

Women's narratives on (in)security in Abkhazia

Theorizing abortion rights as a security issue

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Abstract

This thesis is set out to examine how women in Abkhazia understand their own (in)security and to explore how the participating women understand the prohibition of abortions that is implemented in the breakaway region. Furthermore, the study seeks to, based on the empirical findings, theorize abortion rights as a security issue. The thesis is guided by Feminist Security Theory and previous feminist literature. The data is generated through ten semi-structured interviews with women. Through a thematic analysis the findings from the interviews are categorized into two main themes that are responding to the two first research questions; How do women in Abkhazia understand their (in)security?; How do women understand the prohibition of abortions? The thematic analysis finds that women in Abkhazia understand their (in)security as dependent on four aspects; conflict context; economic insecurity; political representation and participation; structural inequality and gender-based violence. Moreover, it finds that women's understanding of the abortion prohibition also includes four aspects; economic insecurity; women's rights; political representation and participation; the nation's interests. The findings are understood as mirroring and thus this thesis argues that abortion prohibition exacerbates women's insecurity. Lastly, it suggests that abortion rights should theoretically be understood as a security issue. The study at hand empirically contributes to the existing literature on women's (in)security narratives and furthermore adds a theoretical contribution on abortion rights as a security issue.

Keywords: *Women's security, Abkhazia, abortion prohibition, Feminist Security Theory*

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1. Introduction

[A]sking different questions, questions that arise by focusing on (women's) everyday experience, lead to fundamentally different understandings of security.

(Wibben 2011: 87)

1.1 Research problem

For decades, feminist security theorists have challenged and problematized traditional security discourse that have been dominating international relations and global politics with a state centred logic (Wibben, Tickner, Blanchard, Caprioli, McKay and Nussbaum). The state centred logic is argued by critical security theorists to have led to a taken for granted understanding that citizens are secure when the nation-state's borders are secure (Blanchard 2003:1296). Within security studies, feminist perspectives have furthermore uncovered a masculinist and gendered logic that is underpinning key concepts such as; peace, war and security (McLeod 2011:599). Additionally, it is argued that when the state centred- and masculinist logic is intertwined in key concepts of security, women's experiences and voices are subsequently excluded and ignored. Through tireless curiosity in women's lived experiences, feminist security theorists have blurred the line between what is considered to be private and public, and thus recognized other dimensions of security (Busan 2013:457). For example, the traditional definition of peace has been challenged by empirical studies that have showed that women in post-conflict contexts are subjected to direct and structural violence as they remain socially, economically and politically excluded (Gilmartin 2019:96). Moreover, it is argued that language, religion, ideology and culture can support structural violence, and that when structural violence is tolerated, women's security ceases to exist (Galtung 1990:291, Caprioli 2004:413). Women's security is threatened as a wider culture of inequality breeds when women's subordination is normalized and rationalized through structural violence. Structural violence can implicitly and explicitly be tolerated and produced by the state, and even realized in ways that control bodies and deprives women of their bodily integrity and self-determination (Nussbaum 2005:167, Capriol 2004:425). States can produce and practice acts of gendered violence through control of women's bodies and reproductive system, for example by adopting laws that prohibit abortions. Women rights activists and previous feminist literature have critiqued strict abortion legislation as they have connected it to structural violence, human rights violations, high

maternal mortality, unsafe abortions and health issues (Grimes 2006:1908). However, even though feminist scholars understand structural violence and human right violations as insecurities (McLeod 2013:170), abortion prohibition has not been understood as related to insecurity or explored from a security perspective. By adopting the idea that control over women's bodies constitutes structural violence and furthermore by adopting the understanding of structural violence as an issue of insecurity, this study proposes that abortion rights should be explored from a security perspective. Thus, this thesis argues that there is reason to explore whether abortion prohibition is connected to insecurity.

In the strive to challenge traditional security that is privileging masculinist logics, feminist scholars promote a bottom-up perspective that allows women to voice their security concerns (Sjoberg 2009:206). However, even though feminist scholars advocate for making women's voices heard, feminist research that is based on women's own narratives on security is still largely absent from the literature. Existing feminist research on security narratives have focused on women who are politically active or work at NGOs and lacks aspects which include reproductive- and abortion rights. This thesis has only found one study that makes a connection between security and abortion rights. Thomson and Pierson have through a content analysis of UNSC resolutions on Women Peace and Security (WPS) researched if abortion rights could be included in the WPS-agenda. They found that abortion- and reproductive rights are excluded from the agenda and claimed that when abortion rights are included, it is only in relation to sexual violence. Furthermore, they argued that abortions are only included in the agenda when women are victims of sexual violence rather than owners of reproductive rights (Thomson & Pierson 2018:19). However, the study does not centre women's own understanding of abortion rights from a security perspective.

Consequently, this thesis argues that feminist security studies lack a bottom-up perspective that is based on ordinary women's (women who are not politically active or work at NGOs) experiences and understanding of (in)security. Women's understanding and experiences of abortion and (in)security in a context where a ban of abortions is implemented are not explored in the literature. Moreover, this thesis has found that women in Abkhazia are completely excluded from the security discourse and literature, and especially their understanding of the abortion prohibition, which was realized in 2016, when the de-facto government adopted a law that ban abortions.

1.2 Purpose and research question

Even though feminist security research has argued that women are excluded from the security discourse and advocated for a bottom-up perspective, ordinary women's narratives are still largely absent from the literature. Therefore, this thesis argues that there is a gap between what is said to be done and what is actually being done. This thesis identifies two main scholarly gaps; first, ordinary women's own narratives are excluded from the security literature despite the recognition and emphasis of the importance of bringing women's narratives to the centre. Secondly, feminist security studies lack a focus on reproductive rights and especially abortion rights. Furthermore, the connection between abortion rights and security is not explored and women's own understanding of a complete abortion ban is not examined from a security perspective.

Feminist scholars have argued for more field-based research as personal experiences provides access to how people frame their own security issues which is important in creating and supporting security narratives (Cohn 2011:585). Hence, this study will conduct in-depth interviews with women in Abkhazia, where a total ban of abortions is implemented. This study seeks to empirically contribute to existing literature by exploring women's narratives and understanding of their own (in)security and the prohibition of abortions.

The purpose of this study is therefore to through a field-based research explore how women understand their (in)security and the abortion prohibition, and furthermore to theorize abortion rights as a security issue. Thus, this is an exploratory study to examine whether abortion prohibition contributes to women's understanding of insecurity.

To achieve the purpose of this study this study has three research questions:

- How do women in Abkhazia understand their (in)security?
- How do women in Abkhazia understand the prohibition of abortions?
- How can abortion rights theoretically be understood as a security issue, by using women in Abkhazia's conceptualizations of (in)security?

2. Previous research

2.1 Women's narratives on security in conflict and post-conflict settings

Even though this study argues that women's own narratives are absent from the feminist security discourse, some research have been set out to explore women's narratives. These studies have contributed with important insights to how women perceive security, however ordinary and marginalized women are often not included. Literature that focus on women's insecurities have for example contributed to important insights and acknowledged challenges and insecurities that women are exposed to after a conflict resolution. Feminist research have furthermore pointed out a male biased definition of conflict and peace which is dominant in the security discourse. Another example of feminist contribution to the study of security is the unfolding of the relation between gender-based violence, small arms and increased tolerance of violence in post-conflict contexts (Manjoo & McRaith 2011:13).

McLeod has studied gender security narratives in Serbia and examined what security means to activists in feminist and women's organizations. The research aimed to give room for local conceptualizations of security (2013:169). She found that the informants' narratives were shaped by temporal complexities that related to their identity. The activists' personal experiences were articulated as senses of insecurity (feelings and interpretations of insecurity) that shaped their perceptions of security (McLeod 2013:174). The study found that the informants were concerned about; education, health, economic issues and inability to plan for their children's future, as the most pressing issues. In her research in Serbia as a post-conflict setting, McLeod found that the participants connected gender security with human rights which among others included individual rights and freedom of movement. The participants claimed that limitations of human rights increase insecurities as they related the limitations to their experiences from the war (ibid:170). For the activist who participated, limitations to exercise human rights was considered to be a part of the post-conflict context. McLeod further found that *"Temporal complexities about Serbia's relationship to conflict and post-conflict play a part in gender security narratives explicitly described as women-specific concerns about violence and inequality"* (2013:172). Some of the so-called women specific concerns that was raised in the study was domestic violence, misogyny and unequal political representation between men

and women (ibid). Which further reflect feminist contribution that post-conflict settings are characterized by high levels of gender-based violence (Manjoo & McRaith 2011:13 & Groves 2009:191). McLeod found that, when discussing security, the participating women positioned themselves in contexts of insecurity. This uncovers how empirical understanding of insecurities are central into shaping theoretical understanding of security. Hence this thesis will frequently talk about insecurities, although it will inevitably include how security is perceived. Thus, this thesis will empirically focus on insecurities while argue from a security theoretical perspective. Moreover, since there is an identified interchangeability between the concepts and since security often is understood through insecurities, this thesis will continually use (in)security when discussing women's security.

Similarly, to McLeod's research that focused on conceptualizations, Hamber et al have explored women's testimonies in three different post-conflict societies. The research examines women in Lebanon, Northern Ireland and South Africa, and allowed the participants to reimagine the concept of security. They found that security as a concept, was at first referred to as state security and the protection from terrorism and crimes (2006:492). However, they later found that the women perceived that security provided by the state is something that is limiting freedoms. The study was conducted in post-conflict societies where women were allowed to imagine security from their own context and experiences. The study concluded that the women did not perceive the conflict to be ended due to end of the combat. As McLeod, Hamber et al found that women referred to other dimensions of security, with a special focus on economic security, law changes that prohibits domestic violence and that women's political participation and representation would provide security and social transformation (ibid:498-500).

2.2 Reproductive health and rights

For decades, feminist research has argued that reproductive health and rights are human rights. In order to reach this thesis' aim, to examine how women understand their (in)security and theorize abortion rights as a security issue, it will be draw on feminist understanding of reproductive rights as human rights. Mainly, this thesis will be guided by feminist literature that problematizes restricted abortion rights and draws attention to how it is connected to other issues of social and economic inequality. Furthermore, reproductive rights, which among other issues include; abortions, maternal care and health, are interconnected to broader issues of

equality, social justice and individual health (Thomson & Pierson 2018:6). Feminist literature have argued that women's rights to their reproductive choice are viewed as an element for personal integrity and autonomy which is furthermore limited by gender-based violence. Violations of liberty and security occur when the state denies women their access to means of fertility control, leaving them to the risk of unintended pregnancy (Cook 1993:79). Furthermore, scholars have claimed that under international law, states cannot compel women to have children against their will (ibid). Additionally, it is argued that when women control and decide over their own reproductive choices, they are more likely to work. High fertility rates are connected to low economic status, low educational levels and lacking authority both in family and in the community (Caprioli 2004:419).

Similarly do Ní Aoláin et al argue that ignoring reproductive rights is to “*fundamentally disengage from the core rudiments of women's lives that predict the quality, status, and autonomy of life from girlhood through maturity to old age*” (2011:221). However, this thesis argues that even within feminist literature on post-conflict societies, reproductive rights have received insufficient attention, and abortion rights are seldom understood through a security perspective. Nonetheless, it has been explored in “Can abortion rights be included in the Women, Peace and Security agenda?” by Thomson and Pierson. Through a content analysis of the UNSC resolutions on WPS documents they conclude that reproductive rights, and more especially abortion rights are excluded from the resolutions and the WPS-agenda (Thomson & Pierson 2018:352). They argue that when reproduction rights are ignored, as they claim they are in the WPS-resolutions, abortion rights are marginalized which further stifle the development of a more liberal approach to abortions (ibid:1). Furthermore, it claims that when women's abortion rights are discussed it is relating to issues of sexual violence and does not regard the role that reproductive rights can play in women's bodily security and the protection of human rights (ibid:18,19). Reproductive rights stand in the shadow of the discussion on sexual violence in the WPS-resolutions. Which relates to the feminist who have sought to challenge the dominant gender discussion that they claim too often revolve around how women can be understood as the victims of sexual crimes but not as owners of sexual and reproductive rights (ibid:19).

2.3 Economic insecurities and childbearing roles

Caprioli argues that women's reproductive role exposes them to economic insecurities as they often are forced out of formal employment and into informal work (2004:413). Drawing on the idea that the reproductive role risk economic safety, Sasaki et al have researched insecurities among subcontracted female workers in Thailand. They found that 18 of the 23 female workers had to quit their wage work and lost their formal employment due to pregnancy (Sasaki et al 2016:310). Even though both female and male respondents in the study experienced economic insecurity, the narratives differed between men and women. The study shows that many of the insecurities had arisen from gender differences. Similarly to the women in McLeod's research, the women who participated in the study did not see the state as a security provider however in this research the participants argued that the status they gained from work provided them with a sense of freedom from fear and worries (ibid:315). Sasaki et al conclude that women's re-imaginings of the concept of security is dependent on economic security. Through a gender security approach, economic security is found to be a key factor to ensure women of their independence is recognized (Hamber 2004:498). Furthermore, women are denied equal opportunities due to abortion laws and societal rules. According to Cook, this maintain stereotypes and restrict women to childbearing roles and denies them equal opportunities (Cook 1993:74). Women need legal protection so that they are not only expected to serve their community as childbearers. Additionally, women have no opportunity for economic self-determination if they are pregnant at an early age as it hinders education and employment (ibid:80).

2.4 Women's bodies in ethno-nationalistic projects

In order to understand abortion rights as a security issue, this thesis draws on previous research that argue that women's bodies have historically been controlled through reproductive legislations and social obligations as childbearers. Feminist researchers have argued that women as childbearers are used as means in nationalistic projects (Gilmartin 2019:100). Within the nationalistic project borders, ethnicity and the security of the nation-state is central. Thus, the survival and the security of the state is dependent on reproduction of the nation, and more specifically the birth of men who can defend and protect the state. Women's duty has been to bear children, particularly boys, which Cook argues is to maintain stereotypes and restrict women's opportunities and denies them education and experiences which are available for men

(1993:74). Women's reproductive functions have historically been used to control women, as control over reproduction through laws and practices further allow states to control social, economic and population agendas. Prohibition of abortions are argued to protect the foetus; however, feminist scholars argue that abortion law is not protecting the foetus as such, but rather state interests. Moreover, it is argued that abortion laws restrict women's ability to decide over their own body (Cook & Dickens 1999:81). Yuval-Davis has drawn attention to how women's rights and bodily integrity is affected by national and ethnic processes. In the 90's she argued that the positioning of women and their obligations to ethnic and national communities override their own reproductive rights (Yuval-Davis 1996:17). In national and ethnic conflicts, the ethnonational projects have been promoted through honouring and celebrating women who have many children as "heroin-mothers" (ibid:19), which uncovers how women are means for demographic matters. Women's reproductive systems get increasingly politicized and controlled during conflicts and there is a commonly accepted view that "*women should not have the right to abort future defenders of the nation*" (Zajovic 1994, referred to in Yuval-Davis 1996:19). Women's bodies are targeted by those who want to control racial boundaries and hierarchies and becomes central in ensuring the nation state's security (Luibheid 2004:341). Luibheid argue that women's primary role serves as childbearers and reproducers of the collective's members. Secondly, women are held responsible for recreating national, ethnic and racial boundaries through who they procreate with. Thirdly, women transmit culture and values through their childbearing practices (ibid:341,342). It is argued that these functions make it clear that control of women's bodies, sexuality and childbearing remains key in maintaining ethnic and racial boundaries and social orders of the nation-state. Gilmartin have explored reproduction rights in Northern Ireland and found that gendered constructions of ethnonationalism position and value women as childbearers and only for their reproductive roles. Women are constructed as biological reproducers thus; women's rights and health remain subordinate to the needs of the ethnonational project (Gilmartin 2019:100). Male power and the control of women's bodies through an abortion ban is still a prominent cause of gender inequality in Northern Ireland (ibid).

3. Theoretical framework

To be able to examine women's understanding of (in)security and to theorize abortion rights as a security issue, this thesis is guided by feminist security theory (FST). Feminist security theoretical framework is applied in the design of this study, the material and the analysis. The subject of research is women's understanding of (in)security and the abortion law, consequently the theoretical framework derives from FST and previous literature presented in chapter two. The theoretical framework is adopted to make the findings of this research more comprehensive.

Feminist security theory emerged from a cross-ideological, trans-epistemological, multi-voiced debate between several different feminist schools, including liberal-, standpoint- and postmodern feminism (Blanchard 2003:1295). Feminist security theories within international relations have often been understood as and compared to human security approaches (Sjoberg 2009:205). The concept of human security was first introduced in the Human Development Report 1994 and is defined as "freedom from fear and freedom from want", which refers to insecurities and threats such as repression, hunger, and disease. The human security discourse challenges the traditional concept of security, with the state being the referent object. Compared to state security, human security engages in the individual experience of security and introduces a bottom-up perspective. Similarly, feminist approaches share the bottom-up modes for understanding issues of security (ibid:206). However, the feminist approach differs as gender is in the centre of the analysis to understanding how social structures, especially patriarchal structures, negatively impact people's security. Gender hierarchies are claimed to be a social construction that structures and organizes social and political life, which shapes people's understanding and place in the world (ibid:187). Thus, it is argued that gender as a power relation is crucial to understand security processes. Feminist theorists argue that human security fails to acknowledge that humans are gendered, and therefore adopts an insufficient analysis (ibid). This thesis adopts the view that security is a concept of human experience that takes place in everyday life, within different social structures and contexts, and draws of feminist perspectives that recognize security as related to understanding of human interdependence (ibid:206). Hence, FST is not argued to be subsumed by human security approaches but offers an alternative.

As also reflected in previous literature, feminist security theory challenges the taken for granted assumption that the state is the referent object of security. As presented in previous chapter, traditional security is claimed to be limited by the assumption that privilege the protection of institutions and borders. Feminist security theory seek to deepen the understanding of security by exploring other perspectives and by listening to the people and argue that security should be reconceptualized based on (in)securities of civilians, those who are de-politized and marginalized (Newman 2010:84, Wibben 2004; Tickner 2005).

“...feminism’s unit remains the individual [although it is not limited to the individual, as feminisms] examine relationships between and across the analytical levels of individual, household, community, race, class and nation” Tickner (2001: 62). This thesis acknowledges the importance of subjectivity and recognizes people’s own experiences as central in the strive to construct a comprehensive understanding of security (Stuvøy 2010:283). Moreover, it uses Ticker’s theoretical contribution, which is expressed through a formulation that emphasize the relationship between different analytical levels. Furthermore, it is argued that security is understood through experience and perceptions of (in)security, but nonetheless sensory experiences are often ignored in international relations (McLeod 2013:166). As this thesis seek to explore how women understand their security and to theorize abortion rights as a security issue, it adopts this view and explores other perspectives and allows for people’s own understandings and experiences to frame (in)security. As mentioned, FST have contributed to the field of security by challenging and reformulating traditional concepts of security. Additionally, feminist scholars have contributed with important insights of “bodies that matter” and issues of embodiment and the connection between discourse and material (Sjoberg 2013:437).

FST expands and challenges realists’ notions of security, especially on sovereignty and autonomy and instead adopts a vision of interconnectedness and an interdependent international system. A gender perspective is argued to use a more comprehensive notion of security that acknowledges the relationship between international relations and gendered insecurities (Blanchard 2003:1296). Traditionally, the discussion on international security has revolved around issues of war and peace in a system of sovereign states and self-interested nations. Security is provided by the state, as it is considered that the state protects and secures its inhabitants. However, feminists criticize what they claim to be an illusion of total security. Through feminist curiosity, Cynthia Enloe and other feminist theorists following her have

challenged the taken-for-granted view of international relations being a man's business, and asked: where are the women? (Blanchard 2003:1295). FST have asked what counts as security issues and to whom security should be applied, which have revealed a masculinist bias that excludes and ignores women's experiences and voices. Moreover, feminist security theorists have demonstrated that there is a gendered bias in security concepts such as; violence, war, peace and the state; that have ignored and excluded women's experiences and voices (Sjoberg 2009:196). Through a focus on gender this thesis endorses the redefinition on security on the basis of women's experiences of violence that relates violence on local, national and international levels and acknowledges structural violence to expand the narrow focus on direct violence which is often understood from a masculine perspective (Blanchard 2003:1306). Feminist security theorists have shifted the focus and acknowledged structural violence to be included in the security discourse. In order to examine and analyse women's understanding of their (in)security in Abkhazia, this study adopts FST's redefinition of (in)security to include issues of gender-based violence, inequality, poverty and gender subordination (Sjoberg 2009:198). FST scholars have questioned and challenged the exclusion of women within security politics and questioned to what extent women are secured by state protection during times of war and peace (Blanchard 2003:1290). A feminist rethinking of security shed light on how structural violence is understood as natural and unproblematic (ibid:1297,1298). The state is critiqued as a masculinist institution, as the state is implicated in constructing women as objects of masculinist control through direct violence but also structural, as inadequate health care, harassment and access to rights and resources (Hudson 2005:162). Thus, this thesis connects women's everyday experiences and security and adopts feminist security understanding of concepts which are expressed through formulations of insecurity in their everyday (Blanchard 2003:1298). Feminist scholars claim that women have been excluded from international relations and security discussion to such an extent that women's voices are considered inauthentic as international politics and security has become a thoroughly masculinized sphere (ibid:1292).

In turn, feminist security theory and human security are concepts criticized for being meaningless as they mix up international security, social security and civil liberty under the same security discourse. Additionally, critics claim that inclusion of people's subjective perceptions into security would risk "lose real descriptive power" (Sasaki et al 2010:305). If security is defined outside the interest of the state and defined by people's individual views, security can be viewed as anything and everything which make the concept of security

meaningless. The traditional concept of state-oriented security is claimed to be manageable (Hoogensen et al 2004:158). It is claimed that the concept of security is rendered if everything is viewed as a security issue which consequently obstructs the possibility of setting “real” security (Hansen 2000:58).

This study aims to explore women’s own understanding of security; thus, this thesis challenges the dominant traditional definition of security. Furthermore, by theorizing abortion rights as a security issue, it adopts FST claim that security must be understood differently. This thesis will be guided by women’s own narratives in the strive to deepen the understanding of (in)security. By bringing women’s narratives of experiences it seeks to challenge the state as the referent object of security. It further adopts the concept of security as human experience that takes place in everyday life. Additionally, by including everyday experiences it seeks to contribute to the feminist task of blurring the line between private and public. As FST stresses and previous literature has informed, this thesis understands gendered hierarchies as social constructions that exposes women to gendered insecurities in their everyday life (Blanchard 2003:1298). Furthermore, derived from FST framework and previous literature, this thesis understands gender-based and structural violence, inequality, violations of bodily integrity, control and limited economic and social capabilities as insecurities.

4. Method

4.1 Feminist ontology and epistemology

To achieve the purpose of this thesis, this study is conducted within the interpretivist paradigm, and applies the ontological assumption that subjectivity, social reality, social organization and power depend on discourse (Kronsell 2016:106, Jørgensen & Phillips 2002:5). An external world independent of our thoughts and interpretations does not exist, and the representations of reality are shaped by social interactions, history, culture, identity and discourse (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002:22, Blaikie 2016:29). Critical approaches within security studies, challenge ontological and epistemological assumptions of realism and rejects positivist assumptions and universal knowledge claims about objective “truth” (Newman 2010:84). Moreover, the epistemological assumption is characterized by the claim that knowledge is contingent and change through time and space (Ibid). Within this study, a qualitative method is chosen, as the aim of this study is to examine how women understand their (in)security and the prohibition of abortions. Qualitative research seeks to understand the researched through acknowledgment of contextual accounts of participants’ own experiences and how they understand them (Dempsey 2016:482). Furthermore, it is argued that quantitative methodology should be used carefully when seeking to bring women’s voices to the centre, as it can risk excluding people’s own narratives and experiences (Oakley 1998:708). The epistemological standpoint has methodological implications as feminists within international relations also seek to highlight inequality and feminists have paved the way by introducing and applying narrative and cross-cultural methodologies (Sjoberg 2009:193). Feminist scholars claim that knowledge is relative, however the discussion on relativity and objectivity has created a scholarly divide. Critics argue that social constructivist research cannot make claims about the world nor produce knowledge since they are dependent on the assumption that knowledge is relative (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002:22,201). Moreover, some claim that strong objectivity can be achieved through strong reflexivity. There is a balance between understanding that knowledge is contingent and the will to contribute with descriptions of the world (ibid:202).

Feminist research is defined by a methodology which decides how research should be conducted and how feminist theory should be applied to the study (Dallimore 2000:158). Feminist methodology is informed by asking: who can be agents of knowledge? What can be

known and how is knowledge validated? (Landman 2006:430). Hence, feminist methods seek to capture experiences of participants, using their own narratives (Dillmore 2000:158). As feminist methodology is informed by the epistemological assumptions that knowledge is dependent on the relationship between the knower and the known, it opens up for this study to be based on focus group discussions, participant observations or interviews. Focus group discussions enable the study to focus on people's dialogue to find differences and similarities among the participants. However, group discussions are characterized by group dynamics which risk centring someone's experiences while ignoring someone else's. This risk increases further as the study at hand explores a sensitive issue which the women may not want to talk about among their community members. Participant observational methodology is not chosen as it is appropriate for studying people's behaviour, and not to collect data about individual women's own understanding of (in)security and the abortion prohibition. Therefore, this thesis will be based on semi-structured interviews to produce knowledge (Sjoberg 2009:192).

4.2 Data generating method

4.2.1 Semi-structured Interviews

To explore in-depth and to obtain an understanding of women's own experiences this study will be based on semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews are epistemologically distinct from quantitative methods, which critical scholars argue too often exclude female subjects. Semi-structured interviews allow women's voices and their experiences to be central in the research. The flexible format allows women to talk freely and share how they reason and understand their (in)security (Berry 2002:679). Semi-structured interviews collect data about women's lived experiences and the research is informed by the historical, sociological and relational context (Landman 2006:429). As this thesis seek to put women's own narratives in the centre, it is important to allow their voices to steer the conversation. A strict interview format could potentially prevent the study from obtaining crucial information as the question and conversation would be bound to my prior knowledge on women's security. When conducting research through semi-structured interviews it is crucial to prepare the interviews and to construct an interview guide that will be used throughout the interviews. The interviews do not necessarily need to strictly follow the guide since the character is flexible. However, it needs to guide the interview so that one is researching what is set out to research at the same time as allowing interviewees to elaborate and reason (Dempsey 2016:483).

In-depth interviews are argued to be the best data collecting method when researching sensitive topics (ibid:481). However, when researching a sensitive topic as done in this thesis, it is important to contemplate over the exploitative potential of the interview (Landman 2006:432). Furthermore, it is claimed that experience is a problematic unit of analysis and it is argued that the recording and interpretations of the experiences are shaped by the relationship between the interviewer and the participant (Jacoby 2006:154). It is not the people themselves, the events or conversations that are the data, but the researcher's recordings of these which constitute data that is co-produced in the conversation between the researcher and the participant (Stuvøy 2010:287). The interviews for this study are transcribed and analysed through qualitative thematic categorization, which will be further elaborated in the next section.

4.3 Data analysing method

4.3.1 Thematic analysis

To operationalize the research questions, I ask the informants specific questions which follow the feminist security theoretical framework and findings of previous literature. For the purpose of clarity, based on previous literature and theoretical framework insecurity will be understood as; gender-based and structural violence, control, violations of bodily integrity, limited economic and social capabilities and gender subordination/inequality. In this study, to operationalize the empirical findings, a thematic analysis is applied to the transcript of the interviews. Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing and to report patterns within the collected data. It seeks to organize and describe the data and is claimed to be a way of seeing as it provides an overview of the data which enables analysis and understanding of the findings. As this research is guided by feminist security theory, it is of importance to be transparent and stringent with how one went about when analysing the data and what assumptions that informed the analysis. Furthermore, it is argued that it is difficult to evaluate or compare with other studies if this is not made clear (Braun & Clarke 2006:80).

When applying thematic analysis one can either enter the data inductively, also referred to as bottom-up or deductively also referred to as top-down (Braun & Clarke 2006:83). Inductive analysis is a process of coding data without frames of coding and pre-existing preconceptions and ideas. This allows the data to inform the coding and themes (ibid). When conducting the

analysis deductively, the researcher is entering the analysis with pre-constructed themes that is based on theory (ibid:84). For this study, inductive approach is chosen which means that I have read and re-read the data for any themes related to security. The themes have not been constructed prior to the analysis (ibid). Thematic analysis further includes a semantic or latent approach, the first includes analysing explicit content of the data meanwhile latent includes also regarding the context and assumptions that is underlying the explicit content. In the latter approach the construction of the themes involves interpretations, and the analysis that it produces is not just descriptions but also already theorized. Thematic analysis within constructivist framework seeks to theorize the sociocultural contexts and structural conditions, that enable the individual accounts that are provided (ibid:84,85). As the epistemological assumption for feminist theory argues that knowledge is contingent, the analysis of the data for this study has considered the context and underlying assumptions that the content is based on.

Furthermore, when conducting a thematic analysis on a qualitative research, one key is to acknowledge that a theme is not dependent on quantifiable measures, but instead whether it captures data that is relevant for the overall research (ibid:82). Within this study themes are not only developed through what is most prevalent, but rather things that captured important elements of how women understand women's (in)security and the prohibition of abortions. The method seeks to explore patterns, and through the data that is extracted, construct codes and after that abstracted themes. During the course of this study, I have engaged with literature and previous research to enhance the analysis (ibid:86). For this thesis, the thematic analysis has followed the six stages of analysis presented by Braun and Clarke (see appendix 2).

4.4 Validity and reliability

Since this study is conducted within the interpretivist paradigm, it acknowledges that social reality dependent on context and the dynamics between the interviewer and the interviewee (Berry 2002:679). Hence, validity and reliability within social research have to be understood differently than within natural science. When researching subjects, the research process creates its own unique dynamic that cannot be replicated in other contexts. Furthermore, feminist research differs in its approach to objectivity and generalizability (Dallimore 2000:160). Nonetheless, critics claim that validity within feminist research is weak. The discussion on reliability and validity has also created a scholarly divide, many feminist scholars argue that these concepts are irrelevant for feminist studies, as feminist research do not seek to generalize.

Moreover, it is argued that generalizability should be avoided entirely as it risks making essentialist claims about women (ibid:172). Other feminist scholars argue that if all generalizations are problematic, women's emancipation cannot be effectively accomplished. Moreover, it is argued that generalization is problematic and associated with positivist scientific research, which seeks to, through generalization, make universal claims across all people and contexts to achieve the goal of control and prediction (ibid). To remain true to feminist research-practice this thesis argues that there is an important value in the specific, without generalizing across larger populations.

4.5 Reflexivity and ethical considerations

Reflexivity has become increasingly central in feminist ethical research praxis. Moreover, it is a core fundament aligned with the epistemological view that knowledge is situated. Reflexivity is a self-critical observation of the researcher's positionality in the study (England 1994:252). According to Ramazanoğlu and Holland, reflexivity means making the power relations and its consequences for the research apparent (2002:119). In the scope of this thesis I entered the field as an outsider, which comes with a distance to the norms, rules and reality that applies to the participants (ibid:120). By adopting reflexivity within this study, it allows me to reflect on my position in the issue that is researched. The relationship between the researcher and the participants cannot be separated from the analytical process of the data nor the knowledge that the thesis produces (ibid). Hence, I enter this study from a critical feminist perspective, carrying prior knowledge on women's security and reproductive health and rights. Additionally, I enter this study with a feminist security theoretical framework that will shape my interpretation of the findings. Moreover, my theoretical framework shaped the construction of the interview guide and the coding scheme and how the data is interpreted, which impacts the research process. Furthermore, the purpose of my study frames the informants understanding and idea of what I am looking for during my interviews, and there is a risk of participants providing information that fits into that (Temple & Edwards 2002:5).

Moreover, during the field-study three local translators were supporting the interviews, and similarly to me as a researcher, their representations of both questions and answers make an active contribution to the research (ibid:3). In context-specific and situated ways the translator represents voices, understandings and meanings and they can also choose what to include and exclude (Ficklin & Jones 2009:114). The ten interviews were divided between three different

translators. One translator in Gal/i works at a women's rights organisation, which risk of framing the participants idea of what I am looking for and further it allows for the translator to make own interpretations from what is said. In Sukhum/i a student supported me with interpretation who did not have any relation to the interviewees, which could have made the participants insecure of how freely they can talk about the issues. However, I experienced that the women were very transparent and open. In the third geographical area, Gagra, another student supported me, neither this woman did have any relation to the interviewees. Given the sensitive nature of the research, the translators signed a confidentiality contract. Furthermore, a local translator can more accurately represent local nuances which is of value.

The relationship between me as a researcher and the participants is furthermore characterized by the fact that I am conducting a cross-cultural research which itself constitutes a problem that is commonly discussed in feminist research ethics (Temple & Edwards 2002:5). Since there is an issue in representing others, I need to acknowledge that the representations of the participants, my analysis and discussion results in knowledge production which can have consequences (ibid). For the scope of this thesis, I must acknowledge the consequences it can bring the women by their participation in a study which is focusing on a sensitive issue in the context where the study is carried out. This made me aware and allowed me to reflect on my accountability and to whom I am accountable for, when I produce my representations. In this thesis I am accountable to the informants and I have translated this accountability to practices by ensuring informed consent and through anonymising the women in Abkhazia who participated. Furthermore, I made sure not to carry any notes or recordings on me that could compromise the women's anonymity when I entered the crossing point on my way out of Abkhazia. I chose to take these security measures as one incident exposed the vulnerability of the women. On my first day in Abkhazia I was told that the local KGB knew about my visit and wanted to have a talk. I was advised, by the local women's rights organisation who was my contact organisation, to say that I was in Abkhazia to learn about their work. I was advised not to share any information about my thesis and especially not that I was looking into the abortion law, as it could be perceived as a criticism towards Abkhazia. During the interrogation, the KGB representative asked me if and how I will report back on my experience and whether I could share it. Furthermore, he encouraged me to present Abkhazia in a positive manner. This made me very aware, especially as all of the participants showed to be critical of the abortion law, that the informants were put in a precarious position by participating.

By taking accountability for the knowledge that I through this thesis produce, I acknowledge the responsibility that is brought through my position in relation to the research participants and the representations that I am doing. Therefore, I aim to carefully represent the participating women. I seek to situate women in Abkhazia's narrative on (in)security and on the abortion prohibition partly through the ways they word by word represents their reality but also in parts through the ways in what they represent is intertwined in temporal-spatial situated context. I aim to analyse and represent their understandings as situated knowledge dependent on time, context, dominant narratives, history and relations.

4.6 Context of the study and participant sample

This study is based on a field visit and interviews with ten women in the breakaway region Abkhazia. Abkhazia is selected as there is a so-called frozen conflict that has been going on since 1992-1993, when a war between Abkhazia and Georgia followed Abkhazia's claim to independence. Ever since, Abkhazia has been characterized by the strive to become independent, something that has been supported by Russia. In previous literature on women's narratives of security I found that women in Abkhazia's voices are completely excluded from the discourse and literature. Furthermore, in 2016, the de-facto government adopted a law which prohibits abortions. As this thesis argue that reproductive rights are not included in the security discourse this provide an opportunity to study and theorize abortion rights as a security issue. Additionally, women in Abkhazia's movement is restricted by an unpredictable border control and the entrance of foreigners is limited. For example, the field trip for this thesis was at first postponed due to closure of the border after an incident, which remained for a couple of weeks. The process of applying for a visa is tricky, and according to oral decree one never knows who will be allowed in or not. Additionally, it is required to have local contacts that can confirm the visit. All these aspects showed that women in Abkhazia are difficult to reach which further enhanced the importance of putting their narratives of security and the abortion law in the centre.

The sampling method that was chosen for this thesis was exploratory sample which Denscombe argue is suitable for small-scale qualitative research that study something relatively unexplored (2014:33). As representative samples are associated with more quantitative data which reflects a cross-section of the population, the method was not appropriate for this study. Furthermore, the approach was non-probability, Denscombe writes that "*non-probability sample can be used*

where the aim is to produce an exploratory sample” (ibid:34). A non-probability sampling was chosen as it involves selection of people based on experience, as the purpose of this study is to examine women’s understandings based on their own experience (ibid). Furthermore, the sample of participants was selected purposively, Denscombe claims that “*purposive sampling operates on the principle that the best information can be accessed by focusing on a small group of deliberately selected group*” (ibid:41). For this thesis, purposive sampling was chosen to deliberately ensure that different ages, ethnicities and geographical belongings were included in the sample. It was decided to conduct the thesis in three geographically different areas as there is a difference in the socio-economic and political situation in these areas. Gal/i was chosen as it is closest to the Georgian border and is populated by ethnic Georgians, that in many cases are socio-economically vulnerable. In Sukhum/i, which is the de-facto capital where women to some extent have more rights and liberties. Lastly, in Gagra where economic growth is stable, as a result of Gagra being a resort for Russian tourists. The selection of participants was done through three local contacts, each in one of the different geographical areas. I informed them that I wanted the selection to represent different identities, religion, economic background, ages and educational level. The age population ratio was; 21, 25, 29, 33, 35, 38, 40, 44, 60, 75. They represented different ethnic groups; Georgian, Armenian, Abkhazian, Megrelian and Russian. The professions that the women had were; teacher, social worker, finance person, lecturer at the university, board member, unemployed, local administration, nurse, student and public organisation.

4.7 Limitations

Conducting a study that is based on other people’s experiences, always involves a risk, as it is a difficult task to interpret and produce representations. The study is in-depth but could be argued to be based on a few women’s understandings and their representations. However, this study does not seek to generalize and therefore is set out to represent a few women’s lived experiences. Moreover, this thesis is based on interviews with ten women who showed to be critical towards the abortion prohibition. The study would have had a different dynamic if women who are pro the prohibition, also were included which would have provided a more in-depth and findings that could be contrasted and understood in comparison to each other. However, to remain true to feminist praxis, I argue that the findings in this study contributes to a deeper understanding of (in)security as sensory experience is central, furthermore it allows for theorizing abortion rights as a security issue.

5. Findings

In this chapter I will present the findings after the themes identified by adopting thematic analysis to the data. The findings are first presented in two main overarching themes, which are responding to the first two research questions. 1. How do women in Abkhazia understand their (in)security? 2. How do women understand the prohibition of abortions? The overarching themes; women's (in)securities and understanding on abortion prohibition are then divided into sub-themes, which are based on reoccurring patterns and themes from the ten interview transcriptions. For the main themes of women's (in)securities, the sub-themes are; conflict context setting, women's economic insecurity, women's political representation and participation, and structural inequality and gender-based violence. For the second main theme the identified sub-themes are; women's economic insecurity, women's rights, political representation and participation and the nation's interest. The transcribed interviews have been read and reread and sentences have been coded and then categorized into themes. The coding has not specifically focused on word by word, but rather the meaning or the theme of sentences.

5.1 Women's (in)securities

5.1.1 Women's insecurities in conflict context

The participating women's narratives on (in)security are related to the so-called frozen conflict. Many of the women's understanding of the everyday insecurities they face are underpinned by contextual understanding. Even though, Abkhazia often is referred to as post-conflict or a frozen conflict, the understanding is diverging. Arguably, it is difficult to define Abkhazia as a post-conflict since there has only been a ceasefire agreement but not a peace agreement. What was prevalent during the interviews was that many of the women did not consider the conflict as either post or frozen, but rather current. Despite this, the woman's understanding and experiences in Abkhazia is very closely linked to previous feminist literature on post-conflict contexts that have pointed towards that violence and insecurities remain in post-conflict settings (Manjoo & McRaith 2011, McLeod 2013 & Hamber et al 2006).

The majority of the women shared that they feel a sense of insecurity in public spaces when one of two men have a weapon. One of the informants said; "*It is not easy to feel protected or safe when you know every other person carries a gun*". Other participants also came back to

the sense of insecurity because men are armed. This can also be understood by referring to Manjoo and McRaith's claim that there is a relation between small arms and increased tolerance of violence that follow armed conflicts and thus exposes women to insecurities. Moreover, one participant informed that men are carrying weapons to be prepared to protect Abkhazia if the conflict would erupt again. This is important as it represents the mind-set and gives an example of how the conflict is present in Abkhazia. It further gives a small reflection of how masculinist gendered logic is intertwined in the understanding of protection.

High levels of corruption reoccurred as something that exposed women to insecurities as if often involves lack of accountability and in some cases impunity. Women informed that in many cases criminals can pay themselves out of situations without being held accountable.

Another aspect that women in Gal/i shared was issues of documentation. After the war, the ethnic Georgian population do not have the right to have two citizenships. This means that they can only become citizens of Abkhazia if they revoke their Georgian citizenship. Which is a result of the ongoing tensions and the aftermath after the ceasefire agreement. The ethnic Georgian women shared that issues of not having the proper documentation increases their vulnerability as it limits their freedom of movement and also their access to services, healthcare and their kid's access to education. One informant responded to the question, "*How do you understand women's security in Abkhazia?*":

"I don't think women are safe or secure, this goes for myself as well and first of all it is connected to documentation which restricts my freedom of movement but also sometimes there is a problem with health care" (Interview 2).

Furthermore, this responds and confirms the feminist contributions that argue that women do experience increased insecurities in times of post-conflict/frozen conflict. The conflict is very present and is underpinning how the women perceive their (in)securities.

5.1.2 Women's economic insecurity

Moreover, many of the women who participated in this study conceptualized security as related to economic security. Women shared their worries about their ability to provide for their families. It was shared that there is a common understanding that men should be prioritized in the labour market which consequently limits women's opportunities. In most cases there is a noteworthy difference between men's and women's salaries. When elaborating on the economic situation, several of the women argued that the situation is creating dependency on their husbands and/or families. They shared that there is an acceptance that women earn less which maintain women's dependency on others. Which also have resulted in the preferences for sons as boys are seen as an investment who can provide for the whole family meanwhile daughters cannot provide to the same extent as they marry and leave to another family. This was something that some of the women came back to, one woman said that "*Women are not free economically and we depend on our husbands. In cases of divorce, parents are not ready to take back their daughters*". Which further reflects a common acceptance of a structure which maintain women as dependent on others, either husband or her family. Another woman shared her own experience of being economically dependent on her husband:

"A few years back we (me and my husband) came to the point that I wanted to divorce... but I knew I was not financially stable... I am totally dependent. I know I can make my own money but the domestic work and all those things are on my shoulder and my responsibilities so I cannot realize my work nor myself"
(Interview 7).

Similarly, to Sasaki's findings in her research on subcontracted workers in Thailand, the women in this study consider their everyday security as being dependent on economic security. Some of the women shared that economic stability allows them to provide for their family meanwhile others shared that it provides women with freedoms as they are not dependent on husbands or families, which in some cases can be abusive. The women's testimonies which focused on dependency relates to Hamber et al who argued that economic security is a key factor for women's independency (2006:498). Even though it was shared that the economic situation is hard for many people in Abkhazia, the way women understood their economic vulnerability involved gendered dynamics, such as dependency and structural inequalities in the form of unequal salaries and priority for men.

5.1.3 Women's political representation and participation

The majority of the women who participated in the interviews expressed a frustration over the lack of women's representation and participation, and that decision-making authority, both private and public is considered to belong to men. Some informants related issues of representation to tradition and shared that girls are taught that men know best and are more suitable to take decisions. The following are some examples of responses to the question: "How do you understand women's security in Abkhazia?"

"Security differs between men and women; a man is a man... he is the head of the family and the head of the country... you understand. They are more secure because of biology and also because of south Caucasus tradition." (Interview 9).

"I don't think women are secure... they don't have access to governmental structures or security structures... men are always the priority." (Interview 7).

"There is an idea in Abkhaz society that a man can protect himself and that a woman cannot. I think that depends on that women's voices are not heard and that there are only men's voices that are heard." (Interview 10).

Women linked lacking representation and participation in decision-making with increased vulnerability and insecurity. Representation is connected to issues of insecurities, as women shared a feeling of not being heard even when they try to speak up. They argued that there is limited space for women to raise issues of their concern and when women are not represented their issues are not visible. This was also related that to what they mean is lacking political will for men to represent women's issues. When reflecting on security one of the informants shared that women's sense of security relates to their participation and access to institutions: *"Women who feel more secure and have more safety try to bring changes and appeal to institutions but there are many women who don't have access to decision making"* (Interview 5)

The women considered access to decision making structures and power, both private and public, as a security provider. The participating women's conceptualization of security as dependent on political participation and representation reflects the narratives of security in McLeod and Hamber et al.'s two different studies, among women in Lebanon, Northern Ireland, South

Africa and Serbia, who referred to other dimensions of security, including political participation and representation.

One woman informed that the situation with women's political participation was different prior to the war, and that more women were in the parliament at that time. This could be argued to exemplify how the politics is characterized by the conflict which includes harder issues that require decision making which men are considered to be more appropriate for. By privileging harder issues then subordinates "women related issues".

5.1.4 Structural inequality and gender-based violence

Different dimensions of inequality are inevitable intertwined in other aspects of insecurity and cannot be separated from those. However, this sub-theme is focusing on women's narratives that explicitly refer to structural and direct forms of inequality. For many of participating women, their narratives on insecurity revolved around inequality and high levels of gender-based violence. Some of the women reasoned that they understood that violence and inequality relate to the gendered structures and the stereotypical and patriarchal norms deeply rooted in Abkhazia. Meanwhile some informants shared that they saw connections between violence and inequality as consequences of the war.

"In terms of domestic violence and our tradition... we live in Caucasus... all women feel insecure and scarred to some extent... it is part of our tradition that women should not speak about what is happening in the home." (Interview 8)

However, one of the more senior participants shared that she does not agree with the common assumption that claims that gender-based violence is a part of the tradition. She argued that the levels of violence were not as high before the war, but that it has become more common and socially accepted after the war. Which relates to and confirms feminist contribution that have connected increased levels of gender-based violence and post-conflict contexts (Gilmartin 2019, Manjoo & McRaith 2011).

"For me, women's safety is not something that exists in Abkhazia. It is like a decoy. I know that if I have issues in my family, I don't have my own safety... I

won't be secure. If the community knows a woman is beaten by her husband, the first thing they ask is; what did she do?". (interview 7).

Furthermore, the women connected their sense of insecurity to inequality and the low understanding of the importance of equality. Furthermore, women connected physical gender-based violence to other forms of structural violence which affects women's access to healthcare, education and other services. One informant claimed that there is a common acceptance of inequality and that the disproportionate power distribution between men and women increases the risk of women being subjected to violence as violence against women can be considered legitimate as it responds to the gender hierarchy.

Women shared that issues and the sense of insecurity of gender-based violence also related to the social acceptance of violence and that it is considered to be a private matter. One informant shared that, when young girls and women see their mother, mother-in-law, their neighbour and friend being subjected to violence, then it becomes normalized. She said that many women think that, if others live it through, I will too.

Some of the responses that women provided when asked "how do you understand life for women in Abkhazia?"

"For me the situation in Abkhazia for women is often horrible... it starts already when girls are growing up and ends when they get married... I don't know if it is better in Russia or Georgia but there a girl can have equal rights". (Interview 2).

"I could talk a lot about this but... women's rights are not protected... Not in education, healthcare... or human rights" (Interview 3).

"Women live their whole life with the perpetrator, because they do not have any support, not from family, society or the legal system. If a woman marries, she is expected to die there". (Interview 1).

The findings respond to McLeod's findings in Serbia, that argued that women perceive security as related to human rights which includes freedom from violence, individual rights and movement. Previous feminist research claim that direct forms of violence is commonly

understood as a threat and risk, however structural inequality exposes threats to women in forms of limiting capabilities and freedoms and thus is considered as insecurity (Caprioli 2004 & Galtung 1990). Some of the women's reasoning followed the understanding of structural violence as limiting women's freedom and capabilities.

5.2 Understanding of the prohibition of abortions

5.2.1 Women's economic insecurity

All women in this study were to varying degree against the abortion prohibition. Many of the participating women understood the abortion law as increasing families' and especially women's economic vulnerability. Many of the women shared that there is a divide between the urban and rural, and that the women in villages are especially impacted.

“In Abkhazia, the situation often is bad. Some families don't even have a roof and then the government say, “give birth to one more child”.” (Interview 1)

“The law is bad, but for me abortion is also bad... but sometimes families are not economically ready and find themselves in a bad situation where they cannot provide for children.” (Interview 4)

Women reasoned around the issue of economic vulnerability and shared that some families find themselves in a situation where they cannot provide for their children. Furthermore, they shared that the women living in these areas have limited access to information on contraceptives and protection.

“Contraceptives is legal but it is very expensive and you need a lot of money to buy these... you can get support from social workers but no one knows this... six women have applied for this... but they all have six or seven kids when they get it” (Interview 2)

What the women kept coming back to, was that economically stable women in Abkhazia have the possibility to travel either to Russia or Georgia to have an abortion. Abkhazians can go to Russia and ethnic Georgians can go to Georgia. However, the travels involve a lot of expenses

and most women cannot afford to go. Another aspect of the economic impact was not only that it becomes more difficult to provide for more children, but also that women cannot work or contribute economically if they have many children. As mentioned previously, women shared that domestic work is solely put on women and that it is women's responsibility to raise the children.

Some of the women understood abortion prohibition through an economic framework, where vulnerability and impact of the abortion law depend on intersecting aspects of, class, ethnicity, access to information and the rural and urban divide. Furthermore, it was shared that access to contraceptives and protection also dependent on these aspects. This relates to the findings presented in the main theme relating to women's narratives of insecurities, that argued that women relate security to economic stability and independence. Women's understanding of the abortion prohibition informs that it exposes women to economic insecurity, which confirms one aspect of abortion prohibition as related to insecurity.

5.2.2 Women's rights

All participants were to a varying degree against the prohibition. Some of the women explicitly related the prohibition to women's rights and shared feelings of frustration over not being able to decide over their own body. When asked about the prohibition, one woman's first response was; *"the prohibition is against women you know"*. Another woman explained that she considers the abortion prohibition as being a form of violence against women. The majority of the women shared their frustration over not being able to decide over one owns body and claimed that the law deprives the women of their right to decide and be owner of their own body. Furthermore, some shared a sense of vulnerability that doctors, because of this law, prioritize the life of the baby over women's life, which they related to their rights to health and bodily integrity. This further confirms core contribution of feminist research, which have shed light on relation between abortion rights as human rights (Thomson & Pierson 2018:350).

"It means that women's rights are violated, and it sends a big signal to young women -: that someone else can decide over me what I can do with my body. A person is not a thing, a person is a person" (Interview 10).

Furthermore, it was shared that to circumvent the abortion law, some women travel to neighbouring countries. But for those who cannot travel, there are illegal abortions or illegal which exposes the women to major health risks.

“From my point of view this also increases corruption in the health system. That doctors can be payed to do abortions or to provide illegal pills” (Interview 8).

“What we have today is that a lot of women have died, because of the pill they lose a lot of blood and cannot go to the hospital. Especially women in villages who cannot access healthcare”. (Interview 6)

One woman shared her own experience from having an abortion. She said that her health condition and having a chronical disease mean that a pregnancy can put her at risk.

“I got a test and realized that the results were not good, and the heart was not beating. It was my fourth week. The doctor said to wait 7-8 weeks to see if the child would have heartbeats. So according to the rules, the doctor should save my pregnancy as the doctor think is was ok that there were no heartbeats. But according to another hospital this was bad. And given my disease I could die. So, I went to Russia, because I had the financial stability. I understood that I wanted to live, and I did not have a choice. I did the abortion because I am a mother, because I have a child to raise. I had a big fear and felt scared during the situation. I had this fear that someone else is deciding if I can live or not. It feels very unsafe” (Interview 7)

Many of the women shared that they understood the abortion law as violating their rights, including the right to decide over their own body and the right to health. Women’s understanding of the abortion prohibition, reflects how abortion rights are connected to broader issues of equality and health, as previously stated by Thomson & Pierson (2018). The findings show that women are directly exposed to health risks following the prohibition, which unfolds aspects of insecurities. Moreover, the abortion law relates to aspects of insecurities presented in the first section of this chapter which revolves around human rights and equality.

5.2.3 Women’s political representation and participation

Some of the women's views of the abortion prohibition was that they understood it as an issue of political representation and participation. On the one hand, women viewed that the law was a direct consequence of women's low political participation and that it was adopted by a male dominated parliament. At the time of the interviews the parliament consisted of one woman and 34 men.

“The decision makers did not consider women's health or women's rights. They missed a lot of aspects and I think it was because no women were consulted or involved in the process. Women's voices were not heard despite the fact that it is a law that affects the women.” (Interview 10)

On the other hand, women identified another aspect when reasoning which related to how the law further limits women's participation in both community and politics.

“From my point of view, the people (men) who accepted this law, they don't want women in politics. Remember that there were men who accepted this law. Not women.” (Interview 8)

“If women have a lot of children... she cannot be active in her community and especially not in politics. It is difficult for women to take part in the development the country.” (Interview 2).

Some of the women shared their frustration over that their voices were not heard or represented. Two women shared that the abortion law was adopted quickly, so that no one had time to react and try to influence the decision. Both of the women argued that it was a deliberate choice, because now the government says: *“But you did not protest, you did not say anything”*. One woman claimed *“They are smart, they know women don't go to the parliament to protest. It is not Abkhazian culture, but we could have tried to influence it before it was adopted”*. Furthermore, this exemplifies Cook's claim that women's duty has historically been characterized by stereotypical expectations which limit and denies them opportunities available for men (Cook 1993:74). When women don't participate in decision-making, they are not either represented and thus there is no political will to respond to their needs. There was a common understanding that this law would not be adopted if more women would have been involved. It was further argued that when women are not politically represented, the men who constitutes

the state and decision-making body are allowed to govern women's bodies. Even though all women did not argue that their exclusion from the process of adopting this law as explicitly exposing them to insecurities, this exemplifies how lacking women's representation and participation result in a law that limits their rights and in turn exposes them to vulnerability and insecurity. Furthermore, drawing on the findings in the first section, the women participating in this study understood political representation and participation as (in)security, thus it could be argued that this uncover another aspect of insecurity in the abortion prohibition.

5.2.4 The nation's interest

When asked why they think that the government adopted the law, they all replied that it was to change the demography and to increase the Abkhazian population. What was interesting was that when some of the women reasoned around abortion prohibition, they argued that the government should make some kind of support or award system. Which also reflect some kind of understanding or acceptance of the heroin mother, as referred to in previous research (Yuval-Davis 1996). Which can be understood as responding to a nationalist discourse, even though they are against the law. Two participants informed that they have a system in Russia, which rewards women for having many children, which they consider to be desirable.

“But it is very strange because if you want to approve the law you have to pay women with many children. You have to give them financial support. (Interview 4).

“In Russia, families get compensation for having many children, it should be like that here (Interview 6).

Given the women's responses to why the abortion law was adopted, it was interesting to study how the abortion prohibition is connected to women's roles as mothers and what it means to be a mother in Abkhazia. Below are some examples from the talks that revolved around the role of mothers:

“It also signals that women should be mothers. If women will keep have many children, she will stay in their home and don't have time to do other stuff. Is it even worth to marry and have children here with such law?” (interview 8)

“The abortion law is an example to show that women should be mothers, maybe they are afraid that younger women think about their careers” (Interview 10)

Some of the younger women who participated shared a sense that the prohibition reduces women to mothers and limit their choices and chances to proceed a career. They understood the law as having a symbolic value that strengthens traditional and stereotypical gendered hierarchy. The law appeals to the traditional structure and increases social expectations on women to have children and nurture the idea that they can only be realized as women if they are mothers.

When asked what it means to be a mother in Abkhazia, one woman replied; *“For Abkhaz women, a mother means to be home holder, prepare food, clean house, to care about your husband and children”*. I replied and asked, what it means to her and she responded: *“For me? Haha... I believe in equality and the role of the mother is not equal”*. (Interview 4).

The role of the mother should be understood in the conflict context, as the narrative of the independent nation-state is strong, especially as Abkhazia is not internationally recognized. Furthermore, it reflects the idea of women as means to increase the population. In that way, the prohibition can be understood as increasing the control over women’s bodies, to ensure that women fulfil their duties as reproducers of the nation. One woman shared that; *“The society is looking at women as future mothers”* (Interview 1). The statement exemplifies how women in Abkhazia have a communal function and by becoming mothers they serve as public goods. The statement responds very well to what previous research have argued (Luibheid 2004, Gilmartin 2019 & Yuval-Davis 1996), that women serves as reproducer of the collective members and consequently it is a collective task to find women to fulfil that role. This aspect of the abortion prohibition exemplifies and confirms what Luibheid argued; that women are targeted to control ethnic boundaries (2004:341). Women’s bodies are politized to ensure the security of the nation. Furthermore, the findings show that the government explicitly justifies the law as for the ethnonationalist project, compared to Cook and Dickens who argued that it is often morally justified, to protect the foetus and life. Moreover, it is showed that women’s rights are subordinated Abkhazia’s state interests; which drawing on previous research findings increases women’s vulnerability and exposes them to different forms of insecurities.

6. Discussion and analysis

Guided by feminist epistemological assumption that argue that knowledge is situated, this thesis perceives the participating women's understanding of their insecurities and the abortion prohibition as shaped by history, spatial-temporalities, and dominant discourses. The representation of the women's understandings in the findings chapter furthermore uncover how their narratives are shaped by the contextual experiences that they embody. The women's narratives are underpinned by the conflict realities and intersecting aspects of socio-economic status, gender, rural/urban divide, religion and ethnicity. By focusing on ordinary women as referent objects of security, this thesis has found that the participating women's understanding of (in)security includes four different aspects; conflict context; economic (in)security; lacking political representation and participation; and structural inequality and gender-based violence. The findings in this thesis follow the findings from previous feminist security research, however, expands the applicability beyond women that are politically active and civil society activists to ordinary women as referent objects. Moreover, the women's narratives on (in)securities, unfolds how security issues and aspect of insecurity are intertwined with levels of structural inequality.

Guided by previous research this thesis furthermore argues that structural inequality constitutes violence that limit women in Abkhazia's capabilities. The women's testimonies show that security threats are connected to high levels of GBV, low political participation and representation; which can be argued to be symptomatic for the frozen conflict context that relates to increased societal tolerance and acceptance of violence. The context in itself cannot be understood as a security issue but as a framework where security threats and insecurities are increased. Moreover, the women understand women's low political representation and participation as a security issue. The conflict in Abkhazia has affected women's political participation as a result of a deeply rooted understanding that politics and war are masculinist businesses. Furthermore, women's understanding of the lacking participation in politics and economic as a security issue, both in the private and public sphere, follow the logic of men as protectors and women as protected. This binary could be argued to be strengthened and maintained by structural inequalities which seek to limit women's agency to influence and participate; consequently, women's insecurity is increased. Thus, women's low political

representation and participation is understood as a security issue which further increases women's vulnerabilities to security related threats, such as inadequate legal and societal protection. The women's understanding of insecurities are gendered and underpinned by gender hierarchies which privilege men and subordinate women in public and private spheres. Empirically this thesis has contributed to understanding of women's (in)security narratives by adopting feminist methodology and having ordinary women as security referent objects.

Furthermore, this thesis found that the women understand the abortion prohibition in four different aspects; women's economic insecurity; human rights; participation and representation; the nation-state. Moreover, by thoroughly looking into the findings in this thesis it is found that the participating women's understanding of the abortion prohibition largely mirrors their understanding and conceptualization of insecurities. Some of the participants explicitly understood the abortion prohibition as connected to aspects of insecurity meanwhile some of the women reasoned around it as increasing other security issues such as economic insecurity, and political participation and representation. There was a clear tendency that the participating women's understanding of the abortion prohibition followed their reasoning around insecurities and conceptualizations of (in)security. Some of the informants shared that they thought that the prohibition was adopted to maintain gender hierarchies and to keep women in their houses to limit their opportunities. Others focused on the direct forms of security threats that are brought by the abortion prohibition, for example in forms of health and economic insecurities and the material reality it creates. Furthermore, it was suggested that the abortion prohibition maintains and increases women's dependency on men as it limits women's opportunity to participate in economic and political spheres, both public and private. This follow previous research that have linked high fertility rates with low economic status and lacking decision-making authority (Caprioli 2004). The participants informed that the prohibition was adopted to increase the Abkhaz population, some of the participants criticized the justification of the law and thought that the government saw women as a tool to fix the problem with the demography. The abortion prohibition exemplifies how the state is the referent object of security, which consequently excludes women as referent objects and thus ignores what women understand as security issues. Furthermore, abortion prohibition is understood as a security threat as it allows the state to govern women's bodies and violate their right to decide over their own body. The state's governing of women's bodies and the abortion prohibition was by some of the informants understood as a symbolic signal which reduces

women to childbearers. Women's roles as childbearers is further understood through a feminist security perspective and the conflict context, as women during conflict often serve a public good and are valued for being reproducers of the nation. The ideal that value women as childbearers, exemplifies how ideology (of the independent nation-state) and culture can support structural violence which, as argued by Galtung, can create tolerance of violence that lead to that women's security ceases to exist (1990:20).

This thesis is based on ordinary women's understanding of (in)security and the findings have empirically contributed to understanding of women's narratives on (in)security. By centring women's own voices this thesis has furthermore argued that the prohibition of abortions increases women's vulnerability and insecurity. Based on the participating women's understanding, this thesis suggests that abortion rights need to be understood as a security issue, as it is intertwined and connected to a broader range of security issues. Furthermore, drawing on the women's testimonies this thesis argues that abortion rights cannot be separated from the security discourse. Given the so called-frozen conflict in Abkhazia, it furthermore uncovers how the abortion prohibition is used for the ethnonationalist project to serve the nation. To theorize abortion rights as a security issue, allows and further strengthens the strive of feminist security theory to challenge traditional conceptualization of security. Thus, this thesis has shown how the state have implemented abortion prohibition which privilege the own nation's security while subordinate individual security. Through the adoption of abortion prohibition, the state has rather exacerbated women's insecurities and limited their influence in politics and economy, both in public and in private sphere. The prohibition poses women to security threats through direct and structural forms of violence which limit their capabilities and violate their rights. Theoretically, by using the women's own narratives, abortion rights are argued to constitute a security issue.

Arguably, this thesis suggest that feminist security theory should widen the security concept and include understanding of abortion rights as a security issue, more than in cases of sexual violence. By theorizing abortion rights as a security issue, this thesis has uncovered how the abortion law was adopted and justified through a traditional understanding of security, which privilege the security of the nation-state. Furthermore, this contributes to feminist security theory by challenging the state as the referent object as it points towards how women's insecurities are exacerbated when the state is the referent object of security.

7. Conclusion

The aim of this study was to explore women's narratives on (in)security and understandings of the prohibition of abortions in Abkhazia. Moreover, it aimed to theorize abortion rights as a security issue.

Firstly, this study has shown that women in Abkhazia understand their own (in)security as dependent on four aspects; the conflict context, economic insecurity, women's political representation and participation; structural inequality and gender-based violence. Secondly this thesis has also found that women understand the abortion prohibition related to four aspects; economic insecurity; women's rights; women's representation and participation; the nation's interests. The understanding of the abortion prohibition is argued to mirror women's narratives on (in)security and that it constitutes aspects which in several different ways increases women's insecurities. The findings confirm existing feminist literature and empirically contributes to the feminist security study by centring ordinary women's voices. By focusing on ordinary women's narratives on (in)security and understanding of the abortion prohibition, this thesis responds to the identified scholarly gaps, in which it is claimed that these women's voices are completely absent from the literature. By adopting the women's own conceptualization of (in)security and exploring them in relation to their understanding of the abortion prohibition, this thesis has theorized abortion rights as a security issue. By engaging through a feminist security theoretical framework and exploring abortion prohibition from a security perspective, this thesis suggests that abortion rights should be understood as a security issue. Furthermore, it has found that by widening the concept of security to include abortion rights, it contributes to feminist security theory by arguing that women's insecurity is exacerbated when the nation-state is the security referent object. Hence, it contributes to challenging the dominant security theory, which privileges the security of the nation-state and subordinates women's security. This thesis has aimed to deepen understanding of (in)security by exploring other perspectives and listening to women in Abkhazia, and through them rethink what constitutes security issues. Feminist security scholars have previously redefined security to include aspects of domestic violence, rape, poverty, gender subordination (Sjoberg 20019:198) Thus, this thesis argues that security should be widened so that abortion rights are included in feminist conceptualization of security.

To conclude, this thesis touches upon several interesting aspects within the study of security; firstly, it has expanded the applicability of security referent object to ordinary women's understanding of their own (in)security and made an empirical contribution which responds to the research gaps pointed out by this thesis. Furthermore, this thesis makes an empirical contribution by through a field-based study focusing on women in Abkhazia and their understanding of (in)security and the abortion prohibition, and thus contributing to a wider understanding of women's (in)security and abortion rights as a security issue. Through the explorative character of study, this thesis has been allowed to examine abortion rights theoretically as a security issue. Furthermore, it has contributed to theory building by enriching feminist security theory inductively through the empirical findings (Beach 2017:22). However, this opens up to questions that require further research; theorizing on abortion rights as a security issue should first of all be enriched by an empirical field study which includes women who are supporting abortion prohibition, to enable comparison and a dynamic in-depth discussion. Secondly, as this thesis does not seek to generalize across populations, future research should be conducted in other contexts. Theorizing abortion rights as a security issue requires further academic work to enrich feminist security theory so that abortion rights are included in the scholarly field of women's (in)security.

8. References

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8.2 Empirical material

Interview 1: 19-Jan-2020

Interview 2: 19-Jan-2020

Interview 3: 20-Jan-2020

Interview 4: 20-Jan-2020,

Interview 5: 20-Jan-2020

Interview 6: 21-Jan-2020

Interview 7: 21-Jan-2020

Interview 8: 21-Jan-2020

Interview 9: 22-Jan-2020

Interview 10: 22-Jan-2020

Appendix 1. Interview guide

- Tell me about yourself
- How many children do you have?
- How do you understand life in Abkhazia?
- Tell me about your worries in your everyday life?
- How do you understand your own safety? What are the main challenges?
- Can you tell me about when you experienced insecurities in your life?
- What do you and your family do to feel safe? What is important for you to feel safe and make your worries?
- How do you think life in Abkhazia differ between men and women? Do you think men are more secure? If yes/no – why? Comparing to you husband, what are you worried about?
- How do you understand the abortion prohibition?
- What do you think the prohibition of abortions mean to women?
- Follow up questions: In what way is it good/bad? Elaborate. Do you think the law entails any risks?
- How do women circumvent the law? Have you had any experiences with the law or heard stories from other women who have tried successfully or failed to circumvent the law.
- For you, what does it mean to be a mother? (Follow up questions: What is expected from society? Can all women meet these expectations? What troubles do women experience as mothers).

Appendix 2. Thematic analysis guide

Table 1 Phases of thematic analysis

Phase	Description of the process
1. Familiarizing yourself with your data:	Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.
2. Generating initial codes:	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
3. Searching for themes:	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4. Reviewing themes:	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis.
5. Defining and naming themes:	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6. Producing the report:	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

Appendix 3. Coding Scheme

Main themes	Sub-themes	Codes	Examples
Women's understanding of their (in) security	Women's insecurities in conflict context	Criminality Weapons Documentation Crimes	<i>"It is not easy to feel protected or safe when you know every other person carries a gun".</i>
	Women's economic (in)security	Poverty Unemployment Provide for family Low salary Dependence	<i>Women are not free economically and we depend on our husbands. In cases of divorce, parents are not ready to take back their daughters</i>
	Women's political representation and participation	No women in government Prioritizing men's issues Lacking understanding of so-called women related issues	<i>I don't think women are secure... they don't have access to governmental structures or security structures... men are always the priority.</i>
	Inequality and gender-based violence	Domestic violence Abusive husbands Lacking access to education and healthcare Inequality	<i>I could talk a lot about this but... women's rights are not protected... Not in education, healthcare... or human rights</i>
Women's understanding on abortion prohibition	Women's economic insecurity	Difficulties to provide Many children Poverty Insufficient economic support	<i>The law is bad, but for me abortion is also bad... but sometimes families are not economically ready and find themselves in a bad situation where they cannot provide for children</i>
	Women's rights	To decide over one own's body Violation of rights Right to health	<i>It means that women's rights are violated, and it sends a big signal to young women. That someone else can decide over me what I can do with my body.</i>
	Women's political representation and participation	Men's decision Lacking representation No voice Decision making authority	<i>From my point of view, the people (men) who accepted this law, they don't want women in politics. Remember that there were men who accepted this law. Not women</i>
	The nation's interest	Abkhazia Demography Women are mother Domestic work Ethnicity	<i>The abortion law is an example to show that women should be mothers, maybe they are afraid that younger women think about their careers</i>