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Torture and sexual violence in war and conflict: The unmaking and remaking of subjects of violence

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Abstract

Despite the wide repository of knowledge about conflict-related sexual violence that now exists, there remains a lack of understanding about how victims/survivors of such violence themselves make sense of and frame their experiences in conversation with global and local discourses and with the categorisations that underpin support programmes. Such sense-making is important not only because the ways in which violence is categorised shape a victim/survivor's ability to access particular forms of recognition and support, but also because it is central in how shattered selves and worlds are remade in the aftermath of violence. Drawing on individual and group interviews conducted with refugees living in Kampala, Uganda, this article charts how framings of 'torture' and 'sexual violence' become meaningful in participants' accounts in the (re)formation of themselves as subjects after violent victimisation. We trace how participants navigate the heteronormative societal and legal norms that shape their subjectivity and the effects of the violence they experienced through the deeply gendered and political work that these terms do in their narratives. Our analysis thus highlights and reminds us to pay attention to the political stakes involved in fluid processes of categorising injury.

Keywords: Torture; Conflict-related Sexual Violence; Sexual Torture; Gender; Subjectivity

Introduction

Over the past three decades scholars of global politics have come to know a lot about conflict-related sexual violence. It has been considered from a myriad of perspectives and come to be ranked high in the global security architecture, as well as in media, NGO, and national policy agendas. Research has focused on, among other things, victim/survivor testimonies, mapping instances of wartime rape, the rationale(s) behind wartime rape, the different patterns of violence that emerge in different contexts, perpetrator motives, and the effects of sexual violence on victims/survivors, societies, and peacebuilding efforts.[1] Of particular interest to us here, scholars

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[1]See, among many others, Dara Kay Cohen, *Rape During Civil War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016); Maria Eriksson Baaz and Maria Stern, 'Why do soldiers rape? Masculinity, violence, and sexuality in the Armed Forces in the Congo (DRC)', *International Studies Quarterly*, 53:2 (2009), pp. 495–518; Veena Das, *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); Sara E. Davies and Jacqui True, 'Reframing conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence: Bringing gender analysis back in', *Security Dialogue*, 46:6 (2015), pp. 495–512; Megan Mackenzie, 'Securitizing sex?: Towards a theory of the utility of wartime sexual violence', *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 12:2 (2010), pp. 202–21; Sara Meger, *Rape Loot Pillage: The Political Economy of Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict*, Oxford Studies in Gender and International Relations (Oxford: Oxford University

have also persistently and increasingly identified an overlap between the categories of 'sexual violence' and 'torture': some arguing that violence understood as sexual can constitute torture under particular circumstances,[2] or that because of its gravity and political nature, *all* sexual violence should be described as torture.[3] Others argue that the absorbing of sexual violence perpetrated against men, specifically, into the category of torture does a disservice to its victims/survivors, as it obscures the gendered and sexualised nature of the harms endured.[4]

There is, of course, much more to learn. When reviewing the literature, we are struck by a dearth of work that explores how victims/survivors of wartime sexual violence themselves make sense of and frame their experiences, despite the considerable work in both policy and academic fields that recounts the destructive effects of violence on both individuals and communities. We also note the relative facility (despite the massive conceptual and ontological ambiguities involved) with which labels such as 'victim/survivor of torture' or 'victim/survivor of sexual violence' are slapped upon persons who have been through experiences that invite such descriptors.[5] It strikes us as paramount that we (re)turn our attention to examining the fluid sense-making and framing processes enacted by survivors themselves – recognising, of course, that these are informed by and informative of global and local discourses.[6] Asking such questions, of course, evokes a host of methodological and ethical questions about the possibility and politics of any attempt to 'give voice' to others, or to understand their voices through the limited registers available, no matter how well-intentioned or sensitive to power relations one may be.[7] Which considerations do people bring into play in deciding how to describe themselves? What difference might how people name the harms that befall them make to the experience and the effects of violence; to how they make sense of their suffering;[8] and understand who they become through the violences to which they were subjected?[9]

Press, 2016); Nayanika Mookherjee, *The Spectral Wound: Sexual Violence, Public Memories, and the Bangladesh War of 1971* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015); Philipp Schulz, 'Displacement from gendered personhood: Sexual violence and masculinities in northern Uganda', *International Affairs*, 94:5 (2018), pp. 1101–19; Elisabeth Jean Wood, 'Armed groups and sexual violence: When is wartime rape rare?', *Politics & Society*, 37:1 (2009), pp. 131–61; Marysia Zalewski et al. (eds), *Sexual Violence Against Men in Global Politics*, Interventions (London: Routledge, 2018).

[2] Inger Agger, 'Sexual torture of political prisoners: an overview', *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, 2:3 (1989), p. 311; G. Daugaard et al., 'Sequelae to genital trauma in torture victims', *Archives of Andrology*, 10:3 (1983), pp. 245–8; Alice Edwards, *Violence Against Women Under International Human Rights Law* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 224–6; Sharif Mowlabocus, 'Rectal feeding is rape – but don't expect the CIA to admit it', *The Conversation* (2014), available at: {http://theconversation.com/rectal-feeding-is-rape-but-dont-expect-the-cia-to-admit-it-35437}; Hannah Pearce, 'An examination of the international understanding of political rape and the significance of labelling it torture', *International Journal of Refugee Law*, 14:4 (2003), p. 540.

[3] Charlotte Bunch, 'Women's rights as human rights: Toward a re-vision of human rights', *Human Rights Quarterly*, 12:4 (1990), pp. 490–1. See also Catharine A. MacKinnon, *Are Women Human? And Other International Dialogues* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006).

[4] Thomas Charman, 'Sexual violence or torture? The framing of sexual violence against men in armed conflict in Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch reports', in Zalewski et al. (eds), *Sexual Violence Against Men in Global Politics*, pp. 198–210; Sandesh Sivakumaran, 'Sexual violence against men in armed conflict', *European Journal of International Law*, 18:2 (2007), pp. 253–76; Heleen Touquet, 'Unsilenced: Male Victims of Conflict-related Sexual Violence in Sri Lanka' (International Truth and Justice Project, 2018).

[5] See, for example, Mookherjee, *The Spectral Wound*; Inger Skjelsbæk, *The Political Psychology of War Rape: Studies from Bosnia and Herzegovina* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2012).

[6] Veena Das and Arthur Kleinman, 'Introduction', in Veena Das et al. (eds), *Violence and Subjectivity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), p. 1.

[7] Brooke A. Ackerly, Maria Stern, and Jacqui True (eds), *Feminist Methodologies for International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Chandra Talpade Mohanty, 'Under Western eyes: Feminist scholarship and colonial discourses', in Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ann Russo, and Lourdes Torres (eds), *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), pp. 51–80.

[8] Veena Das, 'Violence, gender, and subjectivity', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 37 (2008), pp. 283–99.

[9] Maria Stern, *Naming Security - Constructing Identity: 'Mayan Women' in Guatemala on the Eve of 'Peace'* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005).

Taking these expansive questions as our point of departure, this article homes in on one aspect of sense-making among refugees living in Uganda: namely, how framings of 'torture' and 'sexual violence' become meaningful in participants' accounts in the (re)formation of themselves as subjects. Why focus on these two forms of violence in particular? In addition to the politically charged debates in the literature about the relationship between sexual violence and torture (noted above and explored below, and in more depth elsewhere),[10] an overlap between these categories emerged strongly from our fieldwork interviews. As we shall see, in participants' accounts, the terms 'sexual violence' and 'torture' slip and slide across one another, at times equivalent, at others distinct, performing discursive, political, ethical, cultural, and deeply gendered work. In short, some participants embraced the label 'sexual violence' in framing their experiences and seeking redress, explaining that, in so doing, they named the particular gendered and sexualised harms they endured, and thus also constructed a frame for reconstituting themselves as surviving subjects. For many of the women, understanding this violence as collective and generalised was important in this regard. For many of the men, the individualised nature and specificity of this violence both 'undid' and 'remade' them. Framing their experiences under the marker of 'torture', on the other hand, allowed other participants (both men and women) to avoid the stigmatisation of sexual violence, establish the legitimacy of what they had been through, and draw attention to multiple, systemic violations of their rights. That is, through imbuing sexual violence and torture with meaning in particular ways, the narrators navigate gendered and heteronormative societal and legal norms[11] that shape their subjectivity and the effects of the violence they experienced. In the process, the participants make sense of the ways that the violence 'undid' them and seek to 'remake' their worlds and themselves as subjects.[12]

We pause here to underscore that ours is not an exercise in the exploration of semantics, nor do we wish to police meanings of violence.[13] Rather, by paying attention to the gendered work that the terms 'sexual violence' and 'torture' do in the framing of violence and in the un/remaking of selves and lives, we glimpse how the language that is used to make sense of harm informs and is informed by available 'grid[s] of intelligibility'.[14] Why is this important? First, because processes of meaning-making in relation to acts of violence are interlinked with material conditions in the lives of victims/survivors (and perpetrators).[15] The categorisation of particular harmful acts as torture and/or as sexual violence (or as neither) shapes whether and how victims can access assistance including humanitarian support, refugee and resettlement status, healthcare, and legal redress through international criminal prosecution and Transitional Justice processes.[16] As such, while we focus on participants' accounts, we read them in light of the globalised security architecture, which includes dominant understandings of sexual violence, torture and warring, the particular context of violence and precarity in which participants live, and the legal and humanitarian framings that informed the support services they accessed. We also read them in relation to the gendered power relations and heteronormative imaginaries that constitute the conditions of possibility for the subjects of such violence, as well as for its effects. Furthermore, translations of embodied experiences of violence[17] into grids of intelligibility are emotionally and politically invested processes that allow (some) sense to be made of harm. That is, while the

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[10]Harriet Gray and Maria Stern, 'Risky dis/entanglements: Torture and sexual violence in conflict', *European Journal of International Relations* (2019).

[11]Judith Butler, 'Critically queer', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 1:1 (1993), pp. 17–32.

[12]Veena Das, 'The act of witnessing: Violence, poisonous knowledge, and subjectivity', in Das et al. (eds), *Violence and Subjectivity*, pp. 205–25; Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1985).

[13]Das, 'Violence, gender, and subjectivity'.

[14]Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Vol. I* (New York: Random House Inc., 1978), p. 93.

[15]See Das, 'Violence, gender, and subjectivity'.

[16]Olivera Simic, *Silenced Victims of Wartime Sexual Violence* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2018).

[17]Scarry, *The Body in Pain*.

immediate experience of violence often eludes interpretation, especially when such violence is traumatic, meaning-making occurs through language, among other practices.[18] As such, exploring processes of meaning-making in relation to violence among people who have been subjected to it is crucial in understanding how violence in general – and the framing of that violence – is both performative and performed, productive and produced, shaped and enabled by broader (global as well as local) social, political, and cultural contexts.

The article proceeds as follows. First, we offer a brief discussion of our methods. Next, we explore the theoretical framing that underpins our analysis. Violence, we explain, 'unmakes the worlds' and selves of those who are exposed to it. As such, paying attention to the narratives of victims/survivors can tell us something about how those worlds and selves are performatively 'remade'.[19] Next, we provide a brief overview of the global legal and policy framings of sexual violence and torture, which are integral for understanding the narrators' accounts, and note the slipperiness that characterises both legal definitions and those offered therein. Fourth, we explore the work that 'sexual violence' and '(sexual) torture' do in the narratives of our participants, noting how they (re)create themselves as subjects through their navigation of these terms in relation to their experiences of violence. We then conclude with a reflection on the wider implications of our reading.

Scene setting and sense-making: Methodological reflections

This article draws on group and individual interviews carried out in 2016 with refugees living in Kampala, Uganda. Most participants had fled conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), with smaller numbers coming from Rwanda and Burundi, and all were clients of the Refugee Law Project (RLP), through which they were recruited. RLP is a community outreach project of the School of Law at Makerere University. Established in 1999 to provide legal aid to refugees and asylum seekers, today RLP also provides psycho-social support including counselling, English language lessons, and help with access to medical care, housing, and education.[20] Clients at RLP in Kampala are supported in organising themselves into peer support groups around particular experiences including: Men of Hope, a group of male victims/survivors of sexual violence; Ameruv, a group of women who have children born from rape; Living with Hope, for people living with HIV; and the Association of Torture Survivors, made up of those who identify as victims/survivors of torture. This article draws mostly on eight group interviews, four with fifteen participants and four with four to five participants, which were formed from members of these peer support groups. In addition, 14 individual interviews were also conducted with members of these groups. The individual and group interviews were conducted by one or more of the authors,[21] working together with RLP staff. Interviews were carried out in multiple languages, with participants and researchers speaking a mixture of Lingala, Swahili, Kinyarwanda, Kirundi, English, and French. This process was supported by an interpreter, who translated the conversation as we went along to ensure that everyone was understood. The group and individual interviews addressed how and why the participants identified themselves as victims/survivors of one category of harm in relation to others; how they understood these categories and the benefits/stigma attached to them; and how they made sense of their experiences. In reproducing participants' statements here, we have made some small language edits for clarity and ease of reading. In the interests of anonymity, we do not routinely attribute participants' statements to the group to which they belonged, unless it is specifically relevant to the statement in question.

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[18] See Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); Jenny Edkins, *Trauma and the Memory of Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

[19] Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, p. 142. See also Das, *Life and Words*.

[20] 'Home – Refugee Law Project, School of Law – Makerere University' (2019), available at: {https://www.refugeelawproject.org}

[21] Maria Eriksson Baaz was also part of the team that designed and conducted these interviews.

It is worth noting that we do not present our fieldwork as a representative case study, intended to illustrate generalisable conclusions about the relationship between 'torture' and 'sexual violence' as if they were fixable categories, or as if the work that they do is necessarily translatable across contexts. Rather, we offer an in-depth exploration of the work they do in this particular site. This allows us to illustrate and to explore the politics of these terms, as well as the ways in which they are invested by victims/survivors, in a more nuanced and fluid way than would otherwise be possible.

Accessing victims/survivors of violence through services from which they have already sought and received support offers the best chance of ensuring that they feel safe to, and are comfortable with, sharing their experiences. Additionally, while the interviews were conducted for research, any additional support needs that arose during an interview could be communicated to staff able to offer appropriate support.[22] The ready-made institutional framing of RLP, however, also surely shaped the accounts that participants relayed.[23] Participants' experiences at RLP, their status as refugees, and for many, their intent to apply or experience of applying for third-country resettlement meant that they had become, to a greater or lesser degree, immersed in the hegemonic international narratives on conflict violence, as well as the language of asylum and resettlement. In any setting, the terms to which one has access shape the ways in which an experience is made sense of.[24] As such, the degree of familiarity that individual participants had with dominant international discourses (for example, rape functions 'as a weapon of war'), and with the categories of harm and victimhood that underpin asylum and refugee processes, is likely to shape the terms through which they narrate their experiences of violence.[25] Much could be said about the politicised logics and determinates of the categorisations that underpin asylum and resettlement processes, not least about the complex and fluid (lack of) recognition and positioning of gendered and/or 'private' harms within these systems.[26] The important point for our discussions here is that in order to access services, including but not limited to asylum and resettlement processes, and to be deemed credible by support workers and decision-makers, victims/survivors must be able to frame their experiences of harm in ways that accord with the prescribed categories, using the right language, and in the expected settings. The stakes of framing of one's experiences of harm, then, are high – they shape a victim/survivor's chances of being able to access services and processes, which could change their lives. That is, the 'humanitarian arena' in which RLP operates surely shapes the terms of participants' efforts to heal and, potentially, seek redress.

This is emphatically *not* to suggest that there is a falsehood to participants' narratives engendered by their engagement with these categories;[27] but rather that the existing categories of harm

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[22]Anna E. Jaffe et al., 'Does it hurt to ask? A meta-analysis of participant reactions to trauma research', *Clinical Psychology Review*, 40 (2015), pp. 40–56.

[23]See Dorothea Hilhorst and Bram J. Jansen, 'Humanitarian space as arena: a perspective on the everyday politics of aid', *Development and Change*, 41:6 (2010), pp. 1117–39.

[24]Susan J. Brison, *Aftermath: Violence and the Remaking of a Self* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), pp. 31–3. See also Lydia Cole, 'The Subject of Wartime Sexual Violence: Post-Conflict Recognition in Bosnia and Herzegovina' (PhD thesis, Aberystwyth University, 2017); Maria Eriksson Baaz, Harriet Gray, and Maria Stern, 'What can we/do we want to know? Reflections from researching SGBV in military settings', *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society*, 25:4 (2018), pp. 521–44; Nicki Kindersley, 'Southern Sudanese narratives of displacement, and the ambiguity of "voice"', *History in Africa*, 42 (2015), pp. 203–37.

[25]See Simic, *Silenced Victims of Wartime Sexual Violence*; Cole, 'The Subject of Wartime Sexual Violence'; Eriksson Baaz, Gray, and Stern, 'What can we/do we want to know?'; Kindersley, 'Southern Sudanese narratives of displacement'.

[26]See Hilhorst and Jansen, 'Humanitarian space as arena'; Amy Shuman and Carol Bohmer, 'Gender and cultural silences in the political asylum process', *Sexualities*, 17:8 (2014); Didier Fassin, 'The precarious truth of asylum', *Public Culture*, 25:1 (2013); Heaven Crawley, 'Gender, persecution and the concept of politics in the asylum determination process', *Forced Migration Review*, 9 (2000), pp. 17–20; Jessica Mayo, 'Court-mandated story time: the victim narrative in U.S. asylum law', *Washington University Law Review*, 89:6 (2012), pp. 1485–522.

[27]On the question of the meaning of 'truth' in relation to asylum claims, see Fassin, 'The precarious truth of asylum'.

become part of the landscape through which survivors make sense of, and narrate, their experiences of violence. Indeed, we chose to conduct group interviews within support groups already established under the auspices of RLP precisely *because* we were interested in how people chose and reflected upon the labels under which they sought support, both individually and collectively. However, clearly distinguishing and mapping these influences remains a difficult, if not impossible task. Noting the limitations of our grasp of the different grids of intelligibility that inform the knowledge produced, however, reminds us that meaning-making reflects many intersecting webs of power relations.

Before we turn to the participants' accounts, we first engage in a more generalised discussion of the destructive and productive power of violence – in particular torture and sexual violence – in order to build a frame through which we can examine (what we read as) the work that these categories do in their testimonies.

The 'unmaking' and 'making' of subjects and worlds

Inspired by Elaine Scarry's work, *The Body in Pain*, scholars have identified both torture and sexual violence as forms of harm which, however temporarily, act to '[destroy] a person's self and world'.[28] At the same time, making sense of such violence, and of one's self in relation to it, also becomes a process of *remaking*, or *reforming* oneself as a subject. Indeed, the victim/survivors we talked to all focused (albeit in different ways) on the destruction and construction of subjectivity, personhood, and worlds. Violence, as a governing technique[29] as well as event and underlying structure of everyday life,[30] produces particular subject positions (for example, 'perpetrator', 'victim/survivor', 'bystander'), even as it also simultaneously dismantles subject positions (for example, 'real man', 'obedient, good soldier', or 'good, proper woman'). Our interest lies primarily in the social and political aspects of 'unmaking' and 'making' of subjectivity instead of the psychological or philosophical ones, although these are surely intertwined.[31]

Those who are subjected to violence can feel and be treated as if their cohesive personhood, or their worth as (social and political) human beings, is destroyed. They become 'undone' – stripped of humanity, of their sense of being in the household, the community, and, ultimately, the world. No matter how fluid and always becoming one's subjectivity may be,[32] it *feels* cohesive; in Louise du Toit's words, while the lived body is inevitably relational and porous, the illusion of the unified embodied self is 'crucial for [the] project of being and becoming a coherent subject'.[33] Several scholars have discussed the impact of torture and sexual violence upon this illusion of stable subjectivity in similar terms, and a number have drawn an explicit connection between the 'world unmaking' effects of these forms of harm.[34]

A sense that one has been unravelled or obliterated by violence takes different forms. For instance, in many accounts of torture, the destruction of the subject is framed as circulating

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[28]Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, p. 35.

[29]Following Walters (William Walters, *Governmentality: Critical Encounters* (London: Routledge, 2012)), we understand governing technologies as the overarching rationales or logics at play in the governing of people. Governing techniques refer to the practices that operationalise these, thus producing certain subjects through acting both *on* them and *within* them ('subjectification').

[30]Das et al. (eds), *Violence and Subjectivity*.

[31]See Skjelsbæk, *The Political Psychology of War Rape*.

[32]Jenny Edkins, Nalini Persram, and Véronique Pin-Fat (eds), *Sovereignty and Subjectivity* (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers).

[33]Louise du Toit, *A Philosophical Investigation of Rape: The Making and Unmaking of the Feminine Self*, Routledge Research in Gender and Society (New York: Routledge, 2009), p. 55.

[34]Agger, 'Sexual torture of political prisoners'; Ruth Seifert, 'The Second Front: the logic of sexual violence in wars', *Women's Studies International Forum*, 19:1–2 (1996), p. 40; David Sussman, 'What's wrong with torture?', *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 33:1 (2005); du Toit, *A Philosophical Investigation of Rape*.

primarily around ideas of betrayal; whether formulated through the 'self-betrayal' of confession,[35] or through an experience of pain that makes a victim feel that their own body has somehow turned against them.[36] In such analyses, torture is understood to make its victims feel complicit in their horrific experiences and, therefore, strikes at their (sense of) personhood, agency, and autonomy, 'aim[ing] to strip away from its victim all the qualities of human dignity that liberalism prizes'.[37] Similarly, Ann J. Cahill argues that the embodied subject is one that comes into being through intersubjective relations with other embodied subjects and, therefore, that the harm of rape lies in the ways in which it is 'a threat to the possibility of the bodily integrity of women, and therefore … a threat to her status as a person', which 'destroys (if only temporarily) the intersubjective, embodied agency and therefore personhood of a woman'.[38]

Taking a somewhat different approach, others have charted how sexual violence can engender a 'displacement from gendered personhood',[39] which leaves victims/survivors alienated from their sense of self and their social roles.[40] Female victims/survivors of sexual violence, for instance, may experience a (perceived) loss of honour and difficulties in (re)marrying and maintaining their social status and position, particularly when such violence results in pregnancy.[41] Similarly, scholars have argued that in heteropatriarchal social contexts, being the victim of sexual violence, in particular of rape, 'is considered to render the male survivor feminine, (at least momentarily) stripping him of his manhood and thereby subordinating him'.[42] As Philipp Schulz argues, this displacement from gendered personhood is 'a layered and compounded process, rather than a singular event', in which the effects of the violent event itself are 'further compounded over time through myriad gendered and sexual harms' which, in the case of male victims/survivors for example, may render them 'unable to protect, provide and procreate, and thereby challenge their masculine selves and roles on various levels'.[43] The 'unmaking' experienced by victims/survivors of torture and sexual violence, then, is dynamic and layered; simultaneously both embodied and social and, in many cases, experienced in interlinked but distinct ways by differentially gendered subjects.

Yet, such 'unmaking' occurs in tandem with a 'remaking' of the self and the world in which the self inhabits.[44] That is, people subjected to violence also exercise agency and (re)form

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[35]Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, p. 47.

[36]Sussman, 'What's wrong with torture?', pp. 21, 23; see also Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, pp. 48. 30.

[37]David Luban, 'Liberalism, torture, and the ticking bomb', in Steven P. Lee (ed.), *Intervention, Terrorism, and Torture: Contemporary Challenges to Just War Theory* (Springer Netherlands, 2007), pp. 250–1.

[38]Ann J. Cahill, *Rethinking Rape* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), pp. 14, 10, 13. See also du Toit, *A Philosophical Investigation of Rape*; Victoria Grace, 'Gendered violence and sacrificial logics: Psychoanalytic reflections', in Renée J. Heberle and Victoria Grace (eds), *Theorizing Sexual Violence* (New York London: Routledge, 2009).

[39]Schulz, 'Displacement from gendered personhood'.

[40]Skjelsbæk, *The Political Psychology of War Rape*.

[41]See Mackenzie, 'Securitizing sex?', pp. 39–44; Schulz, 'Displacement from gendered personhood', p. 1107; Nayanika Mookherjee, '"Remembering to forget": Public secrecy and memory of sexual violence in the Bangladesh war of 1971', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 12:2 (2006), pp. 433–50; Marie Claire Omanyondo Ohambe, Jean Berckmans Bahananga Muhigwa, and Barnabé Mulyumba Wa Mamba, 'Women's Bodies as a Battleground: Sexual Violence Against Women and Girls During the War in the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Kivu (1996–2003)', International Alert (Réseau des Femmes pour la Défense des Droits et la Paix ET Réseau des Femmes pour un Développement Associatif, 2005), pp. 39–44.

[42]Schulz, 'Displacement from gendered personhood', p. 1111. See also Jessica Auchter, 'Forced male circumcision: Gender-based violence in Kenya', *International Affairs*, 93:6 (2017); Chris Dolan, 'Victims who are men', in Fionnuala Ní Aoláin, Naomi Cahn, Dina Francesca Haynes, and Nahla Valji (eds), *The Oxford Handbook on Gender and Conflict* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), pp. 86–105; Eria Olowo Onyango, 'Manhood on the Margins: Failing to Be a Man in Post-Conflict Northern Uganda', Working Paper, MICROCON (Brighton: MICROCON, 2012), p. 17; Sandesh Sivakumaran, 'Male/male rape and the "taint" of homosexuality', *Human Rights Quarterly*, 27:4 (2005), pp. 1274–306; Sivakumaran, 'Sexual violence against men in armed conflict', p. 255; chapters in Zalewski et al. (eds), *Sexual Violence Against Men in Global Politics*.

[43]Schulz, 'Displacement from gendered personhood', p. 1118.

[44]Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, pp. 161–326.

themselves.[45] In our reading of their accounts, we pay attention to how participants constitute themselves as subjects. This includes how they invest in, refuse, or reconfigure the subject positions allotted to them (see, for example, victim/survivor of torture/rape/sexual violence; refugee; etc.), and thus how they make a 'claim to politics' as subjects who can become, who can exercise agency.[46] Specifically, we focus on the ways in which victims/survivors narrate their experiences of violence, and conceptualise these as performative acts through which they remake their worlds and themselves as agentic subjects.

In addition, we also pay attention to how the subject is (re)constituted through the routine and everyday enactment of subjecthood[47] as represented in their accounts. In so doing, we follow Veena Das, who has explored how social existence is remade in the aftermath of violence through everyday practices of being in the world. Das suggests that 'the delicate work of self-creation'[48] in the aftermath of communal violence is enacted not through 'some grand project of recovery' but through the performance of 'everyday tasks of surviving – having a roof over your head, being able to send your children to school, being able to do the work of the everyday without constant fear of being attacked'.[49] In this approach, the work of self-creation in the aftermath of violence is centrally and unavoidably *social*: this is not a project undertaken by an autonomous subject as imagined by liberal theory, but rather by a socially embedded and relational subject.

Victims/survivors' sense-making practices appropriate, metabolise, and challenge the subject positions allotted to them in various governing discourses. The discourses on which they draw, and the subjectivities they (re)create, are informed by normative understandings of what a subject is, and what it *should be*.[50] These normative understandings are deeply and heteronormatively gendered. That selfhood is performed in reference to discourses of gender is not, of course, surprising; gender is an integral component of the performative construction of identity. In Judith Butler's words, the 'citation of the gender norm is necessary in order to qualify as a "one", to become viable as a "one", where subject-formation is dependent on the prior operation of legitimating gender norms'.[51] In our discussions of the gendered differences in participants' accounts and of ideas about masculinity and femininity, we draw on a Butlerian understanding of gender identity as performative, constructed through the reiteration of heteronormative conceptualisations of masculinity and femininity.[52]

Before we turn to the work that sexual violence and torture perform in participants' accounts of the destruction and production of the violence that they endured, we pause to reflect on their meaning in both global (legal) discourse and in participants' (retold) experience.

Torture, sexual torture, and sexual violence? Interrogating categories of harm

As we discuss further elsewhere,[53] how the terms 'sexual violence' and 'torture' are filled with meaning in international legal and policy spaces – as well as in victim/survivor's testimonies – is neither fixed nor stable. These are deeply politically infused; they shift and slide across one another in different contexts and different narrations, at times collapsed together, and at others

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[45]Skjelsbæk, *The Political Psychology of War Rape*, p. 35.

[46]Vivienne Jabri, *The Postcolonial Subject: Claiming Politics/Governing Others in Late Modernity*, Interventions (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), p. 107.

[47]Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

[48]Veena Das et al. (eds), *Violence and Subjectivity*, p. 222.

[49]Ibid., p. 216. See also Patricia Lawrence, 'Violence, suffering, Amman: the work of oracles in Sri Lanka's eastern war zone', in Das et al. (eds), *Violence and Subjectivity*, pp. 197–8.

[50]Michel Foucault, *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, ed. Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman, and Patrick H. Hutton (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988).

[51]Butler, 'Critically queer', p. 23.

[52]Ibid., p. 22.

[53]Gray and Stern, 'Risky dis/entanglements'.

held apart. As scholars have noted, the distinction between these categories has in many instances been a gendered one – the category of torture has been developed based on the experiences of men, to the exclusion of violences more commonly faced by women, and vice versa.[54] Even legal distinctions between these categories do not always constitute 'hard lines';[55] rather, they are fluid, contingent, overlapping, and politically infused processes leading to inconclusive and porous categorisations.

The UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, which underpins the international legal and humanitarian frameworks with which participants interact, hinges on three key attributes: torture causes 'severe pain or suffering', it is perpetrated with a specific purpose (for example, to obtain a confession, to punish, to coerce), and it is perpetrated with the involvement of someone 'acting in an official capacity'.[56] Also relevant is the Ugandan national definition of torture, which mirrors the UN definition in requiring severe physical or mental pain or suffering and a particular purpose to the violence, but differs in that it does not require involvement of an 'official' actor.[57] The definition of rape/sexual violence underpinning these frameworks appears in the International Criminal Court's (ICC) Rome Statute and Elements of Crimes Annex. Under Article 7 of the Rome Statute, the following acts can, under particular circumstances, constitute Crimes against Humanity: 'Rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilization, or any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity'.[58] The Elements of Crimes Annex goes further towards specifying the content of some of these acts: rape is defined as (various forms of) penetration of the body of the victim, and sexual violence more broadly as acts 'of a sexual nature', which is/are perpetrated without consent.[59] It is worth noting that the ICC refers to 'sexual- and gender-based' crimes, reflecting a recognition that sexual violence is a *gendered* form of harm (and, moreover, that it is by no means the only form of harm that is gendered), in that it is not just bodily violence, but violence that specifically impacts upon a victim/survivors social status and identity in a context of gendered inequality.[60]

It is important to flag here the considerable lack of clarity as to the *content* of the acts that constitute torture and sexual violence even under these legal definitions. This obscurity can be seen, for instance, in how the definition of torture omits any specification of acts themselves in favour of centring their effects and their circumstances;[61] the deferral of meaning implied by the undefined category of acts 'of a sexual nature'; and the considerable legal room for manoeuvre left by the provision for 'acts of comparable gravity'. Such fluidity is reflected in the inconsistencies, disagreements, and wrangling over the substance and the boundaries of the category of

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[54]Bunch, 'Women's rights as human rights'; Hilary Charlesworth, Christine Chinkin, and Shelley Wright, 'Feminist approaches to international law', *The American Journal of International Law*, 85:4 (1991), pp. 613–45; Rhonda Copelon, 'Gender crimes as war crimes: Integrating crimes against women into international criminal law', *McGill Law Journal*, 46 (2000), p. 234; Edwards, *Violence Against Women Under International Human Rights Law*, pp. 51–71; MacKinnon, *Are Women Human?*, p. 21; Pearce, 'An examination of the international understanding of political rape', p. 537.

[55]Véronique Pin-Fat, *Universality, Ethics and International Relations: A Grammatical Reading* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009).

[56]UN General Assembly, 'Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment' Treaty, Treaty Series (New York: United Nations, 1984).

[57]'Prevention and Prohibition of Torture Act', Uganda (2012), available at: https://ulii.org/ug/legislation/act/2015/3-3.

[58]UN General Assembly, 'Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court' (1998), § 7.

[59]International Criminal Court, 'Elements of Crimes Annex' (2011), pp. 8, 10. While the ICC definition outlines the *act* of rape/sexual violence, this is not the same as defining a *crime*, and such an act may be tried as a war crime, a crime against humanity, an element of genocide, *or as a constituent act of torture*, depending on the circumstances (Edwards, *Violence Against Women Under International Human Rights Law*; Phillip Weiner, 'The evolving jurisprudence of the crime of rape in international law', *Boston College Law Review*, 54:3 (2013), pp. 1207–37.

[60]Valerie Oosterveld, 'The ICC policy paper on sexual and gender-based crimes: a crucial step for international criminal law', *William and Mary Journal of Women and the Law*, 24:3 (2018).

[61]Deborah Blatt, 'Recognizing rape as a method of torture', *New York University Review of Law and Social Change*, 19:4 (1992), pp. 821–66.

'torture', especially, in national and international legal and political spaces,[62] as well as in recent and ongoing attempts to achieve a more explicit definition of sexual violence under international law.[63]

While these categories contain considerable fluidity in and of themselves, there also exists specific fluidity and overlap between them. This fluidity is partly captured through the category 'sexual torture'. In most instances, this term is used to describe acts that fulfil the legal description of both torture and sexual violence: acts that involve severe suffering, are perpetrated in the pursuit of a particular aim, with the involvement of someone acting in an official capacity, and are 'of a sexual nature'.[64] Generally speaking, such acts are framed as a 'method' of torture in that they share a context and purpose with (non-sexual) torture but specifically target parts of the body coded as 'sexual'.[65] Most studies approach such violence as a method, or subset, of the broader category of torture itself.[66] That violence can constitute both sexual violence and torture when it meets these conditions has been recognised by multiple international bodies.[67]

Participants in this study, likewise, described certain acts of violence, in particular violence conducted for a specific purpose and enacted through rape or targeted against sexualised body parts, as constituting both torture and sexual violence:

I was taken, and then they took my penis and started hitting it. They didn't use it to have sex with anything or anybody, but they were just hitting it. They took my private parts and tied them to a block or a stone and hit them; it was a kind of torture, but it's sexual violence as well. (male victim/survivor)

When they came [to the village] and they found that a man is not there, but the rest of the family are the ones present, they would always try to … use the woman or the children for sex, in order to get information from them. You know, they always say maybe the husband is hiding somewhere because they knew that we were coming, so now let's harass these people and see if they will tell us where the husband or young boys are hiding. (female victim/survivor)

Several participants, moreover, argued that sexual torture may be a particularly *effective* method of extracting information from its victims – both because of the physical pain it causes and because of the (gendered) psychological or 'moral' harms it can do to its victims.[68]

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[62]Andrea Birdsall, 'But we don't call it "torture"! Norm contestation during the US "War on Terror"', *International Politics*, 53:2 (2016), p. 181; Fionnuala Ní Aoláin, 'The European Convention on Human Rights and its prohibition on torture', in Sandord Levinson (ed.), *Torture: A Collection* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 213–28; Jeremy Wisnewski, *Understanding Torture* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), pp. 200–26.

[63]Women's Initiatives for Gender Justice, 'Call It What It Is – Time to Define Sexual Violence' (2019), available at: {https://4genderjustice.org/sexualviolence_campaign}.

[64]Blatt, 'Recognizing rape as a method of torture'; Victoria Canning, 'Unsilencing sexual torture: Responses to refugees and asylum seekers in Denmark', *British Journal of Criminology*, 56:3 (2016), p. 443; Pauline Oosterhoff, Prisca Zwanikken, and Evert Ketting, 'Sexual torture of men in Croatia and other conflict situations: An open secret', *Reproductive Health Matters*, 12:23 (2004), p. 71.

[65]For a discussion of fluidity in the sexualisation of body parts, see Cahill, *Rethinking Rape*, pp. 139–40.

[66]See, for example, Agger, 'Sexual torture of political prisoners', p. 311; Daugaard et al., 'Sequelae to genital trauma in torture victims'; Mowlabocus, 'Rectal feeding is rape'; Pearce, An examination of the international understanding of political rape', p. 540.

[67]Edwards, *Violence Against Women Under International Human Rights Law*, pp. 224–6.

[68]Agger, 'Sexual torture of political prisoners'; Evelyn Mary Aswad, 'Torture by means of rape', *Georgetown Law Journal*, 84 (1996), pp. 1913–43; Pearce, 'An examination of the international understanding of political rape', p. 540.

> Whenever they start sexually abusing you, it is for the purpose of getting some information … And it really is very hard. You won't take long before you will say something. (male victim/survivor)

> So they know that whenever they do that [rape you], you will be in serious pain, and you will not keep quiet; you will tell them … they apply it as a torture, to get out of you information. (male victim/survivor)

In these narratives, particular forms of sexual violence are subsumed as a subset of the broader category of torture and, as such, cannot be disentangled from it.

Other participants argued that *all* forms of sexual violence should rightly be considered torture because of the severity of the harm it engenders in its victims. For them, it is nonsensical to attempt to untangle the two. A female participant, for example, described sexual violence as 'falling under' torture, listing acts such as forced fellatio as 'a form of torture'. Several others stated that torture and sexual violence are the same thing; you cannot say someone who has been a victim of sexual violence has not been a victim of torture. Some participants defined torture very broadly as *any* act that happens to somebody without their consent, even including parents' use of threats against their children or the refusal of medical personnel to provide particular forms of treatment. For these participants, sexual violence – as an act which, by definition, occurs without consent – is an obvious part of the broader category of torture. As one female participant put it, 'if torture were a tree, then sexual violence would be one of its branches'.

For others, even those who did not take such a broad view of torture per se, the interwoven nature of the multiple harms they had experienced made it impossible to separate torture and sexual violence as they had experienced them:

> When we emphasise rape, it doesn't mean that they don't injure people's arms, or legs, or beat them. That happens. And many people have died. Many women have died, others have been beaten, it happens so much … many of these people, these women who have been raped, they were also beaten, they were beaten, they have cut them, they have used sticks, and this is for those who survived. (female victim/survivor)

> I have never heard of sexual violence occurring without beatings or torture also happening. (male victim/survivor)

Reflecting this broad intermeshing of torture and sexual violence, scholars have explored how the distinction between these categories is in part dictated not by the content or effects of the acts themselves, but by the (presumed) gender of their victims/survivors.[69] They have charted how identifying a particular act of violence as torture or as sexual violence can have significant implications for whether that violence is or is not taken seriously within various humanitarian and political spaces. Such feminist scholars have argued that sexual violence, often associated in particular with the victimisation of women, has historically widely been seen as both private and *apolitical* – an effect of private desires and, as such, irrelevant to the study of politics and of the international. In contrast, torture has been more readily recognised as a public, political form of harm and associated with male victims. In many instances, this has meant that violences experienced by men are coded as torture, recognised as public/political, and treated with gravity

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[69]Bunch, 'Women's rights as human rights'; Charlesworth, Chinkin, and Wright, 'Feminist approaches to international law', pp. 613–45; Copelon, 'Gender crimes as war crimes', p. 234; Edwards, *Violence Against Women Under International Human Rights Law*, pp. 51–71; MacKinnon, *Are Women Human?*, p. 21; Pearce, 'An examination of the international understanding of political rape', p. 537. See also various chapters in Zalewski et al. (eds), *Sexual Violence Against Men in Global Politics*.

by the international community and under international law; while violences experienced by women are coded as sexual violence, considered private/apolitical, and excluded from similar levels of recognition.[70] In others, it has meant that the sexual nature of the harms experienced by male victims/survivors of sexual violence is obscured, which may exclude these victims/survivors from access to appropriate services.[71]

Hence, in both legal and academic discourses, as well as for many of the research participants, the terms 'torture' and 'sexual violence', and, in some cases, 'sexual torture', slide across one another. Sexual violence and torture do not emerge from participants' narratives as self-evidently and unproblematically distinct forms of violence but, rather, as interrelated harms that blur into and across one another in multiple ways. Despite this, participants did – often implicitly – draw lines of distinction between these forms of violence in narrating how their experiences were involved in the unmaking and remaking of their selves and worlds.

The destruction and reformation of the subjects of violence

Unmaking and remaking

In narrating their experiences of torture and of sexual violence, participants spoke of how these forms of harm – in different ways – 'unmade' their subjectivities and undermined their place in their families and communities. The statements reflect participants' struggles with their (de)subjectification as victims – a position seen to denote powerlessness, worthlessness, and loss. Both torture and sexual violence emerged from their stories as forms of harm that '[disintegrated] the content of one's world and self',[72] and '[reduced] the victim to a nonperson'.[73]

Several victims/survivors, for example, spoke in fairly broad and abstract terms about lasting harms to their senses of self and of wellbeing. These terms were often similar whether they framed their experiences as torture or as sexual violence. They spoke of 'wounds in my heart' (female victim/survivor); of a 'psychological heaviness' (male victim/survivor), and of ongoing 'fear' (female victim/survivor); of having been 'killed … morally' and robbed of 'courage' (male victim/survivor); of being subjected to something that serves to 'attack your identity and reduce you to nothing' (male victim/survivor). Both torture and sexual violence were described as having lingering effects: the violence was described as something that 'killed my future' (male victim/survivor) and that leaves both physical and mental 'scars' – 'this scar will always remind you of what happened to you. So that's the torture' (male victim/survivor). For victims/survivors such as these, torture means that 'you will not be in the same as you were before … something will be now written in your heart' (male victim/survivor). Similarly, sexual violence results in 'something inside of me which is killing me' (male victim/survivor); 'there is always a wound in your mind, in your body and to me in my soul' (male victim/survivor). Several spoke of having experienced suicidal thoughts. They thus spoke explicitly of being 'undone' by harms they classified as torture and/or sexual violence.

Yet, importantly, participants also 'remade' their selves and their worlds through their statements. That is, their narratives resisted the desubjectification of violent victimisation. Participants performed a self that has worth, in conversation with (heteronormative, gendered) social norms, and in the context of the interview space. The ways in which the participants reproduced themselves as agentic speaking subjects who could demand recognition were indeed many. In some instances, this remaking was explicitly expressed but, more commonly, it emerged through other kinds of speech, in particular their narratives of *de*subjectifiation. In narrating

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[70]Ibid.

[71]Charman, 'Sexual violence or torture?'; Dolan, 'Victims who are men'; Sivakumaran, 'Sexual violence against men in armed conflict'; Touquet, 'Unsilenced'.

[72]Lawrence, 'Violence, suffering, Amman', p. 197.

[73]Cahill, *Rethinking Rape*, p. 192.

their destruction, their *unmaking*, participants performatively (re)made their selves and their worlds. They reconstituted themselves as agentic, speaking subjects from whom a story of being unravelled can emerge, as authors of their stories of suffering, as subjects who can place their pain in a narrative framework. The gendered ways in which they framed their experiences of violence as torture, sexual violence, or both, informed this reconstitution.

On the whole, the participants differently navigated the distinct associations that are attached to torture and sexual violence respectively in their recreations of the appropriately gendered self, often through the evocation of heteronormative ideas. While some participants spoke generally of the 'undoing' of self through the experience of torture and of sexual violence in similar terms, there were nonetheless important ways in which the labels 'torture' and 'sexual violence' did distinctive work in their accounts. These coalesce around questions of how the different categories of harm resonated with their particular experiences and allowed for healing, the differing place of stigma, and claims to legitimacy and recognition.

Sexual violence

Placing their experiences within the frame of sexual violence, as opposed to the frame of torture, enabled participants to speak of the particularly gendered and sexualised ways in which their subjecthood was 'undone' by the violence they had undergone. Several explicitly embraced this marker as a recognition of the specific harms that they endured and therefore as a frame within which to remake themselves and heal.

The stigmatisation of sexual violence (and in particular of rape) was discussed as something that threatened the interlinked constructions of subjecthood and one's gendered place within the community.[74] Many spoke of female victims/survivors of sexual violence as having 'been disgraced' and having lost 'respect' (female victim/survivor); of this as something that 'reduces the value of a woman' (female victim/survivor). Rape emerged as a violence that destroys the subject of 'good /proper woman' and produces that of the 'disgraced woman' in her place.

As noted above, the context in which survivors are located is key in shaping the frames and terms to which they have access and, therefore, through which they make sense of their experiences.[75] The RLP is likely somewhat unique in its groundbreaking provision of support specifically targeted towards male victims/survivors of conflict-related sexual violence, and in the outspoken advocacy it performs on this topic.[76] It is thus likely that their exposure to this advocacy and support has shaped the terms through which male participants, in particular, told their stories, and thus, in Vivienne Jabri's terms,[77] made a 'claim to politics'. Indeed, it is worth noting here that, in contrast to much of the existing scholarship that argues that men's experiences of sexual violence are likely to be hidden under the label of 'torture',[78] many male participants, in particular, deliberately spoke about the violences to which they had been subjected as 'sexual'.

Speaking of their experiences as sexual violence (and not torture) enabled many of the male victims/survivors to frame their victimisation as something that specifically robbed them of their

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[74]Schulz, 'Displacement from gendered personhood'.

[75]Brison, *Aftermath*, pp. 31–3; Cole, 'The Subject of Wartime Sexual Violence'; Eriksson Baaz, Gray, and Stern, 'What can we/do we want to know?'; Kindersley, 'Southern Sudanese narratives of displacement'.

[76]Refugee Law Project, Makerere University.

[77]Jabri, *The Postcolonial Subject*.

[78]Charman, 'Sexual violence or torture?'; Sivakumaran, 'Sexual violence against men in armed conflict'. For discussion of the widespread silencing of sexual violence against men in scholarship, policy work, and the lives of victims/survivors themselves, see, among others, Eric Stener Carlson, 'The hidden prevalence of male sexual assault during war', *British Journal of Criminology*, 46 (2006), pp. 16–25; Heleen Touquet and Ellen Gorris, 'Out of the shadows? The inclusion of men and boys in conceptualisations of wartime sexual violence', *Reproductive Health Matters*, 24:47 (2016), pp. 36–46; Chris Dolan, 'Only a fool: Why men don't disclose conflict-related sexual violence in an age of global media', in Paula Drummond, Lisa Prugle, Maria Stern, and Marysia Zalewski (eds), *Sexual Violence Against Men and Boys in Global Politics* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2018), pp. 167–84.

subject position and social status as men.[79] Several male participants described their experience of rape as having been 'used as a woman', and reported that their experiences had 'reduced' them to the status of women – a statement that reflects patriarchal assumptions that men naturally enjoy a higher social status than women that they stand to lose through sexual violence. Male participants further explained:

> Whenever a man is raped, psychologically, you are done. [This] means you will feel as though you are no longer a man in your society. That feeling you had, the power you had, you will lose everything … [Another male victim/survivor] was telling me, 'I don't know if I am a man or a woman.' So now there is doubt about his gender. So, how could another man feel the desire to sleep with me? Maybe I've seen something in me which is not real as a man. (male victim/survivor)

> Whenever a [man] has been sexually abused, you are kind of like a curse, you will never sit among men. So this person will be stigmatised, will be out of his community because of the culture …. He's not worthy to appear again in the presence of God. So he'll just withdraw himself from the community because of the condemnation he's feeling within himself. (male victim/survivor)

> When you are a male survivor you lose the open future. No matter what you are supposed to be in your life, it all dies. It all goes away … For me when I came here, I told the people of RLP, when they write in 'man' [on the intake forms], I say I am not a man. Because I was used like a woman. (Male victim/survivor)

Rape thus emerged from participants' narratives as something that dismantles the subject 'man' and instead constitutes that of 'man reduced to woman'.[80]

Other participants spoke more concretely about the difficulties that their experiences of sexual violence had created for their family relationships – the family, of course, being an important site of subject formation. Women had become pregnant through rape explained that they experienced particular adversity in maintaining their family relationships and performing their familial identities. Several described difficulties in their relationships with their children, troubled relationships between their existing children and those born from rape, feelings of shame and of demoralisation, and financial hardship – all of which led them to feel that they were failing in their role as a parent. Recalling Das's discussion of how violence infuses the everyday practices of being in the world and how the 'delicate work of self-creation'[81] is enacted in the 'everyday tasks of surviving', one can also see how failing in these tasks can be experienced as ways in which rape continues to destroy. Some female victims/survivors spoke of growing to feel 'disgusted with men' as a result of the rapes, and of the difficulties and even violences that subsequently arose in their relationships connected to their disinterest in sex with their husbands.[82] Others spoke of the isolation they felt because they felt they had to hide their experiences from their husbands for fear of a breakdown of their marriage.

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[79]See Auchter, 'Forced male circumcision', p. 1340; Dolan, 'Victims who are men'; Onyango, 'Manhood on the Margins', p. 17; Schulz, 'Displacement from gendered personhood'; Sivakumaran, 'Male/male rape and the "taint" of homosexuality'; Sivakumaran, 'Sexual violence against men in armed conflict', p. 255; chapters in Zalewski et al. (eds), *Sexual Violence Against Men in Global Politics*.

[80]See also Schulz, 'Displacement from gendered personhood'; Zalewski et al. (eds), *Sexual Violence Against Men in Global Politics*, p. 30.

[81]Veena Das et al. (eds), *Violence and Subjectivity*, p. 222.

[82]See Harriet Gray and Chris Dolan, '"Disrupting peace at home"? Narrating relationships between sexual violence perpetrated by armed men and domestic violence in (post-)conflict settings', manuscript in preparation.

Similarly, male victims/survivors of sexual violence also described difficulties being husbands, particularly sexually. One participant stated that: 'A male survivor will never have sex with a wife in the normal way …. Even the words "sex tonight", it's enough for me to have nightmares and questions about how I am going to begin' (male victim/survivor). Another reported that he had avoided marriage because his experiences of sexual violation had left him with a 'weakness of satisfying a woman according to my mind and mental state' (male victim/survivor), which meant that he was unable to become a pastor, as he had intended, and instead found himself unanchored without a social identity; alone, and suicidal. These participants thus spoke of their subject positions as 'parents', 'wives', 'husbands', and of their potential future selves, as continually being undone through the reverberations of the events of the particular violence (rape) to which they were subjected.

Members of the Men of Hope group, while recognising the significant pressures on male victims/survivors of sexual violence to hide their experiences under the label of torture, seemed themselves to be clear and self-assured in explicitly describing themselves as victims/survivors of sexual violence. For many this labelling was a self-consciously agentic act; the act of claiming this particular label did not mean, however, that the gendered stakes entailed in categorising violence were erased. Indeed, perhaps because sexual violence is more easily recognised as a 'gendered' form of harm than torture (as in the phrase 'sexual- and gender-based violence'), the evocation of heteronormative ideas was particularly clear in how participants remade their selves through narratives of the sexual violence they endured.

We therefore turn to the dominant ways in which both men and women remade themselves as appropriately feminine and masculine subjects through narrating their experiences of sexual violence. Distinctions between seeing the violence as collective and generalised or as individually targeted emerged as particularly important.

In short, sexual violence against *women* was framed in both men's and women's narratives as targeted not against a specific, individual woman but against women in general – as representatives of their sex and/or of their ethnic group. There was one exception to this in our discussions: a woman who had held a respected position as a school teacher and felt that she had been targeted in part out of jealousy. More generally, however, sexual violence against women was framed as motivated either by the pursuit of 'pleasure' (male victim/survivor), in particular against 'beautiful ladies' who '[catch] the eyes' of armed men (female victim/survivor), or by the intent to harm women of a particular ethnic or national group as a 'weapon of war'. In both of these frames, participants suggested that the individual victims themselves were not specifically targeted but, rather, randomly selected because they fulfilled certain generalised categories.

In several cases, rapes were presented as unplanned, occurring whenever there is 'opportunity' (female victim/survivor) to take advantage of the 'vulnerability' of women (male victim/survivor). Most commonly, rape was presented as an event occurring after rebels, who have been in the bush deprived of female company for significant periods of time, finally come into contact with women. One male survivor, for example, told us that rapists attack women because they 'think that women are just a thing, just a toy, something to make them play, to make men feel pleasure' (male victim/survivor). In 'weapon of war' rapes, participants suggested, women are again targeted not as individuals but as representatives of their social groups. Several participants, for example, suggested that rapists act on a desire to 'taste' the sexual attributes of women of a particular ethnic group: 'they want to feel how different tribes, how they taste, something like that' (female victim/survivor); 'the Muslim ladies are really totally different from other religions so let's go and taste' (female victim/survivor). In other cases, participants emphasised that rapists do not care about who their victims are as individuals, they only want to harm:

Whether you are an old woman or a young one, they don't mind. And they don't even care whether you are sick or [not] … They don't even care whether you are fine, physically fine, whatever state you may be in, they don't mind … They also don't care what you've gone

through, whether you are separated from your family, your husband, your children, they don't know what you are going through, they just want to see you suffer. And sometimes, even if you are pregnant, they don't mind. (female victim/survivor)

For several of the female victims/survivors, emphasising the anonymity and the randomness of the attacks against them appeared as a way to sidestep some of the stigma associated with sexual victimisation and with any implied complicity in their own harm. Moreover, victims/survivors emphasised that in such a situation there was no way to resist the rapes: 'you cannot even refuse, because you see, because of the gun, or when you see the gun, so you will do anything the person tells you to do' (female victim/survivor). Recalling the work of Das,[83] Scarry,[84] and Brison[85] noted above, we can read such statements as speech acts that explicitly remake the narrators as respectable feminine subjects in the aftermath of sexual violence.

In contrast, the remaking of masculinity among male participants – a move from being 'reduced to women' to repositioning themselves as 'men' – relies upon the idea that male targets were specifically and individually targeted for sexual assault. In general, while there was some small space in the narratives of male survivor participants to frame rape against men as perpetrated for pleasure by homosexual perpetrators or when rapists with frustrated sexual needs 'cannot find women' (male victim/survivor), male participants described the sexual violence they had faced as grounded in 'political interest' (male victim/survivor). Such violence appears in a number of the men's narratives not as random or spontaneous, but very much as a planned attack perpetrated against them as a specific, important individual. That is, several male participants told us that they were targeted for sexual violence not randomly, not because of their gender or ethnicity, but because of their position as high-profile, political figures such as human rights defenders within their communities:

You were not raped because you were the most vulnerable but because you were strong. They need to demystify you and change your status. For example, if you are active in politics, in opposition, defending the rights, people count on you … [rape is] a way to make you retreat from society. (male victim/survivor)

The people who do this, they know the consequences. They plan it to avoid the media and the attention of killing you. They do it in another fashion. Rape. (male victim/survivor)

Moreover, in narrating the particular *effectiveness* of sexual violence as a tactic of political targeting, participants again positioned themselves as subjects who had, at least in retrospect, been effective political actors and organisers: 'I did not have courage to mobilize the people after that' (male participant).

As such, while they framed their experiences as sexual violence (a label more commonly associated with women) the male victims/survivors cited above nonetheless performatively remade themselves as masculine subjects. In their stories of rape, they resisted the collective erasure of their specific selves that punctuated many of the women's stories, and instead, they noted the individual experience of their rape, which also enabled a remaking of themselves as political actors. Resonant of feminist scholars outlined above, who have argued that violences perpetrated against men have been more likely to be recognised as politically motivated than those perpetrated against women,[86] several of the male participants positioned their experiences of sexual

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[83]Das, *Life and Words*.

[84]Scarry, *The Body in Pain*.

[85]Brison, *Aftermath*.

[86]Bunch, 'Women's rights as human rights'; Charlesworth, Chinkin, and Wright, 'Feminist approaches to international law'; Copelon, 'Gender crimes as war crimes', p. 234; Edwards, *Violence Against Women Under International Human Rights Law*, pp. 51–71; MacKinnon, *Are Women Human?*, p. 21; Pearce, 'An examination of the international understanding of political rape', p. 537.

violence firmly within the realm of public sphere, political violences. For some, this was done through explicit comparison with women's experiences of sexual violence, which they framed as more closely associated with pleasure on the part of the perpetrator and, thus, within the private sphere.[87] Through such comparisons, we suggest, these male victims/survivors performatively reclaimed their status as masculine subjects despite having been, in their words, 'reduced' to the status of women. In this way, subjects thus 'remake' themselves in the aftermath of violence through the gendered narratives and assumptions that shape the available 'grids of intelligibility' within their social context.

Torture

While sexual violence was a frame that participants used to describe a specifically gendered form of undoing of the self, many spoke more generally about the 'unmaking' of torture as something that left a lingering sense of having lost (part of) oneself: 'you will not be the same as you were before' (male victim/survivor). In general, torture emerged from participants' narratives as a label that avoided the overtly gendered stigmatisation of sexual violence. This is not to say that torture was considered free from stigmatisation, especially if it took place in public view; 'someone who was the big figure like a politician, someone who was in a settled position of respect and honour, so if … people saw the way he was disgraced [through being tortured], it will stigmatize him' (male victim/survivor). This account suggests that public acknowledgement of victimisation through torture can result in a loss of status and therefore of a loss of selfhood. We could note, however, that in telling the story this way, a subject with 'respect and honor' is also reconstituted – even if only in retrospect.

Despite the stigmatisation that could be attached to torture, many participants drew fairly sharp distinctions between sexual violence and torture in this regard, suggesting that sexual violence led to more distinct, widespread, and destructive stigma than torture. All participants agreed that torture was, in general, something that could be spoken of relatively freely; sexual violence was something that generally should be hidden:

> Being a victim of torture, you can feel free to share with others and say 'I have been tortured.' So there it's really explainable; you can feel free to share with people. But it's really different to someone who went through sexual violence … it's a taboo … You cannot even feel the courage to share it with people. (female victim/survivor)

Largely as a result of this differential level of stigmatisation, several participants subsumed varied experiences of sexual violence into the category of 'torture', some explaining that they had chosen to label their experiences as torture, rather than sexual violence, because of the high levels of stigma attached to the latter categorisation. Several participants whose experiences clearly fit accepted definitions of sexual violence, but who had joined the Association of Torture Survivors group at RLP, noted that, as sexual violence was part of torture, it was easier and made more sense to them to present their experiences under the label of torture. For example, a young woman from the DRC who had been the victim of kidnapping and rape as a child explained that she preferred to seek support through the Association of Torture Survivors because of stigma:

> There is no problem with joining [a support group for women who have experienced sexual violence] but the only issue will be when I go there, people … know already the name of the group. They know those who go there are those who underwent sexual violence. (female victim/survivor)

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[87] See Charman, 'Sexual violence or torture?'.

For participants such as this, using the label 'torture' rather than 'sexual violence' enabled them to remake their selves relatively free from stigmatisation, which otherwise threatened to (continually) 'unmake' their worlds through unravelling their position within their communities.[88]

While both men and women spoke of the appeal of hiding experiences of sexual violence under the label of torture, it is important to note that significant structural factors made this more appealing, and in some cases necessary, for male victims/survivors. For instance, male victims/survivors who report sexual violence perpetrated by men risk criminalisation under Ugandan law, which outlaws homosexuality and which renders queer subjectivity both officially unintelligible and illegal.[89] Additionally, and on a less formalised but no less significant level, several participants noted that, while sexual violence against women is now widely recognised as a problem in conflict, many people, including service providers, do not acknowledge that sexual violence against men exists.[90] One participant stated that a survivor he knew did not initially want to talk to others because 'he thought he was the only male survivor of sexual violence in the entire world' (male victim/survivor). In these instances, the evocation of the label of torture to describe diverse violences – including those which could easily be understood as sexual – enabled participants to demand recognition for the hardships they faced, while also avoiding the significant stigmatisation associated with sexual violence. It is worth noting that not all participants were able to successfully have their experiences of sexual violence recognised as torture – in some cases, victims/survivors found themselves denied the possibility of inhabiting this label by service providers who disregarded their experiences because of the gendered assumptions that constrain their understandings of torture. For instance, a male victim/survivor of rape was told: 'Oh! I thought you were tortured *really*.' For those who were able to successfully claim the label, however, it enabled participants to rebuild habitable lives and worlds in which they could perform themselves as subjects worthy of self respect and the respect of their communities, and thus as properly political (gendered) subjects.

Moving beyond the specific focus on how sexual violence is absorbed into torture, as noted above many participants drew on a very broad definition of torture; citing the burning of houses and the refusal of treatment by medical personnel as examples. What, then, are the stakes for the remaking of worlds attached to this very broad framing? We suggest that the breadth in the way that 'torture' is used here draws the multiple difficulties in participants' everyday lives, including physical violences and socioeconomic struggles, together to reveal a broad picture of the hardships they face. The term 'torture' endows these multiple and overlapping experiences with legitimacy, with a recognition that their grievances are serious, enabling participants to demand recognition for their multiple struggles and experiences of harm. It allows them to perform themselves not as individuals who are failing to build successful, healthy, economically secure lives, but as strong agentic subjects, resisting and struggling against significant and systematic violations of their rights.

Concluding thoughts: Why might this matter?

In this article we have explored how victims/survivors both speak of their undoing and recreate themselves as (gendered) human subjects in the aftermath – and endurance – of violence and war. As feminist academics, we recognise that the processes through which the multiple forms of harm that constitute the 'continuum of violence'[91] are sliced up into apparently distinct categories are not only fluid and context-dependent but also deeply gendered. Despite the fixity

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[88]Schulz, 'Displacement from gendered personhood'.

[89]Ibid., p. 587.

[90]See Caroline Cottet, 'Medical approaches to sexual violence in war, in guidelines and in practice', in Zalewski et al. (eds), *Sexual Violence Against Men in Global Politics*, pp. 89–101; Dolan, 'Victims who are men'.

[91]Cynthia Cockburn, 'The continuum of violence: a gender perspective on war and peace', in Wenona Mary Giles and Jennifer Hyndman (eds), *Sites of Violence: Gender and Conflict Zones* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), pp. 24–44; Davies and True, 'Reframing conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence'.

which we might assume that the existence of legal categories lends to these typologies, they are not neutral descriptors; victims/survivors' adoption of the category of torture and/or of sexual violence is an inescapably gendered and political process.

There remains, however, a dearth of work that explores the gendered fluidity of these categories and labels as they are encountered, navigated, and lived by victims/survivors seeking to make sense of their experiences and their selves in the aftermath of violence – a gap in knowledge that this article goes some way towards beginning to address. As we have shown, victims/survivors of violence deploy the terms 'torture' and 'sexual violence' as intensely invested speech acts through which they performatively remake their worlds and their selves in the persistent reverberations of this violence. The particular ways in which this is done, moreover, are contingent on the context and should not be assumed to be universal. Importantly, our analysis complicates the simplistic assumption that gender norms will call men to frame their experiences as 'torture', and women, theirs as 'sexual violence'. That is, while participants' selection of one label over another – sexual violence over torture, or vice versa – is of course gendered, the fact of this selection alone is insufficient to capture the nuances of the multiple, contingent, messy, and shifting ways in which victim/survivors' inhabitation of these terms is imbued with gendered politics. By paying close attention to the work that these terms do in the framing of violence and in the un/remaking of selves and lives in a specific context, then, we glimpse how the language that is used to make sense of harm informs and is informed by the 'grids of intelligibility'[92] available in any given space.

That these self-(re)making performances are informed by the policy, legal, and humanitarian contexts in which survivors are located and, moreover, are conducted in conversation with globalised, gendered, and heteronormative lexicons is not, of course, a surprise. However, revealing the contingency of and emphasiaing the stakes involved for victims/survivors in these markers highlights the politics involved in categorising injury. Recognising this will hopefully enable us to better attend to and offer adequate redress for the simultaneously globalised and contextually specific destructive and productive experiences and imaginaries of violence.

Such markers, however, are neither determinate nor closed. While much work addressing the harms of sexual violence has successfully debunked a restrictive and reductive victim/agent binary,[93] our focus on the agentic 'claim to politics' as expressed in our respondents' accounts offers a mode for recognising the rich, complex, and lived subjectivity that is simultaneously destroyed and produced in the wake of violence. Much previous literature has done the vital work of painstakingly and critically describing and reflecting on multiple ways in which violence might 'unmake' the everyday lives of its victims/survivors. Our discussion aims to push such discussions further by offering an understanding of the deeply political, embodied practices of simultaneous and interwoven unmaking and remaking of selves – an interrelated process that is often obscured in the rush to recognise, catalogue, and redress harm. Our participants' accounts of the intertwined unmaking and remaking of their lives and selves paints a picture of deeply embodied, messy processes, enacted through all the complexities and contradictions of the lived experiences of everyday lives. This lived complexity serves as a reminder to question the simplicity, perhaps the *inevitability*, that accounts focused on the coming into being of subjectivities through existing imaginaries might be taken to imply. That is, while the space available for remaking one's subjectivity is of course constrained by the available grids of intelligibility (as well as by the legal context), our focus here on participants' narratives highlights how victims/survivors remain agents who navigate and contest, reproduce and comply with, as well as (hopefully) transgress these constraints through the mundane, granular processes of everyday life. As such, their narratives both

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[92]Foucault, *Technologies of the Self*, p. 93.

[93]See, for example, S. J. Creek and Jennifer L. Dunn, 'Rethinking gender and violence: Agency, heterogeneity, and intersectionality', *Sociology Compass*, 5 (2011), pp. 311–22.

indicate how violence continues to work on subjects and lives long after specific injurious acts, as well as how its subjects remake themselves in the wake of and perhaps beyond its reiterative reach.

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