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Rebel Women as a Determinant of Post-Conflict
Democratization: A Comparative Analysis of Nepal and
Zimbabwe

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Abstract:

This thesis examines the relationship between women's participation in rebel movements and post-conflict democratization through a comparative analysis of Nepal and Zimbabwe. Using a qualitative Most Similar Systems Design, the study investigates whether women's wartime participation can contribute to greater political inclusion after conflict. The findings suggest that women's participation can support post-conflict democratization, but that this relationship is not automatic. Wartime involvement may provide women with political experience, organisational skills, and greater visibility, yet these gains produce lasting effects mainly when post-conflict institutions allow them to be translated into representation, rights, and effective political participation. The comparison therefore highlights the importance of institutional arrangements, political openness, reintegration, and continued mobilisation in shaping the long-term political consequences of women's participation.

Keywords: Women's participation; Rebel movements; Post-conflict democratization; Gender and conflict; Political inclusion; Nepal; Zimbabwe.

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Introduction

Why rebel women may influence the democratization process after a civil war? How does rebel women's participation influence post-conflict democratization? In which way rebel women's participation can contribute in the construction of more democratic institutions in the post-conflict era? The present work is trying to address these questions by drawing on evidence from the extraordinary improvement some countries experienced in the post-conflict period with the participation of rebel women in armed groups.

This work starts to analyse women's participation in armed conflict which has received historically less attention than men's participation. Several strands of literature considered in this study show that women have often actively participated in civil wars by holding a variety of different roles in politics, military and organizational fields; for example they may participate as combatants, political organizers, intelligence providers, logistical supporters, members of women's wings, and participants in local structures of rebel governance (Loken & Matfess, 2024). Through participation, women may have new opportunities to be active in politics due to their possibility to acquire greater political awareness of their conditions, new organizational and leadership skills, and stronger expectations. All these aspects taken together may create new spaces that are often restricted during peacetime due male's domain. In this sense the argument reaches the core of this thesis: women's participation may contribute to the democratization process of a country in the post-conflict era (Huang, 2016, pp. 34-36). However, it is important to be aware that the relationship between women's participation in rebel groups during wartime and women's political influence after the end of hostilities is not directly proportional (Tripp, 2015; Viterina, 2013). The fact that women participated in rebel activities does not guarantee their immediate greater representation into the new political order. The efficiency depends on several factors, among them the creation of new democratic institutions which pursue gender quotes, party access, elections, women's organizations or other channels through which women may continue to participate. The type of participation also matters: women's involvement in leadership, military organisation,

political mobilisation, or other wartime structures may provide women with different levels of political experience, resources, and access to decision-making.

In order to address this argument, the thesis develops a comparative analysis of Nepal and Zimbabwe. In this context, the two cases are important examples due to their similar women's participation: in both cases women widely take part in rebel activities, in particular they were involved in combat and political, organisational, logistical and support activities. But the extent to which this participation was taken further to an institutional political acceptance was different in the two countries.

Nepal is a case in which the end of the civil war was followed by a broader restructuring of the political system. The peace process resulted in the end of the monarchy and in the establishment of a republic with the consequent creation of a Constituent Assembly. This allowed the historically marginalized groups, including women, to have more representation in politics (Baniya et al., 2017). Despite their participation during wartime, women remained underrepresented in the peace negotiations. But women's organisations and broader movements for inclusion were able to have an impact on the issue of representation and constitutional reform.

Zimbabwe, instead, followed a different trajectory. Women were heavily involved in the resistance of white minority rule by taking political and military roles that challenged existing gender stereotypes. Then the independence in 1980 transferred political power from the white minority to the black majority and this was followed by a number of legal reforms affecting women. In this context, female ex-combatants faced difficulties in demobilization and reintegration for this reason they remained excluded in the decision making process after the end of the hostilities. Therefore, women's wartime participation was recognized in the history of national liberation without being transformed into equivalent political influence (Chogugudza, 2006; Ndhlovu & Wielenga, 2023).

At the methodological level, the comparison between Nepal and Zimbabwe is based on the Most Similar Systems Design (MSSD) which is focused on the theoretical similarities of the cases and their different post-conflict outcomes (Anckar, 2008). This allows us to examine the conditions under which participation during conflict can, or cannot, contribute to post-conflict democratization. Both had long armed struggles, high female participation, patriarchal social structures, political movements that used inclusive and transformative

discourse, and mobilisation of the groups affected by political and economic exclusion. And the two cases differ in how well women's wartime participation was followed by institutional mechanisms of political inclusion. Moreover, the empirical analysis relies on Women's Activities in Armed Rebellion (WAAR) dataset to provide a systematic basis for comparing women's roles within the armed movements examined in the thesis (Loken & Matfess, 2024).. The dataset allows women's participation to be differentiated across activities such as combat, support, leadership, and participation in women's organisations. This is important because treating women's participation as a single category risks overlooking important differences between the political opportunities created by different wartime roles.

The thesis is divided into five chapters. Chapter 1 establishes the broader theoretical foundations of the study. First it discusses the theories of democracy and democratization and looks at the main political explanation for democratic transition. Then it considers the link between civil war and democratization before moving on to individual participation in armed conflict, and in armed conflict and, in particular, women's participation in rebel movements. Particular attention is given to the reasons why women join armed organisations and to the variety of roles they perform within contemporary rebel movements.

Chapter 2 connects this literature more directly to the main argument of the thesis by examining the relationship between gender and democratization. It considers existing research on women's influence on democratic processes and introduces Civilian Mobilisation Theory as an important theoretical framework for understanding how participation in rebellion can change political behaviour and expectations. The chapter then examines how rebel organisations mobilize women and identifies the mechanisms through which wartime participation may influence post-conflict political outcomes.

Chapter 3 presents the research design and methodology. It explains the comparative strategy used in the thesis and the selection of Nepal and Zimbabwe as case studies. It presents the WAAR dataset and provides a descriptive comparison of women's participation in the armed movements in both wars.

Chapter 4 examines Nepal. First it reconstructs the political, socioeconomic, and institutional conditions that preceded the Maoist People's War and analyses the development of the Maoist movement and the transition from conflict to the 2006 Comprehensive Peace Agreement. Then it focuses on women's participation in the Maoist movement, examining why women

joined, the roles they performed, the relationship between empowerment and instrumentalisation, and the importance of caste, ethnicity, class, and rural marginalisation. The final part evaluates how wartime participation interacted with the post-conflict peace process, political representation, and constitutional change.

Chapter 5 addresses Zimbabwe. It traces the historical development of settler colonialism, African nationalism, and the liberation war before analysing women's participation in the nationalist struggle. Particular attention is given to women's motivations, wartime roles, and the coexistence of empowerment with continuing patriarchal structures. The chapter then analyses the post-independence period, focusing on demobilisation and reintegration, political and legal inclusion, women's autonomous mobilisation, liberation-party dominance, and the political use of liberation memory.

By comparing these two cases, this thesis argues that women's participation in armed conflict may influence the post conflict democratization of a country. Wartime mobilisation can give women new political resources and challenge existing structures of exclusion, but whether these changes survive the end of conflict depends on the institutions, political actors, and opportunities that shape the post-war order. The comparison between Nepal and Zimbabwe therefore seeks to clarify whether women's participation matters and the conditions under which wartime participation can be transformed into more durable forms of political inclusion and democratic change.

Chapter 1 – Democracy and Democratization

1.1 Democracy and Democratization

Since the last decades of the twentieth century, the study of democratization has occupied a central role in the comparative politics strand (Bunce, 2000, pp. 703-704). Democracy has several different definitions due to the absence of a universally accepted definition. Some approaches focus mainly on elections and political competition, while others also consider political participation, civil liberties, freedom of expression, and inclusion as essential elements of a democratic system (Dahl, 1971; Diamond, 1999). The literature on democratization has developed several explanations to understand why some countries democratize while others remain authoritarian or experience a democracy backslide. These explanations focus on different factors, including socioeconomic development, the behaviour of political elites, economic conditions, international influences, and social mobilisation (Teorell, 2010, pp. 16–38).

The first chapter has the aim to provide the theoretical framework to analyze the relationship between women's participation in rebel groups and its impact on the post-conflict democratization. This chapter is articulated around three main sections: the first one aims to analyze the main theoretical approaches concerning the process of democratization; the second section focuses on civil wars and on the reason why individuals decide to participate in rebel groups; the third section is concerning women's participation in rebel activities. It examines the reason why women join rebel groups and the different roles they can carry out during the hostilities, including combat, leadership, political organisation, intelligence, and logistical support. Particularly, this last part will be focused on drivers of women participation and on roles which women can undertake within rebel organizations.

1.1.1 Conceptualizing Democracy and Democratization

The concept of *democracy* has often faced tensions between minimalist views and more maximalist conceptions (Teorell et al., 2018, p. 75). The former approach focuses primarily on the openness and competitiveness of the electoral institutions and procedures (Huang, 2016, p. 25), whereas the other concerns the institutional accountability on civil rights and liberties of the citizens (Diamond, 1999). The minimalistic authors, such as Przeworski et al. and Boix and colleagues, support the idea that the civil liberties should be treated as analytically distinct from democracy itself. Their argument is methodological: if democracy is defined through the election then it is possible to study if democracy is producing civil liberties, so the relationship between the two variables can be empirically verified. If the civil liberties are already incorporated in the definition of democracy, the relationship is becoming partly tautological (e.g., Boix et al. 2012, p. 1527; Przeworski et al. 2000, p. 34). Schumpeter's conception exemplifies the minimalist approach in this sense: democracy is mainly a method to select leaders through electoral competition (Schumpeter, 1942, p. 269). This definition does not necessarily require constituent elements of democracy such as freedom of expression, freedom of association, universal suffrage or a substantial inclusive politics (Schumpeter, 1942, pp. 244-245). On the other hand, democracy is defined through the concept of polyarchy (Dahl, 1971, p. 2). A polyarchy is defined as regime which approaches to the ideal of democracy through some observing institutions such as the free elections, the universal suffrage, the right to be elected, freedom of expression and association, access to alternative sources of information and institutions which make public policies dependent to citizens' preferences (Dahl 1998, p. 85). In this context, this study is relying on Teorell's analysis of democracy (2018, p. 75) who argue that an exclusively election-centered definition risks committing what Karl terms the fallacy of electoralism : the mere presence of elections is not adequately distinguishing a democracy from an authoritarianism (Karl, 1986). Hence, a measure centred on elections must necessarily incorporate other elements not strictly electoral (Teorell, 2018, p. 76). For this reason Teorell et al. (2018, p. 76-78) is reorganizing the elements of Dahl's polyarchy into five components: (1) elected officials (2) free and fair elections (3) associational autonomy (4) freedom of expression and alternative forms of information (5) inclusive citizenship. These components provide the conceptual foundation for V-Dem's measurement of polyarchy, operationalized through the Electoral Democracy Index (Teorell et al., 2018, pp. 76-78). This vision of the five elements is supported by Boese and Wilson (2022, pp. 91-92) which support the

argument that the democratization process can not be automatically captured through two distinct categories: contestation and participation as theorised by Dahl (Dahl, 1971); and the disaggregated structure of the V-Dem Electoral Democracy Index partially addresses this problem by allowing the features of the polyarchy to be examined separately (Boese and Wilson, 2022, pp. 91-92). This conception occupies an intermediate position between the schumpeterian minimalistic view and more minimalist conceptions of democracy. The Electoral Democracy Index is therefore particularly appropriate for the present because it allows democratization to be understood as a multidimensional process involving changes in electoral competition, political inclusion, associated autonomy, and freedom of expression. Changes in the index and its disaggregated components can consequently be used to assess whether post-conflict transformations represent meaningful advances towards polyarchy and to identify specific democratic dimensions in which such advances occur.

This study conceptualises *democratization* as “a process in which a state moves closer to a system that guarantees full procedural and substantive rights, regardless of whether the move is along electoral dimension, along the substantive dimension, or along both dimensions” (Huang, 2017, p. 25). The choice is motivated by several reasons. Firstly, for the relevance afforded to women in the democratization process which is essential for this study. Secondly, it has a multidimensional approach which comprehends the procedural dimension and the substantial dimension: in this sense, the several traditional definitions of democratization tend to focus on few aspects of the procedural dimension neglecting the complexity of the phenomenon of democratic consolidation. The third point is the implicit neutrality by avoiding imposing a single model of democracy, recognizing that democratization processes can be different depending on the context. Lastly, it is an analytic lens to comprehend the post-conflict transition due to its focus on how conflict dynamics can lay the foundations for a democratization process. This definition of democratization includes also other “small-scale reforms”, such as clearance of censorship or greater popular involvement within the writing of the constitution, despite sometimes being labelled as “political liberalization” or “antidemocratic concessions” (Ziblatt, 2006). This distinction is not relevant for the study thus all these reforms contribute to approaching the state to a more democratic system. On the contrary autocratization refers to “a process by which political leaders weaken democratic institutions and consolidate power, reducing accountability mechanisms and limiting civil and political liberties” (L. Way and S. Levitsky, 2020). Moreover, this study recognizes that democratization is not a process that ultimately brings the state to a full democracy, nor that

political leaders are always motivated by a desire to seek democracy even if they pursue democratization. Therefore, it is emphasized the graduality of democratization as “a process which requires decades, during which political institutions can progressively reform and political participation expands [...]” (N. Bermeo, 2016).

1.1.2 Main Explanations of Democratization

This section adopts Teorell’s (2010, pp. 17-37) classification of the main approaches to democratization due to its functional organization of a highly fragmented literature strand. In this work this is useful to understand where the civilian mobilization theory is inserted within the literature framework. Therefore the democratization studies’ landscape is forged around four approaches: the structural approach, the strategic approach, the social forces tradition and the economic approach (Teorell, 2010, p. 17). The structural approach is historically discussed by Lipset (1959) who analyses democracy through the examination of the structures of the society (Lipset, 1959, p. 71). He argues that countries which are going through societal modernization are more likely to sustain democratic institutions (Teorell, 2010, p.17). This means that “*the more well-to-do a nation, the greater chances that it will sustain democracy*” (Lipset, 1959, p. 75); and on this base he identifies four dimensions of societal development: wealth, industrialization, urbanization and education (Lipset, 1959, p. 75). More recently, Teorell (2010, p. 67) provides a more nuanced assessment of Lipset’s modernization argument; he finds out that when dimension of modernization - such as education, urbanization, industrialization and income- are taken into account separately, they do not display statistically significant effect in avoiding democratic downturns. On the contrary, when the socioeconomic dimensions of modernization are considered as a composite process, its coefficient is positive and statistically significant. This finding suggests that the modernization should not be attributed to single factors (Teorell, 2010, p. 67). Nevertheless, the existence of such a structural relationship does not imply that development automatically or immediately produces political change. In this context, it is relevant to outline that development is a structural predisposition and not an immediate cause (Treisman, 2020, pp. 244-247). Treisman (2020, pp. 244-247) finds out that the relation between development and democratization is becoming stronger in windows of ten or twenty years and it’s weaker in windows of one or five years. Consequently, the structural conditions may remain politically latent until they are activated by the so-called “contingent events” such as economic crises, military defeats, and leadership turnover (Treisman, 2020, pp.

250-253). This highlights Treiman's conditional modernization theory, which argues that the level of development is contributing to establishing the direction of change, while contingent events and political actors influence its timing and ultimate outcome (Treisman, 2020, pp. 250-253). At this point the strategic approach plays an important role in explaining how actors react when a contingent event opens a phase of political uncertainty (Teorell, 2020, p. 20). The "extraordinary uncertainty" is a crucial moment where the actors make decisions with limited information and without being able to predict their long-term consequences (O'Donnell and Schmitter, 1986, pp. 3-5). Hence, this phase is characterized by incomplete information, decisions taken rapidly, unpredictable events, and uncertain turnovers (O'Donnell and Schmitter, 1986, pp. 3-5). The strategic approach highlights open-ended and the indeterminate nature of the democratization process which is shaped by multiple contingent factors (Teorell, 2020, p. 20). This ideal is reinforced by a strand of literature which sees its beginning in Rustow's dynamic model of democratic transition. In this context democratization is conceptualized as a sequence of phases- preparatory, decisional and habitational- through which countries pass to reach democracy (Rustow, 1970, pp. 344-350). Building on this perspective, with the work of O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986) the path to democratization is still seen through different phases but with the progressive abandonment of rigid preconditions and with the introduction of the uncertainty, contingency and strategic interaction.

Although the structural and the strategic approaches explain why and how democratization occurs, they pay comparatively less attention to the role of the civil society and their collective mobilization (Teorell, 2020, p. 20). This strand of literature began with Moore (1966) with the statement "no bourgeois, no democracy" (Moore, 1966, p. 418). The main point is that the coalition and countercoalitions between landed aristocracy and bourgeoisie constitute the fundamental framework into which political action takes place (Moore, 1966, p. 423). More specifically, the exit depends on the structure of the social alliances: when the bourgeois and some sectors of the aristocracy oppose the monarchy more favorable conditions for democracy can emerge (Moore, 1966, pp. 424-425). More deeply, Rueschemeyer et al. (1992), contend that the probability of democratization depends from three connected power configurations: the balance class power, the relationship between State and civil society, the international or transnational structures of power (Rueschemeyer et al., 1992, p.5). Among them the balance of class power has a central role: it is defined as the struggle between the dominant and the subordinate classes over the right to rule.

(Rueschemeyer et al., 1992, p. 47). However, the balance of class power changes as social groups acquire the necessary organizational resources for their purposes and common interests. Consequently, the self-organizational capacity of the subordinate social groups boost the engagement in collective actions which is stimulated by capitalism and, in this sense, foster the conditions for the democratization process (Rueschemeyer et al., 1992, p. 49-50). In this context, Tilly (2004) specifies that the mobilization of a social group is not democratic per se but it promotes democratization mainly when the social group activates relational mechanisms which transform the relationship between the citizens and institutions (Tilly, 2004, p. 8). However, democracy emerges contingently from political struggle: there aren't universal pre-requisites which can foster democracy but they vary significantly from the social context- eras, regions, timing (Tilly, 2004, p. 9). In this context democratisation is defined as "the increase in the breadth and equality of relations between government agents and members of the government's subject population, in binding consultation of a government subject population with respect to the government personnel, resources, and policy and in protection of that population (especially minorities within it) from arbitrary action by government agents" (Tilly, 2004, pp. 13-14). Thus, the important focus of this definition is the concept of *protected consultation* which can decrease or increase: the more the relationships between citizens and authorities are broad, equal, protected and binding, the more the level of democratization will be high (Tilly, 2004, p. 14). This transformation of the relationships between citizens and authorities occurs through interconnect changes within three main fields: public policy, categorical inequalities and trust networks (Tilly, 2004, pp.15-16). During the democratisation process a growing portion of the population gains relatively equal rights to participate in public politics and, consequently, a greater capacity to advance protected and binding claims against the government authorities (Tilly, 2004, p. 15). Meanwhile, the incidence of categorical inequalities decrease on the access to political participation (Tilly, 2004, p. 16). Among these inequalities Tilly outlines those between men and women, thus emphasizing how social division can hinder democratisation when they translate into systemic differences in rights and access to the political sphere (Tilly, 2004, p. 16). Lastly, democratisation is accompanied by a progressive integration of networks of trust in public policy (Tilly, 2004, p.16). Crucially, democratisation must be accompanied by contentious mobilization and so from the intersection among the three main fields outlined by Tilly (2004, p. 16).

This framework on mobilization provides an important theoretical bridge for the civilian mobilization theory elaborated by Huang (2016). Civil war itself can constitute a context into which the civilian population previously marginalised, acquire experience in collective action and develop new relationships with the political authorities (Huang, 2016 pp. 18-19). Huang argues that literature in this field has mainly focused on the conditions which make peace durable and on the capacity of post-conflict arrangements to avoid a relapse into conflict, leaving in the background which type of political order emerges after the end of a civil war that is a fundamental aspect to consider for post war democratisation (Huang, 2016, p. 19). In Huang's words, "*postwar regime developments have wartime origins*" (Huang, 2016, p. 19). For this reason the post-conflict context shouldn't be treated as a blank institutional context in which actors are assumed to be able to build a new political order from a blank page (Huang, 2016, p. 3). This study of the wartime itself has the aim of comprehending the political post-conflict developments (Huang, 2016, p. 3). Huang's theory is shifting the analytical attention to the wartime political dynamics supporting the fact that the inheritance left by the wartime period is fundamental for the post-conflict era (Huang, 2016, p. 19). In particular, it is fundamental the analysis on rebels and civilians because the ways in which rebel groups conduct wartime produce different political consequences (Huang, 2016, p. 19). This last statement is derived from the fact that armed groups have different sources of material support: some of them depend to a large extent on the civilian population, while others may rely on external financing. The changes in economic dependence bring different types of relationships that develop between rebels and the population (Huang, 2016, p. 20). When the rebel groups rely to a large extent on civilian population for gaining material support, this dependence tends to involve the civilian population more directly in the conflict's dynamics (Huang, 2016, p. 19). In this way, the mobilization produced during wartime can translate, in the post-war period, into grassroots pressure on political elites, who therefore have greater incentives to adopt liberalization strategies to preserve their position and contain such demands (Huang, 2016, p. 20). This mechanism is defined by the civilian mobilization theory which is the main focus of this present work.

1.2 Civil Wars and Democratization

Under what conditions does wartime social mobilization become post-conflict democratic inclusion? This section is aimed to frame this question and outline the reasons behind individuals' participation in civil wars.

1.2.1 Individuals' participation in civil wars

During decades the reasons behind individual participation in civil wars have been analysed through different theories and perspectives. Early studies often relied on macro-structural approaches which explained rebellions through the analysis of the structure of the civilian communities, the strength of the armed groups, the nature of the international competition and through the opportunities of the potential rebel groups (Huang, 2016, p. 65). More recently, these structural explanations resulted in the debate between greed and grievances (Collier and Hoeffler, 2000; 2004). Moreover, Huang is providing a useful distinction between macro-structural approaches and micro-structural ones due to the relevant role that the individuals' decision to rebel play in this context (Huang, 2016, p. 66). One of the earliest influential explanations is the *relative deprivation theory* (Gurr, 1970) which argues that political violence may arise when individuals perceive a disparity between the conditions they believe they are legitimately entitled and those that are able to obtain. This perception of injustice and disadvantage can generate grievances and, under certain circumstances, contribute to potential collective violence and mobilization (Gurr, 1970, p. 24). According to this perspective, deprivation should be understood in relation to individuals' perception of their circumstance rather than in terms of objective material conditions (Gurr, 1970, p. 25). Other scholars have subsequently emphasized the importance of horizontal inequalities when they are correspondent to collective identities (Cederman et al., 2011, p. 478). Cederman et al. argue that the horizontal inequalities between relevant societal groups and the state can foster conflict (Cederman et al., 2011, p. 479). In particular, these inequalities concern the limited access to central political decision-making and economic disparities in wealth (Cederman et al., 2011, p. 480). In this case the authors conceptualise the relationship between such horizontal inequalities and conflict as a casual process which sees the transformation of these asymmetries into grievances and subsequently trigger violent collective actions through group mobilisation (Cederman et al., 2011, p. 481). Furthermore, mobilisation is fostered by pre-existing collective identities which together with

injustice perceptions can facilitate collective action (Cederman et al., 2011, p. 482). However, material inequality has been explored by other authors such as Edward N. Muller and Mitchell A. explore the link between the unequal distribution of resources and the likelihood of armed conflict or rebellion. In their works, they highlight how societies characterized by strong economic inequalities are more prone to political violence since the poorest classes see rebellion as a means to redistribute resources and achieve social justice.

Nevertheless, grievances alone cannot explain why individuals who experience exclusion, inequalities and repression decide to mobilize. Other scholars have therefore focused their studies on the conditions which foster insurgency. Fearon and Laitin (2003) recognized that grievances may effectively motivate rebellion, but they underline the fact that this factor is too common to explain why civil wars occur in some contexts rather than others (Fearon & Laitin, 2003, pp. 75–76). Following this path, they underline that one of the most important factors for a nascent insurgency is the weak state capacity (Fearon & Laitin, 2003, p. 80) assumption which is also theorized by Charles T. Call (2010) with the capacity gap. In particular, weak financial, administrative, security, and military capabilities reduce the state's ability to identify rebels, thereby increasing the feasibility of rebellion and viceversa: signal of governmental weakness may create opportunities for mobilisation (Fearon & Laitin, 2003, pp. 80-81).

A related economic perspective emphasises that the economic variables are more strictly associated to the variability of rebellion and they have more explanatory power compared to the social and political variables linked to the grievances (Collier and Hoeffler, 2004, p. 563). At the individual level economic variables are influencing the recruitment process of the rebel groups: where the foregone income is low, recruitment into armed organisations becomes comparatively less costly (Collier & Hoeffler, 2004, p. 569). The availability of financial resources is similarly important at the organisational level: rebels finance themselves through the exploitation of natural resources, diaspora funding, and support from hostile governments as potential sources of rebel finance (Collier & Hoeffler, 2004, p. 565). In this context, the author's model is highlighting the connection between dependence on primary commodity exports and the risk of civil war: the risk reaches approximately 22 per cent when the primary commodity export constitutes around 33 per cent of rebel GDP (Collier & Hoeffler, 2004, p. 580). Accordingly to this strand of literature rebellion should be studied considering also economic opportunities and organisational resources of the groups. However, the dichotomy between greed and grievances has been widely criticised, several scholars have demonstrated that the reasons behind rebellion are rarely reducible to a single

economic or political cause. In this field Keen's work (2012) introduces the issue of whether greed and grievances can be considered separately as the most important cause of civil wars due to the fact that the several variables may interact in multiple complex ways (Keen, 2012, p. 757). More deeply, Keen takes Stewart, Brown and Langer and warns that the link between natural resources and conflict cannot automatically be interpreted as greed of the rebels (Keen, 2012, pp. 759-760). Similarly, the association between economics and conflict should not be directly considered as an evidence of greed (Keen, 2012, pp. 759-760). This work suggests focusing on the complexity of the links between greed and grievances and from the fact that they may derive from more different motivations (Keen, 2012, p. 771).

This shift away from the greed-grievances dichotomy has contributed to a greater focus on the micro-level dynamics of civil war. In this context the work of Stathis N. Kalyvas (2003) represents fundamental contributions in the comprehension of individual participation into civil wars due to the particular focus on the local mechanism and the dynamics which influence the individual and collective behaviour within the armed conflict (Kalyvas, 2003, pp. 475-476). He argues that it is barely impossible to understand civil war dynamics, including how and why individuals rebel, without deepening the local dynamics (Kalyvas, 2003, p. 481). Furthermore, Kalyvas's study assigns a relevant role to local agency which is, as a consequence, the main push factor for individuals to join armed groups (Kalyvas, 2003, p. 481). Within this vision individuals are treated as strategic agents which strategically evaluate the context they're involved in; they do not act only for ideological adherence (Kalyvas, 2003, p. 481). In this view, Kalyvas precises that participation may involve a wide range of motivations, extending from ideological commitment to opportunistic behaviour, local rivalries, personal interests, and private grievances (Kalyvas, 2003, p. 483). Together with civilian agency, the local wartime environment plays a relevant role in shaping individuals' participation in rebel groups. Territorial control therefore provides an important mechanism through which individuals' participation happens (Kalyvas, 2006 p. 14). Individuals face different costs and risks depending on the degree of control exercised by armed actors. In particular, the risk of retaliation affects the individual calculus underlying denunciation, with the expected costs of such behaviour varying according to territorial control (Kalyvas, 2006, p. 15). To operationalise this relationship, Kalyvas distinguishes five zones of territorial control, ranging from strong incumbent control to strong insurgent control, with an intermediate contested area in which both actors maintain a presence (Kalyvas, 2006, p. 16). Defection is most likely in the contested zone (Zone 3), remains possible but

comparatively less likely in Zones 2 and 4, and is least likely in areas characterised by strong control by either the incumbent or insurgent actor (Zones 1 and 5) (Kalyvas, 2006, p. 16)

The organisational dimension of individual participation is particularly developed by Jeremy Weinstein who examines how resources available to rebel organisations shape their recruitment strategies and, consequently, the profile of individuals who join them (Weinstein, 2007, pp. 599-601). He delineates economic endowments and social endowment: the first ones consists in material resource that can mobilize to meet the logistical requirements of insurgency; the second ones includes shared beliefs, common expectations, norms of behaviour, trust, and forms of social capital rooted in shared ethnic, religious, cultural, or political identities and repeated social interaction (Weinstein, 2005, p. 601). Individuals that join rebel groups based on social resources have behind motivations linked to collective identity and ideology. These rebel groups tend to base their recruits on their sense of belonging and they mobilize basing on justice narratives, auto determination, repressions and oppressions. An example is the People's Liberation Movement (PLM) in the Philippines which used its connection with the local communities and the ideological identity-based mobilization for recruitments (Weinstein, 2003). On the other hand, rebel groups which are based on material endowments tend to recruit members offering material incentives such as access to natural resources, money or even foodstuffs. In this case individual participation is motivated by programmatic reasons such as economic necessity or the possibility of tangible gain. This is particularly relevant in the context of extreme poverty or in absence of other sustenance opportunities (Weinstein, 2007).

Further micro-level studies demonstrate the importance of social and relational processes. Elisabeth Jean Wood (2008), in particular, focuses on the wartime as the transformation of social actors, structure, norms and practices. In particular she identifies political mobilisation as the key wartime processes through which these transformations take place (pp. 539-540). Social networks are particularly important in explaining how individuals become involved in armed organisations. Existing kinship, clientelist, and community ties can be mobilised by political and armed actors to identify supporters and recruit combatants (Wood, 2008, p. 544). However, the beliefs and norms that individuals bring with them are not necessarily stable once they join an armed group. Wood argues that they can be significantly transformed through military socialisation, both through formal training and through informal interactions within small groups (Wood, 2008, p. 545). Participation can therefore become a transformative process in itself. Through training, interaction with fellow combatants,

exposure to group norms, and experiences of witnessing or exercising violence, recruits may develop new loyalties, behaviours, and social relationships (Wood, 2008, p. 546).

In conclusion, the individual participation within rebel groups perpetrated by many different causes and motivations: it can be considered the result of a complex interaction of multiple factors such as the economic, political and social ones. While some individuals are driven by ideological motivations or the search for justice, others are driven by economic necessity, the search for safety, or personal experiences of discrimination and violence. Furthermore, social pressures, collective identities and local dynamics play a crucial role, demonstrating that decisions to join rebels rarely arise from a single cause. For these reasons this study considers the multidimensionality and the complexity of the motivation behind individual decision to join armed groups.

1.3 Women in Armed conflict

1.3.1 Women Participation in Rebel Groups

War has never been exclusively a male domain, although traditionally narratives portray it that way, often relegating women's participation to the margins of the wartime (Cynthia, 2000, p. 4). Indeed, research on conflict has historically marginalized women's contribution portraying them as the victims of violence rather than its perpetrators (Loken, 2022, p.1; Wood, Reed M., 2019 p. 9). Such conceptualization essentializes women denying their full range of agency and reinforces the naturalized link between masculinity and violence (Shepherd, 2008, p. 47). Yet this tendency to downplay women's contributions stands in contrast with several notable cases¹ where women's active participation in non-state armed groups is thoroughly documented across different geographical and historical contexts (Henshaw, 2017, p. 17).

Cross-national evidence further demonstrated that women's participation in rebel groups is far from exceptional (e.g., Thomas and Bond, 2015; Wood Reed M., 2019). As demonstrated by the Women in Armed Rebellions Dataset (WARD), women are widely present in violent non-state armed actors/organisations (VNSAs): at least 40% of the rebel groups active

¹ It is hard to identify in this study all the relevant cases in which rebel women participated. However, there are several cases which it is possible to cite which corroborate this thesis: Nepal case, LTTE of Sri Lanka, Kurdish fighters YPJ of Rojava, FARC the force of Columbia, MPLA IN Angola (...).

between 1964 and 2014 included women as combatants (Wood, Reed M. 2019; and Jakana L. Thomas, 2017), and as leaders in 28% of the rebel groups (Darden, Henshaw, and Szekely 2019). These findings indicate the significant presence of women in different roles within the rebel groups²: they engage in front-line positions, as leaders and in non-combat roles. Female participation should therefore be understood as a recurrent feature of civil wars and for that it requires systematic explanation.

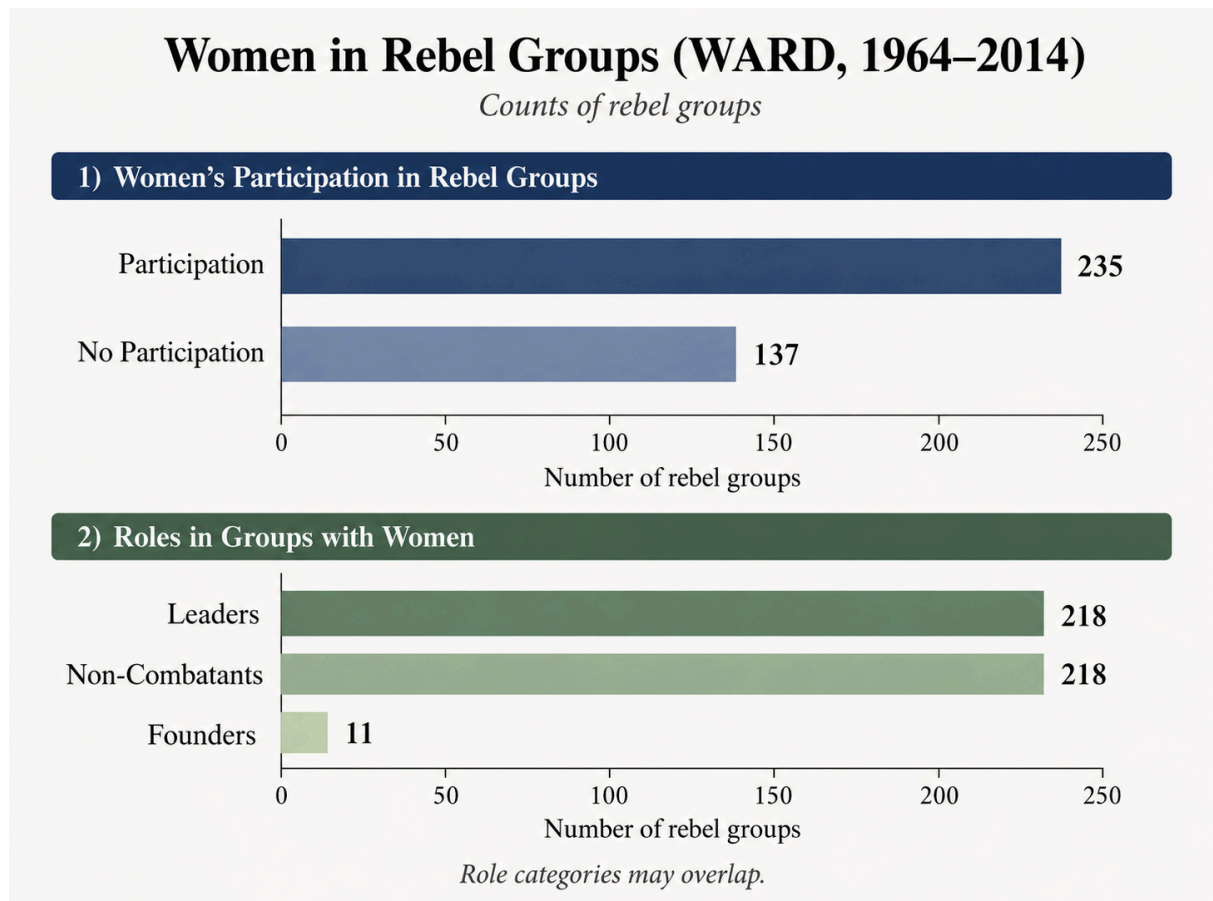


Figure 1 The graph is showing women's involvements on a sample of 373 conflicts analysed by the WAAR Project.

Although scholarly attention has increased in recent years focused on women's participation in rebel movements, there are still numerous gaps in the literature that limit an overall and systematic understanding of this phenomenon.

First, earlier literature on women's participation in rebel groups relied predominantly on qualitative analyses which focused on specific case studies and particular geographical

² Deepening in Chapter 1.2

regions, limiting the possibility of identifying broader patterns across women's involvement (Henshaw, 2013, p. 127; Henshaw, 2016, p. 39). Cross-national research has subsequently expanded through the development of datasets concerning women's involvement in armed groups. However, in this context important limitations remain : existing quantitative dataset have often concentrated on front line women's role, while women's leadership and non-combatants roles have often been left in the background (Loken & Matfess, 2024, p. 489). More recent projects, such as the Women's Activities in Armed Rebellion (WAAR) Project, have attempted to address these gaps by combining systematic quantitative measures with detailed qualitative evidence on women's activities within rebel organizations (Loken & Matfess, 2024, pp. 490-491). In this field, it is evident another theoretical limitation which is the two-way dialogue between the mainstream theories and the feminist research on this topic (Henshaw, 2013, p. 55). Frequently mainstream research has explained individuals' mobilization without theorizing explicitly gender, and this is a relevant aspect in order to have a more comprehensive framework for understanding specific pathways into rebellion (Henshaw, 2016b, p. 204).

Secondly, a substantial strand of literature (e.g. Goldstein Joshua, 2001; Reif Linda, 1986) explains that gender norms together with social, economic, and political integration can influence women's probability to participate in armed resistance movements. In other words, the gender norms, deeply rooted within the society, can restrict women's access to political, economic, and social opportunities while reinforcing a gendered division of labour in which combatant activities are predominantly associated with men.

More recent research (e.g. Thomas and Wood, 2018) have shown that rebel groups tend to include more women when conflicts happen in countries where they are more included into economic, educational, and social institutions during the pre-conflict era (e.g. Thomas and Wood, 2018, p. 218). However, gender norms are not immutable: there are internal factors within the conflict that can weaken the traditional gender norms and consequently creating new opportunities for women to participate in armed rebellions. For example, a combination of increasing economic vulnerability, rural-urban migration and involvement in grassroots political movements contributed women's participation in revolutions in Central America (Mason, 1992). So, while pre-existing gender norms influence the likelihood of women participation in armed conflict, they are not immutable and do not always prevent women's participation (Wood Reed M., 2019, p. 10). Importantly, the effect of women's pre-conflict socio-economic integration may also vary according to the type of participation considered.

Loken and Matfess (2024, p. 496) find that female labour-force participation is associated with women's participation in combat roles but not with their prevalence in auxiliary or leadership roles.

Thirdly, a growing strand of literature highlighted that women's participation in armed groups is often linked to the ideology and the objectives of these movements. In particular, recent research showed that rebel groups which promote economic redistribution, gender equality, or embrace Marxist ideologies tend to include more women. So, it is not strictly necessary that a rebel group must promote gender equality to recruit women. This is demonstrated for example in the Kashmir case (Parashar S., 2011) in which women, despite the nationalist ideology of the movement, were involved in many different militant roles even if this women's contribution was explicitly ignored and excluded by the male nationalists' discourses. Similarly, only a small number of armed groups³ in the post-Cold War era, seems to integrate women's rights issues into their political agendas. Even when these movements address these issues, the impact on women's recruitment seems to be minimal (Henshaw, 2016b, p. 33). More broadly, ideology can directly influence the decision to deploy female fighters in rebel forces. The beliefs and values held by rebel leaders shape their views whether women should participate in combat. Leaders whose ideologies support gender equality or progressive views on women's roles are more likely to consider female fighters essential, especially if they lack enough male recruits. In these cases, ideology not only influences how leaders see women's potential roles in war but also affects their willingness to break with traditional, local gender norms to strengthen their ranks (Thomas, Jakana L. and Wood, Reed M. 2017).

Lastly, a handful of recent studies have highlighted the potential strategic reasons behind the decision of rebel groups to recruit female combatants. Such studies suggest that rebel groups enlist women because they can more easily blend in with civilians and evade detection by security forces, enabling them to carry out covert operations and terrorist attacks more effectively and with greater lethality (Wood Reed M., 2019, p. 12). However, despite these intuitions, there's a lack of studies which examined in a systematic way if the female combatants enhance the probability of strategic success or the achievement of political and military objectives for the rebel groups.

³ The overall sample is taken from the work "Why Women Rebel: Greed, Grievance, and Women in Armed Rebel Groups" OF A.L. Henshaw, 2016. It comprehends 72-armed rebel groups active between 1990 and 2008 distributed in all the continents (pp. 15-16).

As a conclusion, women's participation within rebel movements is a significant phenomenon with growing attention in the research but it still has a lack of quantitative and systematic studies due to the difficulty of integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches in the existing literature. Barriers such as traditional gender norms and socio-economic inequalities still hinder their involvement, yet factors like economic vulnerability and group ideology can promote female participation, showing that this obstacle can be overcome. Additionally, women's roles can serve strategic purposes, such as executing covert operations. Despite this, there's a notable lack of research on the impact of female fighters on the strategic success or political goals of rebel groups. These aspects underline the need for further studies that can provide a more complete and nuanced understanding. From the main points discussed in this instance, the following sections have the aim to explore the reasons behind women's rebellion and to understand their various roles within the rebel group.

1.3.2 Why Women Rebel?

One of the main focuses of the international relations theory within the topic of why women join rebel groups, is the role of the grievances. In general, researchers⁴ have argued that grievance is central because it is one of the push factors for individuals' rebellion; rebel groups need to be able to express and empower this grievance to avoid their failure. Once a certain threshold of deprivation or injustice is exceeding, individuals will be pushed to join the rebellion. Studies⁵ in this field highlighted that the main sources of grievance are linked to economic inequalities, ethnic or religious persecution, and the lack of political rights.

Starting with economic differences, such as poverty and inequalities, are recognized as push factors for people's rebellion since Marx's times (Henshaw, 2016b, p. 206). In contexts of greater income and resource access' disparities, rebel groups can appear as an opportunity to challenge the dominant elites and obtain an improvement of the conditions (T.D. Gurr, 1970). These assumptions are particularly true also for women due to their greater vulnerability to economic deprivation which explains their more frequent union to left-wing rebel groups. (Eager, 2008, ch.2; M. Loken, H. Matfess, 2023, p. 8). Therefore, redistributive movements

⁴ Researchers in this field such as Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler in "Greed and Grievances in Civil Wars" (2004), Stewart, Frances and Graham Brown in "Motivations for Conflict: Groups and Individuals" (2007).

⁵ The studies on rebel mobilization which identified the main source of grievance taken into account in this work are "Evolution of the Global Jihad" (J.Davis, 2013), "Who fights? The Determinants of Participation in Civil War" (M. Humphreys and J.M Weinstein, 2008); "Economic Causes of Civil Conflict and their implication for Policy" (P. Collier, 2007); "Motivations for Conflict: Groups and Individuals" (F. Stewart and B. Graham, 2007).

are more likely to attract women overall. On a sample of 19 redistributive rebel movements 16 involved women in support roles and 10 utilized women in combat operations (Henshaw, 2016b, p. 208).

Secondly, another important variable which influences women's participation in political violence is the ethnic/religious subjugation. Scholars have suggested that both religious and ethnic identity can serve as catalysts in mobilizing individuals by fostering a shared sense of injustice in reaction to oppression. This sense of injustice can be exploited by insurgents' movements to create cohesive groups ready to use violence. At the same time, these religious and ethnical resentments can be deliberately constructed to strengthen group cohesion and encourage the use of violence (P. Collier and A. Hoeffler, 2004, pp. 564-565-571). However, in women's case, this dynamic is more complex. Previous studies ascertained that women do participate, on a regular basis, in uprisings based on ethnic/religious grievances (J.L Thomas and K.D. Bond, 2015, p. 491). However, often the structure of the rebels' groups reflects one of the societies, and this means that women may be limited to supporting roles, without access to direct participation in armed conflicts (Henshaw, 2016b, p. 206). Feminist studies argue that, although women's participation in ethnic or religious movements is tolerated, it is not truly respected. Women's contributions to the rebel movement are seen as less valuable than men's, and there's an implicit expectation that their political involvement should be temporary and not transformative (C. Cohn and R. Jakobson, 2013, ch.5, pp. 105-106). In Islamist movements, for instance, women's participation is often limited or altogether forbidden, and the only ones who take part in these movements tend to hold supportive roles, rather than combat or leadership roles. As demonstrated by the *Women and Armed Rebellion Project* (WAAR Project)⁶ Women's wings in groups with religious ideologies are a minority: only 7% include female military units, while the 25% has a non-combatant wing. For this reason, there will be an exclusion of Islamist movements in this study (J. Davis, 2013, pp. 279-280).

These two points, economic inequalities and religious/ethnic subjugations seem to have a positive impact on women's participation in armed rebellion (Henshaw, 2016b, p. 212). Although previous literature considered political grievances as another push factor for women's participation in rebel groups, recent studies demonstrated that groups which

⁶ The WAAR Project uses primary and secondary sources to provide quantitative and qualitative measure of the visible prevalence and characteristics of women's participation in combatant, non-combatant, and leadership roles within rebel organizations. The dataset covers 372 rebel organizations operating in armed conflicts between 1964-2015. (M. Loken, H. Matfess, 2024, "Women's Wings in Rebel Organisations: Prevalence, Purposes and Variations").

promised women's simple greater access to the political system seem to have a little impact on whether women join. In other words, women are less likely to join a rebel group which promises a simple access to the political system. On the contrary, more efficient movements to motivate women in participation are the ones which offer the possibilities to overcome gender exclusion, by promoting specific civil and political rights for women (Henshaw, 2016b, p. 207).

Another strand of literature on women's participation in rebel groups offers a fourth grievance: grievance based on threat to family and community. Scholars⁷ in this context, argue that women are more likely to participate in armed conflicts when the personal and communitarian security is compromised or threatened. However, this is harsh to clarify due to the difficulty in the quantification of human security and due to the relevance of the localized violence which can bust data to the state level.

As a conclusion, women's motivations to join rebel groups are complex and influenced by a series of factors linked to economic, social, religious, and ethnic grievances. Economic inequalities are one of a major driving force behind women's participation, as economic vulnerability makes them more likely to join redistributive movements, which offer the possibility of challenging the ruling elite and improving their conditions. Furthermore, the sense of injustice related to ethnic or religious subordination act as a catalyst of mobilization, although in many cases women remain relegated to supporting roles within rebel movements, especially in more traditionalist or religious contexts. Moreover, recent research indicates that simple promises of political access are not enough to incentivize women's participation, women appear to be more attracted to movements that promise to directly address gender exclusion and promote civil and political rights for women. Finally, threats to personal and community safety may also play a significant role, but the difficulty of quantifying this factor complicates its systematic assessment. In sum, grievances offer a fundamental explanation for understanding women's participation in rebel groups, but this participation is shaped by more complex dynamics that vary according to economic, social and cultural context.

⁷ J. Tickner, 2001, "Gendering World Politics"; E. Wood, 2003, "Insurgent Collective Action and Civil War in El Salvador", J. Viterna, 2006, "Pulled, Pushed, and Persuaded: Explaining Women's Mobilization into the Salvadoran Guerilla Army".

1.3.3 Women's roles within rebel groups in the contemporary landscape

Women in rebel movements are not merely victims or support actors: they play critical roles as combatants, leaders, strategists, and even in diplomacy. In fact, data showed that often women's wings in rebel organisations are organised and asked by women themselves (M. Loken, H. Matfess, 2024. p. 8). Their involvement challenges traditional gender norms and reshapes the dynamics of conflict (J. Viterna, 2013). Although this study does not explicitly delve into the question of women's agency, it is relevant for the comprehension of women's roles in rebel groups.

The concept of *agency* is often ignored in studies of armed conflicts and it refers to the individual's capacity of autonomous actions in their social environment, by adopting tactics to survive or thrive (R.M. Wood, 2019, p. 13). The agency is strictly linked to a specific social context, and for this reason, women and men experience this capacity in different ways. Due to the different expectations and gender norms imposed by the society, women have different opportunities than men and this led them to use different tactics to survive or thrive within the society they live in. Consequently, women negotiate in a different way their roles within the rebel groups. (Utas, 2005, p. 407; Denov and Gervais, 2007).

However, rebel women – even those who are forcibly recruited such as the girl soldiers- are not simply victims devoid of agency. Indeed, despite the coercion, they find ways to navigate in the rebel organization negotiating their relationships with the rebel leaders. For this reason, women take on many different roles within the rebel organizations. To define the women's wings within rebel groups, this study leverages on the *Women and Armed Rebellion Project* (WAAR Project) (M. Loken, H. Matfess, 2023). In this context, women's wings are classified in two main types: combatants, the ones which undertake military functions, and non-combatants, the ones which operate in support or auxiliary roles. Despite this distinction women's roles (and men's) can be more complex in the sense that these two categories can overlap in the same individual. For example, a female combatant can be part of the leadership and at the same time covering non-combatants roles depending on the necessities of the rebel group she is taking part in (M. Loken, H. Matfess, 2024, p. 6). In this context there are several examples in which women combined non-combatant and combatant roles such as *Revolutionary United Front* in Sierra Leone which highlights that often women (but also men) combine combatant roles with non-combatant roles at the point that the boundaries

between them are not clearly defined; the *National Patriotic Front of Liberia*, the *Maoist Insurgency in Nepal*, and the *Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front of El Salvador*⁸ also demonstrated how women are not limited to a single role but act flexibly and often simultaneously in a variety of roles, making it difficult to draw a clear line between combatants and non-combatant.

Research demonstrated that women's participation in combatants' roles is mostly common, however the extent of this involvement can vary across groups (Thomas and Bond, 2015; Wood, 2019; Wood and Thomas 2017). For example, in left-wing groups, such as the *Tigrayan People's Liberation Front* (TPLF) which participated in the Ethiopian Civil War, female combatants constitute half of all combatants (Wood and Thomas 2017; Burgess, 2013). In the TPL case it is also interesting reporting that the 5-10% of the rebels were women without official combatants' roles. This goes against the dominant gender stereotypes, which portray women as inherently peaceful. On the front-line female combatants engage different military actions such as firefights with security forces, target civilians, suicide bombing and target assassinations, plant explosive devices. Some of them even participate in sexual violences, including rapes (Cohen, 2013). Moreover, women not only participate as combatants but also engage in leadership positions. Scholars⁹ demonstrated that 28% of sampled rebel movements operating between 1990 and 2008 included at least one woman in a leadership role.

Women's contribution in non-combatants roles is still essential for the whole functioning of the rebel organisation. In this case women have vital roles such as nurses and medics, but also logistic roles such as spies, recruiters, smugglers or intelligence officers (M. Loken, H. Matfess, 2022, p. 24). A relevant example in this context is the FRELIMO's case in Mozambique which had many female participants as weapon experts, intelligence gathers, recruiters, nurses, and medics (R. Huang, 2016, pp. 164-173). These roles often are under evaluated, despite their essential contribution since many of these activities are considered an extension of their traditional roles in the society (McKenzie, 2012). Therefore, women, even if they're not directly involved in fighting activities, contribute in essential ways to the armed rebellion.

⁸ Mary M. Horan, 2006, *The Violence of Democracy*; Reyko Huang, 2016, *The Wartime Origins of Democratization*; Karen Kampwirth, 2002, *Women and Guerilla Movements: Nicaragua, El Salvador, Chiapas, Cuba*.

⁹ Henshaw, A., Eric-Udorie, J., Godefa, H., Howley, K., Jeon, C., Sweezy, E., & Zhao, K. (2019). "Understanding women at war: A mixed-methods exploration of leadership in non-state armed groups".

Following the path highlighted by the WAAR Project it is possible to define the presence of women's wings in rebel groups. Approximately 40% of the analysed rebel group have at least one women's wing within its organizational structure, which manifests itself predominantly in non-combatant roles (32% of the groups), while only 15% manage female units or associations for female combatants. Although many groups include military and non-military units, women more frequently participate in non-combatants units rather than female brigades. Women's participation in armed conflicts and their mobilization within rebel groups represents a crucial theme in the literature on war and democratization, as they challenge traditional narratives that see men as the only protagonists of armed conflicts. In recent decades, numerous studies have examined female participation, showing that women not only take on logistical and social support roles but actively participate as fighters and leaders within rebel groups. Several authors ¹⁰ have highlighted how women's presence within rebel organisations is often underestimated and how women in this field have the potential to change both the dynamics of the conflicts and the prospects for post-conflict reconstruction and the transition towards democracy (A. Miranda, 2004, pp. 447-463; E.J. Wood, 2008, pp. 539-561; Thomas, Jakana & Wood, Reed M., 2018, pp. 225-257). The contribution of women has often been overlooked in literature because armed conflicts are traditionally seen as a male domain (M. Zalewski, 2000, pp. 339-359; E. J. Wood, 2008, pp. 539-561), where the concept of "combatant" or "fighter" is associated with the virile figure of the man. However, more recent studies have begun to shed light on the fact that women, once mobilized, can profoundly influence the internal structure of rebel groups and, consequently, the outcomes of conflicts. Their involvement is not limited to weapons: women hold leadership roles, engage in recruitment, propaganda and negotiation activities, and often act as a bridge between rebels and civilian communities, supporting the legitimacy of resistance movements in the eyes of the population.

In this context, it is crucial to recognize that women's experiences and contributions cannot be considered simply "supportive" or "complementary" to men's. On the contrary, women take on crucial roles in all phases of the conflict, from the initial mobilization to the struggle

¹⁰ Alison, M. (2004). *Women as agents of political violence: Gendering security*. Security Dialogue, 35(4), 447-463. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010604049522>; Wood, E. J. (2008). *The social processes of civil war: The wartime transformation of social networks*. Annual Review of Political Science, 11, 539-561. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.8.082103.104832>; Thomas, J. L., & Wood, R. M. (2018). *The social origins of female combatants*. Conflict Management and Peace Science, 35(3), 215-232. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0738894217695524>; Wood, R. M., & Thomas, J. L. (2017). *Women on the frontline: Rebel group ideology and women's participation in violent rebellion*. Journal of Peace Research, 54(1), 31-46. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343316675025>;

on the ground, up to the management of the post-conflict transition. For example, women who actively participate as fighters or rebel leaders can foster greater social and political inclusion in the post-conflict period, thus influencing democratization processes significantly. In other words, their conflict experience can help promote fairer and more participatory governance models in the transition to democratic regimes. However, despite these contributions, much research focuses predominantly on men as main actors, often ignoring the specific experiences of women in rebel groups. This lack of attention not only marginalizes the role of women but also perpetuates an incomplete view of armed conflicts and democratic transitions. Hence a need for a deeper exploration of the role of women not only as fighters but also as agents of political and social change, both during the conflict and in the phases of reconstruction and democratization.

Chapter 2- Women and Democratization

How does women's participation in rebel movements impact a country's post-conflict democratization? This question represents the core and the objective of this chapter. I argue that women's substantive participation in rebel movements can create the conditions for them to be represented in the post-conflict reconstruction and, consequently, foster democratization. During wartime, women can acquire legitimacy through the participation in rebel groups due to network, organizational experiences and visibility, and for this reason they may become better positioned to claim political representation and participate in the post-conflict reconstruction of the institutions. The argument developed in this chapter seeks to identify the mechanism through which wartime participation may be translated into post-conflict political influence and, specifically, it does not assume that women participation automatically produces democratic outcomes.

Although there are several points of view to explain this relationship, the chapter draws particularly on Reyko Huang's Civilian Mobilization Theory (2016). Huang argues that civil war can generate long-lasting political transformations when rebel groups rely and mobilize civilians. This is because civilians may develop greater political awareness, organizational capacity, and expectations of political change, eventually becoming a bottom up political force that post-conflict elites cannot easily disregard. This work builds on this theoretical insight introducing a gendered view into the Civilian Mobilization Theory's framework.

Therefore, the chapter proceeds in four stages: the first section examines the relationship between gender and democratization through a review of the existing literature on women's influence on democratic processes; the second section develops Huang's Civilian Mobilization Theory application to women's wartime participation; the third section is outlining the ways into which rebels mobilize women. Finally the fourth section presents the

research design and methodology employed to investigate the proposed relationship between women's participation in rebel movements and post-conflict democratization.

2.1 Gender and Democratization

The relationship between gender and democratization has become an increasingly relevant area of research, as democratization may create new opportunities of political participation in the same moment in which new institutions, laws, and politics are negotiated (Viterna & Fallon, 2008, p. 668). However, the creation of democratic institutions does not automatically result in a greater gender equality or in the political women emancipation. This apparent contradiction has been identified in the literature as a central issue in the relationship between gender and democratization. Although democratic transitions bring more opportunities for women to participate in politics, empirical research often discovered that influence and political representation of women can remain limited or even decline (Viterna & Fallon, 2008, pp. 668-669). Viterna and Fallon underlines that democratization often failed to improve women's political influence, even when they actively participated in the transition process. Fallon, Swiss and Viterna (2012) furtherly develop this argumentation through the "paradox of democracy": higher level of democratic liberties should theoretically facilitate the access of women to political positions, but democracy alone has not consistently produced higher levels of women's legislative representation (Fallon et al., 2012, pp. 380-382). Rather than the level of democracy, it is the democratization process itself that shapes women's political representation (Fallon et al., 2012, pp. 380-382).

In order to understand these uneven findings it is necessary to focus on the character of the political institutions. The feminist institutionalist studies challenges the assumption that the institutions operate in a neutral way, emphasizing instead that institutional norms can be structured by gender and, as a consequence, can produce different opportunities and different political results distinguished by gender (Mackay et al., 2010, pp. 573-574). The feminist institutional research tries to overcome the gender blindness of traditional institutional analysis by examining the interaction between political gender, political institutions, and power inequalities (Mackay et al., 2010, p. 574). The effects of democratization on women's political inclusion should be understood as conditional and dynamic and not as automatic. Paxton, Hughes e Painter (2010) argue that the political effects of democracy may develop during time: open political institutions, electoral competitions, political rights, and civil

liberties which may create opportunities for women to acquire political experience (Paxton et al., 2010, pp. 4-5). In the same way, Viterna and Fallon (2008) support the fact that the results of democratization depends from a combination of factors, in particular from the characteristic of democratic transition, the legacy of women's previous mobilization, political parties, and international influences (pp. 668-670). Thus, democratization can open new opportunities for women, but if these opportunities evolve in political inclusion depends on institutional conditions.

2.1.1 Research on women's influence on the democratization process

Women's role in democratization processes has gained increasing scholarly attention, underlining the recognition that this topic cannot be fully understood without considering gendered patterns of political women's inclusion. Despite the centrality of women's participation and inclusion in political democracy, traditional studies on democratization had largely overlooked this topic (Lindberg, 2004, p. 30). More recent studies have examined the conditions of women's inclusion in post-conflict politics: greater or substantive representation, institutional reform, changes in policy-making, and enhanced legitimacy of the emerging democratic institutions (Waylen, 2007, pp. 521-524, 532-533; Franceschet et al., 2009, pp. 16-17; Lindberg, 2004, p. 30).

A first relevant perspective is given by the feminist institutionalism which emphasizes that the rules of the political institutions are profoundly linked to gender and can reproduce unequal patterns of access to political power (Kenny, 2014, pp. 679-680). Furthermore, women may face disadvantages due to formal institutional arrangements but also for informal political networks and unequal access to the resources needed to gain political influence (Kenny, 2014, p. 680). This perspective is particularly important for political transitions because building new institutions does not necessarily eliminate the previous inequalities. The old gender norms and the institutional legacies can be reproduced also in the new post-conflict institutions (Kenny, 2014, pp. 682-683). Consequently, the post-conflict reconstruction is not automatically producing democratic institutions; but this last depends on women's ability to contest existing patterns of exclusion. This argument is closely connected to the strand of literature on women's mobilization during democratic transitions. Waylen (2007) argues that women's mobilization can be relevant for placing gender concerns in the political agenda and, as a consequence, influence the emerging institutional agreements.

However, mobilization alone does not guarantee positive results in this sense but its efficiency depends on the structures of the political opportunities, the strength and autonomy of women's organizations, their relationships with other political actors, and their capacity to intervene strategically during the transition (Waylen, 2007, pp. 523-524). An example of this mechanism is the South African transition where organized women were able to intervene strategically in the transition process and place gender matters in the political agenda (Waylen, 2007, pp. 523-524), this has contributed to the incorporation of gender equality into the emerging constitutional framework (Waylen, 2007, p. 532). At the same time, Waylen underlines that the increase of women's representation do not necessarily translate into an equivalent increase in substantive representation due to the fact that the institutional and political constraints may prevent formal reforms from producing meaningful change (Waylen, 2007, p. 524). Therefore, women's mobilization should be understood as an important but insufficient political resource, whose capacity to generate post-transition outcomes remains conditional on the political opportunity structure and the broader institutional context (Waylen, 2007, pp. 523-524). Similarly a related strand of literature on this topic demonstrates that the diffusion of quota policies contributed to increase women's access to political positions such as in Rwanda, Nepal, Argentina, and Sweden (Franceschet et al., 2009, p. 3). Particularly, in the Rwandan case, women deeply influenced the drafting of laws on gender equality and this contributed to having a strong female representation never seen before, with 61% of women in parliament in 2022 (Franceschet et al., 2009, p. 3).

In this context, it is relevant to analyze the distinction between the different forms of women's representations because it may affect their substantive influence in political institutions (Franceschet et al., 2009, pp. 15-16). Franceschet, Krook, and Piscopo (2009) distinguish between descriptive, substantive, and symbolic representation. Descriptive representation concerns the characteristics of those elected, substantive representation refers to the attention given to group interests in policy-making, and symbolic representation regards the broader cultural meanings and the consequences of the representative process (Franceschet et al., 2009, p. 4). In particular, this research is highlighting that women's political inclusion may also generate broader democratic effects through its symbolic dimension: women's presence in political institutions may strengthen perceptions of the legitimacy of elected bodies, challenge traditional understandings of politics as male domain, and encourage other women to become more politically involved (Franceschet et al., 2009, pp. 17, 21-22). Moreover, Franceschet et al. (2009, p. 9) observe that democratization generates new demands for participation, inclusion, and fairness, thereby opening political

space for organized women to place gender equality on the public agenda. Beyond women's representation within already established political institutions, there is a particular relevant strand of literature for this study which has examined women's participation in the broader process of post-conflict reconstruction. Post-conflict periods constitute crucial moments of institutional transformation, as states emerging from a conflict may undergo constitutional reform, the reorganization of political institutions, and the reconstruction of governance structures (GIWPS, 2020, pp. 7-15). Within this environment, women may contribute to shaping more inclusive post-conflict institutions and broadening political participation and representation (GIWPS, 2020, p. 15). An important example within this context is Tripp's research (2015, p. 3) which shows that post-conflict African countries have experienced higher levels of women's political representation than countries that have not recently experienced armed conflict. She links this post-conflict phenomenon to three interconnected mechanisms: wartime disruptions in gender relations, the mobilization of women's movements, and changes in international gender norms (Tripp, 2015, pp. 3334). Similarly, research on post-conflict reconstruction underlines that women's participation may contribute to peace and long-lasting stability, while women's political representation is associated with more equal result and to a reduced probability of new conflicts (GIWPS, 2020, pp. 7-9).

A particularly relevant argument in this context is the relationship between popular participation and women's political empowerment. Lindberg (2004) finds that increased popular political participation has a positive relationship with women's legislative representation. For example a higher voter turnout is significantly associated with a greater share of women in parliament, even when the quality of elections is taken into account. Lindberg interprets this finding as evidence that the effective exercise of political rights by ordinary women can contribute to increasing overall women's legislative representation (Lindberg, 2004, p. 42). Moreover, political empowerment may also develop cumulatively: as women acquire political experience and organizational capacity, their ability to gain legislative representation may increase (Lindberg, 2004, pp. 45-46). This insight is particularly relevant to the present research because it suggests political experience gained before entering formal institutions may constitute an important resource for subsequent political participation.

In sum, these literature strands outline a more broader mechanism which connects mobilization, political agency, and institutional inclusion. Women that acquire political

experience, organizational capacities, networks, and collective expertises may be in a better social position to require representation when political opportunities occur. However, neither mobilization nor the descriptive representation alone are able to guarantee a substantial political influence. Their effectiveness depends on women's capacity to translate political resources into access to the decisional process. This logic provides the bridge towards the theoretical framework adopted in this study: the theory of the Civilian Mobilization of Reyko Huang (2016). This theory is fundamental because it moves the attention to the political institutions alone to political transformation generated to wartime mobilization. Therefore, applied through a gendered perspective, the relevant question becomes whether women's participation in rebel movements can generate political consciousness, organizational experience, networks, and expectations of inclusion that survive the end of the conflict and subsequently facilitate their participation in post-conflict politics.

2.2 Women within the Civilian Mobilisation Theory

This study applies the Huang's Civilian Mobilization Theory to women's participation in rebel movements in order to investigate how their participation can impact post-conflict democratization. It starts with the hypothesis that women's participation within rebel movements during civil wars enhance the probability of post-conflict democratization processes. This assumption is relying on Huang's work which found out that democratization is more likely following wars in which the rebels depend on civilians as a significant source of material and funding than following wars in which they do not (R. Huang, 2016, H1, p. 41). This expectation originates from the assumption according to which political order emerging after a civil war is partly endogenous to the political and social dynamics generated during the conflict itself (Huang, 2016, pp. 8-9). The causal mechanism proposed by Huang rests precisely on this view of wartime mobilization. When rebels rely extensively on civilians, participation in rebellion exposes ordinary people to new political information which are alternative views of the political order, collective grievances, and organizational practices. In Huang's theory, wartime participation can therefore increase civilians' awareness of their political rights and create expectations of substantial change from the pre-war status quo (Huang, 2016, pp. 8-9, 38). Once mobilized in this way, civilians may become a political force whose demands may persist after the formal termination of hostilities. Consequently the political elites may take these expectations into consideration, since excluding or repressing a highly mobilized population can be politically costly; their

exclusion may generate further instability, and potentially undermine the survival of the emerging political order (Huang, 2016, pp. 38-41). From this perspective, democratization can be considered as an elite response to sustained political pressure from below (Huang, 2016, pp. 38-41).

This study extends this logic specifically to women who participate in rebel movements. Such an extension is theoretically relevant because women are strongly present actors within contemporary rebellions. Research demonstrates that women participate in armed organizations in a wide variety of functions, including combat, logistical support, intelligence, recruitment, political mobilization, and leadership (Henshaw, 2016, pp. 39-60; Wood & Thomas, 2017, pp. 31-46). Wartime participation can create opportunities for transformations in women's political agency. Research in this field has demonstrated that war can disrupt established social structures and gendered social divisions, this may contribute to expose women to responsibilities, organizational experiences, and public roles that were previously inaccessible to them (Berry, 2018, pp. 2-3; Yadav, 2021, pp. 449-452). For example, Berry conceptualizes that war is a period of accelerated social change capable of reconfiguring gendered power relations and creating spaces for women's political engagement (Berry, 2018, pp. 2-3). Similarly, Yadav in his research on post-conflict Nepal shows that armed conflict can disrupt restrictive gender norms and expand women's capacity to exercise political and social agency (Yadav, 2021, pp.449-461). Participation in rebel movements may consequently provide women with several resources that can remain politically relevant after the conflict. First, exposure to rebel ideologies and grievances may contribute to greater political awareness and alter women's perceptions of their position within society (Huang, 2016, p. 34). Secondly, participation can generate skills such as recruitment, coordination, political education, leadership, and collective mobilization (Huang, 2016, p. 35; Viterna, 2013, pp. 172-202). Thirdly, wartime involvement may produce interpersonal networks that can subsequently facilitate political involvement (Viterna, 2013, pp. 172–202; Carpenter & Moore, 2014, p. 479). Finally, women's participation can cause the development of new expectations regarding their social and political roles once hostilities have ended (Berry, 2018, p. 3; Yadav, 2021, p. 452). The persistence of these wartime transformations into the post-conflict period is crucial for the argument developed here (Huang, 2016, pp. 38-41; Berry, 2018, pp. 2–3). Viterna's analysis of female participants in El Salvador's FMLN shows that some women were able to translate their wartime engagements into post-conflict political and social gains (Viterna, 2013, pp. 172). The theoretical relationship proposed in this chapter is a sequential process: women's wartime

participation can first generate altered expectation concerning women's political and social roles (Viterna, 2013, pp. 172–202; Berry, 2018, pp. 2–3), these transformations can facilitate prolonged mobilization in the post-conflict era which may cause women's entrance in political parties, civil society networks, electoral institutions (Waylen, 2007, pp. 50–92). When such mobilization is sufficiently strong, it may increase pressure on elites during the post-conflict era. In this way, theHuang's argument can therefore also be used to explain how women's participation in rebel movements may shape their post-conflict political engagement.

Nevertheless, this link should not be understood as granted: wartime mobilization does not necessarily translate into post-war political empowerment. Women may be marginalized during demobilization, excluded from peace negotiations, displaced from former rebel organizations, or encouraged to return to traditional gender roles once the conflict ends (Viterna, 2013, pp. 172-202). Post-conflict periods may also witness a patriarchal backlash that undermines gains achieved by women during wartime and weakens their capacity for collective political organization (Berry, 2017, p. 830).

Huang's empirical analysis demonstrates how extensive wartime reliance on civilians can generate political mobilization that continues to shape bargaining between elites and society after the end of armed conflict (Huang, 2016, pp. 110-115). The Nepalese case is particularly significant because the Maoist insurgency combined extensive civilian mobilization with substantial female involvement.

2.3 How Rebel Mobilize Women?

There are several ways in which civilians, and so women, become mobilized as political force within the armed rebellion.

First, women gain political consciousness through their involvement with rebel movements. The act of joining rebel groups increases women's (and men's) awareness of their political rights (Huang, 2016, p. 33) This is crucial because awareness helps women to question and challenge traditional gender roles, fostering their political empowerment in the democratization process. For instance, women in El Salvador's guerilla became politically conscious during their participation which influenced their post war activism (Viterna, 2013). The involvement of women in rebel movements often leads to higher levels of political participation. Women in conflict settings frequently transition from passive societal roles to

active participants in political life, whether through leadership roles in rebel organizations or participation in post-conflict elections and political institutions. This increased engagement translates into a greater push for gender equality in political institutions during transitions to democracy (Waylen, 2007).

Moreover, the experience of being part of a rebellion often raises women's expectations for their political and social roles after the conflict. Having fought for change during the war, women expect to be included in decision-making processes in the post-conflict period. This can lead to demands for gender inclusivity in governance, constitutional drafting, and legal reforms. Women's participation in post-conflict governance can break down deeply entrenched gender barriers, enhancing democratization by making it more inclusive (Kenny; Mackay, 2009).

Relying on the theory of civilian mobilization (Huang, 2016; Wood, 2003) women can be involved in different roles (as explained in 1.3.3) and so, they have different kinds of involvements in rebel groups. These different involvements generate different impacts on capacity to influence post-conflict processes, including democratization.

- (1) Women who take on the role of founders of rebel groups have a decisive influence on the decision-making process and long-term goals of the movements. Reyko Huang (2016) highlights how strong and ideologically oriented leaderships towards social change are more likely to translate mobilization into democratic institutions. Women founders, having direct access to decision-making power, can ensure a more inclusive and equal agenda.
- (2) Women who take on the role of leaders, even if they're not founders, help to shape the internal dynamics of armed groups and can facilitate the transition to a democratic system. Elisabeth Jean Wood (2008) analyzes the role of women leaders during conflicts in Latin America, such as that of El Salvador, showing how female leadership has strengthened the demand for political equity and human rights. Reyko Huang (2016) demonstrates that women as leaders influence the drafting of a more inclusive constitution and the transition to a democratic system as shown in Nepal's case (Maoist Insurgency).
- (3) Women as participants can contribute to democratization even if they do not occupy founder or leader positions. Broad and visible participation creates greater legitimacy for the inclusion of gender issues in post-conflict political agendas. Megan MacKenzie (2012), in her book "Female Soldiers in Sierra Leone: Sex, Security, and Post-Conflict Development", explains how female fighters, although

marginalized in formal negotiations, still manage to bring forward demands for change through their visibility during and after the conflict.

Scholars¹¹ noticed that the success of rebel groups which include women in the creation of more favourable states (to women) is linked to specific characteristics: “completeness” of the democratic transition, women pre-transition mobilisation, party-policies effectiveness and international influences (Viterna, 2008, p. 670).

First, the concept “*completeness*” of a democratic transition refers to the extent to which the previous regime has yielded power and to what extent new institutions, laws and constitutions are open to change (Viterna, 2008, p. 670). In other words this implies that the previous regime has effectively lost power and no longer exercises significant influence over the new political structure brought by the armed conflict. This can influence women inclusion within the new political asset. Democratic transition can introduce new ideologies which can be used by rebel women to pursue their own objectives. The success of the affirmation of women’s objectives depended on the extent to which the rebel ideological frameworks (also known as “*master framework*”, see Snow and Benford, 2000) are widely accepted among civilians and when it is in line with women’s requests (Noonan, 1995).

Secondly, literature recognizes¹² that the pre-transition women mobilization has a crucial role for the democratization process. The mobilization of women in this pre-transition phase lays the foundations for a more inclusive democratization, as it increases public awareness and creates an organized political force that cannot be ignored in the post-conflict phase. For example, in many cases of civil war, as in the case of Nepal (Huang, 2016) and Colombia, women took key roles in rebel movements, helping to negotiate peace agreements and trying to ensure that women's rights were part of post-conflict reforms. This point is the core of this study: in the following chapters it is argued that women’s mobilization is the crucial starting factor of the democratization process of a country which led to all the four characteristics explained in this section.

Thirdly, when countries go through a democratic transition, social movements, including women's movements, can lose some of their influence. This is because, in a democracy, it is political parties, not movements, that control access to state power (O'Donnell and Schmitter

¹¹ See Georgina Waylen, 1994 “Women and Democratization: Conceptualizing Gender Relations in Transition Politics.”; 2007, “Engendering Transitions: Women’s Mobilization, Institutions, and Gender Outcomes”. Huntington, Samuel. 1991. “The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century”.

¹² See R. Huang, 2016, “The Wartime Origins of Democratization”; J. Viterna, 2008, “Democratization, Women’s Movements, and Gender-Equitable States: A Framework of Comparison”. Noonan, Rita K. 1995. “Women against the State: Political Opportunities and Collective Action Frames in Chile’s Transition to Democracy.”

1986). Movements can have greater influence if they manage to maintain close ties with political parties. If women's movements collaborate with liberation movements before transition, women can use those ties to reclaim power in political parties once democracy is established (Britton 2002; Hassim 2006;). This means that women's activism in a pre-transition context can provide them with levers to influence political decisions within new democratic governments. However, many times women's movements are co-opted by political parties once the democratic transition has taken place (Alvarez 1999; Manuh, 1993). This means that political parties absorb women's movements but limit their ability to pursue gender-specific goals, often subordinating women's demands to the party's overall goals. Women's branches of parties are often weak and poorly funded, preventing them from exercising real political influence (Geisler, 1995). In response to co-optation, some women's movements choose to declare themselves autonomous from political parties to pursue their own agendas (Alvarez, 1999). However, this choice of autonomy can also limit their access to state power. Political parties, especially those on the left, tend to be more open to reducing gender inequality. Socialist parties can support feminist goals such as ending women's "double work" (domestic work and paid work) and encouraging greater female participation in politics and economics (Caul 1999; Chinchilla, 1990). While these ideological promises don't always translate into action, some research suggests that women can still use these ideals to gain more rights within parties. In some cases, left-wing ideologies have led to real improvements in women's political participation (Waylen 2007).

Another important aspect of the discussion concerns the international influence on the women's movement. The literature emphasizes that international support, such as global feminist movements or UN conventions, can strengthen local movements and provide material and symbolic resources (Britton 2002; Hassim 2003). When governments sign international agreements, local women's movements can use these laws as a basis for claiming equality. However, some scholars warn that over-reliance on international support can distort local priorities. Local women's organizations may be tempted to focus their efforts on what attracts funding from international NGOs rather than on what local women really need (Barrig 1994; Caldeira 1998). Furthermore, the institutionalization of women's movements (when they turn into NGOs or other institutions) can create a distance between the professional leaders and grassroots women that the movement represents (Richards, 2004).

Chapter 3- Introduction to the case studies

The third chapter introduces the empirical case studies through which the relationship between women's participation in rebel groups and post-conflict democratization is established. This chapter applies a *Most Similar System Design* (MSSD) as the main comparative strategy because it allows to focus on two cases that share several relevant structural and conflict-related characteristics while displaying different post-conflict political outcomes. This comparison aims to investigate the differences in the outcomes which is a strong way to explain divergent democratization trajectories. Within this framework, Nepal and Zimbabwe constitute particularly relevant case studies because both countries experienced long civil wars with substantial female participation in rebel groups. However, despite these similarities the two cases followed markedly different trajectories during the post-conflict period: Nepal experiences a significant institutional transformation towards democracy; whereas Zimbabwe progressively consolidated an authoritarian political system.

Therefore, this chapter is organized as follows. The first section presents the research design and methodological framework of the study, with particular attention to the *Most Similar Systems Design* (MSSD) and to the rationale underlying the selection of Nepal and Zimbabwe as comparative case studies. The second section introduces the Women's Activities in Armed Rebellion (WAAR) dataset and explains how it is used to operationalize and assess different dimensions of women's participation in rebel organizations. Finally, the third section provides a descriptive comparison of Nepal and Zimbabwe within the WAAR dataset, highlighting similarities and differences in women's combat, non-combat, and leadership participation and identifying the main empirical patterns that will guide the subsequent in-depth case analyses.

3.1 Research design and methodology

This section outlines the research design and the methodology employed to address the research question of this study: how does women's participation in rebel movements impact a country's post-conflict democratization? Its purpose is to provide a clear account of the methodology used in the present study.

The comparative method serves as one of the main research approaches utilized by political researchers to explore causal connections, especially when experimental controls are unfeasible or unsuitable. Within this framework researchers strive to approximate the logic of control by methodically comparing scenarios that vary along theoretically relevant dimensions. Lijphart (1971) argues that comparison is a particularly important strategy in political science while simultaneously emphasizing its principal limitation: this kind of research usually operates with a relatively small number of cases in relation to the potentially large number of explanatory variables. He defines this problem as "many variables, small N" (Lijphart, 1971, p. 685). In order to mitigate this problem it is possible to select cases that are sufficiently comparable and concentrate on the analysis of a limited number of theoretically relevant variables.

This study is relying on the *Most Similar System Design* (MSSD) as a research strategy which is based on the selection of cases that are as similar as possible in the relevant background characteristics; while differing in the outcome of interest (Anckar, 2008, p. 390; Przeworski & Teune, 1970). The underlying logic is to reduce variation in potentially confounding factors by maintaining as many relevant contextual characteristics as possible across the selected cases. In this way, the researcher can more effectively identify the factors that can explain the observed variations in the dependent variable (Bartolini, 1993; Sartori, 1991; Skocpol, 1984). The MSSD is therefore theory-oriented in the sense that its comparative logic is particularly useful for evaluating theoretical expectations derived from an existing analytical framework (Anckar, 2008, p. 391). This means that the analysis starts from a theoretically specified relationship derived from a substantial literature review and this corresponds to a deductive research strategy (Anckar, 2008, p. 392). Anckar (2008, p. 393) distinguishes between research questions formulated as "Does X affect Y?" and those asking "What explains Y?". The former implies that the independent variable has already been identified through the theoretical framework and it is particularly compatible with a deductive application of the MSSD. In the context of this study, women's participation in rebel movements constitutes the principal explanatory variable of interest, while the extent and

characteristics of post-conflict democratization constitute the dependent variable. Therefore, the relationship between these variables should be treated as a multidimensional phenomenon which means that women's participation should be understood considering also their different wartime roles and different degrees of access to organizational authority. Consequently, the comparative design adopted in this study investigates the differences in the extent, position, organizational character, and post-war political translation of women's wartime participation.

Anckar (2008, p. 390) usefully distinguishes between a strict and a looser application of the MSSD. Under a strict MSSD, cases should be matched systematically across a predefined set of control variables and should ideally differ only with regard to the key independent variable. Such an ideal configuration is rarely achievable in comparative political research. A looser application instead selects cases that are similar with regard to as many theoretically relevant background characteristics as possible without claiming that every potential confounding factor has been perfectly controlled. The latter conception is more appropriate for the present study. The selection of Nepal and Zimbabwe as comparative case studies provides a robust empirical basis to examine the relationship between women's participation in armed conflict and post-conflict democratization. Nepal represents a positive case, where women's mobilization in the Maoist movement contributed to tangible gains in political representation, legal reforms, and democratization processes (UN Women, 2013; Hutt, 2004). In contrast, Zimbabwe exemplifies a negative case: despite significant female participation in the liberation struggle, post-independence politics were marked by authoritarian consolidation and the exclusion of women from formal political power (Chogugudza, 2002; Kaarsholm, 2006). Employing the Most Similar System Design (MSSD) logic, these cases are highly comparable in key structural and contextual variables—including prolonged internal conflict, substantial female combatant involvement, and entrenched patriarchal norms—while diverging sharply in the outcome of democratization (Przeworski & Teune, 1970; Bartolini, 1993). This comparative approach allows for the isolation of factors that either facilitate or hinder the translation of women's wartime participation into post-conflict political empowerment. By juxtaposing a successful and a failed case, the analysis highlights not only the potential for female participation to influence democratization but also the institutional and political constraints that may prevent such outcomes, offering a nuanced understanding of the gendered dynamics of post-conflict political transitions. Nevertheless, the MSSD is subjected to important methodological limits. As emphasized by Meckstroth (1975, p.134) and Peters (1998, pp. 38-39), comparative research is necessarily

constrained by the limited number of available cases, making it impossible to control for every potentially relevant explanatory variable. Consequently, differences that are not explicitly included in the research design may still influence the observed outcome and this disturbs the possibility of establishing a perfectly isolated causal effect. Anckar (2008, p. 390) similarly stresses that an MSSD cannot realistically keep every potential explanatory factor constant. This means that omitted variables may continue to influence the dependent variable and that conclusions about causation must therefore be formulated cautiously.

3.2 Descriptive comparison of Nepal and Zimbabwe in the WAAR Dataset

The *Women's Activities in Armed Rebellion* (WAAR) Project provides the empirical base for comparing women's participation in rebel groups. The choice of this dataset (Loken & Matfess, 2024) is motivated by its conceptualization of women's participation in rebel groups as a multidimensional phenomenon. It contains information of women's engagement in 372 rebel organisations associated with civil conflicts between 1946 and 2015 and includes 22 measures which capture women's presence into different organizational roles (Loken & Matfess, 2024). More specifically, the WAAR Dataset distinguishes between women's participation in frontline or combatants roles, non combatants roles and leadership positions, at the same time it also provides information on more specific participation forms and on specific wings of women within rebel organizations (Loken & Matfess, 2024). This highlights that women's participation rarely assumes just one form: women can operate as combatants, intelligence supporters, recruiters, medical personnel, logistic operators, political organizations or leaders. Loken and Matfess (2024) through the WAAR Dataset try to outline both the presence of women and the prevalence of their participation across different organizational roles. This allows the present study to go beyond the presence of women and to examine instead how extensively they participated, in which roles and at which level of the rebel organisation. The WAAR variables utilize an ordinary scale from 0 to 4. A value of 0 indicates that it was not possible to verify women's participation in the respective role. A value of 1 indicates an occasional participation, generally it corresponds to the cases in which women represent less than the 5% of the participants. A score of 2 represents a low participation, around the 5-9%, while 3 corresponds to a moderate participation, about the 10-19%, and lastly 4 identifies the cases characterized by an high women's participation, it comprehends the cases in which women's participation reaches at the least the 20% of the participation of that role in the rebel organization (Loken & Matfess, 2024). Moreover, the

WAAR is based on a great variety of materials, among which academic researches, reports of the international organizations and non-governatives organizations, governative documentations, material generated from rebels, local and international news, ethnographic studies and interviews with participants into conflicts (Loken & Matfess, 2024). The quantitative set of data is accompanied by a qualitative manual which provides the contextual experiences of women and their organizational roles in the single rebel movements. This combination makes the dataset especially suitable for the comparative strategy adopted in this thesis. Against this methodological background, the selected rebel organizations reveal a particularly interesting pattern.

Country	Rebel organization	Front-line participation	Non-combat participation	Leadership participation	Women's wing
Nepal	Communist Party of Nepal–Maoist (CPN-M)	4	4	4	Yes
Zimbabwe	Patriotic Front (PF)	3	4	3	Yes
Zimbabwe	Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU)	3	4	3	Yes
Zimbabwe	Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU)	2	3	2	Yes

The Nepalese case stands out immediately. The Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist (CPN-M) receives the maximum score of 4 across front-line participation, non-combat participation, and leadership. The data demonstrates also the female involvement in the Maoist insurgency and that this was not concentrated within a single organizational domain. The front-line of 4 is particularly relevant because it indicates that women were not exceptional or isolated participants in the Maoist movements. Instead, their participation in rebel activities reaches the highest category identified by the WAAR Dataset. This interpretation is also in line with the literature on the Maoist insurgency in Nepal. For example, Machanda (2004) highlights that women's participation in the Maoist movement challenges the consolidation of the

gender identities, even if the leadership remained ambivalent regarding the complete gender transformations. Women participated directly as combatants, in the intelligence, in the propaganda, in the political mobilization and in other activities in support of the rebellion (Manchanda, 2004, pp. 237-239; Joshi, 2025, pp. 6-7). The Maoist movement's ideological orientations contributed to create a political space for women's mobilization: before the beginning of the armed conflict in 1966, the movement included explicit direct requests against the patriarchal exploitation and discrimination against women (Manchanda, 2004, pp.247; Joshi, 2025, p. 6).

The WAAR score of 4 for non-combat participation reinforces this interpretation. Loken and Matfess (2024) demonstrates that women involvement in rebellions occurs through logistic support, clandestine activism, civil sensibilization, recruitment, and political and organisational work. These activities are essential to rebel organisations because they link armed groups to the civilian population and support their organizational infrastructure. This kind of participation may generate political skills and networks which can last even in the post-conflict era.

The WAAR score of 4 for leadership participation is arguably even more significant for the central hypothesis of this thesis. Taking leadership positions differs significantly from marginal or grassroots participation, as it offers direct access to strategic processes and political power within an organization. For women, leading a department or occupying management roles means acquiring relational capital, reputation and negotiating skills. These are key elements in post-conflict contexts, particularly during the metamorphosis of rebel forces into party formations or in the transition to stable institutional arrangements. The case of Nepal shows that the Maoist insurgency has not eradicated internal gender disparities, highlighting a gap between the movement's emancipatory rhetoric and the persistence of male dominance in the leadership (Manchanda, 2004, pp. 238,253). However, the political transition following the 2006 peace agreements and institutional engagement have offered new opportunities, fostering broad visible participation of women in post-conflict political processes (Joshi, 2025, p. 8).

Zimbabwe offers a more fragmented empirical pattern than Nepal. WAAR metrics indicate that the Patriotic Front and ZANU register a 3 for front-line action, 4 for non-combat tasks, and 3 for leadership, while ZAPU logs scores of 2, 3, and 2. This distribution reflects robust female engagement in logistics and support, but comparatively weaker representation in direct combat and executive roles. Such distinctions validate the utility of the WAAR

framework, which evaluates female mobilization through specific organizational roles rather than treating it as a binary phenomenon (Loken & Matfess, 2024, pp. 492-495).

Crucially, extensive mobilization during the liberation struggle did not yield proportional political authority in the post-independence landscape. Ranchod-Nilsson terms this dynamic a “gender backlash,” illustrating how wartime mobilization frequently gives way to post-war demobilization and the marginalization of feminist demands (Ranchod-Nilsson, 2008, pp. 642-643). This marginalization was structurally reinforced, as Sadomba and Dzinesa note, by a lack of gender-responsive demobilization and reintegration strategies, which isolated female ex-combatants socially, professionally, and militarily (Sadomba & Dzinesa, 2004, p. 51). Consequently, as Law observes, a profound gap emerged between wartime expectations of holistic emancipation and post-independence outcomes (Law, 2021, pp. 249-251).

Taken together, the comparison with Nepal shifts the analytical focus from the mere presence of women in armed struggles to the structural quality of their engagement. Nepal represents a model of multi-dimensional mobilization across all sectors, whereas Zimbabwe reflects a localized concentration in non-combat functions. Rather than validating a direct causal trajectory between armed mobilization and democratic transition, the WAAR data instead underscores the existence of divergent, context-dependent patterns of wartime participation.

Chapter 4 - Nepal

Chapter four analyzes the first empirical case study of this thesis, focusing on the relationship between women's participation in the Maoist insurgency and the post-conflict democratization. Nepal represents a crucial case due to the combination between an extensive civilian mobilization and a deep transformation of the political system during the conflict named People's War (1996–2006). The end of the conflict was followed by the monarchy's abolition, the establishment of a federal democratic republic, and the introduction of institutional measures that increased inclusion of the marginalized groups. The purpose of this chapter is to investigate through which mechanisms women's wartime participation contributed to border processes of political inclusion and so institutional change.

This Chapter is organized around three main sections. The first section which is 4.1 provides historical and political background of the conflict: it examines the broader political environment in which Maoist mobilisation developed and explains the institutional and social conditions that shaped the insurgency. Section 4.2 focuses on women's participation in the Maoist movement by analyzing the main motivations behind women's participation and the extent to which this participation generated experiences of empowerment. In conclusion, Section 4.3 examines the transition from wartime participation to post-conflict inclusion. It assesses women's limited involvement in the formal peace negotiations and in the post-conflict institutions. The section also highlights how the Nepalese case is supporting the present work of thesis showing that women's participation may contribute to post-conflict democratization. However, Nepal's case shows that this effects depends on what is happening after the conflict: if there is the existence of institutions, organisations and opportunities which are able to transform the experience gained by women during conflict into representation, rights and effective participation.

4.1 Historical Background

The emergence of the Maoist insurgency in Nepal must be understood within the political and socioeconomic tensions that characterised the country during the 1990s. The restoration of multiparty democracy in 1990 introduced important institutional changes, but it did not resolve the inequalities and patterns of exclusion that affected large parts of Nepalese society. Political instability remained high, while access to state institutions continued to be uneven, with high-caste hill elites retaining a dominant position and many marginalised groups remaining underrepresented (Lawoti, 2008, pp. 365–366). At the same time, poorer and more peripheral districts were more exposed to the conditions in which the insurgency initially expanded (Do & Iyer, 2010, pp. 743–745). For this reason, the historical background of the Nepalese case is essential to explain both the rise of the Maoist movement and its capacity to mobilise groups that had long remained at the margins of the political system. This section is divided into other different sub-sections.

Section 4.1.1, *Political Transition and Institutional Fragility (1990–1996)*, examines the restoration of multiparty democracy, the persistence of monarchical powers, and the instability of the new political order.

Section 4.1.2, *Socioeconomic Inequalities, Peripheral Marginalization and the Emergence of the Maoist Movement*, focuses on the territorial, economic, caste, and ethnic inequalities that shaped the context in which the insurgency developed.

Section 4.1.3, *The Maoist Movement*, analyses the ideological foundations, organisational structure, and inclusive mobilisation strategy of the CPN-Maoist, including the 40-Point Demand and the movement's efforts to recruit socially excluded groups (International Crisis Group, 2005, pp. 14-16, 40-41).

Section 4.1.4, *Escalation and Militarisation (2001-2005)*, examines the intensification of the conflict after 2001, the deployment of the Royal Nepal Army, and the growing political intervention of King Gyanendra (Muni, 2010, pp. 14-15). Finally,

Section 4.1.5, *From War to Peace: the 2006 Comprehensive Peace Agreement*, considers the rapprochement between the Maoists and the parliamentary parties, the 2005 political agreements, and the peace process that culminated in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement of November 2006 (International Crisis Group, 2006, pp. 1-2, 11-12).

4.1.1 Political Transition and Institutional Fragility (1990-1996)

Until 1990, Nepal's political development was shaped by a long history of highly centralised power with limited political pluralism (Do & Iyer, 2010, p. 5). During the second half of the eighteenth century the territorial expansion of the Gorkha kingdom under the Shah dynasty established the foundations of the modern Nepalese State (Whelpton, 2005, pp. 35). However, from 1846, the effective political power shifted from the Shah to the Rana prime ministers (1846-1951), this contributed to reducing the monarchy to a symbolic institution (Whelpton, 2005, pp. 46-48). In this moment, power was exercised through vertically organized networks which linked the ruler to the elites. The end of the Rana's started a period of political experimentation between 1951 and 1960, during which Nepal attempted to establish a representative government even if monarchy followed to exercise its political influence (Whelpton, 2005, pp. 87). In December 1960, King Mahendra dismissed the elected government and suspended parliamentary elections, paving the way for the establishment of the partyless Panchayat system which continued for the following decades (Whelpton, 2005, pp. 99-100). However by the late 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s, the Panchayat system faced growing political opposition: in fact in 1979 there were some student protests which contributed to King Birendra's decision to call a national referendum on the future of the political system (Shaha, 1990, pp. 48-51, 68-70). Growing opposition eventually culminated in the 1990 People's Movement (Jana Andolan I), which forced the monarchy to accept the restoration of multiparty politics and substantial constitutional reform (Whelpton, 2005, pp. 113).

The promulgation of the *Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal 2047* (1990) represented a major transformation of Nepal's institutional order due to its establishment of a constitutional monarchy, parliamentary government and multiparty democracy. For instance, this constitution also enlarged the range of fundamental rights, for example, Article 3 explicitly attributed sovereignty to Nepalese people (Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal 2047, 1990, art. 3). Nevertheless, the monarch continued to exercise constitutionally defined prerogatives: as stated in art. 53.4 The King could dissolve the House of Representatives upon the recommendation of the Prime Minister, or as explicit in art. 115 retained the authority to proclaim a state of emergency under specified conditions, although such a proclamation was subject to subsequent parliamentary approval. These provisions demonstrate that the 1990 settlement represented a constitutional redistribution of political authority rather than the complete political marginalization of the monarchy. The first parliamentary elections under

the new democratic system were held in 1991, and then in 1994 and 1999. Yet the new democratic order was characterized by considerable political instability due the succession of twelve different governments (Do & Iyer, 2010, p. 736). In particular, in 1994 elections demonstrated these difficulties because no party secured a parliamentary majority and subsequent years were marked by unstable governments and shifting political alliances.

Political instability was accompanied by a deeper problem of political and social exclusion. Lawoti argues that Nepal's democratization remained structurally exclusionary, as high-caste hill elites continued to dominate political institutions, while ethnic minorities, lower castes, and peripheral populations remained underrepresented in state structures (Lawoti, 2008, p. 365-366). Consequently, the establishment of competitive elections did not automatically result in equally inclusive access to political representation and state institutions. Therefore, the period between 1990 and 1996 reveals important tension between the formal establishment of democratic institutions and the development of a more inclusive political order. This situation can be framed through the "legitimacy gap" theorized by Charles T. Call (2011) which refers to the gap between political elites and the government and political authorities (pp. 308-309).

4.1.2 Socioeconomic inequalities, peripheral marginalization and the emergence of the Maoist Movement

Between the 1990 and 1996 the Nepalese society was characterized by socioeconomic inequalities and territorial marginalisation. In particular, the poorer districts experienced a significant conflict intensity and tended to become involved in the insurgency earlier than in the wealthier districts (Do and Iyer, 2010, pp. 743-745). In fact, the People's War of 1996 started from a marginal area (Bohara et al., 2006, pp. 108–109). In this context, it is possible to analyse that the Nepalese society remained structured around caste and ethnic identities, while many lower caste, Janati, Madhesi, and religious minority groups felt excluded from the national identity promoted by the state (Gellner, 2007, pp. 1823–1824). Even during the transition to multiparty democracy the exclusion of marginalized groups from effective participation in governance persisted (Lawoti, 2008, p. 365). Despite Nepal's consistent social diversity continued to be disproportionately dominated by the Caste Hill Hindu Elite (Lawoti, 2008, p. 366). These disparities can be understood with the concept of horizontal inequalities, so inequalities between culturally defined groups (Stewart, 2008, p. 3). Such

inequalities can become politically relevant when they coincide with collective identities and provide a basis for group mobilization (Stewart, 2008, pp. 11-18). Therefore, the post-1990 democratic opening didn't dismantle these structures of exclusion. However, this period brought greater political freedoms which expanded the possibilities for organization and mobilization: the more the political environment is open, greater political awareness and mobilization grew among marginalized groups (Lawoti, 2008, pp. 365-366). This contradiction helps explain why the post-1990 political opening could expand opportunities for participation while also increasing political expectations among previously marginalised groups. This pattern of vulnerability to civil war is not unique to Nepal. In Hegre et al.'s study (2001), they found that intermediate political systems were at greater risk of experiencing civil war than were fully democratic systems or stable authoritarian systems. They also found that the period immediately preceding and following a regime change has a greater potential for creating internal conflict (pp. 34-43). The authors' research suggests that political transitions can cause temporary weakness in existing governmental structures, which creates uncertainty until a new system of governance is established. In Nepal, the restoration of multiparty democracy therefore did not cause the Maoist insurgency by itself. Rather, it opened new political space while existing patterns of exclusion and inequality remained largely unresolved. As political participation and expectations increased, the continued underrepresentation of marginalised groups became more visible (Lawoti, 2008, pp. 365-366). The post-1990 period can therefore be understood as a transitional context in which greater political openness coexisted with persistent exclusion, contributing to dissatisfaction with the existing institutional order.

However, the relationship between economic deprivation and Maoist mobilization was more complex. Macours demonstrates that, between 1995 and 2003, economic gains were distributed unequally: families with larger land properties benefited more than landless families (Macours, 2011, pag. 8). More importantly, Maoist mass recruitment was more intense within districts into which inequalities between land-holders and landless groups were more accentuated (Macours, 2011, pp. 13-14). His results suggest that the perceived relative deprivation may contribute to recruitment even in contexts where poverty has declined. At the beginning of the war, as demonstrated by Do and Iyer (2010), the poorer districts tend to be more involved in the insurrection. However, when the conflict intensified in 2001, Maoists began to expand even through more rich and urban areas (Sharma e Gibson; 2023, pp. 590-560). They highlighted that local poverty wasn't the main factor associated to violence,

and so the socioeconomic geography of the conflict has changed with the development of the insurrection.

In conclusion, the Maoist insurgency should be understood as an interaction between geographical depreciation, relative economic inequality, the persisted political exclusion of certain social groups, and the anchored system to castes and ethnic hierarchies. Poverty contributed to the early spatial pattern of conflict (Do & Iyer, 2010, pp. 743-745), while inequalities between socioeconomic groups became relevant to patterns of Maoist recruitment and expansion (Macours, 2011, pp. 6-7, 13-14). At the same time, the persistence of exclusion of certain social groups despite the liberalisation contributed to enhance grievances (Lawoti, 2008, pp. 365-366). All these conditions taken together created an environment in which the Maoist movement was able to mobilize the population.

4.1.3 The Maoist Movement

Ideological Foundation

The ideological foundation of Nepal's Maoist People's War was characterised by two main problems: (i) Nepal was seen as a semi-feudal country where the economic and social power were still concentrated in the monarchy, in the land-holders elites, while the marginalised groups had few resources and low power; (ii) Nepal was seen as a semi-colonial country due to its interdependence with India (Mishra, 2006, pp. 27-33). So, Maoist immediate political objective was the establishment of a "New Democracy" capable of transforming these structures through revolutionary change (Mishra, 2006, pp. 25-29).

These ideological principles were translated into a concrete political programme called the 40-Point Demand, submitted by Baburam Bhattarai in behalf of the United People's Front on 4 February 1996. The document organized Maoist grievances around three areas: nationality, people's democracy, and livelihood. It also included demands concerning national sovereignty, royal privileges, civil and political rights, caste and gender discrimination, land redistribution, employment, education, and social welfare (Bhattarai, 1996, reproduced in International Crisis Group, 2005, pp. 40-41). A relevant point is that the document concluded if the government failed to respond positively to these demands, the movement would be "forced to adopt the path of armed struggle" (Bhattarai, 1996, pp. 40-41).

(a) Nationality, anti-dependence politics, and the “semi-colonial” framing.

The first part of the 40-Point Demand focused on nationality and sovereignty issues. The Maoist argued that Nepal was politically and economically interdependent with external powers, particularly India. For this reason, the document demanded the revision of the Nepal-India Treaty of Peace and Friendship established in 1950 and the Mahakali Treaty of 1996. The first one is concerning the economic relations and the second one is regarding the water resources. It also called for the regulation of the open Nepal–India border, the closure of Gurkha recruitment centres, and restrictions on foreign capital in the Nepalese economy (Bhattarai, 1996, as reproduced in International Crisis Group, 2005, pp. 40-41). These demands reflected the semi-colonial dimension of Nepal under the Maoist’s point of view. National independence was also associated with political and economic freedom from external powers. Foreign influence was reinforcing internal elites and contributed to maintaining the existent inequalities (International Crisis Group, 2005, pp. 3-6, 40-41).

(b) “People’s democracy” and the transformation of the political order

The second set of demands, which concerned "People's Democracy," were primarily focused on creating new structures for governing Nepal through a complete overhaul of its current political systems instead of merely changing the way it currently operates. The Maoists advocated for a new constitution that would be created by elected representatives; eliminated all privileges associated with the King and Royal Family; and placed the military, police force, and bureaucracy under the direct supervision of "People's Control," as defined by their program (Bhattarai, 1996, as reproduced in International Crisis Group, 2005, pp. 40–41). Additionally, their program contained demands for free speech and press; the release of political prisoners; and an end to repression by the security forces (Bhattarai, 1996, as reproduced in International Crisis Group, 2005, pp. 40–41). Consequently, these proposals represented both a transformation of institutional arrangements within the state and an expansion of individual rights and liberties. Nonetheless, these were also part of a larger revolutionary agenda. Since the Maoists sought to not only reform the institutions of the state but also to replace the existing political structure with a form of "New People's Democracy," they based on Maoist revolutionary theory (International Crisis Group, 2005, pp. 3–6).

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(c) Civil rights and recognition politics embedded in the revolutionary agenda.

The 40-Point Demand also incorporated a programme of reforms of social and identitarian character. It asked Nepal to become a secular State, guaranteed freedom of expression and press and demanded the end to caste discrimination (Bhattarai, 1996, as reproduced in International Crisis Group, 2005, pp. 40-41). Secularism was particularly important because the Nepalese monarchy had historically been closely associated with Hindu identity; separating religion from state authority therefore challenged one of the symbolic foundations of monarchical rule (Malagodi, 2011, pp. 234-236). The very particular thing was the mentioned gender equality in this programme. They called for an end to “patriarchal exploitation and discrimination against women” and demanded daughters’ rights to paternal property (Bhattarai, 1996, as reproduced in International Crisis Group, 2005, pp. 40-41). These demands were particularly relevant because all these limitations influenced access to economic resources, political power, and social opportunities (World Bank & DFID, 2006, pp. 6-8). Such rivendications contributed to Maoist’s capacity to mobilize women because they became significant for women coming from marginalized communities (ICTJ & Advocacy Forum, 2010, p.24).

(d) Livelihood, land, and the explicit anti–semi-feudal programme.

The final cluster is called “Concerning livelihood” and addresses livelihood and economic redistribution. The Maoist called for land cultivated by tenants to be transferred to them. The redistribution of land held under “feudal” arrangements, minimum wages, employment support, debt relief for poor farmers, free health care, and wider access to education (Bhattarai, 1996, as reproduced in International Crisis Group, 2005, pp. 40-41). These demands reflected the Maoist interpretation of Nepal as a semi-feudal society, in which rural poverty, agrarian inequality, and unequal relations of economic and political dependency were considered central features of the existing social order (Mishra, 2006, pp. 26-33; Joshi & Mason, 2008, pp. 765-769).

Taken together, the 40-Point Demand shows that the Maoists understood political transformation as much more than electoral reform. National sovereignty, civil liberties, gender equality, caste and ethnic inclusion, land redistribution, labour rights, and social welfare were presented as interconnected parts of the same revolutionary project (Bhattarai, 1996, as reproduced in International Crisis Group, 2005, pp. 40-41). This broad programme

allowed the Maoists to connect different forms of exclusion—class, gender, caste, ethnicity, region, and political marginalisation—within a single political narrative. This was especially important for the movement’s strategy of inclusive mobilisation, because it enabled the Maoists to appeal to groups that experienced several forms of disadvantage at the same time, including women from historically marginalised communities (ICTJ & Advocacy Forum, 2010, pp. 23–24; World Bank & DFID, 2006, pp. 6-8).

Organizational Structure

The Communist Party of Nepal–Maoist (CPN-M) created a structure that helped it organise civilians and expand its political influence. Its structure was based on three main components: the Communist Party, the People’s Liberation Army (PLA), and the United Front. This structure followed the Maoist model in which the party provided political leadership, the army conducted the armed struggle, and the united front mobilized broader sections of society (International Crisis Group, 2005, p. 7).

The People’s Liberation Army represented the military branch of the movement but remained formally subordinated to the party. Prachand occupied a dual role within the party: chairman and supreme commander of the PLA, demonstrating the close connection between the political and the military fields (International Crisis Group, 2005, p. 7). By the mid-2000s, the PLA had developed into a more structured military organization composed of several brigades, although estimates of its actual number of fighters varied considerably (International Crisis Group, 2005, pp. 7-8).

The Maoist movement also mobilized groups that had traditionally experienced political and social exclusion. Poor peasants, Dalits, Janajatis, and women became important parts of its recruitment base. The International Crisis Group notes both the significant participation of excluded caste and ethnic communities and the deliberate Maoist effort to recruit women as active participants (International Crisis Group, 2005, pp. 15–16). The Maoists’ emphasis on gender equality, property rights, and opposition to patriarchal discrimination also contributed to their appeal among women, particularly those from marginalized communities (ICTJ & Advocacy Forum, 2010, p. 24).

Together with the PLA, the Maoists created parallel political institutions in areas under their influence. The United People’s Revolutionary Council functioned as the central body of the United Front and was conceived partly as a future alternative government (International

Crisis Group, 2005, p. 7). At the local level, Maoist “people’s governments” operated through district, village, and ward structures. These institutions carried out functions such as dispute settlement, tax collection, administration, and local service provision (Basnett, 2009, pp. 22-23). These institutions were particularly important because they allowed the Maoists to administrate the territories under their influence. However, this system should not be treated as fully democratic: the Maoist authority combined local participation with coercion, armed discipline, taxation, and centralized party control (Basnett, 2009, p. 23). Their organizational structure can be considered as a provider channel through which these grievances could be transformed into participation. Basnett describes this process as the transformation of “collective grievance” into “collective force”, made possible through party organization, armed mobilisation, and parallel government (Basnett, 2009, pp. 22–23). This process is particularly relevant to understand women’s participation. Maoists actively incorporated gender equality into their political programme and recruited women into military and political structure (International Crisis Group, 2005, pp. 15-16). This point is particularly relevant for this thesis because women’s participation developed through these organizational opportunities.

Inclusive Mobilization as Strategic Choice

Inclusive mobilization was an important part in the Maoist insurgency. Social grievances already existed before the beginning of the People’s War, but the CPN-M was particularly effective in connecting them within a common political narrative (Basnett, 2009, p. 24). The strategy of transforming different individual and local grievances into a shared “collective grievance” was particularly relevant for recruitment (Basnett, 2009, pp. 22-24). The International Crisis Group shows that the Maoist support base included significant participation from lower castes, ethnic minorities, rural populations, and women, and argues that the movement’s explicit attention to minority and gender rights helped make it attractive to groups that felt poorly represented by mainstream political actors (International Crisis Group, 2005, pp. 14-16). This strategy deserves particular attention to women: in fact, Maoists made a specific effort to attract women and presented gender equality as an important element of their political programme (International Crisis Group, 2005, pp. 15-16). Pettigrew and Shneiderman show that women’s involvement reflected real political aspirations and experiences of agency, while at the same time being shaped by Maoist ideology and the needs of the revolutionary movement (Pettigrew & Shneiderman, 2004, pp.

19-23). For this thesis, inclusive mobilization is therefore important because it explains how the Maoists were able to transform existing exclusion into active participation. Inclusion was not simply a consequence of the movement's ideology of equality; it was also a political strategy that helped the CPN-M expand support, strengthen its legitimacy, and mobilize groups that had previously remained at the margins of formal politics (Basnett, 2009, pp. 22–24; International Crisis Group, 2005, pp. 14-16).

4.1.4 Escalation and Militarisation (2001-2005)

The period between 2001 and 2005 marked a decisive turning point in the Nepalese civil war. Until 2001, the conflict had been fought mainly between the Maoists and the police forces. After 2001, the conflict became increasingly militarised and expanded across the country. Muni identifies 2001 as the beginning of a second phase of the People's War: internally there was the massacre of the royals and the accession to the throne to king Gyanendra; externally the international context post 9/11 facts increased the military support of Nepal from India, the United States, and the United Kingdom (Muni, 2010, pp. 14-15). The royal massacre of June 2001 was an important moment in this transformation because it changed the "character of the monarchy" (Muni, 2010, pp. 14). Gyanendra, the new king, adopted a more direct approach towards both the Maoists and representative political institutions, and also supported the deployment of the Royal Nepal Army against the insurgency, creating a much more direct military confrontation between the Maoists and the state (Muni, 2010, pp. 14-15). Another relevant turning point happened in November 2001, when peace negotiations between governments and Maoist collapsed. The government declared the CPN-Maoist a terrorist organisation, introduced anti-terrorism measures, declared a state of emergency, and deployed the Royal Nepal Army. The police and the Armed Police Force were also placed under the operational command of the army (Amnesty International, 2002, p. 1). This changed the nature of the conflict that became an effective military threat. The state of emergency, which remained in force from November 2001 until August 2002, also suspended fundamental rights, including freedoms of expression, association, and movement and protections against preventive detention (Amnesty International, 2002, p. 1). The militarisation of the conflict was accompanied by an increase of violence. Amnesty International reports that 4,366 people were killed between November 2001 and October 2002, compared with approximately 2,700 during the previous five years of the conflict. This report considered that at least half of these killings may have been

unlawful with 66 cases of disappearance due to security forces' detention (Amnesty International, 2002, p. 1). The Maoists were also responsible for serious abuses, including killings of civilians, hostage-taking, torture, and the recruitment of children (Amnesty International, 2002, p. 1). Amnesty International notes that almost one year after the deployment of the army had produced only limited results. The Maoists continued to control several districts in the Mid-Western region, where they had established local "people's governments", while in other areas similar structures operated at village level. State security forces, by contrast, often maintained stronger control over towns and major roads (Amnesty International, 2002, p. 3). The political crisis became even more serious as King Gyanendra increased his intervention in national politics. This process culminated on 1 February 2005, when the king seized executive power, arrested political leaders, imposed a state of emergency, restricted political freedoms, and increased the role of the security forces (International Crisis Group, 2005, pp. 1-4). The 2005 coup weakened constitutional politics and the distinction between monarchy and authoritarian rule. Gyanendra justified the concentration of power as necessary to defeat the insurgency, but the International Crisis Group argued that the attack on democratic parties and institutions was likely to strengthen the Maoists and encourage cooperation between the rebels and mainstream political parties against the king (International Crisis Group, 2005, pp. 2-4). The report also observed that the government's authority had become limited outside Kathmandu and other urban areas, while the coup risked providing the Maoists with new opportunities for recruitment (International Crisis Group, 2005, pp. 2-4). Similarly, Muni argues that the 2005 coup facilitated Maoist efforts to build a united front with the political parties because the king had antagonised both the parties and much of the international community. This process eventually contributed to the 12-Point Understanding of November 2005 between the Maoists and the Seven Party Alliance, which later became an important basis for the 2006 political transition (Muni, 2010, p. 15).

In conclusion the period between 2001 and 2005 is important because the war became more violent and the political legitimacy of the monarchy became increasingly difficult to maintain.

4.1.5 From war to peace: the 2006 Comprehensive Peace Agreement

The transition from war to peace in Nepal was the result of the growing opposition to King Gyanendra's rule, the rapprochement between the Maoists and the parliamentary parties, and the mass mobilization of 2006. The peace process opened the way for the transformation of Nepal's political system. The International Crisis Group traces the origins of the 2006 peace agreement to the negotiations between the Seven Party Alliance and the Maoists that began in 2005 and later provided the basis for the April 2006 movement and subsequent negotiations (International Crisis Group, 2006, pp. 1–2). The 12-Point Memorandum of Understanding of November 2005 between the Seven Political Parties and the CPN-Maoist represented a crucial step towards peace: both sides agreed that King Gyanendra's authoritarian rule had become the main obstacle to peace and democracy and decided to cooperate against the monarchy (Seven Political Parties & CPN-Maoist, 2005, pp. 1-3). The agreement was important because it required compromise on both sides. The Maoists accepted to pursue their objectives through negotiations and elections and not just through armed struggle. At the same time, parliamentary parties accepted one of the Maoists' demands: the election of a Constituent Assembly charged with redefining Nepal's future political system (Seven Political Parties & CPN-Maoist, 2005, pp. 2-3). This political alliance gained much greater force during Jana Andolan II in April 2006. For nineteen days, large demonstrations challenged King Gyanendra's direct rule: they demanded the restoration of the democratic government and greater economic inclusion for marginalized groups (Routledge, 2010, p. 1279). The protests forced the king to restore the Parliament and created the political conditions for more serious negotiations between the government and the Maoists. The International Crisis Group describes the April movement as the event that ended Gyanendra's direct rule and opened the way for the negotiations that followed (International Crisis Group, 2006, pp. 1-2). The Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) was signed on 21 November 2006 and formally ended the decade-long armed conflict and established the Maoists' entry into mainstream politics (International Crisis Group, 2006, pp. 11-12). The CPA agreement is particularly relevant because it linked peace with political and social inclusion. In this sense some themes that had been important during Maoist wartime mobilization entered the official political framework of the post-war transition (Government of Nepal & CPN-Maoist, 2006, §3.5). The peace agreement also created the institutional path for the Maoists to move from armed rebellion to electoral competition. The International Crisis Group notes that the settlement provided for a government including the Maoists and

for Constituent Assembly elections, while the Maoist army was to be placed in cantonments and its weapons monitored under UN supervision (International Crisis Group, 2006, pp. i–ii, 11–12). The 2008 Constituent Assembly election represented an important result of this process. The Maoists became the largest party in the Assembly, and at its first meeting the Constituent Assembly declared Nepal a republic, formally ending the monarchy (Farasat & Hayner, 2009, pp. 7–8). However, the transition also had important limitations. The CPA included commitments concerning human rights, truth, reconciliation, and accountability, but their implementation was weak and often unclear. For this thesis, the 2005–2008 transition is therefore important because it shows how Maoist wartime mobilization became connected to institutional political change. Farasat and Hayner show that the agreements contained limited mechanisms for implementation and left important questions concerning justice and accountability unresolved (Farasat & Hayner, 2009, pp. 19–22). For this thesis, the 2005–2008 transition is important because it shows how Maoist wartime mobilization became connected to institutional political change. Huang identifies Nepal as a case in which civil war was followed by the removal of royal autocracy, the creation of a republic, and an expansion of political representation and rights (Huang, 2016, pp. 116–139).

4.2 Women's Participation in the Maoist Movement

Women's participation was one of the most visible aspects of Nepal's Maoist insurgency. Women participated in both the military and political activities of the movement, so they were not confined just in supportive roles. They served as combatants, commanders, informants, political activists and organisers, provided assistance to injured fighters, and participated in the All Nepalese Women's Association (Revolutionary), local people's governments, the Maoist justice system, and cultural organisations (ICTJ & Advocacy Forum, 2010, p. 26). The exact number of women included remains uncertain: Pettigrew and Shneiderman report that some contemporary observers estimated that women represented up to 40 percent of Maoist combatants and civilian political supporters (2004, p. 19). K.C. and Van der Haar similarly report estimates of around 30–40 percent of the Maoist combat force (2019, p. 434). However, official UNMIN verification after the conflict identified 3,846 women among 19,602 eligible Maoist combatants, or approximately 20 percent (ICTJ & Advocacy Forum, 2010, p. 25). Pettigrew and Shneiderman argue that women's experiences differed according to their personal and social circumstances, including caste, class, ethnicity,

religion, and gender (2004, pp. 19–20). K.C. and Van der Haar did not form a single and homogeneous group, because differences in caste, ethnicity, and class influenced their experiences during the conflict and afterwards (2019, pp. 434-435).

4.2.1 Why Women Joined the Maoists

Women joined the Maoist movement for multiple and overlapping reasons rather than through a single process of recruitment. Some women were attracted by Maoist political ideas, while others were influenced by their marginalisation (ICTJ & Advocacy Forum, 2010, pag. 24). For some women, Maoist ideology gave political meaning to inequalities that they already experienced in their everyday lives. Nepalese women were traditionally strongly dependent on male family members, had limited access to decision-making, and were often confined to the domestic sphere (K.C. & Van der Haar, 2019, p. 436). The Maoists challenged these traditional roles by presenting gender equality as a part of their agenda. K.C. and Van der Haar show that this ideology attracted women to the movement and encouraged some of them to remain involved because they connected Maoist ideas about equality with their own experiences and desire for greater independence (2019, p. 438). Women's motivations were also strongly connected to other forms of inequality. Many of those who joined came from Dalit,¹³ ethnic, indigenous, and economically marginalized communities, where gender discrimination was often combined with poverty, caste exclusion, and limited access to education and other opportunities (ICTJ & Advocacy Forum, 2010, p. 24). Similarly, K.C. and Van der Haar argue that their decision to participate was influenced by caste, class, age, family position, and experiences of social injustice. Some women, for example, described joining after experiencing caste discrimination, exploitation, violence against relatives, or the absence of protection from state institutions (K.C. & Van der Haar, 2019, p. 441). However, women's participation was not always completely voluntary. The conflict created situations in which political conviction, family influence, insecurity, and pressure could overlap. The ICTJ documents cases of women and girls who reported being recruited against their will, showing that coercion was also part of some women's experiences of the Maoist movement (ICTJ & Advocacy Forum, 2010, p. 55).

¹³ The term Dalit refers to communities historically placed at the lowest levels of the Hindu caste hierarchy and subjected to social exclusion and discrimination traditionally associated with "untouchability." In Nepal, Dalits have also faced significant disadvantages in access to education, economic resources, political representation, and social opportunities (Lawoti, 2008, pp. 365–366; Gellner, 2007, pp. 1823–1824).

4.2.2 Women's Roles During the War

Women's roles vary a lot beyond armed combat. Within the People's Liberation Army (PLA), women participated as fighters and some also reached positions such as section commanders and vice-commanders. The movement also created female squads and platoons, showing that women were directly involved in the military structure of the insurgency (Pettigrew & Shneiderman, 2004, p. 21). However, women also carried out many other activities that were necessary for the functioning of the movement. They worked as political organisers, informants, health workers, members of cultural organisations, and participants in local Maoist institutions. The ICTJ also documents women's involvement in the CPN-M, the PLA, the All Nepalese Women's Association (Revolutionary), local "people's governments," the Maoist justice system, and cultural organisations (ICTJ & Advocacy Forum, 2010, p. 26). The non-combat roles were also politically important. The Maoist movement depended strongly on local mobilisation, and women helped connect the organisation with rural communities through political activities, social campaigns, cultural initiatives, and local organisations. Riley, Ketola, and Yada argue that women became an important part of the movement's wartime "progressive" identity (Riley et al., 2022, pp. 35-46). Women also gained experience in political organisation and local decision-making. Pettigrew and Shneiderman show that women were increasingly present at lower and intermediate levels, while the highest positions of the Maoist leadership remained largely dominated by men (2004, pp. 21-22). Further difficulties emerged during the reintegration process. Upreti, Shivakoti and Bharati argue that reintegration policies have not adequately addressed the specific needs of former combatants, especially with regard to motherhood, childcare, social stigma, psychological difficulties and access to economic opportunities (2018, p. 41). The ICTJ also highlights the uncertainty faced by many ex-combatants with respect to their social and economic reintegration after leaving the PLA (ICTJ & Advocacy Forum, 2010, pp. 93-95). Participation during the war thus produced important changes in women's roles and experiences, but many of these changes remained fragile once the conflict ended.

4.2.3 Empowerment and Instrumentalization

Women's participation in the Maoist movement can be understood as a combination of empowerment and instrumentalisation. For some women, conflict's participation meant to enter into roles traditionally dedicated to men. The female ex-combatants interviewed by K.C. and Van der Haar explained their use of weapons, their responsibilities within military

units and their participation in politics' formation (2019, pp. 440-444). These experiences contributed to enhance self confidence, political awareness, and their personal independence. Women's presence contributed to challenge the vision of women as war victims (ICTJ & Advocacy Forum, 2010, p. 26). However, the opportunities created during the conflict have not completely eliminated the gender inequalities inside the Maoist movement. Women were largely present within combatants and political roles, but the highest positions of leadership continued to be occupied predominantly by men (Pettigrew & Shneiderman, 2004, pp. 21-22). At the same time, women's participation has a political value for Maoists because it reinforced the image of the movement's image as a force capable of promoting social change. Riley, Ketola and Yadav indeed show how gender equality became part of the progressive identity built by the movement during the war, although this commitment became less evident in the post-conflict period (2022, pp. 35-46). These limits emerged even more clearly after the end of the war. K.C. and Van der Haar show that many former combatants had difficulty transforming the experience gained during the conflict into concrete opportunities in civilian life. Difficulty finding work, social stigma, economic dependence, and the return of traditional expectations about the role of women reduced many of the opportunities they had experienced during the insurgency (2019, pp. 445-449). The authors also point out that, after the war, women's issues progressively lost importance within the Maoist political agenda, leaving many former combatants with the feeling that their contribution had not been fully recognized (KC & Van der Haar, 2019, pp. 447-449). Further difficulties emerged during the reintegration process. Upreti, Shivakoti and Bharati argue that reintegration policies have not adequately addressed the specific needs of former combatants, especially with regard to motherhood, childcare, social stigma, psychological difficulties and access to economic opportunities (2018, p. 41). The ICTJ also highlights the uncertainty faced by many ex-combatants with respect to their social and economic reintegration after leaving the PLA (ICTJ & Advocacy Forum, 2010, pp. 93-95). Participation during the war thus produced important changes in women's roles and experiences, but many of these changes remained fragile once the conflict ended.

4.2.4 Intersectionality: Dalit, Janajati, Rural and Poor Women

Gender alone is insufficient to explain women's participation in the Maoist movement. Nepalese women were not an homogeneous group, but they were different based on caste, ethnicity, social class, religion and local contest. Pettigrew and Shneiderman emphasise considerable diversity among Maoist women and show that gender interacted with

these different elements (2004, pp. 22-23). For Dalit, Janajati, poor rural, and other marginalised women, participation could therefore simultaneously challenge several forms of hierarchy. This intersectional dimension was closely related to the Maoists' mobilisation strategy. The movement connected women's equality with opposition to caste discrimination, ethnic exclusion, socioeconomic inequality, and the centralised state. The ICTJ notes that many of the women involved in the Maoist movement came from marginalised communities and that demands concerning inheritance, equal pay, patriarchal exploitation, and discrimination were embedded within a wider programme of social transformation (ICTJ & Advocacy Forum, 2010, pp. 24-26). K.C. and Van der Haar similarly show that gender inequality in Nepal intersected with caste and ethnic hierarchies, creating differentiated experiences even among women who participated in the same armed movement (2019, p. 436).

The meaning of wartime empowerment consequently differed according to women's social position. For a Dalit woman, participation could challenge both caste hierarchy and patriarchal authority; for a Janajati woman, it could combine gender mobilisation with demands for ethnic recognition; and for poor rural women, it could provide access to political education, mobility, collective organisation, and public roles otherwise difficult to obtain. This does not imply that the Maoist movement eliminated these inequalities. Rather, it created temporary political and organisational spaces in which some of them could be contested. The intersectional character of participation is therefore crucial for understanding both the breadth of Maoist mobilisation and the difficulties many women faced when attempting to translate wartime agency into durable post-war power.

4.3 From Wartime Participation to Post-Conflict Democratization

The relationship between women's wartime participation and post-conflict democratization in Nepal is understood as a conditional and mediated process. Women's participation in the Maoist movement gave many women greater political access and new opportunities to take part in public and political life. Women remained largely absent from the main peace negotiations, and many female ex-combatants struggled to maintain the autonomy they had experienced during the conflict (ICTJ & Advocacy Forum, 2010, p. 64; K.C. & Van der Haar, 2019, pp. 445-449). After the war, these wartime experiences helped generate demands for more inclusive institutions, even though women remained largely excluded from the main peace negotiations and many female ex-combatants struggled to

convert wartime authority into post-war political power (Ariño, 2008; ICTJ, 2010; Bell & O'Rourke, 2017). In this sense, Nepal supports Reyko Huang's argument that rebel mobilisation can contribute to democratization when it expands political consciousness, creates new constituencies, and links wartime participation to post-war institutional transformation (Huang, 2017).

4.3.1 Women in the Peace Process

A central contradiction of Nepal's transition was the contrast between women's extensive wartime participation and their limited presence in formal peace negotiations. Despite women's roles within the Maoist movement and broader civil society, formal bargaining remained dominated by male political leaders. The ICTJ describes women's participation at the principal negotiation tables as negligible and documents sustained demands from women's organisations for greater representation (ICTJ & Advocacy Forum, 2010, p. 64). Similarly, Baniya et al. show that women were absent from the core formal negotiations and note that even the Maoist negotiating team remained male-dominated (2017, p. 6). This exclusion demonstrates that participation during war does not automatically generate bargaining power during a political settlement. However, this does not mean that women were completely absent from the political transition: in fact, women's organisations continued to exercise pressure through demonstrations, advocacy campaigns, and civil society activities. The ICTJ notes, for example, that protests by women's organisations contributed to the expansion of the Interim Constitution Drafting Committee, which had originally been composed only of men (ICTJ & Advocacy Forum, 2010, p. 64). Baniya and colleagues also show that women's organisations remained active during the constitution-making process and pushed for stronger female representation in the future Constituent Assembly (2017, p. 8). The 2006 Comprehensive Peace Agreement recognised some of these broader demands for inclusion: section 3.5 committed the parties to an "inclusive, democratic and progressive restructuring" of the state, with particular attention to discrimination affecting women, Dalits, Janajatis, Madhesis, minorities, and neglected regions (Government of Nepal & CPN-Maoist, 2006, §3.5). Section 7.1.1 also reaffirmed the principle of non-discrimination, including on the basis of gender. These provisions created an institutional basis for later demands concerning women's inclusion, even though women themselves had been poorly represented in the negotiations that produced the agreement.

Despite these limitations, the post-conflict transition expanded women's formal political representation. Women's organisations strongly pushed for greater representation in the Constituent Assembly: in 2008, 197 of the 601 members of the first Constituent Assembly were women, representing almost one-third of the Assembly (Baniya et al., 2017, p. 8). The authors connect this increase both to the new electoral arrangements and to the mobilisation of women's organisations during the transition (Baniya et al., 2017, p. 8). These changes continued during the constitutional process. The 2015 Constitution recognised a number of specific rights for women. Article 38 guarantees, among other things, reproductive health rights, protection from violence, equal rights in property and family matters, and the right of women to participate in state bodies on the basis of proportional inclusion (Constitution of Nepal, 2015, art. 38).

However, these reforms should not be attributed only to women's participation in the Maoist movement. Greater political representation resulted from the interaction of several actors, including women's organisations, civil society, political parties, and other social movements. Baniya and colleagues particularly emphasise the role played by women's organisations in promoting female representation in the Constituent Assembly and influencing the constitutional process (2017, p. 8). Women's participation during the war therefore helped increase their visibility as political actors, but the reforms that followed were the result of a much broader political process.

4.3.2 Assessing the Nepalese Case

The Nepalese case shows that women's participation in a rebel movement can contribute to political change after the conflict, but the relationship is neither direct nor automatic. During the insurgency, women entered political, military, and organisational roles that increased their visibility and gave many of them experience in mobilisation, leadership, and public participation. After the war, demands concerning representation and inclusion became more visible within the political system, as shown by women's presence in the Constituent Assembly and the later constitutional recognition of proportional inclusion (Baniya et al., 2017, p. 8; Constitution of Nepal, 2015, art. 38).

At the same time, these outcomes cannot be explained only through women's participation in the Maoist movement. Women's organisations, civil society, political parties, other social movements, and the institutional design of the post-war transition also played important roles. Women themselves had very limited influence in the main peace negotiations, while much of

the pressure for greater representation continued through organisations operating outside the formal negotiation process (ICTJ & Advocacy Forum, 2010, p. 64; Baniya et al., 2017, pp. 6–8).

For the argument of this thesis, the Nepalese case therefore suggests a conditional relationship between wartime participation and post-conflict democratization. Participation during the conflict can provide women with political experience, greater awareness, organisational skills, and stronger expectations of inclusion. However, these wartime changes can influence the post-conflict political order only when they are later translated into institutional rights, representation, and opportunities for political participation. The experience of female ex-combatants also shows that formal institutional change alone is not sufficient when wartime gains are not supported by social and economic conditions after the conflict (K.C. & Van der Haar, 2019, pp. 445-449; Upreti et al., 2018, p. 41).

Women's wartime participation should therefore be considered one component of Nepal's wider post-conflict political transformation. It contributed to challenging traditional ideas about women's political roles and to increasing the visibility of demands for inclusion, but its effects were shaped by the institutions and political actors that managed the transition after the war. In this sense, the Nepalese case supports the central argument of this thesis while also showing its main limitation: wartime participation can create conditions for greater post-war inclusion, but it does not guarantee that this inclusion will automatically translate into equal political power.

Chapter 5- Zimbabwe

Chapter 5 examines Zimbabwe as the second empirical case of this thesis and provides a comparative counterpart to the Nepalese case. While Nepal's insurgency developed within an independent state affected by political instability, socioeconomic inequalities, and persistent forms of social exclusion, Zimbabwe's liberation struggle emerged from a system of settler colonial rule based on racial political and economic inequality. In both cases, women participated in armed and political mobilisation, but the post-conflict outcome was significantly different. Zimbabwe in this context, is a relevant case to underline under which women's wartime participation can, or cannot, be translated into post-conflict political inclusion. The liberation struggle opened political and military spaces that had traditionally been dominated by men. Women participated as combatants, political activists, couriers, intelligence gatherers, nurses, organisers, and providers of logistical support, while some also obtained military and organisational responsibilities (Mudeka, 2014, pp. 90–97). At the same time, nationalist organisations continued to reproduce important gender hierarchies, and women's wartime participation did not eliminate patriarchal relations within the liberation movements themselves (Chogugudza, 2006, pp. 43–48). The Zimbabwean case therefore provides an important opportunity to distinguish between wartime participation and the longer-term political consequences of that participation. The chapter is articulated into different sections. Section 5.1, "Historical Background: Settler Colonialism, Nationalism, and the Liberation War", reconstructs the political and socioeconomic context in which the conflict developed. Section 5.2, "Women's Participation in the Liberation Struggle", focuses specifically on women's involvement in the conflict. Finally, Section 5.3, "From Wartime Participation to Post-Independence Politics", analyses whether women's wartime participation was transformed into political representation, institutional rights, socioeconomic opportunities, and influence over the post-independence state.

5.1 Historical Background: Settler Colonialism, Nationalism, and the Liberation War

5.1.1 Settler Colonialism and Political Exclusion

Zimbabwe's liberation struggle has been part of the longer history of settler colonial rule in Southern Rhodesia. The colonial State has created a racial division in terms of access to land, which has given the white population a greater access to agricultural resources than the African majority. The Land Apportionment Act of 1930 formally strengthened this racial division. According to Mlambo, the Act allocated approximately 51 percent of the country's land to around 50,000 white settlers, while only 29.8 percent was allocated for the use of more than one million Africans (Mlambo, 2014, pp. 60-62). Furthermore, the system also contributed to overpopulation and decreased quality of agricultural production in the African reserves. Land inequality was connected to wider forms of political and economic exclusion. African demands for majority rule developed alongside grievances concerning access to land, employment, and political representation. After World War II, as nationalist movements grew stronger, the demand for political independence increasingly became linked to the concept of majority rule and the rejection of white settler control (Mlambo, 2014, pp. 146-148). Women in Southern Rhodesia were impacted by both the racial inequality and gender discrimination. Chogugudza demonstrates how women's position was influenced by the combination of traditional patriarchal customs and colonial Victorian and Christian ideas about women's domestic roles. These structures limited women's ability to achieve economic and social independence and reinforced expectations that women should remain primarily wives and mothers (Chogugudza, 2006, pp. 34-35). For some women, therefore, the subsequent liberation struggle represented an opportunity to challenge not only colonial oppression but also the limitations imposed upon them due to their gender.

5.1.2 The Rise of Nationalist Movements and Armed Struggle

The nationalist movement in Africa expanded rapidly from the mid-1950s through the early 1960s. After the banning of earlier nationalist movements, the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU), led by Joshua Nkomo, became one of the main nationalist forces. Political repression and the banning of ZAPU in 1962 caused the growing belief among some nationalist leaders that peaceful political action was no longer sufficient. Internal disputes

among these leaders led to a split within the nationalist movement, leading to the formation of the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) in August 1963 under Ndabaningi Sithole (Mlambo, 2014, pp. 147-148). The two organisations subsequently developed separate military wings: ZANU was associated with the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA), while ZAPU was associated with the Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA). Armed resistance became increasingly important after Ian Smith's government issued the Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) in 1965, maintaining white minority rule despite growing demands for an African majority government. As the conflict continued to escalate throughout the 1970s, it evolved into a full-scale liberation war fought by both ZANLA and ZIPRA forces (Mlambo, 2014, pp. 151–166). The liberation struggle was not based on a single motivation or experience. Land dispossession and racial political exclusion were important, but socioeconomic problems and individual circumstances also influenced participation. Mtisi, Nyakudya, and Barnes argue that there were many “struggles within the struggle” during the liberation war and that we cannot simply view the war as a battle between a united African population and the Rhodesian government (2009, pp. 141–166). This complexity is particularly important when analysing women, whose participation was shaped by nationalism but also by gender, family circumstances, economic conditions, and personal aspirations.

5.1.3 The End of the War and the Lancaster House Settlement

By the end of the 1970s, the war had increased the military, economic, and political pressure upon the different actors involved. The conflict ended through negotiation rather than through a complete military victory by either nationalist forces or the Rhodesian state. Mtisi, Nyakudya, and Barnes show that the combination of military pressure, economic hardship, regional pressure and the fatigue of each party led to the negotiations at Lancaster House (2009, p. 165). The Lancaster House Agreement of 1979 provided the basis for the transition to independence. The parties agreed to a ceasefire, elections under the supervision of Great Britain, the establishment of the new independence constitution, and the abandonment of the use of force for political objectives (Lancaster House Agreement, 1979, paras. 1-4). Elections were subsequently held and Zimbabwe became independent in April 1980.

While the settlement produced several positive outcomes, it contained some significant compromises. Land was one of the main areas of disagreement. Under the Lancaster House framework, land redistribution could occur only if there was a willing seller and willing buyer, limiting the possibility of immediate large-scale redistribution after independence (Mtisi et al., 2009, p. 165). The agreement provided for majority rule; however, it failed to resolve some of the economic disparities that existed due to settler colonialism.

The settlement also had limitations from the perspective of female ex-combatants. Ndhlovu and Wielenga argue that Lancaster House addressed former combatants broadly but did not treat women ex-combatants as a specific group or consider how their wartime experiences and post-war needs differed from those of men (2023, p. 824). After independence, women ex-combatants attempted to convert their wartime participation into recognition, economic opportunities and political power.

5.2 Women's Participation in the Liberation Struggle

Women were involved in various ways during Zimbabwe's liberation struggle. Women participated in the struggle as trained combatants, political activists, couriers, intelligence gatherers, nurses, teachers, organizers, and logistical supporters. While their participation increased opportunities for women to engage politically and militarily, they did so within movements that continued to be dominated by men. Therefore, the participation of women in the liberation struggle should be viewed through both the opportunities presented to them through the liberation struggle and the limitations placed upon them through nationalist organizations.

5.2.1 Why Women Joined the Liberation Struggle

Women joined the liberation struggle for different and often overlapping reasons. National liberation was an important motivation: colonial political exclusion, racial inequalities, repression, and socioeconomic grievances affected both women and men. However, women could also have specific personal and gender-related reasons for joining. Chogugudza shows that some women viewed the liberation movement as an opportunity to improve their own situation, gain greater equality, access education, or escape restrictive personal and family circumstances (2006, pp. 36-37). Therefore, national and personal

liberation could go hand in hand. The opportunity to achieve equality within a revolutionary organization provided opportunities that were difficult to find in daily civilian life. Chogugudza reported that former combatants said they were drawn into the movement due to its promotion of equality and opportunities for education and a new social status (2006, p.37). Participation could represent both support for national independence and an attempt to challenge restrictions affecting women personally. At the same time, participation should not be presented as completely voluntary in every case. Mtisi, Nyakudya, and Barnes show that people entered the liberation struggle for a wide variety of reasons. In addition to politics, some used participation to escape from personal/financial problems, while others were pressured/forced to join. In particular, they reported that press-ganging (including in schools) took place during portions of the conflict (2009, pp.153-154). Thus, the participation of women in the liberation struggle must be understood through a combination of political commitment, personal desires, social conditions and perhaps coercive methods.

5.2.2 Women's Roles During the War

Women performed a wide range of activities during the liberation struggle. Within ZANLA, women transported weapons and ammunition, guarded bases, received military training, collected information, and in some cases participated directly in combat. Mudeka describes female detachments that underwent military training and defended themselves during attacks, while some women also reached positions of command (2014, pp. 90–92). Their participation was not limited to military activities. Women also worked in political education, administration, health care, food provision, surveillance, and communication. Mudeka shows that women participated in the Department of Women's Affairs and carried out a combination of military and traditionally female activities that were important to the functioning of ZANLA (2014, pp. 93–97). These roles demonstrate that the liberation movement depended on forms of participation that extended far beyond direct combat. However, the division of labour remained strongly gendered. Chogugudza shows that nationalist organisations continued to assign women many activities traditionally associated with femininity, including cooking and other support functions, even while women were participating in an armed revolutionary movement. She argues that both ZANLA and ZIPRA continued to reproduce elements of male authority and traditional gender expectations (2006, pp. 43-46).

This distinction is important because women's contribution must be measured by the number who fought directly on the battlefield and by all the other functions which supported the war. Logistical support, intelligence, transport, health care, and political organisation were necessary to sustain the liberation movements. At the same time, the lower status often attached to these roles meant that women's contribution could later be more difficult to recognise as equivalent to that of male fighters.

5.2.3 Empowerment, Instrumentalization, and Different

Women Experiences Wartime participation created real opportunities for some women to challenge traditional gender expectations. Military training, carrying weapons, political education, travelling outside their communities, and taking organisational responsibilities placed women in spaces that had previously been strongly associated with men. Mudeka argues that women's recruitment into ZANLA and their presence in leadership and military roles contributed to changes in perceptions of women, even though these changes were gradual and incomplete (2014, pp. 84-85, 96-97). The opportunities created by the war for women were limited; they did not create full equality. The nationalist organizations still maintained a great deal of control over how women behaved sexually. Chogugudza indicates that women cadre members were required to meet certain expectations of moral conduct and social acceptability. Pregnancies or being mothers would result in women being removed from their military assignments. In addition, she describes ongoing sexual exploitation and inequitable power dynamics within the camps (2006, pp. 45-48). Women's participation contained an important contradiction. Their visible presence supported the revolutionary claim that liberation would create a more equal society, while the organisations themselves continued to reproduce many patriarchal practices. Women could become fighters and political actors without obtaining equal control over the movements' strategic decisions. Wartime women's empowerment was indeed real for many participants in the liberation struggle; however, it was always constrained by the structures and priorities of the nationalist movements. Additionally, we need to avoid treating all women who participated in the liberation struggle as a single group. The experiences of these women during the war and after the war were significantly different based upon their social class, ethnic background, level of education, organizational status, and the type of work they did while fighting. As Ndhlovu & Wielenga would state, gender alone cannot account for the status of women ex-combatants in post-independence society due to the fact that social class and ethnicity also

had an impact on whether or not they received official acknowledgement or compensation (2023, p. 824). An intersectional approach provides us with a clearer view of why the potential benefits of the liberation struggle did not result in equal opportunity for each participant.

5.3 From Wartime Participation to Post-Independence Politics

The end of the liberation war created a new political context for women. Independence removed white minority rule and introduced majority government, but the political and social opportunities created during the war were not automatically preserved. The central question for this thesis is therefore not simply whether women participated in the liberation struggle, but whether that participation was later transformed into political representation, institutional rights, autonomous organisation, and influence over the post-war state.

5.3.1 Demobilization and Reintegration of Female Ex-Combatants

The first important problem concerned the transition from military participation to civilian life. Sadomba and Dzinesa argue that Zimbabwe lacked a sufficiently gender-sensitive approach to demobilisation and reintegration. Their study concludes that the specific contributions and needs of female ex-combatants were inadequately recognised, contributing to their marginalisation in military, political, professional, and social life after the war (2004, p. 51). Ndhlovu and Wielenga reach a similar conclusion. They show that women ex-combatants were not treated as a specific social group in post-independence policies. The Lancaster House discussions addressed former combatants more generally, without giving comparable attention to women's distinct wartime experiences and post-war needs. Their access to redress was also influenced by differences in class and ethnicity, meaning that not all former female fighters experienced reintegration in the same way (Ndhlovu & Wielenga, 2023, p. 824).

Social attitudes created additional difficulties. Chogugudza shows that some former female fighters faced stigma after returning to civilian communities. Women who had lived in military camps and challenged conventional expectations of femininity could be treated with suspicion rather than simply celebrated as liberation veterans. Her research describes women ex-combatants as occupying an uncomfortable position between recognition as heroines and negative social stereotypes concerning their behaviour during the war (2006, pp. 51-53).

Recognition as war veterans was also complicated by the lower value attached to non-combat roles. Chogugudza notes that proving direct participation in combat could be important for veteran recognition and compensation, creating difficulties for women whose wartime contribution had been primarily logistical or organisational. She also shows that many former female fighters continued to face limited employment opportunities and economic insecurity (2006, pp. 53-55). The experience of reintegration shows one of the main limits of wartime empowerment. Women had entered roles that challenged traditional gender expectations, but post-war institutions did not consistently recognise these experiences or transform them into stable political and socioeconomic opportunities. This corresponds to the broader pattern described by Ranchod-Nilsson as gender backlash, in which women are mobilised during liberation struggles but their demands become less central after independence (2008, p. 642).

5.3.2 Political and Legal Inclusion: Gains and Limitations

Post-independence Zimbabwe did introduce important reforms affecting women, and these changes should not be ignored. Chiroro notes that the early post-independence period saw legislation concerning equal pay, maternity leave, divorce, child maintenance, pensions, and legal majority. The Constitution was also amended in 1996 to prohibit discrimination on the basis of gender (Chiroro, 2005, p. 95). These reforms show that independence created genuine legal openings for improving women's status.

However, formal reform coexisted with continuing legal and political limitations. Chiroro points out that constitutional protections still allowed discrimination in areas connected to family law, marriage, divorce, inheritance, and customary law. She also notes that women's parliamentary representation remained relatively low: women represented 9 percent of legislators in 1980, 14 percent in 1990, and 16 percent in 2005 (Chiroro, 2005, pp. 95-100).

The electoral system provided limited institutional support for increasing women's representation. Writing about the 2005 elections, Chiroro observes that the first-past-the-post system contained no general affirmative-action mechanism guaranteeing women's representation and that access to party nominations remained strongly gendered (2005, p. 99). Women's presence in formal politics therefore depended heavily on party structures and nomination decisions rather than on strong institutional guarantees.

At the same time, women did not simply disappear from political mobilisation after independence. Independent women's organisations became important actors. Chiroro describes the development of the Women's Coalition and other organisations that campaigned for constitutional reform, gender justice, and increased female representation. During the constitutional reform process of the late 1990s and 2000, these groups attempted to place women's rights directly on the political agenda (Chiroro, 2005, pp. 96-97). This is an important correction to the idea that post-war Zimbabwe simply lacked autonomous women's mobilisation. Such mobilisation existed, but its capacity to influence the political system was limited by the wider political environment. Women therefore achieved some legal reforms and developed organisations outside the state, while continuing to face important barriers to representation and political influence.

5.3.3 Liberation-Party Dominance, Political Space, and Liberation Memory

The possibilities for transforming women's wartime participation into political power were also affected by the wider development of the post-independence political system. Onslow shows that political power became increasingly centralised after 1980. The 1987 Unity Accord resulted in the absorption of ZAPU into ZANU-PF, after which a one-party-dominant political system persisted until the emergence of the Movement for Democratic Change in the late 1990s (Onslow, 2011, pp. 2-3).

This broader concentration of political power is important for analysing women because it affected the space available for independent political organisation. Women could participate through political parties, state institutions, and civil society, but their capacity to organise autonomously depended on the openness of the political environment. By the 2000s, Chiroro identified restrictive laws, limitations on assembly, political violence, and restrictions on independent media as important obstacles to women's political participation and civil-society activism (2005, pp. 101-102).

The memory of the liberation struggle also became politically important. Ranger uses the concept of "patriotic history" to describe a version of Zimbabwe's past that presented the revolutionary tradition as a central source of contemporary political legitimacy and reduced space for more plural interpretations of the liberation struggle (2004, p. 215).

Onslow similarly shows that, particularly from the late 1990s and after 2000, liberation history became increasingly connected to ZANU-PF's political legitimacy. Her analysis describes how the official narrative emphasised ZANU/ZANLA's contribution to independence while giving less attention to other actors, and how "patriotic history" was used to define an increasingly exclusive national political narrative (Onslow, 2011, pp. 5-6). This has an important gender dimension. Women's participation could be remembered and celebrated as part of the history of national liberation without automatically giving women greater control over the post-independence state. Chogugudza shows precisely this tension: female fighters could be represented as symbols of revolutionary equality while many former combatants continued to face weak representation, stigma, and economic disadvantages after the war (2006, pp. 49-55).

The problem was therefore not that women completely disappeared from Zimbabwe's liberation memory. Rather, symbolic recognition and political power were not the same thing. Women's wartime contribution could support the national narrative of liberation while providing former female fighters with limited independent influence over the institutions created after independence.

5.3.4 Assessing the Zimbabwean Case

Within the comparative design of this thesis, Zimbabwe represents the case in which substantial female participation during armed struggle was followed by a more limited translation of that participation into post-conflict political power. Women participated in military, logistical, organisational, and political activities during the liberation war and, for some, these experiences challenged traditional gender roles and increased political awareness (Chogugudza, 2006, pp. 36-43; Mudeka, 2014, pp. 90-97).

The post-independence period nevertheless produced a mixed outcome. Women obtained some important legal reforms and continued to mobilise through civil society, but female ex-combatants were not consistently recognised as a distinct group in demobilisation and reintegration policies, political representation remained limited, and wartime roles did not automatically translate into decision-making authority (Sadomba & Dzinesa, 2004, p. 51; Ndhlovu & Wielenga, 2023, p. 824; Chiroro, 2005, pp. 95-100).

The broader political environment also mattered. The increasing concentration of authority within ZANU-PF reduced the political space in which women and other actors could convert wartime mobilisation into independent political claims. At the same time, liberation history became an important source of ruling-party legitimacy, meaning that women's wartime participation could be recognised symbolically without necessarily becoming a basis for autonomous political power (Onslow, 2011, pp. 2–6; Ranger, 2004, p. 215).

The Zimbabwean case therefore suggests that women's participation in armed movements is not sufficient on its own to produce post-conflict democratization. Wartime participation can create political experience, new expectations, and challenges to existing gender roles, but its longer-term effects depend on the institutions and political opportunities that follow the conflict. In Zimbabwe, several mechanisms limited this translation: gender-insensitive reintegration, continuing patriarchal expectations, relatively weak institutional guarantees of political representation, and the concentration of political authority within the post-liberation party-state.

This conclusion is particularly important for the comparison with Nepal. The difference between the two cases should not be reduced to the simple presence or absence of women during conflict, since women participated substantially in both. Rather, the comparison directs attention to what happened to women's wartime participation after the conflict. In Nepal, the post-war transition created institutional debates and mechanisms concerning representation and proportional inclusion, although these remained incomplete. In Zimbabwe, independence created majority rule and some legal reforms, but women's wartime participation was less consistently converted into autonomous political influence and institutional representation. The comparison therefore supports the central argument of this thesis that the democratizing effects of women's participation are conditional on the political and institutional environment that follows armed conflict.

Conclusions

The analysis developed throughout this thesis finds that women's participation in rebel movements may contribute to post-conflict democratization. The starting point of the research was the idea that participation in armed movements may have consequences that extend beyond the conflict itself. The main finding of this research is that women's participation in rebel movements may contribute to post-conflict democratization when wartime experiences are followed by political and institutional opportunities that allow women to remain active in public life. Participation may provide women with political awareness, organisational experience, social networks, and greater confidence in occupying roles traditionally dominated by men. Huang similarly argues that involvement in rebellion can increase political consciousness and participation among previously marginalised groups (Huang, 2016, p. 33). However, these resources only become politically significant after the conflict if women are able to use them within the new political system.

In this context several factors appear particularly important:

First, institutional access plays a central role. Constitutional reforms, electoral mechanisms, quotas, representative bodies, and other forms of institutional inclusion may provide channels through which wartime political mobilisation continues after the end of conflict. In Nepal, for example, the post-war transition created new mechanisms of political inclusion and representation, while women's organisations continued to press for greater participation in the Constituent Assembly process (Baniya et al., 2017, p. 8). The 2006 Comprehensive Peace Agreement also explicitly referred to the need for an "inclusive, democratic and progressive restructuring" of the state (Government of Nepal & CPN-Maoist, 2006, §3.5).

Second, the findings show that women may be widely involved in a rebel movement without having the same influence over leadership or important decisions. This was visible in both cases. In Nepal, for example, women participated extensively in the Maoist movement, but

the highest leadership positions remained occupied by men (Pettigrew & Shneiderman, 2004, pp. 21–22). For this reason, the type of participation has a certain importance. Combat, support, and leadership roles may provide different levels of political experience, access to networks, and influence within the organisation. Future research should examine whether women in leadership positions are more likely to gain political influence after the conflict than women involved in combat or support roles.

Third, post-conflict reintegration is crucial for understanding whether wartime gains last. Female ex-combatants may return to economic dependence, social stigma, limited job opportunities, and traditional gender expectations, weakening the political experience gained during the conflict (K.C. & Van der Haar, 2019, pp. 445–449; Sadomba & Dzinesa, 2004, p. 51). The transition from war to peace is a decisive stage. Peace agreements, constitutional reforms, electoral rules, and demobilisation policies can either support women's continued political participation or limit it.

Finally, women's experiences are shaped by more than gender alone. Class, ethnicity, caste, education, and position within the movement can influence both wartime opportunities and post-conflict outcomes. For this reason, women who participated in the same rebel movement may have very different experiences of empowerment and political inclusion.

Limitations and Future Research

The findings of this thesis should be interpreted in light of several limitations. The first is the small number of cases. The comparison between Nepal and Zimbabwe allows a detailed examination of political mechanisms, but it cannot establish whether the same relationship applies systematically to all post-conflict societies. Future research could therefore extend the analysis to a larger number of cases characterised by different ideological movements, conflict outcomes, and institutional transitions.

A broader comparison could also make it possible to test more systematically one of the central propositions emerging from this research: that the type of wartime participation matters. Future studies could distinguish between combatants, political organisers, civilian supporters, and women occupying leadership positions and examine whether these different roles are associated with different levels of post-conflict representation and influence.

A second direction for future research concerns the transition period itself. The findings presented here indicate that the years immediately following conflict may be decisive for determining whether wartime political changes survive. Future research could focus on peace negotiations, constitution-making processes, electoral reforms, and disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration programmes.

Particular attention should also be given to women's participation in peace negotiations. Wartime participation does not necessarily guarantee access to formal bargaining after conflict. In Nepal, for example, women remained largely excluded from the central negotiation process despite their extensive participation during the insurgency (ICTJ & Advocacy Forum, 2010, p. 64). Examining this transition more systematically could help identify where the political influence gained during conflict is most frequently lost.

A third area for future research concerns the relationship between former female combatants and broader women's movements. These actors should not automatically be treated as a single political group. Their interests, experiences, and political strategies may differ considerably. Understanding whether they cooperate, compete, or remain politically separated after conflict could provide a clearer explanation of how women's wartime mobilisation influences institutional change.

Long-term research would also be particularly useful. The political consequences of conflict may change over time. Reforms adopted immediately after war may later weaken, while political opportunities that initially appear limited may expand through civil society mobilisation and institutional change. Longitudinal studies could therefore distinguish short-term post-conflict gains from more durable transformations.

Finally, future research should examine more closely the difference between numerical representation and substantive political influence. Rather than focusing exclusively on the number of women elected to parliament, future studies could analyse women's presence in cabinet positions, party leadership, constitutional committees, peace negotiations, local government, and other areas where political decisions are actually made.

Final Conclusion

Taken together, women's participation can create political resources and challenge existing patterns of exclusion, but the durability of these changes depends on what follows the conflict. Institutions, political opportunities, reintegration policies, civil society mobilisation, and access to decision-making all influence whether wartime participation becomes a lasting source of political inclusion. The central contribution of this thesis is therefore to shift attention from participation itself to the process through which participation is translated into post-conflict political power. The comparison between Nepal and Zimbabwe shows that the important question is not simply whether women participated in armed struggle, but whether the political system that followed allowed them to convert this experience into representation, influence and durable opportunities for participation. The hypothesis of this thesis is therefore partially supported and, at the same time, requires an important qualification: women's participation in rebel movements can favour post-conflict democratization, but its effects depend on the political and institutional conditions that follow the end of conflict. Future research should consequently focus less on whether women were present in rebel organisations and more on what they were able to do within them, what resources they acquired, and whether those resources remained politically usable after the transition to peace.

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