

“I used to be a strong man, but now I am not”

Gendered Vulnerabilities and Harms

Sexual violence against men during armed conflict is commonly theorized to compromise male survivors’ masculine identities. What throughout the literature is almost exclusively labeled as the “emasculatation” and “feminization” of male survivors is frequently portrayed at once as a motivation for the perpetration of such violence as well as its primary consequence and harm. Yet how exactly such perceived processes of gender subordination and the compromising of masculinities unfold, and what they entail, is only poorly understood.

To this end, in this chapter, I empirically deconstruct the gendered effects of sexual violence on Acholi male survivors’ masculinities, drawing directly on their experiences and guided by their views, voices, and perspectives. While most existing studies treat the effects of sexual violence on male survivors’ masculinities in static terms and as one-time events, I argue instead that gender subordination is a dynamic and manifold process, initiated by acts of penetration and further exacerbated by myriad layered harms that subordinate male survivors through gendered disempowerment. Challenging dominant assumptions in the literature, this chapter thereby demonstrates that the impact of wartime male rape is a fluid and compounded process, perpetuated over time through social interactions, health implications, and a lack of gender-sensitive medical service provision.

Throughout the growing literature on the topic, such processes are frequently conceptualized and portrayed as “emasculatation” by way of “feminization” and/or “homosexualization.” Male survivors’ experiences, however, are much more fluid and nuanced than these seemingly static concepts and their associated terminologies suggest. In light of these discrepancies between dominant conceptual assumptions and survivors’ empirically grounded lived realities, I avoid reproducing this language, and instead think and speak of these dynamics and of survivors’

experiences as forms of “displacement from gendered personhood” as laid out in the introduction. In unpacking these dynamics, this chapter departs from “thick descriptions” of Acholi masculinities as a conceptual premise, because understanding the effects of violence on gender needs to depart from a contextualized understanding of relational gender identities in the first place.

COO-PEE—WHERE “MEN ARE NOT THERE”

Before proceeding with theoretical reflections about masculinities constructions and a deconstructed analysis of survivors’ gendered harms, I begin by introducing the case of *Coo-Pee*, the village where men (*coo*) are considered not to be there (*pee*). I introduce this case study to illuminate the manifold ways in which armed conflict can impact men’s gender identities and to illustrate how the effects of war and sexual violence against men are understood and perceived locally in northern Uganda.

Coo-Pee is a small rural trading center in Bungatira subcounty, approximately fifteen kilometers north of Gulu town along the road to Palaro (see figures 2 and 3 in chapter 3). In Acholi language, *coo* is the plural for men, while *pee* refers to something or someone not being there. *Coo-Pee* can therefore be translated and understood as a place where “men are not there,” or at least are considered not to be there. Throughout the course of my research, I heard different explanations regarding the origin and meaning of this name. However, one interpretation in the contemporary environment appears to dominate the contextual understanding of the meaning of the village’s name, at least among my respondents. Given the multiplicity and ambivalence of existing attributed meanings, however, my aim here is not to determine the *actual* meaning of the name Coo-Pee, which appears to have been in circulation from at least the 1950s, as demonstrated, for instance, by the archives of anthropologist Paula Hirsch Foster, and appears to have varying connotations and interpretations. Rather, I aim to explore how the community makes sense of the name, in Coo-Pee and in Acholiland more broadly, as well as among my respondents in the contemporary context in particular against the backdrop of recent developments during the protracted armed conflict and in its aftermath.

The most prevalent explanation of the meaning of the name Coo-Pee among my respondents goes as follows: During the early stages of the conflict, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the civilian population, and especially males, suffered most heavily from violence perpetrated by government soldiers (see chapter 3). Acholi men were particularly targeted because of stereotypical assumptions linked to masculinities and ethnicity, and because they were suspected of fighting the state army and joining rebel groups, or as retaliation attacks for previous episodes of conflict linked to the country’s troubled political history. As a consequence, in Coo-Pee, as in many other places across Acholiland, men were arrested, tortured, and killed in large numbers. Therefore, during that time, some men were physically



FIGURE 2. Coo-Pee.

absent from Coo-Pee. Other men remained in the village but were considered spiritually, symbolically, and psychologically not to be there. Confronted with the hardships of conflict and contextualized in a continuum of severe discrepancies between socially constructed and homogenized expectations and heterogeneous phenomenological lived realities, some of these men did not perform in their socially conditioned masculine roles and were thus displaced from their gender identities. At the same time, various other men were considered not to be there because they were “turned into women” as a result of having been raped by government soldiers, which was thought to have heavily impacted their masculinities and to displace them from their gendered personhood.

Kenneth, my research collaborator, and I regularly passed through Coo-Pee on our numerous trips to other villages in the surrounding areas, many of which were heavily affected by tek-gungu cases (see chapter 3). However, I learned about the apparent interpretation of the name as described here only during the latter part of my fieldwork. During an interview with a male elder in another village in Bungatira sub-county while writing down the name *Coo-Pee* in my notebook, I noticed the translation of the name and asked about its meaning and origin. Both Kenneth and the elder explained that it means “that men were thought not to be there, because of this thing of tek-gungu.” On our journey back to Gulu, Kenneth

elaborated in more detail the meaning of the name and his interpretation of it, reflective of the narrative offered above.

A few days later, Kenneth and I embarked on yet another trip that once again led us through Coo-Pee. Soon after we departed from Gulu town, it began to rain heavily, and due to the quickly worsening road conditions caused by the heavy down-pour, we decided to seek shelter under the protective crown of one of the many large mango trees covering the road, just a few miles outside of Coo-Pee. A male elder on his bicycle followed our lead, and we began to talk— about football, the elections a few months earlier, and Ugandan politics in general—while sharing a few sweet and juicy mangoes from the trees protecting us. As it turned out, the *Mzee* was from Coo-Pee and without yet having told him about my research, I asked him about his interpretation of the meaning of the village's name. He elaborated:

Coo-Pee has been known like this among the local people since a long time already. It is even the official name now. But as far as I know, it is nowadays called like this among the people, even from town, because when the Lakwena [referring to the rebels] conflict started, and the NRA mobile units were active in this place, many men were arrested, tortured, and killed, and they used the three-pieces method.¹ Many other men were made to suffer like women because [the soldiers] would even rape them, and so they were not seen as men anymore. That is why people now say Coo-Pee is the place where men are not there.

Identical versions of this story have thereafter been repeated to me, by others in Coo-Pee and Gulu town alike and independent from each other, even though I have heard at least one alternative explanation linked to the contemporary context. According to this alternative explanation, Coo-Pee would be short for *Coo mono pe kwene?*, which can translate as “Where do you think the men are” or “Do you think the men are not here?,” which was subsequently shortened into Coo-Pee. According to this version of the meaning of the name, in the mid 1990s men in the village formed a local defense unit to protect themselves from increasing rebel attacks, as communities all over Acholiland did, which the community here provocatively called *Coo mono pe kwene?*, later on shortened into Coo-Pee.

This variety of possible explanations goes to show that there most probably is not one singular interpretation of the name, but that its meaning might be subjective as well as shaped by recent sociopolitical events. According to the apparently more common interpretation, however, which I am adapting here, the example of Coo-Pee illuminates the many ways in which Acholi men were impacted during the conflict while also illustrating how socially constructed expectations surrounding masculinities can render men vulnerable. The case furthermore exemplifies that sexual violence against men in this local context is predominantly experienced, theorized, and perceived as compromising male victims' gendered identities.

CONCEPTUALIZING MASCULINITIES

An important theoretical premise for my argument is that processes of (perceived) gender subordination are highly contextual in nature and must therefore be positioned in relation to local and temporally contingent constructions of gender. Any attempt to understand what it means to be considered “less of a man” thus needs to be firmly rooted in a prior conceptual and empirical understanding of what it means to be a man in the sociocultural context in the first place. Before conceptualizing locally contingent constructions of Acholi masculinities further below, I begin more broadly by reflecting on the multiplicities and contingencies of masculinities across time and space, particularly focusing on inherent hierarchical power structures and hegemonic forms of masculinity, which ultimately fuel unequal gender relations.

In more general terms, masculinities are socially constructed gender norms that refer to “anything which is associated with being a man in any given culture. Interpretations of what is considered to be masculine, and what constitutes being a man, vary across time and space, as well as between and within cultures” (Wright 2014: 4). The groundbreaking work by R. W. Connell (1995, 2005) provides particularly useful and applicable theoretical frameworks for conceptualizing the inherent power relations within and between masculinities and gender hierarchies more widely as well as for understanding the multiplicities and variations of masculinities, which encourage us to speak of masculinities in plural. Important historical and anthropological works similarly lay open the vast geographical and cultural differences across and between various masculinities conceptions and expectations (Gilmore 1990; Ratele 2007). Some key developments of masculinities theorizing hence arguably include the realization that masculinity is not unitary, and that different forms of masculinities exist across time, place, and space, marked by clear power differences and hierarchies.

Masculinities are also dynamic and imply the capacity to evolve over time and within spaces. Masculine gender constructions are therefore far from being universally applicable or static, but vary across and within cultures and contexts. Gilmore’s (1990) extensive ethnographic collection of cultural concepts of manhood across a variety of settings evidences that masculinities are characterized by spatial and geographical contingencies. In particular historians and anthropologists have convincingly demonstrated that what it means to be a man and to perform and embody masculinities varies over time, context, and culture, and most often even within spaces. It is therefore necessary to acknowledge that “masculinities are configurations of practice that are accomplished in social action, and therefore, can differ according to gender relations in a particular social setting” (Porter, A. 2013: 488). Masculinities must thus be understood in comparative and regional terms.

Hierarchies of Manhood: Hegemonic Masculinity

In addition to these spatial, temporal, and cultural contingencies, significant power differences between and within gender relations in general and within masculinities constructions exist, and not all forms of masculinities are valued equally.² Within these multiple versions of manhood, some interpretations of being a man are prized as being more valuable to aspire to than others. The conception of manhood that appears as culturally dominant is labeled as hegemonic masculinity, in relation to which various subordinate and subversive notions of manhood exist (Connell 1995; Kronsel 2005). Masculinities are therefore relational within and among themselves, as well as in relation to the gender order as a whole. Gender scholars in fact emphasize that masculinities cannot exist but in contrast to femininities.³ As stated by Michael Kimmel, an influential sociologist focused on men and masculinities, the “masculine identity is born in the renunciation of the feminine” (Kimmel 1996: 63). In his incredibly insightful investigation of military masculinity in the US military, sociologist Aaron Belkin takes this juxtaposition forward by further specifying that in almost all contexts globally, the ideal of masculinity “depends on a disavowing practices which position masculinity in opposition to its unmasculine foils: weakness, subordination, queerness, and so on” (2012: 26). Gender constructions in general, including masculinities conceptions, furthermore relate to and intersect with other social characteristics, such as class, race, sexual orientation, and age.

Within these relations and in most societal contexts globally, the hegemonic model of masculinity is seen as “an expression of the privilege men collectively have over women” (Connell 2002: 15) as well as over less powerful men and certainly over sexual and gender minorities. In this reading, hegemonic masculinities stand at the top of the gender hierarchy, above other complicit, subordinated, and marginalized masculinities, and certainly above femininities, let alone gender nonconforming, trans, or queer identities. The theoretical frame of hegemonic masculinity is therefore important in dealing with relational and power aspects of masculinities and gender. At the same time, and although culturally dominant and most aspired to, the hegemonic form of manhood does not necessarily need to be, and rarely is, the most common form of masculinity. In light of these assessments and observations, South African masculinities scholar Kopano Ratele (2014) has advocated for “marginality within hegemony” as an important prism and framework for advancing a critical understanding of the hierarchies of masculinities, with particular application to the diverse interpretations of manhood in a sub-Saharan African context. As summarized by Isaac Dery, Ratele’s approach effectively argues that “any intervention that seeks to progressively approach and study African boys and men ought to be alert to the complex interplay between dominant notions of masculinity and political, economic, and social realities that

circumscribe the daily life of men and boys in a deeply classed society” (Dery 2019: 175).

Just as masculinities in general develop and alter over time, the particular nature and characteristics of hegemonic masculinities change too. When ideas of hegemonic masculinities change over time, so too must the attributes and behaviors to achieve such hegemony adapt. In this vein, Myrntinen et al. reiterate (2016: 5) that “what counts as hegemonic is not fixed but is constantly subject to contestation and alteration.” This potential for hegemonic ideas of masculinities to evolve can be particularly pronounced in postconflict contexts and in times of transition, for instance from war to peace, due to the variety of potential external influences and the often radically changing nature of society. At the same time, the forms of hegemonic masculinity, including their attributes and traits, are often aspired to but less frequently actually realized, therefore suggesting a discrepancy between masculine ideals and the daily lived realities of most men, especially during great economic, political, and social upheaval. Widespread violence, militarization, and displacement make it almost impossible for most men to realize a hegemonic state of masculinity (Dolan 2002), which nevertheless prevails, and which most men are socialized to aspire to. These discrepancies expose a seeming paradox between strongly pronounced and homogenous expectations vis-à-vis heterogeneous lived realities.

Critical Perspectives on Hegemonic Masculinity

While the concept of hegemonic masculinity has “influenced gender studies across many academic fields” (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005: 829) and is utilized by most existing masculinities scholarship, various scholars have nevertheless articulated a number of critiques, highlighting different shortcomings of the concept and especially its applicability.⁴ Most critiques in the literature seem to refer to the application of the hegemonic masculinity frame in a globalized world (Morrell et al. 2012), or relate to conflating notions of hegemonic masculinity with narrow understandings of the concept, rather than to Connell’s concept directly.⁵

Firstly, critical scholarship has evidenced prevailing conceptual and analytical gaps associated with the hegemonic masculinity frame and its Western-centric conceptions of manhood, especially “as the term goes global” (Beasley 2008: 91) and is increasingly employed in non-Western and conflict-affected settings. Hollander (2014: 417) proclaims that “Connell’s classification of masculinities is inadequate for the analysis of clear crisis situations,” losing “some of its analytical value in situations of extreme distress” (419). According to Hollander, Connell’s theorization of hegemonic, complicit, subordinate, and marginalized masculinities furthermore “inadequately captures the complexities of situations of enduring crisis” (ibid.). Hollander therefore argues that new subcategories of manhood conceptions need to be added. In concert with this critique, Myrntinen et al. (2016) similarly emphasize that particularly in conflict-affected contexts, the notion of

hegemonic masculinities “needs to be re-examined and re-articulated in more nuanced ways’ (103). In recent years, a growing body of scholarship on non-Western, and often African, conceptions of masculinities has uncovered these context-specific differences and particularities of the positioning of hegemonic masculinities within hierarchies of manhood and gender (Ouzgane and Morrell 2005; Ratele 2014).

I agree that indeed caution is required not to uncritically and universally apply Connell’s framework, particularly because it was developed in Western peacetime contexts and is based upon the lived realities of mostly white, Western (and economically relatively well-off) men. I therefore concur with Hollander (2014) that Connell’s framework *may* under certain circumstances be inapplicable to *some* situations of crisis, extreme distress, and conflict. At the same time, however, the concept may prove to be applicable in other situations if qualified and applied with sensitivity to the context (Morrell, Jewkes, and Lindegger 2012). Depending on the circumstances, the hegemonic masculinity frame might be even more stratified in non-Western and conflict-affected settings. The mixture of repressive and patriarchal gender orders, combined with insecurity and armed conflict, can in some contexts imply that “the possibility of multiple, parallel and equivalent masculinities collapses” (Dolan 2011: 127), which in turn can cement new and contextually relevant notions of hegemonic masculinity. There is indeed evidence to suggest that this seems to be the case in northern Uganda, as I seek to demonstrate further below. In other words, Connell’s classification cannot necessarily be applied wholesale to all (conflict) situations across the globe, but may be applicable in certain conflict settings, depending on contextual and circumstantial factors.

Secondly, although the concept of hegemonic masculinity is intended to highlight which forms of masculinities take on a dominant character at any given time and place, the concept is frequently misused to simplistically foreground “negative ‘types’ of violent and/or militarized masculinities” (Myrntinen et al. 2016: 107). This severely undermines the concept’s applicability and utility. Indeed, the frame of hegemonic masculinity is often used imprecisely with regard to conflict-affected situations, thus often reproducing a false premise assuming that violent, military, and hypermasculinities are hegemonic. This misleading association results in a false conflation of hegemony with violence and militarization, often presenting the relationship between violence and masculinities as natural. Most scholarship therefore focuses on men’s violence, leaving out nonviolent masculinities and the men and boys embodying such nonviolent masculinities. Connell (1995) clarifies, however, that it is “the successful claim to authority, more than direct violence that is the mark of hegemony” (77). Violence and militarization thus do not ubiquitously qualify as hegemony in any given context. With my examination of the model of normative hegemonic masculinity in Acholiland below, I likewise show that in this particular social and cultural context, hegemony in relation to manhood does not necessitate violence but is instead centered around other

attributes and behaviors, including most importantly the ability to protect, provide, and procreate.

ACHOLI GENDER IDENTITIES

Drawing on these overall theoretical reflections regarding masculinities constructions across time and space, I now proceed to provide “thick descriptions” of Acholi gender identities and (hegemonic) masculinities, positioned in relation to contextual gender relations and constructions more broadly. I argue that despite some of the more general critique regarding the adaptability and utility of the concept, as articulated above, a model of normative hegemonic masculinity prevails in northern Uganda to which the majority of men are taught to aspire. The ideal of Acholi hegemonic masculinity is primarily characterized by men’s responsibilities to protect and provide for their families and is centered around notions of heteronormativity, patrilocality and patrilineality. Even though significant variations exist between different conceptions of manhood in northern Uganda—defined by class, ethnicity, socioeconomic background, and locality (urban versus rural)—and despite sociopolitical developments over time, influenced by among others colonialism, modernization, and armed conflicts, one dominant ideal of civilian Acholi manhood continues to prevail. This form of hegemonic masculinity stands at the top of the hierarchical gender order, which in its hetero-patriarchal manifestation is inherently unequal, implying clear benefits and advantages for men aspiring to a sense of hegemonic masculinity vis-à-vis other subordinated men and, of course, women.

Dolan’s influential work on this topic evidences the prevalence of common denominators of hegemonic ideals of manhood for Acholi men, setting clear parameters for what it means to be (or considered to be) masculine in a hegemonic manifestation in the northern Ugandan context. Further building on this, Rebecca Tapscott in her insightful work on the contrast between civilian and militarized masculinities in Uganda likewise identifies commonalities of “ideal types” of Acholi manhood. The majority of Acholi men are socialized into this model and judged and evaluated against it, by themselves, their families, and their communities as well as by the state and wider society. Especially during conflict, however, “the possibility of multiple parallel and equivalent masculinities collapse[d]” (Dolan 2002: 127), with a hegemonic form of masculinity manifesting itself above a ladder of lesser-valued masculinities. This empirical observation indeed suggests that the analytical and theoretical frame of hegemonic masculinity, although developed outside the context of violence and war and based upon Western men and masculinities, might be even more stratified and pronounced in non-Western and conflict-affected settings, as theorized above. Although Acholi gender constructions and understandings of masculinities are nonstatic and developed over time, among others shaped by colonialism, modernization, and militarization,

as well as partly differ between rural and urban settings, this hegemonic conception of masculinity largely remains intact in the contemporary context. This status quo considerably fuels growing discrepancies between homogenized expectations and heterogeneous lived realities.

Gender Relations in Acholiland

Comparable to other societies in East Africa and sub-Saharan Africa, conceptions of manhood in northern Uganda must be situated within wider heteronormative, patriarchal, patrilineal, and patrilocal gender orders. These relationships are structured by clear gendered power relations among and across multiple gender identities, with a hegemonic masculinity model at the top of the hierarchy. These relations are especially pronounced between masculinities and femininities, resulting in vast gendered inequalities.

Acholi gender identities and related conceptions of manhood also need to be situated in wider social relations, which in turn depend on contextual constructs of personhood. Building on Acholi poet-scholar Okot p'Bitek (1986), Baines and Rosenoff-Gauvin (2014) emphasize that “conceptual categories of personhood and sociality, while fluid, necessarily impact human practice and social organization through time” (286). In the case of Acholi identity, such personhood and sociality is relational and rests upon social collectivism and communal structuring. In essence, an individual's existence and humanity emerge from their connections to others (p'Bitek 1986: 19–20). Okot p'Bitek writes that one can only answer the question of “Who am I?” about self and identity by first understanding the relationships in question (p'Chong 2000: 85; Baines and Rosenoff-Gauvin 2014: 286).

These relational and collective constructions of personhood are captured by the Acholi cultural concepts of *dano adana* and *bedo dano*. As contextualized by various informants, these cultural concepts imply that a singular person can only exist in relation to a community of people, while at the same time also dictating certain forms of normative behavior. In addition to the relational and communal aspect of society, the concept of *dano adana* specifically also refers to “a real human being” who knows his or her duties, including with regard to gender roles, identities, behaviors, and expectations. In Acholi language and within the context of these concepts, *bedo* refers to “being” or “to be,” while *dano* circumstantially refers to a person in singular or people in plural. *Bedo dano* thus refers to the ways of being a person, or of constructing personhood. Anthropologists Sverker Finnström (2008) and Holly Porter (2017) both respectively discuss and apply these ideals of personhood to the Acholi idioms of *piny maber*—or “good surroundings” in Finnström's case, and “good existence” in Porter's case—referring to what it means to be human and to be in relationship with one another. Ultimately these concepts emphasize the cultural centrality of subjectivities and personhood constructions in the Acholi context, which in turn are central to my conceptual framework of

“displacement from gendered personhood,” as offered in the introduction, for understanding the effects of violence on gender identities.

Holly Porter’s (2017) insightful discussion of “good existence” in the context of Acholi personhood, subjectivities, and relationalities also explicitly incorporates a gender focus, relating to ideal types of manhood and womanhood that make up and shape personhood and subjectivities. What it means to be a (good) person or a “real human being” (*dano adana*) for Acholi women and men respectively therefore shapes how femininities and masculinities are defined. A cultural leader representing the Acholi cultural institution Ker Kwaro Acholi (KKA) explained to me that “what it means to be a good person, *dano adana*, for a woman and for a man in Acholi influences how femininities and masculinities are constructed.” Deriving from these conceptual and empirical observations, it appears that one dictated or hegemonic premise of being a good person in Acholi society prevails for women and men respectively. Such constructions and expectations of gendered personhood thereby result in normative hegemonic models of gender identities in general, including of masculinities, which (at least in part) impede the emergence of alternative constructions.

Acholi Femininities

Various gender scholars emphasize that masculinities cannot exist but in contrast with femininities. Therefore, to conceptualize Acholi masculinities, a prior relational understanding of “what women are (supposed to be) like” (Dolan 2009: 192) in northern Uganda proves necessary. In many ways, external influences in Acholiland, including colonization, the armed conflict, and globalization have shaped how Acholi womanhood is constructed. Acholi femininities are therefore dynamic and manifold and differences exist, among others, between classes or urban and rural settings. Nevertheless, despite these variations, a hegemonic premise of “being a woman” appears to dominate both the traditional as well as the contemporary context.

In Acholiland’s patriarchal, heteronormative, and patrilocal society, a widely held assumption prevails that women differ from men in that they are “weaker, incapable and a burden” (Dolan 2009: 61). Across historical and contemporary Acholiland, it is relatively widely believed “that women cannot perform to the level of men, and must conform to the culture of their husbands” (Dolan 2009: 192). Indeed, through marriage and once the full bride-wealth has been paid via an elaborate *cuna* process, the woman is expected to leave her parental family and move to the husband’s home, “where she is considered the subordinate and the property/asset of the husband” (Dolan 2009: 193), evidencing the patrilineal and patrilocal character of Acholi society.⁶ Following the bride-wealth payment, the man’s lineage agrees to politically and legally include the woman into their family or lineage and to properly provide for her (e.g., through the provision of land, a kitchen hut, granaries) (Porter 2016).

In Acholi language, the word for woman, *dako*, is closely linked to the verb *dak*, which loosely translates as “to migrate,” reflecting the relationalities between men and women, the movement character defining Acholi gender relations and the expectation that women will migrate to their husbands’ homes. Movement indeed quite clearly defines feminine identity constructions: In Acholi culture, women are expected to move, or to migrate, from their paternal home to their husbands’ compound (and in the case of separation or divorce, back into their paternal home). Once a woman marries, she *de facto* loses her own clan identity, without fully assuming or inheriting her new husband’s clan identity either, further evidencing the patriarchal and patrilocal system.

Acholi femininities are furthermore closely linked to motherhood and marriage. Baines and Rosenoff-Gauvin (2014) emphasize that a woman’s “process of ‘becoming a person’ is assumed through the birth of children within a formalized marriage” and that a “woman’s status as mother, therefore, defines her social role in her (adopted) home village” (288–289). Motherhood can thus be seen as embodying the Acholi female *dano adana*: the attainment of gendered personhood. In addition to motherhood, female personhood is furthermore defined by caretaking responsibilities and feminized activities designated for women, such as cooking, cleaning, and the day-to-day management of the family compound. Characteristic of patriarchal gender orders, women are therefore reduced to the private sphere, while men occupy and dominate public spaces, setting the political, social, and cultural parameters for the social order while simultaneously asserting male dominance.

Acholi (Hegemonic) Masculinities

The dominant notion of manhood in northern Uganda rests upon and constitutes a *normative hegemonic* model of masculinity. This social construction is hegemonic in that it prevents alternative forms of masculinities from emerging, while also being underpinned and sustained by significant forms of societal and political power. At the same time, the model qualifies as normative in that men (and women) are socialized into it. Society at large is taught that men should strive to achieve these defining components of masculinity. Not only men themselves, but also their families, communities, the state, and wider society judge, evaluate, and assess men’s behavior and performance against this framework of hegemonic masculinity (see Dolan 2009). According to this normative hegemonic model of Acholi masculinity, men are expected to protect themselves, their families, and homesteads, provide for their families, and procreate.

Among a variety of factors, the recent LRA conflict (and related postconflict dynamics) in northern Uganda contributed toward manifesting this hegemonic model, preventing alternative forms of masculinities to emerge. In this capacity, Acholi hegemonic masculinity constructions also constitute a political construct and weapon at the disposal of national political forces (Tapscott 2018), the state,

the military, and churches in Uganda. As argued by Dolan, “The Ugandan state severely aggravated the collapse of potential multiple masculinities through its simultaneous practices of militarization and forcible internal displacement” (2009: 128). Christian churches, and in particular the Catholic Church, further cemented this hegemonic ideal of manhood by holding it static and enforcing associated stereotypical assumptions about gender roles and relations in Uganda (see Alava 2016).

Colonial influences, Christianization, and globalization have also influenced Acholi gender identities in general, including how masculinities are constructed and related expectations placed on men. For instance, the colonization of the region, and with it the growing influence of Christianity, significantly shaped how young men and boys were socialized into manhood and adulthood. Traditionally and historically, informal education and socialization—primarily for boys, who are considered smarter and brighter than girls and who are given better access to education—were provided by male elders in the community. Through the rise of the formalized education system accompanying colonization, however, this largely changed. Culturally, male elders’ roles included educating their sons, but when schools take over this role, this can be seen as “under[ining] the masculinity of adult fathers” (Dolan 2009: 198). In relation to formal and informal education, it is interesting to note that formalized education was by no means universally considered positive. Dolan’s influential work demonstrates that some traditional and cultural authorities and male elders initially viewed formalized education as undermining informal and traditional socialization, thereby contributing to a process of cultural dilution. In a context where culture and education are greatly intertwined, “the rise of the formal education model made it difficult if not impossible for a boy to become a man” (Dolan 2009: 198). Such views are metaphorically reflected in the cultural writings of Acholi artist and academic Okot p’Bitek, and in particular by this poem from 1985:

For all young men
 Were finished in the forest,
 Their manhood was finished / in the class-rooms
 Their testicles / Wer’ smashed
 With large books!

Constructions of Acholi masculinity must also be positioned in relation to a mixture of precolonial, colonial, and postcolonial influences that resulted in what can broadly be referred to as a hybrid-hegemonic form of normative masculinity. Comparable to, for instance, developments in the eastern DRC, the influence of colonization in northern Uganda did not necessarily result in the holistic collapse of indigenous gender orders, but rather “induced a hybridity between traditional and modern notions of hegemonic masculinity” (Hollander 2014: 421).

Africanist gender theorists and ethnographers have previously observed colonizers' attempts to shape gender identities.⁷ Throughout most of colonized sub-Saharan Africa, colonial administrators endeavored to construct an African masculinity that remained subordinate and colonized to the imperialists' and colonialists' notions of manhood. Dolan (2009) similarly notes that in constructing contextual masculinities, "it is important to pay due heed to the undermining of men's sense of self in the colonial period" (128) by the imperial administration. At the same time, the growing influence of Christianity and especially the Catholic Church—a by-product of colonialism and in itself intensely male-centric and patriarchal—furthermore entrenched heteronormative patriarchy in Acholi society, rooted in a hegemonic model of masculinity. Drawing on empirical research on the role of religion in Kitgum, Alava (2016) concludes that the heteronormative and patriarchal gender order of the Catholic tradition "found a fertile ground in customary Acholi gender notions" (45).

In light of these external influences and dynamics, a common set of responsibilities and roles dominates not only historical constructions of manhood in northern Uganda but also current idea(l)s and expectation, thus constructing the model of Acholi normative hegemonic masculinity in the contemporary context. This model of hegemonic masculinity originates from constructions of sociality and personhood, dictating a male *dano adana*, for a masculine gendered personhood.

If masculinities are defined in contrast with femininities, then it logically follows that men in northern Uganda are "supposed to be richer, stronger, more capable, knowledgeable and skilled [and] trustworthy" (Dolan 2009: 194) than women. As is characteristic for patriarchal societies in general, men enjoy clear benefits in various dimensions of social life, including access to land and education, and men and boys are generally regarded as brighter and better in most aspects when compared to girls, representing and reproducing gender inequalities. Being a man also entails being responsible, patient, moderate, respectful, serious, and effective, but also reproductive and sexually active, among others.

Constructions of masculinities and the hierarchical gender order as a whole are furthermore naturalized through social practice. Ethnographic research by Finnström (2009), for instance, demonstrates that according to Acholi sociality, "men are more able to resist," while "women are weak" (64). Finnström illustrates this by referring to funerals, "in which women are allowed to cry and publicly express their agony while men are discouraged from doing so" (*ibid.*). My own observations confirm these gendered behavioral patterns: At the funeral of my friend's sister, mourning female relatives of the deceased cried intensely at the grave, while my male friend and other male relatives made sure not to display any emotions in public. "I have to remain strong and cope like a man," my friend said, while obviously struggling to withhold tears and control his emotions for the sake of remaining, or rather appearing, masculine.

Male elders on the community level furthermore repeatedly emphasized that “men must be strong, wise, knowledgeable, and respected, and they must provide and protect for their families.” This observation is echoed by the assessment of a male cultural leader who confirmed that “the cardinal roles and responsibilities of men in Acholi are to provide and to protect and defend the family.” While a whole variety of external factors and influences arguably influenced the means to provide and protect, which further differ between urban and rural localities, the responsibilities for men to do so prevailed over time and remain intact today. In addition to protecting and defending their families and wider communities, Acholi men are also specifically expected to provide protection for the family’s homestead, which is the center of Acholi cosmology and therefore supposed to be impenetrable, private, and secure. In this capacity, men are primarily expected to ensure physical protection, from violence, attacks, and armed robberies.

The primary social requirements for achieving hegemonic masculinity are therefore the provision for and physical protection of the household, following the attainment of some level of financial independence, wealth, and preferably employment, coupled with marriage and starting a family (p’Bitek 1986; Porter 2017). As explained by one of my interlocutors, in Acholi, “The accumulation of wealth is the central epitome of manhood,” as it allows men to provide materially and economically for their family and to offer physical protection. “Accumulating wealth constitutes an integral step toward achieving and fulfilling your responsibilities and duties as a man.” These defining characteristics of Acholi manhood correspond with constructions of masculinities on the African continent more widely. African gender theorists have outlined how self-sufficiency, financial independence, and familial provision and protection are paramount characteristics for and among the most consistent measures of sub-Saharan African masculinities (Baker and Ricardo 2005; Ouzgane and Morrell 2005).

Acholi manhood is also constructed in contrast with youth, and an integral component of being a man is marriage. The full achievement of masculinity is “impossible without making the transition to adulthood by way of marriage and thereby making the difference between youth and adults” (Dolan 2009: 196). In fact, merely being a provider is insufficient for the comprehensive realization of hegemonic masculinity: “a man has to be a *married* provider” (ibid.), preferably formalized with children. During my fieldwork period various friends and colleagues often jokingly yet somewhat critically remarked that even though I was able to provide for myself, I was not yet considered a real man because I was not yet married nor did I have children. When in April 2017 I phoned one of my close friends and research collaborators to share with him the happy news of the birth of our daughter, and then later of our marriage, he seemed relieved: “You are a real man now—congratulations.”

An Acholi proverb, captured in the writings of Okot p’Bitek (1985), colorfully illustrates this interdependence between marriage and masculinity: *Labot*

kilwongo ka dek wi kot—“A bachelor is called to a meal in the rain.” According to p’Bitek (1985: 7), this particular proverb “reflects the attitude of the Acholi towards unmarried young men.” p’Bitek explains that “to be seen running through the rain to go for a meal was considered undignified. But since unmarried men lived in the boys’ hut, *otogo*, they had to go for their meals wherever they were prepared” (ibid.). Unmarried men, the proverb asserts, are not yet considered to be real men in the hegemonic and normative sense.

During the conflict in northern Uganda, however, men were confronted with substantial challenges that hindered their paths toward marriage and thus manhood. The conflict made it almost impossible for young men to become financially secure enough to marry. Dolan (2009: 199) observes that “the economic basis of the hegemonic combination of marriage and the subsequent provision and protection of the household was substantially worsened by the war.” In particular, the large-scale forced displacement of up to 95 percent of the Acholi population into IDP camps, characterized by a considerable lack of income-generating and agricultural opportunities, significantly constrained men’s capacity to accumulate wealth and thus afford marriage. Neither Dolan (2009) nor Finnström (2008), who both have conducted extensive research in northern Uganda since the late 1990s, witnessed or came across even a single wedding inside the protected villages.

This inability to marry during the conflict heavily affected the ability of men to achieve the defining requirements of adulthood and manhood, and thus negatively impacted their masculine identities. Masculinities constructions and associated expectations, however, did not rigorously change as a result of these impediments to marriage, and during the conflict as well as in the current postconflict phase, marriage remains closely connected to hegemonic Acholi masculinity. Although there is a lack of systematic research on the rates and frequency of weddings in the postconflict setting, my own observations seem to suggest that in the contemporary context, more than ten years after the war, wedding rates have increased significantly. While working in northern Uganda between 2011 and 2012, I attended four weddings. During my research in 2016, I attended three, was invited to several more, and heard of countless more weddings taking place across the subregion, including both traditional and religious ceremonies (see Alava 2016).

Comparable to constructions of manhood elsewhere globally, notions of Acholi masculinity are furthermore shaped and enacted by heterosexuality and sex. Based on ethnographic research in Acholiland, Porter (2013) notes that “sexual relationships with women [are] a medium by which [men] establish and perform their own masculinity in relation to their peers” (183). Porter further observes that sex “is an enactment of gender relationships and what it means to be a man or to be a woman through social practice” (ibid.: 184). The centrality of sex and reproduction to Acholi relationships and specifically to love and intimacy is furthermore reflected in Okot p’Bitek’s essay “Acholi Love” (1964). Sex thereby plays an important role in men’s relationships not only to their female partners but also

to each other, and among themselves men frequently speak about heterosexual relations. Porter describes that one of her male respondents estimated that sex “was usually about 90 percent of what he and other Acholi men talk about when they get together” (2013: 183). My own observations and interactions with male Acholi colleagues and friends mirror Porter’s assessment regarding the centrality of sex and sexuality in embodying and enacting masculinity in relation to male peers, often through sex being the primary topic of conversation. Interestingly, however, at least in my company, men seldom spoke about sex with their wives but more often about sex with their numerous “girlfriends” or “side-dishes,” how casual female sexual partners were often referred to. Overall, masculinity is thus shaped by foregrounding and highlighting one’s heterosexuality and sexual virility—often in relation to others.

Throughout much of the gender studies literature, hegemony in relation to manhood is also often falsely equated with physical violence, and Acholi masculinity in particular is frequently portrayed to be inherently violent, both within Ugandan society and throughout the literature. Esuruku (2011) for instance classifies “risk-taking, physical toughness, aggression and violence” (26) as defining elements and ingredients of hegemonic masculinity in the Acholi context. Such portrayals, however, are in part based upon and simultaneously responsible for ethnocentrism and stereotypical portrayals of Acholi men as warriors and war prone. These misleading portrayals sit uneasily with Acholi men’s self-identifications and perceptions (Dolan 2009) and are influenced by colonial and postcolonial policies of playing out the country’s regions against each other—as detailed in the previous chapter. Even though providing physical protection occupies a prime role in the construction of Acholi manhood, the use of violence is in fact not a defining element of the model of hegemonic Acholi masculinity.

As reflected upon earlier, across time and space “hegemony does not necessarily require violence,” and “the use of physical violence is often not viewed societally as a hallmark of respectable or hegemonic masculinity” (Myrtilinen et al. 2016: 108). Mirroring observations from other cases, in the civilian Acholi context, being a member of the military or a military-like institution or behaving particularly violently is not necessarily the most hegemonic, nor the most accepted or respected, form of masculinity. Violent men, and especially soldiers and combatants, are often equated with lower levels of education and thus in some ways occupy subordinate masculinities. At the same time, members of different vigilante groups are comparatively poorly remunerated (Tapscott 2018) and frequently not paid for months, thus often lacking the financial means to provide for their families in a hegemonic sense. In contrast, bureaucrats, businessmen, and staff and representatives of international organizations, for instance, are seen as the epitome of the ability to provide financially and materially for (and thus also to ensure the protection of) one’s family, thereby striving for hegemony.

To an extent the contemporary and customary homogenized expectation of masculinity thus stands in stark contrast to the heterogeneity and vast diversity of most men's gendered lived realities. Comparable to many developing and post-conflict contexts globally, the hegemonic aspirations of manhood are extremely difficult to attain in conflict-ridden northern Uganda, conditioned by a variety of internal and external factors, including most prominently the more than two decades of armed conflict. Dolan (2002) argues that "in the northern Ugandan context of . . . war, heavy militarization and internal displacement, it [was] very difficult if not impossible for the vast majority of men to fulfill the expectations of husband and father, provider and protector which are contained in the model of hegemonic masculinity" (64).

Noncombatant civilian men (constituting the overwhelming majority of men in northern Uganda) faced extensive difficulties, which left them unable to achieve "some of the key elements [of] the normative model of masculinity into which they have been socialized" (Dolan 2002: 67). At the same time, during the conflict and in the contemporary context, economic constraints prevented many families, as headed by men in a patriarchal domain, to pay school fees and therefore for their children to receive an education, and boys were thus confronted with difficulties in living up to societal expectations of being educated in order to become a man. On a more structural level, the increased militarization of the region in the context of war also meant that there were very few secondary schools available in rural areas and outside the district capitals.

Among a variety of conflict-related factors, in particular the forced displacement of up to 95 percent of the Acholi population into internally displaced persons camps at the height of the conflict furthermore "contributed to a loss of social control" (Baines and Rosenoff-Gauvin 2014: 289). Constituting a form of enforced infantilization, the conditions of the camps installed significant barriers for men to live up to socially constructed expectations surrounding masculinities, and effectively incapacitated men in their masculine roles and responsibilities. Severely limited income-generating and agricultural opportunities largely rendered men unable to provide. Instead, women often became the primary breadwinners of their families, both through greater access to food aid and camp regulations that at times allowed women to maintain small gardens surrounding the camps. At least in some camps, some women (in certain age segments) were allowed to leave the camp during curfew hours and to cultivate their fields and gardens, and were thus able to provide at least some food.

According to some respondents, only women were allowed to leave the camp because they were erroneously deemed to be at lesser risk of abduction or violent attacks by the rebels than men. Evidence shows, however, that young girls were also abducted in large numbers and frequently exposed to sexual violations (Okello and Hovil 2007; Okot, Amony, and Otim 2005). Men's social responsibilities to protect were also largely (yet unsuccessfully) taken over by the state, and the

army specifically. In the IDP camps, therefore, temporarily “men became women and women became men” (Hollander 2014: 420; Lwambo 2013). Nevertheless, and despite this overall inability of the majority of men to live up to the hegemonic notions of Acholi masculinity, the most important and prevalent expectations regarding this model—that is, men’s abilities to protect and provide and to remain strong and invulnerable—are applicable in the contemporary context.

DECONSTRUCTING MALE SURVIVORS’ HARMS

These contextual reflections on Acholi hegemonic masculinity constructions were necessary because any attempt to understand the impact of violence on manhood must be firmly rooted in a prior understanding of what it means to be a man in each socio-cultural context in the first place. Therefore, and building on these theoretical and contextual reflections, I now proceed with the analysis by unpacking Acholi male survivors’ sexual and gendered harms.⁸ I specifically argue that the impact of male-directed sexual violence is characterized as a process, rather than a singular event as it is most commonly treated in the literature.

This process begins with perceived gendered subordination through acts of penetrative rape but is further manifested and cemented through a variety of gendered harms extending far into the postviolation period. Throughout the expanding literature on sexual violence against men, the impact of these crimes is frequently theorized as compromising survivors’ masculine identities, which in turn is most often linked to perceived gendered subordination as the result of penetrative rape. In the literature these processes are frequently labeled as “emasculatation” by way of “feminization” and/or “homosexualization.” Yet, despite initial conceptual insights, how exactly the compromising of masculinities unfolds empirically remains only poorly understood, both in general terms and context-specifically in northern Uganda. At the same time, scholarship has not yet sufficiently scrutinized the conceptual categories and associated terminologies of “emasculatation” and “feminization,” which imply analytical and normative limitations and ultimately do not do justice to survivors’ dynamic lived realities. Recalling my critique regarding the emasculatation-feminization-homosexualization conceptualization and terminology offered in the introduction, I therefore instead think of and refer to these processes as forms of “displacement from gendered personhood.”

In essence, I seek to demonstrate that within a heteronormative and heterosexual context such as northern Uganda, male-directed sexual violence in general, and penetrative anal rape in particular, is considered as subordinating male survivors within a gendered hierarchy. During a focus group discussion, various respondents, for instance, stated that “men were sodomized, and therefore they are now seen as women because they are powerless and have been slept with.” A former service provider explained that “the process of male victims losing

their manhood has to do with them being subordinated through the penetration. Only women are supposed to be penetrated, so if a man is raped he becomes like a woman.” Within the Acholi cultural context and according to corresponding constructions of gender and sexuality, men are expected to actively penetrate and women to be passively penetrated. If a man is forcefully penetrated, however, he involuntarily assumes a female sexual role or character and is therefore rendered feminine, and thus subordinate in the gender order. To reiterate Sjöberg’s argumentation (2016: 39), “Gender subordination is fundamentally a power relationship in which those perceived as female/feminine are made less powerful than those perceived as masculine/male. This power relationship extends through the perceived possession of gendered traits and the gendering of perceived behaviors and actions.”

Applying this to the context of male rape in Acholiland, a key informant explained that “through penetration, you subordinate the man. Male victims are helpless and give in to other men and are being subordinated through penetration.”

Crimes of sexual violence thus communicate a power and dominance relationship between the victimized, who are “perceived as female/feminine” and “less powerful,” and the perpetrator, or “those perceived as masculine/male” (Sjöberg 2016: 24). Rendering someone (or something) as female through acts of penetration, often referred to as “feminization” throughout the literature, can conceptually be understood as placement along gendered hierarchies. According to Sjöberg, femininity “is associated with rejection, devalorization, immobility and limits” (*ibid.*), while Cynthia Enloe (2004) explains that to marginalize the female implies to infantilize, ignore, or trivialize, among others. In contrast, to masculinize someone (or something) is associated with affirmation, potential, success, and valorization. For Peterson (2010), the ultimate effect of rendering someone (or something) female is a reduction in legitimacy, status, and value. Sjöberg (2016) further argues that “gender relations are not power relations that just happen between men and women” (26). Instead, “gender relations happen among parties in war and conflict” (*ibid.*), including between war-affected civilians and armed combatants.

These (perceived) processes of compromising masculine identities as a result of male-directed sexual violence similarly rest upon the theoretical premise of a socially constructed discrepancy between masculinities and victimhood (chapter 1). Across most patriarchal societies, the notion of vulnerability arguably sits uneasily with “social expectations of what it is to be a man . . . —as strong, tough, self-sufficient and impenetrable” (Weiss 2008: 277). Within a heteronormative environment in particular, this disjuncture becomes further exacerbated if the victimization takes on a sexual(ized) dimension. Concurring with Fineman’s (2008) theoretical work on vulnerabilities as inevitably human, and based on a feminist premise, Gilson argues that vulnerability is a feminized concept, “associated both with femininity and with weakness and dependency” (71). Precisely because of these feminized characteristics, vulnerability is constructed

as incompatible with manhood, and men are therefore socially conditioned not to be vulnerable if they wish to remain masculine.⁹ Sexual victimhood in particular clearly signifies (sexual) vulnerability, which in turn is irreconcilable with manhood, and male sexual victimization thus implies perceived compromises of masculinities.

From Bodies to Acts—The Gendered Performativity of Penetration

While compromising the survivors' sense of manhood, sexual violence (perpetrated against women or men) is also often seen as enhancing the perpetrator's masculinity and equipping him (or her) with a sense of hypermasculinity. Conceptually, however, it may seem contradictory and even paradoxical that acts of same-sexual penetration between men are theorized to cast "a taint of homosexuality" (Sivakumaran 2005) only on the victim but not on the perpetrator. Why is the perpetrator who actively penetrates another man not also (or even more so) regarded as homosexual and thus as less of a man, but instead seen as even more of a man and hypermasculine? We might assume that he who actively and consciously engages in same-sexual acts between men might also (if not even more so) be considered gay and thus in hetero-patriarchal terms as less of a man.

As poignantly argued by Edström, Dolan, et al. (2016), however, it is not exclusively gendered bodies but rather *acts* of penetration that most effectively communicate and transfer power and dominance and thus masculinity within the context of male-directed sexual violence. "It is the subjection to an act of penetration (i.e. being penetrated), rather than the body of the victim, that renders the victim feminine, a woman, and therefore subordinates" (ibid.: 36). Drawing on empirical research on male-male rape in the US military, Aaron Belkin similarly argues that "penetration is associated with masculinity and dominance while penetrability is a marker of subordination. . . . The penetrator is masculine while the penetrated is feminine" (2012: 83). Being penetrated, Belkin writes, "is a marker of weakness, subordination, and a lack of control" (80). Taking these gendered markers of penetration into account, feminist scholar Laura Sjoberg (2016) further attests that "both the enactment and the experience of sexual violence in war and conflict is an embodied practice, where people's bodies (as victims and as perpetrators) are both the sites of inscribed violence and the site of the inscription of messages of gendered subordination" (196).

A systematic examination of sexual violence against men and penetrative rape in particular thus contributes to a shift of the "basis of gender essentialism from bodies to acts" (Edström, Dolan, et al 2016: 36). Understanding the sexual *act* of penetration as effectively communicating masculinity, power, and dominance helps us to resolve the seeming paradox of why victims' masculine identities seem to be compromised, but perpetrators seem to gain masculinity within the context of male-on-male rape. This is because of the powerfully gendered performativity of penetration as linked to masculinity and gender (see Butler 1990; Drumond

2018). Sjöberg (2016) similarly emphasizes the need “to focus on *what happens* when sexual violence is committed” in terms of gendering and that “acts of sexual violence . . . can be understood as gendered” (177).

Crucially, an analysis of penetrative acts is inherently linked to the thwarting, compromising, and awarding of masculinities thus (re)connects elements of sexuality and sex, as linked to gender, power, and dominance, to discourses around sexual violence in general and against men in particular. Recent research by Eriksson Baaz and Stern (2018) has demonstrated and critically questioned that gendered scholarship on conflict and security increasingly seems to write out and neglect sexuality and sexual acts, instead focusing solely on gender (as separated from sex). Such is particularly the case for discussions around male-directed sexual violence that center only around gender as linked to dominance and control (Schulz and Touquet 2020). Sivakumaran, for instance, claims that male “rape is about power and dominance *and not sex*” (2007: 272)—thereby directly ignoring sexuality and sex as contributing causes to male-directed sexual violence, and neglecting how sex itself is also inherently linked to power. Sara Meger likewise explicitly states that “women may experience CRSV borne out of opportunism, bolstered by ideas of masculine virility . . . , and the male sex right . . . , as well as for strategic purposes. Male victims, on the other hand, are targeted for this violence not out of patriarchal constructions of the male sex right, but for their particular strategic value” (2018: 114).

Scholarship on male-directed sexual violence thus evidently fails to seriously consider how sexuality and sex are organically connected to power (and thus to gender) (Foucault 1987). While gender must crucially be the cornerstone of any analysis of sexual violence, an examination of penetration within the context of sexual violence and its gendered effects reminds us that sexuality and sex similarly need to be foregrounded in any such discussions. Sjöberg (2013) argues that “sex, sexuality and violence are more closely linked than traditional analyses [of sexual violence in war] might acknowledge” (196). Sjöberg therefore concludes that conflict-related sexual violence, including against men, is sexed, sexual, and gendered—and urges us to analyze these crimes as such as well.

The literature on sexual violence against men moreover suggests that such violence not only renders the victim female, but also/alternatively potentially “homosexualizes” male survivors. Acts of anal penetration by another man are theorized to render the male survivor homosexual, which in Acholis’ heteronormative society is similarly seen as incompatible and irreconcilable with manhood, in addition to being socially unacceptable and criminally punishable. However, none of the survivors who participated in this study expressed that they perceived themselves as “homosexualized” (see Sivakumaran 2005) following their sexual violations. As evidenced above, survivors regularly articulated that “they turned men into women” or that the soldiers “made us to suffer like women” as a result of the rapes, but never that they were turned into homosexuals. In northern Uganda’s

highly heteronormative society, where homosexuality is regarded as an abnormality and outlawed, ascribed homosexualization as a result of male-directed sexual violence thus appears to be less prevalent among survivors' experiences and lived realities, at least in terms of how they spoke about and categorized their harms. Speculatively this may well be due to the exacerbated and immense stigmatization attached to homosexuality in northern Uganda, which may be intensified by the government's criminalization of same-sex acts. In this social context, being considered by others and perceiving oneself as homosexual may be even more harmful and damaging than being symbolically "turned into a woman." At the same time, however, society at large, and in fact various service providers and health professionals, nevertheless frequently confused male rape with homosexuality. To illustrate, when I interviewed a potential research assistant (with extensive prior experience) to work with me on this project, he responded to my explanation of my project on male rape with: "Ah, you are studying homosexuals". Needless to say, I did not end up collaborating with him.

*"I used to be a strong man, but now I am not"—Gender Subordination
through Disempowerment*

Most of the literature's theories and analyses regarding the gendered effects of sexual violence against men center on the subordination of male survivors through various sexual acts, and therefore most analyses stop here. My fieldwork findings, however, evidence that survivors' displacement from their gendered personhood frequently is a layered process, revolving around myriad intertwined gendered harms rather than a one-time event solely linked to penetrative rape or other sexual crimes. Essentially the gendered impact of sexual violence is further compounded by the sexual violations' gendered aftereffects. These different and intersecting harms signify male survivors' inability to protect, render them unable to provide for their families, and imply effects on their abilities to erect and procreate, which in turn further compromise survivors' gendered identities. The analysis offered in this section is structured in accordance with these most common gendered harms that holistically contribute toward survivors' (perceived) displacement from their gendered identities and personhood.

First, sexual violence against men communicates and is perceived to symbolize male survivors' inability to protect themselves and, often by association, their families as they are expected to according to the model of normative hegemonic masculinity. One male survivor explained that "admitting the violation would admit that I have not been able to protect myself, which means I am no longer a man." A key informant likewise confirmed that according to survivors, "if they admit to the violation, they admit to being less of a man because they failed to protect themselves." This perceived inability to protect themselves furthermore embodies what many survivors frequently referred to as "helplessness" and "powerlessness" or as "being forced to give in." In relation to this, a male community

member said, “What makes you less of a man, in Acholi it is cultural norms, it is about power. If I take your woman and you cannot protect, you are not a man. Men are expected to provide and to protect. So if you do not have the power to protect either your wife or yourself, you are not a real man.”

As this statement evidences, it is commonly assumed that if a man is not capable of protecting himself, he will likewise not be able to protect his family, thus significantly failing in one of his cardinal masculine roles as protector of the homestead. As a result of this perceived inability to protect themselves and the assumed incapacity to protect their families, various male survivors have been left by their wives (as examined in further detail below).

A spatial analysis of where the sexual violations took place offers further insights: As documented in the previous chapter, sexual violence against men in northern Uganda occurred both in the public as well as in the private spheres. When perpetrated in public, deliberately visible to other family or community members, the sexual violations were highly symbolic, communicative, and performative, as they publicly demonstrated the men’s gendered subordination and their inability to protect themselves. On the other hand, when the sexual violations occurred within the men’s own homesteads and therefore in the private sphere, the male survivors considered themselves and are perceived to be unable to provide for the protection of their homestead, considered the epicenter of Acholi cosmology (p’Bitek 1986). Male survivors are thus seen as failing in one of their primary masculine responsibilities of protecting themselves and the home, and sexual violations within the men’s own homesteads signal clear intramale communication and an establishment of masculine hierarchies between the hypermasculine male perpetrator and the subordinated male victim. Their (perceived) inability to live up to the model of hegemonic masculinity thus (at least temporarily) displaces them from their gendered personhood.

At the same time, the physical consequences of sexual violence frequently affect men’s capacities to work and thus their abilities to provide, as is expected of them as male breadwinners and heads of households. Many respondents reported that the health complications caused by the violations, including significant waist and back pain and rectal injuries, prevented them from carrying out any manual labor or agricultural work.¹⁰ Most respondents indeed attested that as a result of their violations and the related health complications, they are too weak to conduct any work. As one survivor explained, “I have many scars and injuries that I got as a result of the rape and this has weakened me and it cannot enable me to do any hard labor. I am not performing as a man.” Another survivor attested that the sexual violation “has also affected my ability to work and my productivity.” The majority of survivors who participated in the study reported that the physical injuries caused by the sexual violations rendered them “unable to perform any farm work as men are expected to do.” Many respondents indeed described that they felt less of a man because of this: “I started feeling useless and not man enough,” a male

survivor said, while another complained that the “was not having the ability to work like a man.” Yet another survivor articulated it this way: “I am not a real man anymore because ever since the violence, I cannot do any work anymore and I cannot dig in the gardens so I cannot provide for my wife and for my children and my family. I cannot raise enough money to pay my children into school. So that is why I am now no longer a man.”

These layered gendered and sexual harms further challenged the survivors in their masculine roles and responsibilities as providers, thereby (at least temporarily) displacing them from their masculine personhood. As Onyango (2012) attests, “For the Acholi, men feel they are ‘not men’ when they cannot provide for their families’ (217). In addition to the physical implications of the violations, the psychological effects also prevent male survivors from working and thus from providing for their families. As a result of diverse psychological consequences, many male survivors have disengaged from many community activities, including agricultural work.

Yet this displacement from the survivors’ gendered identities can be temporary. Some male survivors have regained their physical strength and thereby their ability to work. Some, following medical treatment, are experiencing improved health conditions and are therefore in a position to work again and thus to adhere to masculine expectations compared to the immediate aftermath of the violations. These improvements are often connected to their engagement in survivors’ groups as well as their conceptions of postconflict justice, as will be explored in more detail in the following two chapters.

Another consequence of the sexual violations is survivors’ difficulties in achieving or maintaining an erection. Edström, Dolan, et al. (2016) note that the “almost universal numbing of their capacity for sexual arousal” (26) constitutes one of the most common and most prevalent physiological aftereffects of male-directed sexual violence. Several survivors I engaged with indeed reported not only difficulties in achieving an erection, but also a lack of interest in sexual interaction. As one male survivor put it, “Without the ability to have sex I feel like a castrated bull. Due to that pain that I experience I have no urge for sex.” Survivors feel the impact of this physical impairment on their masculinities.

A service provider working with male survivors contextualized these common experiences: “The inability of manhood in relation to [sexual violence against men] is psychological and physiological. He cannot perform his sexuality and functioning of sex anymore and is thus no longer a man, according to him and his wife.” As further argued by Edström, Dolan, et al. (2016: 26), “One of the concerns around this is, of course, centred on the absence of sexual pleasure and joy in a person’s private life. . . . But it is also linked to fundamental issues around masculinity and identity, not to mention serious concerns over reproductive health and choice.”

The service provider quoted above also referred to another male survivor for whom “sex was useless because it reminded him of his own rape all the time. His

erection goes and his feelings of being a man are completely lost.” Being sexually active and the ability to father children (and preferably boys as firstborns) constitute central markers of Acholi manhood, and being unable to fulfill this translates into an implied inability to be a “real man” and thus a compromising of their masculine identities and a displacement from their gendered personhood. Yet, over time, several survivors (following group-based therapy) have regained their sexual potency, thereby repairing and remaking their gendered self and personhood.

A combination of these layered gendered and sexual harms likewise heavily impacts male survivors’ relationships to their partners, families, and communities. The empirical findings underpinning this study suggest that these impaired and aggravated relationships constitute significant harms, often resulting in communal isolation, social exclusion, and stigmatization. As a result of survivors’ inability to have sex, procreate, and reproduce, further compounded by the inability to protect and to provide, numerous survivors have been left by their wives. “I cannot stay in the house with a fellow woman” is a statement and a lived reality that several respondents were confronted with by their wives. Keeping in mind that having a family and being married constitute cornerstones of the Acholi model of normative hegemonic masculinity, such experiences—in addition to causing much emotional and mental distress—further undermine male survivors’ masculinities within this local context. One survivor attested, “I am less of a man because now nobody is with me. My wife left and I am not a real man anymore.” This mirrors previously documented dynamics of female sexual violence survivors being left by their husbands or boyfriends due to the stigma attached to their sexual violations, both in northern Uganda as in other conflict settings globally (Coulter 2009).

Furthermore, in Acholiland men and especially elders are culturally and socially expected to attend and actively participate in community meetings and consultations. Respondents explained that taking on a leadership role in the community is one of the integral responsibilities and requirements of being a man in northern Uganda. Out of fear of being stigmatized, however, many survivors purposely decide not to engage in any such meetings. “It is better to stay alone and not to attend these meetings, because they might stigmatize or name-call you,” one survivor explained. By not participating in these meetings, male survivors are seen as neglecting and ignoring their masculine duties and responsibilities within their wider communities, which in turn negatively impacts their gender identities.

Clearly, the inability to provide and to protect as undermining manhood within the context of a protracted conflict are neither unique nor exclusive to male survivors of sexual violence. The example of men’s forced infantilization in the context of displacement camps shows that these experiences are representative for large parts of the male Acholi population. Similarly, throughout the conflict, countless civilians suffered horrendous atrocities, leaving them with a variety of untreated wounds and physical and psychological health complications

impacting their abilities to work and provide and thus also their gender identities. For instance, a man who was beaten by the rebels and suffers from medical complications, or who was shot by government soldiers and has bullet fragments in his body, is equally, if not even more so, unable to conduct physical labor and thus to provide.

However, when initially conditioned and caused by sexual violations, which affect male survivors' masculinities in the first place, these layered gendered harms can become further gendered, compounded, and intensified. The experience and process of displacement from gendered personhood must thus be conceptualized as an intertwined process, originating from the sexualized, sexed, and gendered nature of initial violations in the first place and further exacerbated through layered gendered harms experienced in the aftermath of the violent acts.

As my analysis here shows, these sexual and gendered harms are never static but rather fluctuate over time and are malleable by different socioeconomic and political interventions. These key insights, to be gained from this deconstructed understanding of the impact of wartime rape on masculinities, ultimately prevents me from wrongly freezing dynamic experiences into time and space, which the commonly employed conception of "emasculatio" often does. Instead, and as described in more detail in the introduction, I apply the frame of "displacement from gendered personhood" to analyze these dynamics, which more accurately captures the fluid and variable character of survivors' experiences.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have offered insights into the phenomenological lived realities of male sexual violence survivors in northern Uganda. My findings foreground that the impact of wartime rape on male survivors' masculinities is not a static one-time event, but rather a dynamic process of layered gendered harms unfolding over time. The impact of sexual violence on survivors' masculinities is initiated through acts of penetrative rape, which within a patriarchal and heterosexual context "turned men into women." This perceived gendered subordination is further compounded by the violations' layered gendered harms, which render male survivors unable to protect (themselves and their families), to provide, and at times to perform sexually and procreate, thereby significantly challenging their masculine roles and responsibilities and hence impacting their gender identities. Male-directed sexual violence during armed conflict thus strikes at multiple levels of what it means to be a man. The compromising and reifying of male survivors' masculine identities must therefore be understood as an evolving and unfolding process, rather than an event, necessitating the more fluid and dynamic understanding of the "displacement from gendered personhood" frame.

This deconstructed understanding of male survivors' experiences enables us to better theorize and grapple with these gendered harms, therefore setting the

foundations for the next chapters to explore how survivors in northern Uganda engage with the gendered harms. Against this background, the following two chapters carefully take into account male survivors' phenomenological experiences and their gendered harms when analyzing survivors' agency and quests for justice in relation to these crimes and their impact.