The War in Your Head: 
On the Origins of Domestic Violence

Tilman Brück    Wolfgang Stojetz∗

Abstract

This paper studies the long-term, intrapersonal origins of domestic violence. Using primary survey data from Angola, we show that exposure to wartime sexual violence against women significantly increases a former soldier’s propensity to commit domestic violence more than a decade after the end of the war. To establish causality, we exploit a natural experiment in exposure to wartime sexual violence by armed groups induced by the Angolan war. We argue that the increase in domestic violence is caused by being conditioned into ‘gender-based violent practice’, and that this effect is psychological and persistent in nature. The results challenge the view of domestic violence as behavior that is triggered by payoff-relevant considerations, and are not consistent with dominant economic models of domestic violence as a short-term function of intra-family power structure or prevailing cultural norms.

∗Stojetz (corresponding author): Excellence Initiative, Humboldt Graduate School. Email: wstojetz@gmail.com. Brück: International Security and Development Center. Email: tilman.brueck@isd-center.org.