

Introduction

Male Survivors' Experiences in Context

One night in April 1987, while Okwera was asleep, rebels of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) camped against his will in his homestead in rural northern Uganda. The next day, neighbors and other community members who were concerned about the rebels' presence in the area informed the nearby stationed government soldiers about the rebels' whereabouts. The following day, at about four o'clock in the morning, Okwera woke up to the sound of gumboots in his compound. Suspecting either that the LRA rebels had returned or that government soldiers of the National Resistance Army (NRA) under the command of incumbent President Museveni had come to interrogate him about the rebel incident, Okwera alerted his wife. But before they were able to go into hiding, the soldiers had already surrounded the homestead. The NRA cadres forced him to open the door, but Okwera refused. Equipped with the power of their guns, a group of soldiers eventually forced their way in and began to loot, while others stood guard outside or proceeded to neighboring compounds. With a gun pressed against his back, Okwera was dragged outside, behind his kitchen hut, while his wife had to remain inside the hut with several other soldiers. The soldiers accused Okwera of "being a father to the rebels," and after further intimidation, they ordered him to kneel down and bend over. In a testimony recorded and published by the Refugee Law Project (RLP), Okwera recalls: "My hesitation earned me a kick '*kwara*' and a bayonet pointed in my back. Not knowing what to do, I complied. They removed my trousers and each penetrated me in turn. I could tell that those who penetrated me were three in number because each of them would do it in turn and then leave."

Along with countless other civilian men across the entire Acholi subregion during the early phase of the war, Okwera was sexually violated by the NRA government soldiers. As he was sexually violated, his wife—who was about seven months pregnant with twins at that time—was also raped by another group

of soldiers who remained with her in the hut. At that time, during his own violation, Okwera did not know about this and only found out after the soldiers had left. Three weeks later, his wife suffered a miscarriage and died soon thereafter as a result of injuries caused by the sexual assault. “It was a very traumatizing moment for the whole family,” Okwera recalled. During a conversation we had in March 2016, he explained that he felt extremely devastated, lonely and isolated for years after this.

Regarding this own sexual violation, Okwera described it as “the most painful experience ever.” But due to shame and fear, he decided to keep it to himself. He did not tell his children what had happened to him, and he felt that he could not report the violation officially, since the soldiers who committed the violence belonged to the same government that remains in power today. “We did not have any voice,” Okwera said. Although these crimes were widespread across the entire war-torn Acholi subregion—as I will demonstrate throughout this book—nobody spoke openly about it, and survivors had no actual opportunities or spaces to share their stories or narrate their testimonies. Okwera himself also did not share his experience, because he felt it was too dehumanizing and shameful.

About ten years later, in the midst of the conflict during the mid- and late 1990s, the government forced up to 95 percent of the civilian population into internally displaced persons (IDPs) camps, which according to Chris Dolan (2009) constituted their own form of “social torture.” In the camps, civilian communities were forced to live side by side in overcrowded conditions, which further strained the already ruptured social fabric of life and relationships. Rumors quickly began to spread about different stories related to the war, including about who was a victim of male rape or other humiliations. Even though Okwera began to understand that he was not alone and that others must have endured similar experiences, he still heard of only one other case, and he did not know any other survivor personally.

In 1999, after more than twelve years of silence, Okwera nevertheless eventually gathered his courage to report the violation to the Uganda Human Rights Commission (UHRC). At the time, the commission was the only institution Okwera knew of that was dealing with human rights abuses during the war. The commission, however, turned him away, arguing that the violations occurred outside the temporal and definitional scope of their mandate. Okwera felt extremely demoralized and disappointed. Even though he (at least temporarily) accepted the stigmatization that he anticipated to follow his report, he was turned away without any support. He felt he had been denied the opportunity to share this testimony, to be listened to, and to seek justice and redress. Elsewhere I have described this experience as “ethical loneliness” (Schulz 2018b), understood as “a condition undergone by persons who have been unjustly treated and dehumanized by human beings and political structures, who emerge from that injustice only to find that the surrounding world will not listen to or cannot properly hear their testimony” (Stauffer 2015: 1).

During the postencampment period and in the final stages of the LRA's presence in northern Uganda, from about 2006, rumors and stories continued to spread within the camps and the communities about different violations and humiliations committed during the conflict. Okwera's children became more inquisitive and wanted to know what happened to him during the war and how their mother died. "I became deeply troubled and had nightmares about that experience," Okwera recalls. Still feeling shame and fearing stigmatization, however, he did not yet tell them about his violent ordeal. Hoping to find ways to cope, he joined a church group and regularly attended local counseling sessions as well as community events organized by different humanitarian and civil society actors. During one of these events in 2008, Okwera met staff from the Refugee Law Project (RLP). Okwera appreciated that, unlike other humanitarian agencies or service providers at that time, "they listened carefully" to what he had to say. After much consideration, various visits, and a sense of mutual trust that had begun to develop, Okwera decided to share his full testimony with them. The fact that they *listened carefully*, and did not further silence or ignore him, was a paramount reason Okwera broke his silence.

Despite early hesitation and even some resentments, after a long and continuous process of building trust and relationships, further catalyzed by the gradual passing of time, fellow survivors eventually shared their experiences as well, talking about *tek-gungu*—how male rape is locally referred to—and encouraging other male victims of sexual violations to tell their stories and support one another. Coordinated by Okwera, a support group was formed: the Men of Courage. The group is composed exclusively of and led by survivors, and primarily engages in peer counseling, income-generating economic activities, and advocacy. For Okwera, as well as for many other male survivors, being in this group enables them to exercise agency and even facilitates a sense of justice on the micro-level (chapter 5). Today Okwera has narrated his testimony on his own terms, and his account has been published by the Refugee Law Project (RLP) and is featured in two widely viewed RLP-produced video documentaries. He has articulated male survivors' needs and demands in various forums locally, nationally, and internationally—for instance, during meetings and workshops in northern Uganda, regional conferences such as the annual Institute for African Transitional Justice (IATJ), and the global South-South Institute (SSI) on sexual violence against men and boys in Uganda (in 2013 and 2019) and Cambodia (in 2015). As of this book's writing, he continues to coordinate the Men of Courage support group, raise awareness, and advocate for justice on behalf of male survivors.

THE CENTRAL ARGUMENT

This book is about the diverse stories, experiences, and viewpoints of not only Okwera but numerous male sexual violence survivors in northern Uganda more

broadly. By centralizing their lived realities, this book seeks to broaden and deepen our understanding of the gender dynamics of armed conflicts in general, and of conflict-related sexual violence in particular. In many ways, Okwera's narrative—and in particular his contemporary role as an advocate—is exceptional and not necessarily representative for the majority of male survivors of sexual violence in northern Uganda, or across the globe. Nevertheless, his experience and viewpoints as well as his inspiring transformation are certainly illustrative for many of the arguments I pursue throughout this book. Okwera, just as most other male sexual violence survivors in this context, experienced different and intersecting layers of gendered harms caused by the violations committed against him. As I demonstrate throughout this book, wartime sexual violence against men was widespread in northern Uganda, perpetrated by soldiers of the government army against civilian men in the early stages of the country's civil war, during the late 1980s and early 1990s. Yet for years, and most often even decades, survivors like Okwera were silenced—by society, their communities around them, or by bodies and organizations initially designed to assist them. Due to the shame and stigma surrounding their experiences, many survivors did not reveal their experiences to anyone, and many continue to uphold this protective silence in the current postwar context. As a result, crimes of *tek-gungu* remain notoriously under-explored in the contemporary Acholi context, so that a persistent vacuum of assistance, support and justice for male sexual violence prevails, reflective of the overall inattentiveness to sexual violence against men globally.

At the same time, however, survivors also grapple and engage with their harmful experiences in myriad ways, thereby resisting and subverting the stereotypical image of the ever-vulnerable and inevitable passive survivor of sexual violence. As I will explore in this book, survivors form and engage in support groups, break the silence surrounding their experiences on different levels and in different spheres, and advocate for justice. Within the absence of official measures, male survivors in Acholiland therefore exercise agency on their own terms, primarily through their participation in survivors' groups, but they also articulate demands for state-driven assistance and support, especially in form of acknowledgment of their otherwise silenced experiences. The central argument that I posit in this book thus holds that sexual violence against men can significantly impact male survivors' masculine identities, but that survivors in the contemporary postconflict context seek to respond to, engage with, and remedy these gendered harms in various endogenous and exogenous ways.

Recognizing this heterogeneity and complexity of survivors' experiences, this book paints a detailed and holistic picture of wartime sexual violence against men in northern Uganda by placing male survivors' diverse lived realities under the microscope and by centralizing their perspectives. The book thereby follows feminist scholar Donna Haraway's (1988) methodological approach of "situated knowledge(s)," whereby "diverse views from below, clearly rooted in life

experiences” (Cockburn 2010: 141) can help us to construct embedded accounts of the world in all its complexities and lived realities. In light of this, the central premise of this book is the construction of a holistic narrative of survivors’ experiences in terms of gendered harms, but it is also attentive to various postviolation elements with regard to agency and justice. While in the last decade various empirical, conceptual, and political inroads have been made into recognizing men and boys as victims of sexual violence, much remains unknown about the dynamics surrounding these crimes, and about male survivors’ lived realities in particular.

This book therefore addresses a twofold gap in existing research on wartime sexual violence, and on gender and armed conflict more generally, as well as on the conflict in northern Uganda: On the one hand, although conflict-related sexual violence against men is committed more frequently than assumed, these crimes continue to be underexplored and silenced, and much remains unknown about the dynamics surrounding this type of violence. Survivors’ experiences in particular remain strikingly absent from the increasing scholarly and political engagement with this issue. On the other hand, while much has been written about the war in northern Uganda, and in particular about the horrendous atrocities committed by the LRA, human rights violations by the Ugandan army, including male-directed sexual violence, have thus far received only insufficient attention. By documenting, discussing, and analyzing crimes of sexual violence against civilian men in northern Uganda—through the eyes, voices, and experiences of male survivors directly—this book therefore engages with both of these areas of study, and thereby answers persistent questions regarding male survivors’ lived realities in conflict zones.

The book draws upon and speaks to intersecting bodies of scholarship broadly situated within International Relations (IR), including most importantly feminist IR scholarship as well as research on political violence and armed conflict. In methodological and epistemological terms, the book is also guided by ethnographic approaches to and ideals of research, as elaborated upon below, and therefore perhaps also speaks to scholars from across disciplines, beyond the boundaries of IR.

WARTIME SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST MEN

Much like the IR literature more broadly, the study of armed conflict was traditionally silent on gender.¹ As noted by Laura Sjöberg, “the great majority of studies seeking constitutive understandings of or causal explanations for war do not consider gender . . . as potential cases or elements” (2013: 4). Despite this neglect of gender as an analytical tool in IR and conflict studies in general, however, recent decades nevertheless witnessed an increasing utilization of gender perspectives and in particular of diverse feminist theories to elucidate the gendered dimensions of armed conflicts. Predominantly guided by feminist curiosities to

comprehend, unravel, and uproot patriarchal structures and gendered inequalities within theaters of war, as Enloe (2004) puts it, a diverse set of studies increasingly seeks to examine conflict, violence, and peace building through a gender lens. As emphasized by Cockburn (2001), these interventions are much needed, as “being alert to the power relations of gender enables us to see features of armed conflict and political violence that are otherwise overlooked” (13). The underlying premise of my position taken in this book is that wars and armed conflicts cannot be fully understood without centralizing gender. Following Jill Steans, applying a gender lens to the study of armed conflict thereby means “to focus on gender as a particular kind of power relation, or to trace out the ways in which gender is central to understanding international processes” (1998: 5).

Crucially, this growing body of scholarship has convincingly documented how war is constituted by and at the same time constitutes gender. Diverse feminist approaches to theorizing war have laid open the multiple and embedded ways in which war is a gendered concept and follows a gendered logic. Among the arguably more influential insights of feminist war theorizing is the standpoint that patriarchal gender relations are among the root causes of and set “favorable conditions” for the onset of armed conflicts, positioning patriarchy (and its intersections with national and economic power) as causal in militarization and war. Feminist IR scholar Kimberly Hutchings similarly identifies a connection between gender relations, and in particular certain hegemonic and militarized conceptions of masculinities, and war. “Masculinity is linked to war because the formal, relational properties of masculinity provide a framework through which war can be rendered both intelligible and acceptable as a social practice and institution,” Hutchings writes (2008: 389). According to these diverse feminist insights, therefore, “gendering is a key cause of war as a well as a key impact” (Sjoberg 2013: 6). Much of this engagement with gender in the context of conflict and security arguably comes through a focus on sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), widely considered a phenomenon exacerbated by war and conflict and forming the overarching focus of this book.²

At the same time, throughout most of the literature on violence and conflict, however, employing a “gender perspective” is frequently equated with feminist perspectives and is thereby (erroneously) perceived as exclusively highlighting the roles, needs, rights, and vulnerabilities of women and girls. Owing to the pervasive marginalization of women and female experiences, during conflict and beyond, such a focus is urgently needed and warranted. In scholarship and practice, however, there often seems to be a tendency to equate *gender* with *women*. Chris Dolan (2015) consequently proclaims, “If gender is a potentially powerful analytical, practical and political engine”—which it undoubtedly is—“it is one which is currently firing on only half its cylinders” (486). As a result, and despite the increasing utilization of gender lenses, specific masculinities perspectives—and careful consideration of men and their experiences *as*

gendered—as well as queer lenses oftentimes remain missing from gender analyses of armed conflicts.

Since crimes of SGBV against men are immediately underpinned by masculinities, it is inevitable that we use a masculinity lens—namely, that we foreground the roles, structuring, and positioning of masculine identities and highlight the experiences of men and boys, or of masculine bodies and actors, as gendered. Quite generally, masculinities are socially constructed gender norms, referring to the multiple ways of “doing male.” Over the past decades, a growing body of interdisciplinary literature has begun to pay critical attention to masculinities and their relations to and positioning in the global gender order, including their roles in political and social structuring.³ Although still underresearched, the study of masculinities in recent years has also increasingly extended toward analyses of armed conflicts. Consequently, and despite a prevailing lack of *systematic* and *holistic* attention to masculinities during conflicts and transition, a “fairly substantial amount of literature has been generated over the years regarding the forms of masculinity that emerge in times of armed conflict and war” (Ní Aoláin, Haynes, and Cahn 2011: 104).

However, investigating armed conflicts through a masculinities lens and paying attention to men’s gendered experiences and roles during war must not be misappropriated toward diverting attention from women’s experiences and feminist approaches. Examinations of masculinities can therefore not be decoupled from analyses of patriarchal gender hierarchies more broadly. Rather, studies of men’s roles and experiences in (post)conflict contexts must maintain a holistic gendered focus. Caution is also required so that centralizing a masculinities perspectives does not reinforce gender binaries, which “have been remarkably consistent across time, place and culture in human social and political relations” (Sjoberg 2016: 4). Therefore, despite this study’s focus male survivors’ experiences as underpinned by masculinities, careful consideration of gender as a fluid spectrum and of the elasticity of gender identities is required. The inclusive recognition of gender nonconforming, intersex and/or trans, or queer identities is consequently necessary to fully comprehend studies of war.

At the same time, while the roles of masculinities during armed conflict are slowly but increasingly recognized, this “research has tended to be focused on certain groups and to employ a relatively narrow scope” only (Myrntinen et al. 2016: 1). Indeed, most dominant research on men and masculinities in the context of war focuses on the “violences of men” (Hearn 1998) and the linkages between (militarized) masculinities and the various forms of aggression and violence associated with them. All too often these examinations have (re)produced an unreconstructed view of men as universal aggressors and women as universal victims during armed conflicts. In her groundbreaking work on the gender politics of militarism, Cynthia Enloe (2004) critically exposed these essentialist binary categorizations of “all the men are in the militias and all the women are victims.”

Empirically, however, this is a gross “over-simplification that both reinforces ideas about violence being natural to men and fails to explain for women’s roles in conflict” (Cleaver 2002: 17). Problematically, and as pointed out by a growing body of critical scholarship, the literature’s persisting focus on hyper- and militarized masculinities omits attention from the gendered experiences of nonviolent, non-soldiering, and civilian men.⁴ As MacKenzie and Foster (2017) note, “Although there is a rich and growing literature on masculinities and war, there remains little understanding of how non-combatant civilian men and civilian masculinities are impacted by war, conflict, occupation and militarization” (210).

As a consequence, men as victims and male vulnerabilities in theaters of war are only insufficiently addressed and frequently overlooked, largely due to stereotypical gender assumptions about women’s and men’s roles in society. This misrecognition and denial of masculine vulnerabilities is wrongheaded and irritating. Vulnerabilities are fundamentally human, constituting an “underlying, ever present and abiding undercurrent of our natural state,” as poet David Whyte (2018: 233) puts it. In line with Hannah Arendt, Martha Fineman (2008) further argues that “vulnerability is universal and constant, inherent in the human condition, . . . arising from our embodiment, which carries with it the ever-present possibility of harm, injury and misfortune” (Fineman 2008: 9). Somewhat ironically, however, and even though vulnerability is ultimately beyond human control, dominant hetero-patriarchal assumptions of gender nevertheless presume masculinities to be irreconcilable with victimhood, instead expecting men to be invulnerable. Owing to these socially constructed premises, the intersections between masculinities and vulnerabilities, despite emerging scholarship, remain heavily undertheorized and underresearched, and it seems that “we do not really have any idea of the full extent of male vulnerability” (Dolan 2011: 135) in conflict scenarios. In particular the seemingly mundane and everyday gendered harms and vulnerabilities experienced by men in conflict-affected contexts, during displacement, or under militant occupation remain particularly neglected. To obtain a realistic and holistic understanding of the workings and functioning of gender in conflict-affected contexts, however, “the scope of studying masculinities in these situations needs to be broadened to go beyond merely examining the violences of men” (Myrtilinen et al. 2016: 1) to include male vulnerabilities.

One scholarly and politically relevant entry point for analyzing masculine vulnerabilities in conflict settings are crimes of wartime sexual violence against men and boys. Although still largely ignored in dominant global conceptions of conflict-related gender-based violence, violence against men has increasingly received attention from academics and humanitarian actors in the past decade.⁵ However, despite some newly gained attention and important theoretical, empirical, and political inroads, much remains unknown about the dynamics of male-directed sexual violence. In this introduction, and even more so in the following chapter, I identify numerous lacunae in the growing literature on male-directed

sexual abuse in conflict settings, which I then seek to engage with throughout the book. By and large, much of the growing yet limited body of scholarship is largely descriptive or conceptually dominated and lacks both theory and, even more so, empirical foundations, with only few noteworthy exceptions.

Empirically grounded in-depth case study analyses and documentation of the dynamics surrounding wartime sexual violence within (or across, for that matter) specific cases remain particularly underdeveloped. For instance, while the LRA's horrendous atrocities in northern Uganda have been subjected to extensive scholarly debate and have received widespread media coverage, the pervasive human rights violations committed by the Ugandan government armed forces have received significantly less attention. Within this context, crimes of male rape committed by the government's National Resistance Army (NRA) in the early phase of the war, during the late 1980s and early 1990s, are particularly poorly documented. While scholars have brought detailed attention to gender-based violence against women and girls, who remain disproportionately affected, only occasional references to male-directed sexual violence in Acholiland exist, which in turn lack empirical data and analytical depth. By painting a detailed and empirically grounded picture of conflict-related sexual violence against men in Acholiland—situated within the overall historical and political context and intersecting episodes of violence and war—the analysis in this book thereby offers a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the war in northern Uganda, as well as of the dynamics of wartime sexual violence more broadly.

By examining questions of context, gendered harms, agency, and justice, in this book I intend to complicate dominant conceptions of the gender dynamics of armed conflict in general and to deepen our understanding of wartime sexual violence and of male survivors' experiences in particular. This book serves as an empirically grounded response to the growing body of scholarship on wartime sexual violence that still largely ignores male survivors and has not yet carefully enough engaged with survivors' lived realities.

DISPLACEMENT FROM GENDERED PERSONHOOD

To analyze male survivors' experiences in holistic ways, I employ the conceptual framework of "displacement from gendered personhood."⁶ While this framework will be analytically employed most centrally in chapter 4, which analyzes the impact of sexual violence on male survivors' masculinities, the temporal and spatial dimensions of this framework are indeed indicative of the wider argument I make about male survivors' overall experiences across time and space—and thus warrant sufficient explanation here.

Most of the existing scholarship on the topic suggest that sexual violence against men compromises or thwarts male survivors' gender identities as men.

What in existing scholarship is almost exclusively referred to as “emasculatation” through “feminization” and/or “homosexualization” is frequently portrayed at once as a motivation for sexual violence to occur and as its primary consequence. In existing scholarship, there appears to be a consensus that “sexual violence against men involves forms of emasculatation in which perpetrators seek to feminize their victims by rendering them weak, violated and passive, in contradistinction to stereotypical masculine ideals” (Auchter 2018: 1440). The vast majority of studies on sexual violence against men indeed argue that “emasculating” victims is among the most common drivers, if not the single most prevalent driver, of male-directed sexual violence and simultaneously its primary consequence and harm. These global assumptions reflect the ways in which sexual violence against men is locally made sense of in Acholiland. Among the conflict-affected community, and situated within hetero-patriarchal gender relations, men who were raped are perceived as “less of a man” and “stripped of their manhood.”

Yet despite initial conceptual insights, how exactly sexual violence impacts upon male survivors’ lives, and in particular how the compromising of masculinities unfolds, and what it entails, are questions that remain insufficiently understood. Most discussions about wartime sexual violence against men are conceptually dominated, abstract-descriptive and consistently lack empirical data on survivors’ experiences. Conditioned by the methodological and ethical challenges of collecting data on this topic, insights into the longitudinal effects of gender-based violence against men from a survivor perspective remain mostly absent from the existing literature. At the same time, existing scholarship has not yet sufficiently enough engaged critically with the analytical categories and associated terminologies of “emasculatation,” “feminization,” and “homosexualization,” which are characterized by different normative and analytical challenges.

Throughout the expanding and interdisciplinary literature on gender, war and (in)security, including feminist theorizing, “feminization” is broadly conceptualized as devalorization and devaluation, illuminating the gendered power inequalities constituted by the asymmetric privileging of masculine over feminine qualities inherent in global gender orders. For Peterson (2010), the ultimate effect of rendering someone (or something) female—that is, of “feminizing”—is a reduction in legitimacy, status, and value, associated with rejection and weakness. In studies on wartime male sexual assault, “feminization” is thus used as a synonym for degradation and humiliation. In this reading, “emasculatation” by way of “feminization” and/or “homosexualization” is underpinned by the premise that femininities, as well as the female (and/or homosexuality), are seen as inherently undesirable and problematic. Such dynamics and assumptions in many ways rely upon (implicit and explicit) misogyny, gender essentialism, and homophobia. This marginalization and infantilization of the female and femininities, which lies at the core of the “feminization” terminology, has been critiqued by decades of feminist IR scholarship.

In light of this, I am concerned that employing this language without critically examining and questioning it can imply the risk of accepting and normalizing these patriarchal assumptions behind unequal gender expectations, orders, and relations, in which women and homosexuals are automatically subordinate to all (heterosexual) men. Ultimately, the dichotomous assumptions of inviolable and invulnerable masculinities vis-à-vis infantilized females and femininities that underpin the language of “feminization,” specifically when employed for male sexual assault, risk reinforcing dominant ideas about masculinities and heterosexualities. While I recognize that simply avoiding the use of this language cannot change these assumptions and gender inequalities, my motivation in refraining from employing this terminology nevertheless in part constitutes a normatively driven endeavor of not wanting to reproduce these presumptions.

In addition to these normative challenges, the concept of “emasculatation” is furthermore characterized by analytical shortcomings. As predominantly applied throughout the interdisciplinary literature on sexual violence against men, “emasculatation” is predominantly understood as the *ultimate* loss of manhood, and survivors are seen as being *completely* and *indefinitely* stripped of their masculine identities. In his groundbreaking and widely cited article on the topic, Sivakumaran (2007), for instance, posits that sexual violence *robs* victims of their masculine status—thereby implicitly suggesting ultimate, nonreversible effects. Empirically, however, there often is a misfit between the idea of “emasculatation,” which appears static and unambiguous, and survivors’ lived realities, which often are dynamic, fluid, and variable—as demonstrated throughout this book.

Mindful of these normative and analytical shortcomings, I instead adopt the idea and wording of “displacement from gendered personhood.” In a recent examination of the lived realities of refugee survivors of male sexual violence from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) living in Uganda, Edström, Dolan, and colleagues (2016) refer to the effects of male-directed sexual violence as “displacement from self and personhood.” Drawing on this, here I seek to unpack and further develop this framework, and specifically its gendered components and applicability.

Importantly, the displacement terminology suggests that—like physical displacement, for instance in a refugee camp—“displacement from gendered personhood” can potentially be mitigated, of course not without leaving its physical and psychological marks. Linked to survivors’ harms, employing the language of displacement in this context thus illustrates that survivors’ harmful experiences are potentially temporary and can possibly be alleviated, preventing us from employing terminology that freezes dynamic experiences into time and space. As poignantly argued by Gray, Stern, and Dolan, the “unmaking” of survivors’ personhood and subjectivities as a result of sexual violence frequently “occurs in tandem with a ‘remaking’ of the self and the world in which the self inhabits” (2019: 7). To illustrate, and as unpacked in chapter 4, male survivors in northern Uganda often

felt they were “less of a man” as a result of the sexual violations they had experienced. In the local Acholi context, constructions of personhood play a fundamentally important role in identity formation and societal structuring in northern Uganda (p’Bitek 1986), and are inherently linked to and constructed through gender (Porter 2016). Similarly, the concept of “displacement from gendered personhood” accommodates different intertwined harms composed of physical, psychological, social, and physiological effects that reflect survivors’ long-term lived realities, thereby emphasizing that the impact of violence on gender identities frequently is a layered process perpetuated over time and composed of layered vulnerabilities, rather than a singular event exclusively linked to particular acts of rape (chapter 4).

At the same time, however, for numerous survivors these perceptions regarding their impacted masculine identities were able to change again over time, shaped by different factors, such as membership in survivors’ groups or access to physical rehabilitative support. The analysis underpinning this book therefore evidences that these gendered harms do shape male survivors’ lived realities in different ways, but do not always and indefinitely define them as ever-vulnerable, helpless, and “emasculated” victims. Instead, survivors’ viewpoints and their experiences show that these harms and vulnerabilities, as associated with normative gender constructs, are contextually dependent and often are potentially malleable through sociopolitical and economic assistance. This can include ways in which survivors themselves exercise varying forms of political agency as well as different forms of justice in response to their sexual harms, as I explore throughout this book.

“THE LONG STICK CANNOT KILL A SNAKE”

In northern Uganda’s subregion of Acholiland, much sociocultural knowledge and wisdom is communicated through proverbs. What Chinua Achebe in *Things Fall Apart* (1958) writes in a beautifully poetic way about the Ibo (in the novel) in Nigeria—that “proverbs are the palm-oil with which words are eaten”—similarly applies to the Acholi in northern Uganda. The careful reader will notice that throughout the book I illustrate certain contextual and culturally specific interpretations or arguments through Acholi proverbs or idioms, many of which were recorded in the writings of the late Acholi poet-artist-academic Okot p’Bitek. I use one particular Acholi proverb as a guiding framework for this book and its argumentation: *Odoo mabor pe neko twol*—“A long stick cannot kill a snake.” In borrowing and applying this particular proverb, I am inspired by Holly Porter’s (2016) application of it in her own work.

The proverb’s explanation or interpretation, as put forward by both Okot p’Bitek and Holly Porter, goes as follows: If one tries to kill a snake by hitting it with a long stick, and is thereby far away from the snake, one’s efforts will most likely not be

rewarded with success. If one tries to hit the snake with a long stick and from afar with only weak blows, the snake will inevitably curl around the end of the stick, latching on. As the stick is raised to deliver another blow, there is a danger that the snake releases and falls on the person holding the stick. At the same time, the relatively low force of the blow with a long stick ultimately cannot kill the snake either. Being far away from the snake with a long stick therefore does not work, and in fact can even prove counterproductive. Instead, one will have to get closer to the snake, with a shorter stick, and deliver strong, decisive hits in order to kill it. The moral of the proverb, according to both p'Bitek and Porter, is "If you are too far away from a problem, you cannot contribute to the solution" (Porter 2013: 107). One needs to get close to the problem in order to deal with it, resolve it, and contribute to a potential solution.

Based on this interpretation, I first employ this Acholi proverb in methodological and epistemological terms: In this study, I get close to the stories, experiences, and lived realities of male survivors of sexual violence in northern Uganda and listen to their perspectives and priorities, including those about the current postconflict context or about justice. I therefore follow what can be called an epistemology from below, guided by the experiences and viewpoints of survivors themselves. This attentiveness to survivors' perspectives, which is unique in comparison to existing research on the topic, is also crucial in order to get close to and contribute to a solution—thus metaphorically using a short stick—instead of listening only to, for instance, external service providers, and therefore being too far away from the problem, which would figuratively resemble using a long stick.

Second, conceptually, I get close to the "problem" by carefully analyzing and understanding the sexual and gendered harms experienced by male survivors of sexual violence before considering appropriate responses, remedies, or processes. I thus get close to the "problem," or the harm resulting from the violations, in order to then be able to think about possible appropriate "solutions," such as survivors' agentic capacities or quests for justice. As argued by Porter (2013), any appropriate response to wrongdoing and crimes, and any consideration of how to engage with the ensuing harm, "must begin with an understanding of the act itself, and how it is perceived in terms of its damage and harm" (69). This will be done in chapter 4, which unpacks the harms experienced by Acholi male survivors, specifically examining how sexual violence impacts their gender identities.

Third, in analytical terms, throughout this book I demonstrate that in responding to sexual violence against men in northern Uganda, different processes—such as avenues for agency or justice measures—must be contextual, culturally appropriate, and in direct response to local needs and concerns in order to potentially contribute to the solution. Rather than "distanced" responses to violence and crime, solutions that are close to the problem, embedded in the local context, and driven by conflict-affected communities themselves (for instance, survivors' support groups) are necessary. This approach follows how Porter (2013) utilizes

the proverb in her work and necessitates as well as embodies a survivor-centric approach, as put forward toward the end of this book.

REFLECTIONS ON METHODOLOGIES AND ETHICS

Although I have conducted research in northern Uganda since 2011, the empirical material underpinning this book derives primarily from a total of nine months of field-based research conducted in Acholiland in northern Uganda. Following a preparatory visit in May 2015, I collected the bulk of the data between January and July 2016, followed by two shorter spells of research in June and September 2018. During this period, I was affiliated as a research associate with the Refugee Law Project (RLP) at the School of Law at Makerere University, which I reflect upon in more detail below. Overall, the data derive from different triangulated qualitative data-collection techniques, including four participatory workshop discussions with a total of 46 male survivors of sexual violence who are members of survivor support groups; 79 in-depth key-informant interviews; two focus-group discussions with male elders; and ethnographic participant “reflection.” The data collection was also made possible through the diligent and thorough assistance of my research collaborator and translator, Kenneth Oyet Odong.

The focus on northern Uganda as one in-depth case study, based on embedded qualitative field research, facilitates a holistic and grounded examination of the dynamics of sexual violence against men within a particular context. This approach specifically allows me to foreground the experiences and viewpoints of male survivors directly. Conducting a single case study analysis on northern Uganda thus allows for what Geertz (1983) labels in ethnographic terms as “thick descriptions.”⁷

A variety of methodological and ethical criteria as well as feasibility and practicality aspects influenced the focus on northern Uganda as a case study. In methodological terms, northern Uganda is among a growing list of conflicts in which sexual violence against men occurred, and for which at least initial documentation exists. Crimes of sexual violence against men, however, remain absent and marginalized from dominant analyses of the conflict and are insufficiently explained, understood, and explored. In addition to this widespread occurrence of sexual violence against men in northern Uganda, the region also constitutes an interesting and exemplary case of a relatively diverse postconflict landscape, which includes numerous implemented and proposed transitional justice and peace-building mechanisms. This diversity of ongoing and attempted postconflict initiatives thus enables me to engage with broader and related questions of survivors’ views on justice and the ways in which they exercise agency. In addition to these underlying methodological considerations, practicality and feasibility considerations likewise informed the case selection. The research was facilitated by my basic knowledge of the local language, Acholi—which enabled me to have

social conversations but was not good enough to conduct thorough interviews or research-related exchanges—coupled with contacts across northern Uganda that I have developed through research and advocacy work since 2011.

It was also during my prior engagement in northern Uganda in late 2011 that I first heard about the occurrence and dynamics of sexual violence against men in this context. Together with a colleague from the Justice and Reconciliation Project (JRP), we interviewed representatives of various survivors' associations. During one of those interviews in Kitgum district, after diligently having answered our questions, the leader of a massacre survivors' group continued to describe to us the manifold ways in which his community had been affected by episodes of violence and brutality throughout the war, not only by the LRA but also by government soldiers. What appeared to be most memorable and noteworthy to him was a particularly gruesome act of sexual torture of a male community member by the NRA in the early 1990s, which he graphically recounted to us. I had read as many books and articles about the conflict as I possibly could, and had conducted several interviews across Acholiland for the previous four months, and so I naively thought that I roughly knew about the various forms of violence perpetrated during the conflict. Up to that point, however, I had not yet heard anything about sexual crimes perpetrated against men in this context. Later in the car, on our way back to Kitgum town, I asked my colleague whether this instance of male-directed sexual abuse was an isolated case. "It was widespread and happened a lot, but people do not talk about it at all," my colleague explained to me. "This is why you and even most people from here have never heard about it," I was told.

Since then, I have been intellectually and personally interested in the dynamics of these crimes and in male survivors' experiences. Why did these crimes occur? Why are they seldom discussed locally and internationally? What characterizes the lived realities of male survivors? How do survivors experience the silencing of their harms for more than twenty years, and how do they want these crimes to be redressed? Out of those deliberations and over time grew not only my academic but also my personal interest and curiosity, which underpins this inquiry.

Reflections on Positionality

As a young, white, European academic, I am obviously an outsider, even a stranger to Acholiland and thus to most of my respondents. A *munu*, as the Acholi would say. In many ways, I could not be any more different from the elderly Acholi survivor I engaged with for this study. At times our gender identities were the only obvious and visible common personal characteristics; and yet we did have much more in common that initially appeared. In retrospect, I think that in particular my sexual and gender identity as a heterosexual man constituted a crucial enabling factor for me to conduct the research. I specifically believe that as a heterosexual man, I have been able to relate in a variety of ways not only to my male colleagues at RLP (and thus with some of my key informants), but also to the male survivors

who participated in the study. I believe that especially our conversations about the physiological impact of the sexual violations on male survivors' sexualities were made possible in part because of my own positionality in that regard. At the same time, however, I am of course fully aware of the power asymmetries that characterized my relationships with research participants in heavily gendered and racialized ways (see Schulz 2020b). As a young, white researcher (now with a PhD, at the time of researching the bulk of the material in the process of acquiring that title) I without a doubt enjoy a tremendous amount of socioeconomic, cultural, and political privileges vis-à-vis the vast majority of my respondents and collaborators, which in turn shape the power dynamics that structured our engagement and relationships.

My external appearance resembles those of the countless expatriate aid workers, students, Christian missionaries, travelers, and tourists who populate Gulu, particularly during the summer months. However, to the best of my abilities, I have attempted to distance myself from assumptions and expectations related to this status and to transcend the obvious differences and boundaries between me and my interlocutors. I tried to learn the local language Acholi as best as I could, although my inability to have a fluent professional conversation or to conduct an interview must be acknowledged as a methodological limitation. I also tried to participate in my informants' lives as much as I could. I attended funerals, weddings, graduation parties, and traditional ceremonies. I spent countless afternoons or evenings in local bars or at the kiosk around the corner from my house, participating in everyday activities and tasks and learning as much about culture, sociality, and gender identities and relations as I could. When traveling to the field, when and wherever possible, I also made a purposeful and methodologically informed choice of traveling by motorbike—locally called a *boda-boda*—rather than by car to visibly distance myself from other expatriate aid-workers who frequently travel in air-conditioned SUVs. I thus concur with Ryan (2017: 377), who, reflecting on her own field research in Sierra Leone, attests that “turning up on the same mode of transport frequently used to travel to markets, or to health centres, or to visit relatives made me more relatable to the communities I visited.”

During one of our numerous stays in “the field,” a group of villagers gave me a new Acholi name: *Omara*—the “loved one,” or the “one who loves.” The name, they explained, reflected what they saw as my appreciation, perhaps even love, for Acholi culture and Acholi ways of life. I am aware that this is not necessarily unique, and yet it meant (and continues to mean) a great deal to me. Indeed, these were among the experiences where conducting this empirically rich research just felt, as Sverker Finnström (2008) has put it, “like the exact right thing to do.”

It probably goes without saying that conducting the research and engaging with the survivors was not easy emotionally and psychologically. Many a time, as I sat with the survivors and listened to their stories, tears were shed—tears of sorrow, of compassion, but at times also tears of relief. Many sleepless nights I lay awake

recounting the horrors of the stories and thinking about the past, the present, and the future that is linked to these narratives. These emotional and psychological impacts that accompany research on sensitive topics must be commonplace, but their effects on researchers too often go underacknowledged and remain undiscussed. My intention here is absolutely not to (re)center my own experiences at the expense of decentring my research participants' realities and stories. Rather, I want to be honest and transparent about how engaging with these at times heartbreaking narratives has shaped me in some ways and therefore also the research process and its output, in the form of this book.

As I left the field in the summer of 2016 and returned first to Northern Ireland and then to Sweden, where I was based for the initial analysis and drafting of the dissertation, these stories (obviously) traveled with me, on paper in my notebook and on my laptop, but also in my mind and heart. In many ways I found it much more difficult to reread and reengage with these narratives in this context of greater spatial and geographical (but also emotional) separation from Acholiland and my research participants. To some extent this was probably due to the absence of the support network that I had built and nurtured in northern Uganda, primarily composed of my colleagues at RLP, as described below, but also of friends and colleagues with whom I could talk about the challenges I faced. In other ways, as I was back home I was often accompanied by feelings of concern, if not guilt, of simultaneously having done (or rather asked) too much and of not having done enough to support and be there for the survivors who so generously and compassionately shared their stories and worries. Maintaining regular, often daily, contact with my colleagues at RLP via social media was one way of trying to extend that presence. Follow-up visits in 2018, during which I had a chance to engage with some of the survivors and share copies of my dissertation, also constituted small steps in countering these concerns.

Nevertheless, the last thing I want is for any of the survivors who participated in this study to feel that they and their stories have been exploited and have been taken advantage of. Trying to do justice to that and to their stories, and trying to respectfully, truthfully, and sensitively convey them in the pages of this book, have thus far been one of the hardest but also most rewarding tasks I have taken on. At this stage, it must suffice to say that these stories resonated with me not only on an intellectual or political level but also more deeply on a personal level. They brought out many uncomfortable truths but also helped me to make sense of certain questions, issues, and lived realities myself.

Joining an Established Process: My Institutional Affiliation with RLP

For the field research period, I was affiliated as a research associate with the Refugee Law Project (RLP), an outreach project at the School of Law at Makerere University in Uganda. Between January and July 2016, I was based in the organization's Gulu office and closely worked with its staff there. Cooperating and being affiliated

with RLP allowed me to become part of an established and sustainable process of engaging with male sexual violence survivors in a participatory approach and enabled me to closely partner with local experts on the topic. For the past ten years, RLP has engaged with male survivors of sexual violence in an inclusive, empowering, and ethically sensitive way. Specifically, RLP is working with three institutionalized and organized victims' groups composed of male survivors of sexual violence. One of these groups specifically unites Acholi male survivors and is based in northern Uganda: The Men of Courage umbrella association is composed of three subgroups located in three separate locations across Acholiland.

The collaboration with RLP was particularly important not only in gaining physical access to male survivors but also in developing mutual trust, between me and my research collaborators at RLP as well as between me and the research participants who are members of the survivors' groups. Due to their prolonged and sustained engagement with male survivors, RLP has been able to establish a level of mutual trust between the organizations and its staff as well as the groups of survivors. A recent study about the cooperation between RLP and the Men of Hope Refugee Association Uganda (MOHRU) of male survivors—one of Men of Courage's partner associations based in Kampala—refers to this continuous process and cooperation as “engaged excellence,” “meaning that the work is dependent upon it linking to and involving those who are at the heart of the change they wish to see” (Dolan, Edström, et al. 2016: 37).

By becoming an integral component of this process, some of the trust the survivors have in the institution (and by association its staff) was transferred to me as an affiliated researcher. During my engagement and meetings with the survivors, many emphasized that they felt reassured and comfortable to participate in the discussions precisely because they were conducted in cooperation with RLP and accompanied by staff with whom they had engaged with over a prolonged period of time. To further build trust, my RLP collaborators and I also regularly engaged with members of the group on an informal basis prior to each of the more formal data collection exercises, to ensure that the participating survivors had an opportunity to at least meet and engage with me before agreeing to share their viewpoints and experiences. The cooperation and affiliation with RLP also allowed me to conduct the discussions with male survivors in the presence of experts in the field. One of my colleagues is a trained psychological counselor who regularly conducts counseling sessions with conflict-affected communities in northern Uganda, including the groups of male sexual violence survivors. By joining the workshops, he was able to provide immediate psychological and psychosocial services to respondents if and when necessary.⁸

At the same time, my cooperation with RLP was not a one-way street characterized only by their support of my research. Rather, our relationship was one of mutual collaboration. Especially in the early months of my affiliation with RLP, I regularly assisted and supported my colleagues' daily work-related activities,

traveled to the field for consecutive days to implement RLP's programming, and immersed myself in the organization's work. Taken together, these different levels of involvement with RLP's work were not just unique and fascinating opportunities for me to obtain a deeper understanding and appreciation of the local context; they were also intended as my active part in a collaborative process. They thus constitute elements of my giving back to a process I benefited from immensely, something that is of particular concern to scholarly discussions about ethical research.

Data Collection

Most of the contextual background about the war as well as gender identities and relations in northern Uganda is based on in-depth interviews conducted with key informants. The experiences and viewpoints of male survivors, on the other hand, constituting the empirical core of this book, specifically derive from four workshop discussions with a total of forty-six male survivors who are members of survivors' support groups. In conducting these workshop discussions, I was inspired by normative and methodological principles of a participatory research approach, which seeks to conduct research *with* people, rather than *on* them, in order to "ground knowledge production in the everyday lives of those most affected" (Robins and Wilson 2015: 236). Such an approach to research likewise "rejects the liberal value of neutrality in social research and aims to advance the goal of a particular community" (Robins and Wilson 2015: 228). Indeed, I am increasingly convinced that attempting neutrality or value-free engagement in the context of sensitive research with populations in marginalized, victimized, and vulnerable situations in general often does not only seem impossible but would at times also be highly undesirable or even unethical. The careful reader will therefore notice that remaining entirely neutral or value-free in light of survivors' heartbreaking stories and experiences is not something I managed or something I, in full honesty, truly aspired to. Rather than staying entirely value-free, my normative aim here is to foreground and elucidate the harmful experiences of marginalized and victimized male sexual violence survivors in northern Uganda.

In practical terms, the workshop sampling strategy of engaging only with survivors who are members of organized support groups is underpinned by various ethical considerations. Specifically, the Men of Courage umbrella group has clearly defined political and societal agendas and follows a commitment to advocate for justice on behalf of male survivors. Deriving from this premise, the voluntarily participating members within the group had a predefined interest in workshops on these themes. However, only including male survivors who are members of institutionalized survivors' associations also implies methodological limitations for the representativeness of the argument, and in particular the findings on justice cannot necessarily be extended toward male survivors who are not part of these groups, but require further examination. Furthermore, through their membership in groups and their linkages to RLP (see further below), the participants,

to differing degrees, were already exposed to dominant international and national discourses, specifically with regard to dealing with the past. As such, this degree of familiarity and experience with these discourses may well be expected to have shaped their viewpoints on questions of postconflict justice and social reconstruction. While I thus acknowledge the limitations of engaging only with survivors who are members of survivors' groups with close links to an organization, I emphasize the ethical integrity of this approach that situates the study as part of a continuous process of working with male survivors.

The Men of Courage association specifically consists of three subgroups in separate locations in across Acholiland (see chapter 5). To preserve survivors' anonymity and confidentiality, the exact locations of these groups will not be revealed. One participatory workshop was conducted with each of these groups, in addition to a final workshop, which brought together representatives from each of the three groups. For each of these workshops, only voluntarily participating members joined the discussion. Two of the workshops were conducted in the familiar locations where the groups usually held their meetings, which in both cases were members' homesteads. One of these discussions preceded the group's weekly meeting, which ensured that numerous members were already present and that survivors did not have to devote too much extra time to the research project. Another workshop took place in a nearby school compound (during the school holidays). Members of the group chose this location because they deemed it safe for discussing their viewpoints without raising the community's attention or suspicion. The fourth workshop, which brought together representatives of all three organizations, was held in RLP's office in Gulu.

Rather than following a more imposed and rigid group interview or focus-group discussion format, these workshops were less guided and confrontational, and more open and participatory. For the first three workshops, I posed one guiding question: "What does justice mean to you?" This then initiated a longer discussion. I thus primarily served as a facilitator rather than the research director, while participants had some agency over the workshop process and the direction of the discussion. All four workshops were conducted in Acholi, and two RLP colleagues translated for me.⁹ Due to the focus of the workshops, and for ethical reasons, I did not include any questions about their harmful experiences of sexual violence directly. In each of the discussions, however, survivors themselves always situated their perspectives in relation to their respective experiences and harms, and at times openly spoke about their sexual violations. Various survivors expressed that "talking has really helped, and it was important to get this out." We therefore never interrupted these elaborations, letting survivors speak freely and then linking their input back to the initial focus of the discussions.

The fourth workshop, bringing together representatives from each of the groups in Gulu town, was designed slightly differently. At the beginning, I gave a presentation on the Ugandan government's draft transitional justice policy in order to

allow for a sufficiently informed discussion about contextual postconflict developments. In preparation for this workshop, together with my colleagues, I compiled a summary of the draft policy. The summary was then translated into Acholi and copies were provided to the participants. Following the presentation on the draft policy, we asked survivors to position their views and perspectives on justice in relation to the draft policy and its proposed justice mechanisms. The discussion then followed a similar open structure comparable to the previous three workshop discussions and was directed by the same guiding question.

The fourth workshop was also followed by a meeting for members and representatives of the groups to collectively work toward the future development of the separate groups and the Men of Courage umbrella association. Based on previous deliberations within the group, a strategy meeting for the future of the group was determined as the right approach and thus formed the focus of the latter part of the workshop. During the meeting, members confirmed their commitment to further formalize the structure of the groups in order to officially register as an association at the local government level. Toward this end, a constitution was needed for the Men of Courage umbrella group. Following the workshop discussion, we thus began to jointly develop a constitution, which I together with representatives of the group and colleagues at RLP continued working on after the workshop. Providing this space for the group thereby constituted an aspect of actively involving research participants in the process and was part of my objective to “return to the community something of real value, in forms determined by participants themselves” (Pittaway, Bartolomei, and Hugman 2010: 234).

Overall, participants regularly stated that the workshops were empowering and emancipatory. “I am glad you are giving us a chance for telling the truth and we shall use the information accordingly,” one survivor proclaimed. Another survivor attested that this “research is also justice, because the truth will come out during research.” In relation to such viewpoints and expectations specifically but also during the research more generally, I attempted to manage my informants’ expectations about the actual expected outcome of the study. To this end, I continually emphasized that the purpose of the research was for an academic study, and that I could not promise that any of this would ensure that “the truth will come out” or that survivors would immediately benefit from this.

Throughout my period in the field, I also constantly listened, observed, and learned, and thus engaged in the ethnographic method of “participant reflection.” While most ethnographic research refers to this method as “participant observation,” I am instead inspired by Swedish anthropologist Finnström (2003), who describes ethnographers’ predominant data collection techniques as participant “reflection” rather than “observation.” In his groundbreaking study on the conflict in northern Uganda, Finnström (2008) explains that “we do the best to participate in the works, questions, joys and sorrows of our informants’ everyday life. Then we take a few steps back, to be able to *reflect* upon what we have learnt and

experienced, again to step forward to participate. This we do daily in the fieldwork encounter” (29, emphasis added).

This process of participating, listening, and learning and then taking a few steps back to *reflect* upon the newly learned insights adequately reflects my own approach of conducting empirical research in northern Uganda, thus leading me to adapt and borrow Finnström’s (2003) consideration of participant reflection.

In the field, and during the data collection period, simply engaging with non-work-related activities, or taking on another task, for instance with RLP, helped me to maintain a certain distance for reflection on the stories I heard during the interviews and workshops. In addition to these more structured methods of gathering information, countless more informal and often unexpected conversations with a range of individuals—often initiated by stopping at the side of the road and taking notes (Finnström 2008)—proved to be equally important and relevant, at times even more so.

ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

Guided by feminist research methods in the social sciences, throughout this book I use direct quotations as much as possible and when appropriate, to “enable the reader to ‘hear’ what the researcher heard” (Reinharz and Davidman 1992: 39) and to avoid the all-too-common problem of speaking for others—of depriving them of the opportunity to speak in their own words, on their own terms. Important feminist critique, including by Linda Alcoff, has long argued that “speaking for others is arrogant, vain, unethical and politically illegitimate” (1991: 6), and so I seek to let survivors speak for themselves by (re)citing their views and words. In doing so, I concur with Boesten (2014) that “in order to understand the gendered nature of war, we need to listen to the complex experiences of women [and men] beyond any prewritten assumptions and scripts” (112).

Although I draw on the experiences of male survivors and at times include their testimonies of violence and abuse, as illustrated by the case study narrative that opened this Introduction, I am nevertheless also mindful of not engaging in what others have termed a “pornography of violence” (Daniel 1996). I therefore do not describe in detail the violent sexual acts perpetrated against male survivors as at times narrated to me by research participants themselves, but rather focus on their phenomenological lived realities of gendered harms and the ways in which they come to terms with their experiences in the contemporary post-conflict context.

Furthermore, by homing in on the experiences of male sexual violence survivors, under no circumstances do I mean to divert attention from and resources for female sexual violence survivors, who across time and space remain disproportionately affected by such violence. I also do not mean to hierarchically classify wartime male rape in comparison to sexual violence against women, or other

conflict-related harms experienced by women and men alike. As poignantly stated by Audre Lorde, “There is no hierarchy of oppressions” (1983: 9).

*“When a mushroom grows, it no longer fears the sun”—A Note on
Names and Anonymity*

In the interest of anonymity and confidentiality, and particularly in the interest of survivors, no respondents’ personal identities and locations are revealed. An exception to this strict preservation of anonymity is the in-depth case study of Okwera that opened this chapter and that will follow us throughout this book. Okwera’s story, including his full name, location, and experience, has previously been published as a written narrative (RLP 2014) and is included in RLP’s video documentaries on sexual violence against men and boys. Okwera himself explicitly stated to me, as well as to many of my RLP colleagues, that “when a mushroom has grown, it no longer fears the sun,” to confirm that he wanted his identity revealed and his story publicly known. Finnström similarly utilizes the Acholi proverb “The growing millet does not fear the sun” (*bel ka otwi pe lworo ceng*) (2003: 15) in relation to some of his informants insisting on having their full names and identities mentioned throughout his ethnography, “which they claimed gave authenticity to the stories” (ibid.). Anthropologist van der Geest (2003) reflects upon his experience of conducting ethnographic research when he argues that more often than not, informants want to be remembered for what they say and how they contributed to the study. To this end, I follow Okwera’s request, as I feel that disrespecting his wish and anonymizing his narrative would in turn be the unethical thing to do.

Chapter Organization

Following this introduction, the following chapter turns to offer a global perspective about the occurrence, dynamics, and scope of conflict-related sexual violence against men across time and space. Chapter 2 systematically reviews the growing literature on wartime sexual violence against men, thereby situating the book in existing scholarship and in relation to what is already known and what remains to be known about the phenomenon under scrutiny here. The examination in chapter 2 then includes an overview of existing evidence regarding the scope, frequency, and prevalence of conflict-related sexual violence against men across and within contemporary armed conflicts. The chapter likewise includes a systematic outline of dominant explanatory frameworks regarding the causes of wartime sexual violence, framed within feminist theorizing and insights about the gendered dynamics of war and violence more broadly.

Turning to the locally specific dynamics in northern Uganda, chapter 3 then situates crimes of sexual violence against men within the context of the more than two-decades-long war between the Ugandan government and the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) rebel group. While much has been written about the northern Ugandan conflict, government-perpetrated human rights abuses, and in particular

crimes of male rape, are only poorly documented and remain almost entirely absent from any scholarly analysis of the conflict. Painting a detailed picture of the dynamics surrounding conflict-related male rape in Acholiland, I evidence that these crimes were geographically widespread and perpetrated across vast areas of the conflict-ridden north, leading the local population to invent a new vocabulary to describe these crimes as *tek-gungu*, which translates as “to bend over” (*gungu*) “hard” or “forcefully” (*tek*), or as “the way that is hard to bend.” Perpetrated by government forces of the National Resistance Army (NRA) under the command of incumbent President Museveni and embedded in a protracted web of postcolonial historical developments and intersecting conflict dynamics, these crimes formed an integral component of wider systematic and strategic warfare operations against the civilian population, centered around retaliation, punishment, and terrorization.

Building on this contextualization, chapter 4 then specifically scrutinizes male survivors’ lived realities of gendered vulnerabilities and harms. It specifically analyzes the impact of sexual violence on male survivors’ masculinities. Despite the increasing realization and/or assumption that sexual violence against men compromises male survivors’ masculine identities, how exactly such perceived processes of gender subordination and the compromising of masculinities unfold, and what they entail, are only poorly understood. To understand the impact of war and violence on masculinities, a prior conceptual understanding of locally contingent gender constructions and identities is needed in the first place. This chapter therefore begins with conceptual reflections and an empirically grounded examination of Acholi gender identities and relations. Building on these theoretical and contextual premises, I then analyze how sexual violence impacts male survivors’ identities in myriad ways. I show how penetrative anal rape subordinates male survivors along gender hierarchies, and how the effects of such violence render male survivors unable to protect, provide, and procreate, all of which signify survivors’ inability to live up to socially constructed expectations of masculinities.

In response to the impact of wartime rape, and in the absence of formalized support avenues, numerous male survivors in northern Uganda began forming survivors’ support groups. These groups constitute a poignant way in which survivors exercise agency in order to engage with their harmful experiences, which constitutes the focus of chapter 5. To commence this examination, I review dominant framings of wartime sexual violence against men, which largely fall into a tendency to represent male survivors as ever-vulnerable victims without a voice and without any agency. Although agency is usually attributed as a masculine trait, men who were sexually violated and are perceived to have been compromised in their gender identities are likewise seen as having been deprived of their agency. To remedy this, I take inspiration from emerging research within critical feminist IR, which in recent years not only has begun to draw out the manifold ways in which women and girls in situations of armed conflict are passively subjected to violence,

but which also considers women's active roles and positions in war zones, ranging from political agents to combatants. My analysis thereby demonstrates that within the context of support groups, survivors exercise agency in numerous ways, including by repairing impacted gender identities, rebuilding social relations, and obtaining recognition of their harmed but largely neglected experiences.

Despite engaging with their harms on their own terms in the context of support groups, however, male survivors in northern Uganda also articulate diverse exogenous justice-related needs. While recent attention has been gathered to remedy sexual violence against women, the growing literature on transitional justice has thus far turned a blind eye to redress for male survivors of gender-based violence. Chapter 6 therefore explores how male survivors conceptualize justice and what their respective remedy and redress priorities are. This chapter discusses gendered political, societal, and cultural barriers male survivors face in accessing the secular justice sector and standardized transitional justice processes in northern Uganda but also globally. Drawing on survivors' viewpoints and priorities, the analysis reveals the importance of broader recognition and of government acknowledgment of male survivors' harms and experiences.

Chapter 7 concludes the book by summarizing its main findings and providing an overview of key arguments. The chapter specifically lays out a survivor-centric approach of responding to sexual violence against men and of engaging with male survivors, both in terms of policy and scholarship, built from the findings and insights offered in the preceding chapters.