Civilian protective agency

An introduction

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More than half the world's population live in violent settings, such as civil wars, communal conflicts, cities plagued by gang violence, and entire areas governed by criminal organizations (United Nations 2020). Living exposed to diverse forms of violence, individuals and communities have found innovative—and sometimes counterintuitive—ways to protect themselves and others.

A burgeoning body of research has developed to study the phenomenon of civilian agency and its implications for protection. Distinct research streams on civil war and rebel governance, communal violence and resilience, genocide and rescue behaviour, urban crime and criminal governance have all produced new insights about civilian agency and civilian self-protection. Yet knowledge on the topic remains highly fragmented, as it has developed within the confines of specialized subfields (e.g. micro-dynamics of civil war, politics of crime, peace studies, Holocaust studies), across several disciplines (e.g. political science, sociology, anthropology, history), and within specific area studies (e.g. Latin America for crime research, South Asia for election and communal violence research). The result is a compartmentalization of knowledge, raising questions about the comparability of findings and their scope conditions.

The power of ordinary people to resist various forms of oppression and injustice as well as promote social and political change has been widely researched by students of revolutions, social movements, and, more recently, civil resistance. Although this work has stressed agency and people's power, and much of it touches directly or indirectly on issues related to protection, a unified and explicit research agenda on civilian protective agency has yet to take shape. Further, academic scholarship is disconnected from major policy debates on the protection of civilians, conflict prevention, and peacebuilding. This is unfortunate, especially at a time when international organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and donor countries increasingly seek to integrate local protective agency into their programming given the follies of direct intervention.

This volume aims to establish the study of civilian agency and its protective dimension across various violent settings as a systematic and unified field of

research. In doing so, it responds to calls by influential scholars for research that accounts for the similarities and differences of dynamics in the face of different expressions of political violence (Tilly 2003; Kalyvas 2019). As a starting point, we define civilian protective agency broadly as *actions carried out by individuals and communities to protect themselves and/or others in violent settings*. From here we delineate some important conceptual boundaries and motivate a set of core questions: How does civilian protective agency emerge in different violent settings? What forms does it take and do these differ according to the setting where they emerge? How does civilian protective agency impact the dynamics of violence in different settings? What are its consequences for conflict processes, governance arrangements, and sustainable peacebuilding?

To engage with these questions, the volume brings together researchers spanning several social science disciplines and relying on a wide variety of research methods for data collection and analysis, including ethnography, interviewing, survey research, archival research, and statistical analysis. The contributors study civilian protective agency in different violent settings, including civil war, genocide, communal violence, and organized crime, and in various geographical world locations, from Syria to Mozambique, Sri Lanka to Mexico, Iraq to Colombia, and Western Europe. The volume offers conceptual foundations, new theoretical insights, and detailed empirics that advance our understanding of civilian protective agency and promote future research on the topic that is comparable, tractable, and cumulative.

In what follows, we provide an overview of the origins of this diverse field of scholarship and practice, and we sketch the conceptual terrain. We define civilian protective agency, examine its constituent components ('civilian', 'protection', and 'agency'), distinguish it from cognate terms, and situate the concept within the broader literature. We then review the various ways that civilian protective agency emerges as well as its consequences in terms of protection. Finally, we provide an overview of the volume.

1. Origins of a diverse field of scholarship

Individuals and communities have always played an active role in their own survival and protection in the face of violence. And yet, with relatively few exceptions, their agency was long neglected by social scientists as well as the range of international organizations and NGOs that operate in violent settings. That has begun to change.

In recent years scholars of civil war, building on the foundations laid by the anthropology of conflict and violence (e.g. Kriger 1991; Stoll 1993; Nordstrom 1997; Lubkemann 2008), have increasingly paid attention to civilian agency in conflict and post-conflict settings. This has been a remarkable turn from a previous generation of scholarship that either focused on macro-level processes

(e.g. civil war onset, duration, termination) in large-N cross-country analysis, or on meso-level dynamics with a dyadic understanding of conflict as a contest almost exclusively between non-state armed actors and the state. Both perspectives left little to no room for considering civilians as agents in their own right.

While civilians have featured in studies of rebel recruitment and mobilization (e.g. Wood 2003; Weinstein 2007), Kalyvas established the centrality of civilian agency on the dynamics of civil war *violence*. He argued that armed actors and civilians jointly produce violence and showed that civilian actions (such as collaboration and denunciation) can shape both types and levels of civilian victimization (Kalyvas 2003, 2006). This insight was articulated in a model aimed at explaining violence a*gainst* civilians and mostly stressed civilians' ability to manipulate widespread violence for private purposes (Kalyvas 2006 p. 386). Yet, it implied that what civilians do has the power to alter violence and related war dynamics. Expanding on this insight, scholars have shown that civilian organization can limit levels of civil war violence (Kaplan 2017), influence the capacity of armed groups to control territory (Rubin 2019; Jackson 2021), and shape the nature and scope of rebel governance (Mampilly 2011; Arjona 2016; Breslawski 2020).

Similar developments have occurred in related fields where scholars have analysed violent and nonviolent civilian agency in violent settings other than civil war. Scholars of communal conflict, for example, have showcased that civilian action can effectively prevent violence from emerging and escalating in areas surrounded by communal violence (Varshney 2003; Berenschot 2011; Carpenter 2012; J. Krause 2018; Dhattiwala 2019; Klaus 2020). Similarly, moving away from conventional understandings of episodes of mass violence as totalizing and unaccommodating, genocide researchers have established that even in extremely violent contexts such as the Holocaust and Rwandan Genocide, civilians retain some agency in the face of extermination campaigns. This work has examined the individual and collective self-protective actions of those persecuted, as well as the efforts of some to save others from harm despite enormous risks to themselves (Oliner 1992; Tec 1995; Fujii 2009; Maher 2010; Einwohner and Maher 2011; Monroe 2011; Luft 2015; Finkel 2017; Braun 2019). Looking beyond settings not formally designated as 'armed conflict', students of organized crime have also examined how civilians respond to different forms of criminal violence and governance (Fahlberg 2018; Ley et al. 2019; Osorio et al. 2021; Moncada 2022; Barnes forthcoming).

Civilian agency has also gained attention within policy domains such as humanitarian relief, peacebuilding, and refugee protection, where various forms of 'localization', aimed at supporting individual and community agency, have become a priority for a host of international actors (Obrecht 2014; Gingerich and Cohen 2015; Wallace 2016; Julian 2020; Pincock et al. 2020; Kaplan 2021; McQuinn et al. 2021). With increasing recognition that violence in armed conflict represents only a fraction of violence worldwide, some of these same international actors have pursued similar activities in what the International Committee of the Red Cross

(ICRC) refers to as 'situations other than war' (Geneva Declaration 2015; Bradley 2020). Relatedly, peace researchers, following this 'local turn', have increasingly stressed how everyday civilian practices contribute to managing conflicts less violently and fostering peace locally (Mac Ginty 2014, 2021; Firchow 2018), as well as carving out pockets of peace in the midst of ongoing violence (Hancock and Mitchell 2007; Autesserre 2021).

2. Mapping the conceptual terrain

We define civilian protective agency as *actions carried out by individuals and communities to protect themselves and/or others in violent settings.* We begin purposefully with a broad and inclusive definition that aims at identifying the concept's four core attributes: the agent (civilians), the goal and action (protection), the beneficiary of the action (either the agents themselves or others), and the context in which the action takes place (violent settings). This definition builds on previous research that conceptualized protective civilian agency as tactical, strategic, and rescue agency, arguing that civilians' time horizon and social knowledge shape protective action (J. Krause 2017). We provide a more comprehensive conceptualization of civilian protective agency that includes both nonviolent and violent practices and is based on a broader understanding of protection. In what follows, we further define the core constituent components of the concept ('civilian', 'protection', and 'agency'), which together cover the four core attributes listed above. We discuss relevant demarcations and identify some of the empirical manifestations of civilian protective agency.

Who is a civilian?

Defining the term 'civilian' has moral, legal, and political implications. As with most (if not all) existing definitions of civilian, empirical challenges are likely to emerge when it comes to distinguishing who is, and who is not, a civilian 'on the ground', given that in many contemporary violent settings frontlines are blurred, and armed actors hide amongst the population. Consistent with scholarship in conflict research, we adopt a definition based on International Humanitarian Law (IHL) that distinguishes between 'combatant' and 'non-combatant'. Under Article 50 of Additional Protocol I, the civilian is defined in a negative manner as anyone who is not a combatant (Slim 2016; Williamson 2016), which implies that *a civilian is not a recognizable member of an organized armed group with a clear command structure.*

To further distinguish combatants from civilians, civil war scholars have relied on the criterion of 'full-time membership' in state and non-state armed

organizations (Kalyvas 2006 p. 19; Steele 2009). Steele (2009 p. 421), for example, defines civilians as 'individuals who do not participate in the military activities of any armed group, but who may be "part-time" affiliates or collaborators'. Related, conceptual and empirical work by scholars of different types of violent settings have shown that civilians (and civilian protective agency) can be both unarmed and armed (Finkel 2015, 2017; Jose and Medie 2015; J. Krause 2018; Bateson 2021; Masullo 2021; Schubiger 2021; Jentzsch 2022; Moncada 2022). We follow these two leads, allowing the concept of civilian protective agency to include both unarmed and armed individuals, so as to explore the protective role of part-time armed actors, such as community-initiated militias (Jentzsch within volume) and vigilante groups (Ben Hamo and Masullo within volume; Moncada within volume). Yet contributions in this volume (see chapter by Jentzsch) problematize this distinction further, noting that for militia members to be understood as armed civilians, the militia must be part-time *and* community-initiated (as opposed to state-created).

While this definition makes for a largely inclusive conception of civilians, we exclude external protection actors, such as humanitarian actors or military peacekeepers. Several chapters in the volume account for these actors' interactions with civilians and, in some cases, their support for civilian protective agency. They are not, however, the focus of the volume given their status as *external* actors. Civilian protective agency is about *local* actors exercising agency for the purposes of protection.

What is protection?

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, protection is '[t]he action of protecting someone or something; the fact or condition of being protected; shelter, defence, or preservation from harm, danger, damage, etc.; guardianship, care; patronage' (OED n.d.). As such, protection can be an action, a condition or even, as in the case of paid protection, a commodity. Later in this section we detail the forms of action that fall within 'protection'. The key question here is then: protection from what?

We adopt a broad conceptualization of protection to accommodate a wide range of threats and harms that give rise to protective action in violent settings. While the literature on wartime civilian agency has mostly focused on protection from physical violence by armed groups,[1] we follow the lead of scholars that recently

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[1] For example, early work defined 'civilian self-protection' as strategies adopted by civilians to 'avoid, mitigate or thwart violence by armed groups' (Baines and Paddon 2012 p. 234). Similarly, a later key conceptual contribution referred to 'actions taken to protect against immediate, *direct* threats to physical integrity imposed by belligerents or traditional protection actors' (Jose and Medie 2015 p. 516).

have called for a more holistic concept of protection, recognizing that the indirect effects of conflict are amongst the most harmful to civilians (K. Krause 2016; Wise 2017). This involves attending to individual actors' perceptions of their circumstances and the phenomena that affect their lives (Baines 2016; Paddon Rhoads and Sutton 2020). In doing so, harms that often cannot be attributed to the actions of armed groups and that do not derive directly from the conflict are included in understandings of protection (Nordstrom 1997; Carbonnier 2010; Gorur and Carstensen 2016). As such, alongside protection from direct and physical violence, the volume features research on protection from indirect and less physical threats, such as disruption in livelihoods and inadequate access to health care, food, shelter, and other basic necessities (Howe within volume), as well as spiritual threats and occult war practices (Lombard and Kozaga within volume).

In widening the conceptual aperture, our approach is in step with feminist and humanitarian conceptions of protection as extending 'beyond physical assistance to the protection of a human being in their fullness' (Slim and Bonwick 2006 p. 23). According to the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) on humanitarian assistance, protection 'encompasses all activities, aimed at obtaining full respect for the rights of the individual in accordance with the letter and spirit of the relevant bodies of law (i.e. human rights, humanitarian law, and refugee law)' (ICRC 2001 p. 19).[2]

While a broad conception captures a spectrum of threats and potential harms, it is not without challenges for scholars and practitioners alike. As Paddon Rhoads and Gorur (within volume; see also Paddon Rhoads and Sutton 2020) show, competing understandings of what constitutes a threat and how protection should be pursued exist within and across communities and in relation to international actors. As Krause underscores in her chapter on Myanmar, civilian protective agency is political agency and as such it is contested (Krause within volume).

What is 'agency' in civilian protective agency?

A comprehensive understanding of agency is fundamental to establishing civilian protective agency as a distinct and thriving research field. We adopt an expansive conception of agency as the capacity to engage with and shape the violent settings and circumstances in which people find themselves. Before exploring the various forms that civilian protective agency can take on the ground, we briefly examine the rich sociological and anthropological literature on agency which informs our conception. We distinguish different theoretical perspectives

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[2] ISAC is forum for coordination, policy development and decision-making involving the key UN and non-UN humanitarian partners.

and their implicit assumptions, teasing out the implications for analysing civilian protection in violent settings.

Sociologists have referred to agency as the 'existential capacity for exerting influence on our environments' (Hitlin and Elder Jr 2007). A prominent conceptualization of agency refers to a temporally embedded process of social engagement—informed by the past but oriented towards the present and the future—shaped by the interplay of habit, imagination, and judgement (Emirbayer and Mische 1998). Agency is exerted differentially depending on the actor's salient time horizon (Hitlin and Elder Jr 2007). Our conception stresses agency's goal-seeking, projective, and purposive dimension[3] because the disruptive context and dangers of violent settings represent circumstances where habit and pre-established routines may quickly fail to guide protective actions.

Social psychologists theorize agency as rooted in an individual's socialization and sense of self, including their perceived interconnectedness with others, moral beliefs, and worldviews. Early research into civilian agency during the Holocaust was informed by this work (Oliner 1992; Tec 1995; Monroe 1998, 2011). For example, to explain rescue behaviour during the Holocaust, Monroe (2011) argued that 'social perspective' determines 'the menu of behavioural options' actors see as available to themselves. In contrast, social anthropologists have proposed theorizing agency through the prism of 'social navigation', analysing how civilians navigate complex and often fast-changing environments (Utas 2005; Vigh 2009; Verweijen 2018). This approach emphasizes the fluidity of both individual agency and structural contexts over a more durable individual moral worldview and sense of self in guiding civilian action. Recent research has conceptualized civilian agency as fluid along a spectrum ranging from rescue behaviour to bystanding, evading, and participating in killing (Fujii 2009).

Both the sociological and the anthropological perspectives create room for taking civilian meaning-making seriously. In Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) conceptualization of agency's projective dimension, projectivity 'encompasses the imaginative generation by actors of possible future trajectories of action . . . in relation to [their] hopes, fears, and desires for the future'. In Vigh's (2009) social navigation approach, 'people invest a great deal of time in making sense of and predicting the movement of their social environment, in clarifying how they are able to adapt to and move in relation to oncoming change'. Meaning-making, imagination, and anticipation of potential threat scenarios can determine whether and how civilians effectively protect themselves and others in violent settings (J. Krause 2018), as chapters by Verweijen, Lombard and Kozaga, and Braun and Stallone within this volume highlight.

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[3] Note that this does not imply embracing a rational action-based conception of agency. Agency can be purposive and be driven by a multiplicity of considerations, of which rationality is only one.

Research on agency and intersectionality has received less attention in studies of civilian agency than in other fields (notable exceptions include works by Tec 2004; Bonkat 2014; J. Krause 2019; Zulver 2022). Contributors to our volume advance knowledge on one fundamental but often neglected aspect of social identity—gender—with chapters on women's mobilization against violence (Zulver within volume), women's rescue agency (Braun and Stallone within volume), and women's contribution to civilian protection monitoring (Krause within volume). As the Conclusion notes, disaggregating civilian protective agency based on race, ethnicity, sexuality, age, socio-economic status, and (dis)ability are areas ripe for further investigation.

Forms of civilian protective agency across violent settings

We encounter individual and collective civilian protective agency in various manifestations across different violent settings. In what follows, we distinguish four inter-related yet distinct forms of civilian protective agency: evasion, resistance, rescue, and adaptation.

Evasion includes actions to escape the reach of armed actors to avoid immediate danger, recruitment, control, and/or persecution (Jose and Medie 2015). It can take the form of daily commuting, as in Uganda, at the height of the civil war, when thousands of children and youth walked to town centres and cities at night to avoid abduction by rebels (Baines and Paddon 2012). Yet, it can also involve longer-term flight, a more permanent departure from one's home, akin to what Barter (2014) called 'exit' building on Hirschman's 'exit, voice and loyalty' framework. As in various civil wars (Steele 2017; Schon 2020), flight was a survival strategy available to some ordinary Jews living in ghettos during the Holocaust (Finkel 2017).

Resistance implies the refusal to act according to implicit and explicit demands by armed groups. This may include acts to oppose the imposition of certain ideologies and to deny, or at least mitigate, demands for material and non-material resources, such as information, food, shelter, and taxes. Across violent settings, civilians have resisted armed organizations to short-circuit spirals of civil war and communal violence (Kaplan 2017; J. Krause 2018), limit forms of rebel rule (Arjona 2016; Gowrinathan and Mampilly 2019; Jackson 2021), eschew protection rackets and criminal extortion (Moncada 2022), and undermine foreign occupation (Petersen 2001) and extermination campaigns (Maher 2010; Finkel 2017).

While not every expression of resistance is necessarily aimed at protection, many documented instances of civilian resistance do involve the goal of protecting oneself and/or others. Forms of resistance with the clear objective of civilian

protection include the decision to designate areas off-limits to armed groups and establish peace zones (Hancock and Mitchell 2007; Mouly et al. 2015; Autesserre 2021), engagement with armed groups to negotiate norms of behaviour and terms of coexistence (Kaplan 2017; J. Krause 2018), as well as more specific and targeted efforts, such as the release of kidnapped community members or the creation of humanitarian zones or corridors. Moreover, protective resistance can take an armed form, such as when communities counter armed organizations with violence of their own in settings as diverse as civil wars, criminal conflicts, and genocide (Finkel 2015, 2017; Schubiger 2021; Jentzsch 2022).

The distinction between evasion and resistance maps well onto existing categorizations that distinguish between survival and resistance (Schon 2020), non-engagement and engagement (Jose and Medie 2015), and victim's and oppositional agency (Gowrinathan and Mampilly 2019). Protective agency can also take the form of *rescue* when people who are not directly targeted by armed groups make efforts to protect others living in their localities who have been singled out for persecution or extermination (Fujii 2009; Monroe 2011; Sémelin et al. 2014; Braun 2019). Rescue is distinct insofar as it captures actions aimed at saving *others*. Yet, it can also be seen as a form of resistance as it represents a challenge to an armed group's ideology and orders. Rescue is a particularly risky form of action, as it commonly takes place in contexts of overwhelming military force such as mass persecution, extermination campaigns, and genocide.

Lastly there is *adaptation*, a concept rooted in such diverse literatures as child development and climate change, which increasingly is incorporated into research on civilian agency in conflict settings (Howe within volume; J. Krause 2018). In complexity theory, adaptation is the 'process whereby an organism fits itself to its environment' (Holland 1995 p. 9). For civilians in conflict zones, adaptation is based on conflict perception, social knowledge, social learning, and 'the capacity to imagine alternative futures' (J. Krause 2018 p. 66). Adaptation often includes deliberately maintaining social identities that sustain hope and enable collective action. It can encompass a wide range of protective responses to the direct and indirect effects of violence, including changes in livelihood practices, education, and access to health care. As such, adaptation is a broad category that encompasses civilian protective actions that can enable and sustain evasion, resistance, and rescue agency.

3. Explaining civilian protective agency

As the contributions to this volume attest, research explaining various dimensions of civilian agency across different violent settings has advanced considerably in recent years. Spanning distinct fields and disciplines, this research identifies

different factors and conditions that enable the emergence of civilian protective agency, as well as some of its consequences for the protection of civilians—what we refer to later in the chapter as the 'protection dividend'.

Triggering and enabling civilian protective agency

To explain why some individuals or communities engage in different forms of civilian protective agency, scholars explore both the forces that trigger people to protect themselves or others in their local contexts and the factors that provide them with the capacity to do so.

It is in the context of violence that people engage in civilian protective agency. They do so to survive, to reduce existing levels of harm and in some cases to prevent violence from spreading into new areas. This deeply human impulse is visible across violent settings, including civil war, criminal conflict, communal violence, and mass atrocities. Yet the relationship between the dynamics of violence and civilian protective agency has been qualified in important ways. First, the relationship is not necessarily linear. For example, Ben Hamo and Masullo (within volume) show that armed mobilization against drug cartels in Mexico's criminal conflict is more likely to take place when violence is neither too low nor too high. Second, the way people are targeted matters. Collective targeting, for example, triggered the emergence of civilian self-defence units during the Peruvian civil war (Schubiger 2021) and non-violent campaigns of civilian non-cooperation in the Colombian conflict (Masullo 2017). Similarly, selective targeting provided ordinary Jews with the skills necessary to mount sustained and organized anti-Nazi resistance during the Holocaust (Finkel 2015). Finally, violence does not necessarily have to be lethal to trigger civilian protective agency. Zulver (within volume) shows that non-lethal forms of gendered violence in the Colombian civil war incentivized women to mobilize resistance against armed groups (see also Kreft 2019). Similarly, criminal extortion and other non-lethal predatory practices have been a central trigger of community resistance to criminal organizations (Moncada 2022).

Territorial control and competition between armed groups are important situational factors that form the incentives and disincentives that civilians consider when engaging in protective agency. Both armed and unarmed resistance to armed groups are more likely when local control of a territory is contested (Masullo 2017; Vüllers and Krtsch 2020; Jentzsch 2022). As Jentzsch (2022) shows for the Mozambican civil war, stalemates between competing armed actors can empower communities and lead them to create militias, as stalemates commonly increase violence and reduce armed actors' capacity to reliably offer protection. Similarly, in contexts of criminal violence, the presence of multiple cartels can create incentives

for communities to establish vigilante groups as a self-protection strategy (Ben Hamo and Masullo within volume). Finally, the different levels of territorial control and types of violence exercised by the Nazis across Europe created divergent opportunities for both targets and non-targets to engage in protective agency (Balcells and Solomon 2020).

These findings do not, however, preclude instances of civilian protective agency when a single armed group holds tight control of a territory. Excessively intrusive forms of rebel rule can also motivate resistance (Arjona 2015, 2016; Masullo 2017; Gowrinathan and Mampilly 2019; Mampilly 2011; Svensson and Smart within volume). Rather than protecting themselves from violence, civilians may seek to protect themselves from unwelcome systems of rebel governance, directly and indirectly challenging the rule of armed groups. While civilian perceptions of governance are crucial in motivating people to stand against rebel rule, Svensson and Smart (within volume) show that perceptions are an insufficient explanation. Residents of Islamic State (IS)-controlled areas in Iraq protested and engaged in acts of everyday resistance, despite holding favourable attitudes and assessments of IS governance. This highlights the importance of identity, as lack of identification with a group may push people towards resistance.

Conflict conditions, including characteristics of armed groups, such as ideology (Sanín and Wood 2014), reliance on or sensitivity toward the civilian population (Weinstein 2007; Kaplan 2017; Jackson 2021), internal discipline and political education (Hoover Green 2018), and responsiveness to norms of restraint (Stanton 2016) all shape the space civilians have to engage armed groups to protect themselves or others (J. Krause and Kamler 2022).

Beyond conflict conditions and situational factors, organizational capacity is needed to enable (some forms of) protective action (Arjona 2016; Kaplan 2017; Masullo 2017; J. Krause and Kamler 2022). Mobilizing in the face of violence is challenging. Risks are high and benefits uncertain, armed actors closely monitor civilian behaviour, violence can weaken interpersonal trust and foment social divisions, and civilians often have very limited lead time to organize. Therefore, local community structures are crucial in enabling collective action. In particular, pre-existing communal and indigenous organizations, as well as previous experiences of collective action, have consistently been found as key facilitators of collective forms of protective agency (Varshney 2003; Arjona 2015, 2016; Kaplan 2017; Masullo 2017; Ley et al. 2019; Breslawski 2021). To understand why and how these factors matter, scholars underscore the importance of more specific mechanisms, such as leadership (Peterson 2001; J. Krause 2018; Masullo 2017) and social connectedness (Howe within volume; Schon 2020). As Howe demonstrates in her chapter on Syria, social connections have been critical in enabling both individuals and communities to engage in survival strategies such as flight and adaptation.

While these findings come mostly from civil and communal war settings, community structures also matter greatly for rescue in situations of mass persecution. For example, local religious minorities were more likely to protect potential victims of Nazi persecution than their majority counterparts, as they were better positioned to set up clandestine networks and they empathized more profoundly with the persecuted (Braun 2019). The gender composition of community structures is also significant for rescue. As evidenced by Braun and Stallone (within volume), during the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands, Dutch women were uniquely positioned to foster inter-regional rescue networks as they could strategically perform traditional feminine roles that allowed them to travel and carry out rescue work undetected.[4]

These findings have recently been complemented by studies of large-scale criminal violence and mass persecution that adopt a longer historical perspective to show that the enabling effect of community structures and past experiences of collective action can persist across generations and conflict periods. For example, experiences of armed mobilization dating back to the early 1900s, left legacies that facilitated the organization of armed self-defence groups amidst Mexico's current criminal conflict (Sánchez-Talanquer 2018; Osorio et al. 2021). Similarly, the possibility of ordinary Jews resisting the Nazis during the Holocaust depended on organizational legacies left by pre-World War II political regimes and experiences of repression (Finkel 2015, 2017), as well as the readiness of non-Jews to help Jews evade persecution in the Low Countries hinged on the long-lasting impacts of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation (Braun 2018).

Consequences of civilian protective agency and the protection dividend

What are the effects of the individual and collective actions that civilians undertake to protect themselves and/or others? There is some evidence that civilian protective agency can result in a positive protection dividend. However, as discussed in the Conclusion to the volume, further research is necessary to rigorously assess the impact of different civilian responses across diverse violent settings.

In terms of violence, adaptation and community resilience have been shown to effectively prevent communal violence from emerging and from expanding into new areas (Carpenter 2012; J. Krause 2018). Similarly, local institutional mechanisms designed by civilians to protect themselves, such as peace committees,

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[4] In the context of civil war, concretely in the Sri Lankan case, ideological and cultural dimensions of rebellion have also created some space for certain women to challenge armed groups governing rules and practices (Gowrinathan and Mampilly 2019).

have effectively prevented violence, dissuaded threats, and saved lives across civil conflicts (Kaplan 2017). In some contexts, communities have even managed to carve out 'islands of peace' amidst violent conflict (Hancock and Mitchell 2007; Mouly et al. 2015; Masullo 2017; Autesserre 2021). Moreover, civilian protection monitoring in conflict zones of Myanmar has helped mitigate the indirect but devastating long-term effects of violence against civilians by aiding civilian displacement and humanitarian support (J. Krause and Kamler 2022; Krause within volume).

Temporary and permanent evasion has protected some individuals and groups from violence and recruitment in a range of settings, such as the Holocaust (Finkel 2017) and civil war (Baines and Paddon 2012; Schon 2020). Other forms of civilian protective agency have enabled entire communities to remain in place, avoiding displacement and loss of livelihoods (Krakowski 2017; Marston 2020). Relatedly, collective forms of protective agency have proved effective in limiting and/or shaping non-state governance. In the context of civil war, civilian resistance has limited the extent to which rebel governance interferes in civilian affairs (Arjona 2016) and allowed civilians to demand better, less violent, and more inclusive forms of governance (Breslawski 2020; Rubin 2019). This protective potential has also been found in contexts of criminal governance, where communities have managed to effectively resist extortion (Moncada 2022) and counter criminal governance in urban spaces (Lessing 2021). For example, in Rio de Janeiro, favela resident organizations have opposed criminal governance by effectively promoting social development and the integration of marginal areas into the political arena (Fahlberg 2018; Barnes 2021).

While civilian protective agency may produce a protection dividend, it can also lead to more violence and deepen insecurity. Some forms of action, such as overtly refusing to cooperate with armed groups or hiding potential victims, can put civilians at higher risk of harm, while other forms can produce new violence and new protection challenges. For example, Verweijen (within volume) documents how civilians' quest for immediate protection in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) entrenched the dominant position of armed actors in non-military spheres of social life and sparked violent competition between protection providers. These transformations are not unique to civil war. Moncada (within volume) shows that the day-to-day challenges that vigilante groups face can over time lead them to engage in some of the same criminal behaviours they originally formed to stop—as has also been reported for various militia groups in civil war settings (Agbiboa 2021). These transformations underscore the importance of adopting a longer temporal perspective when assessing the consequences of civilian protective agency. As Jentzsch (within volume) shows for community-initiated militias in Mozambique, there are reasons to believe that a positive protection dividend may only be temporary, as armed actors can quickly adapt and learn how to respond to civilian protective strategies (see also Kaplan 2013).

International actors and civilian protective agency

A growing body of scholarship examines the ways in which external actors—from humanitarians to human rights activists to peacekeepers—shape the emergence and trajectories of civilian protective agency through direct support for community organizations, the co-creation of new structures, and other types of engagement including training and network-building (Kaplan 2021; J. Krause and Kamler 2022; Paddon Rhoads and Gorur within volume). The mere presence of external actors with a protection mandate can alter how civilians think about their own protection, their risk calculations, and the actions they pursue (Paddon Rhoads 2016). In her chapter on Syria, Howe stresses the role that the international community can play in civilians' local adaptation to chronic insecurity, identifying ways in which humanitarian and stabilization operations can both support and undermine civilian protective agency.

Providing international support for civilian protective agency is not without challenges. Kaplan (2021) cautions that international peacebuilding and protection actors must guard against creating a 'moral hazard' by promoting ultimately risky civilian protection practices, while Krause and Kamler (2022) warn that supporting local protection mechanisms does not necessarily mean that international actors can 'scale up' local civilian protection. While international and local perceptions of effective protection practices may at times be misaligned, civilians often adapt protection knowledge provided by international actors to their reality on the ground, which allows them to mitigate risks to themselves and others (J. Krause and Kamler 2022; Krause within volume). Devolving decision-making authority and control to communities may also give rise to institutional risks for international actors, particularly where conceptions of protection and threat do not align, and/or the forms of civilian self-protection pursued contravene the values of the organization (Baines and Paddon 2012; Welsh et al. forthcoming).

While support for civilian protective agency poses challenges for all international actors, there is variation in how they manifest across organizations. As Paddon Rhoads and Gorur show in their chapter, the distinct role of UN peacekeepers as armed protection actors and the UN's perceived partiality in some contexts, makes supporting civilian protective agency particularly risky for the UN. Consequently, UN policy has not translated meaningfully into practice. While peacekeepers have significantly increased engagement with communities on protection, the authors find few instances of support for community-*led* protection efforts. Recognition of the diversity of approaches to supporting civilian protective agency as well as the inherent challenges will thus be critical as we look to a future in which international actors are likely to continue shifting away from 'top-down' protection approaches towards more localized forms of engagement that centre the agency of communities.

4. Overview of the book

This volume is the first to examine civilian agency and protection across different types of violent settings. The book is organized into three parts. Part One features six chapters exploring distinct forms of civilian protective agency in different violent contexts. Contributors explore women's rescue agency during the Holocaust in the Netherlands (Braun and Stallone), civilian networks and adaptation in the Syrian civil war (Howe), civilian adoption of occult practices for their own protection in the Central African Republic (Lombard and Kozaga), civilian resistance against Jihadist governance in the Iraqi conflict (Svensson and Smart), the durability of women's resistance during the Colombian civil war (Zulver), and finally the commodification of civilian protective responses in the context of the DRC (Verweijen). Part Two shifts the attention from nonviolent action to exploring the ways in which protective agency can evolve into armed mobilization. Contributors analyse the relationship between community militias and the intensity of the Mozambican civil war (Jentzsch), self-defence groups in Mexico's criminal conflict (Ben Hamo and Masullo), and trajectories of vigilantism in response to criminal victimization in Nigeria and El Salvador (Moncada). In Part Three, contributors establish vital linkages between the study of civilian agency and scholarship on international interventions, peacebuilding, and the protection of civilians. They consider the role of external actors in enabling, supporting, and sustaining civilian protective agency with chapters on civilian monitoring in Myanmar (Krause), mass atrocity prevention in Sri Lanka, South Sudan, and the DRC (Mampilly and Solomon), and UN peacekeeping across a range of contexts (Paddon Rhoads and Gorur). The Conclusion synthesizes the volume's findings, reflects on the methodological and normative questions raised by the chapters, and identifies areas for future research and interdisciplinary collaboration.

Our broad conceptualization of civilian protective agency facilitates the comparative analysis of the protection practices civilians adopt to not only save themselves and others from being killed but also to mitigate the manifold and devastating humanitarian consequences of violence across settings. When analysing civilian protective agency, we should never forget that civilians adopt such protection practices under utmost duress with high risks and costs to themselves, their families, and livelihoods. Consequently, civilian protective agency may not always be sustainable and it may expose individuals and communities to new protection threats and potential harms. Taken together, the contributions to this volume are a testament to the remarkable agency of civilians across violent settings. However, they should also serve as a cautionary reminder that people's local protection efforts should never be taken for granted.

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