Development and Change

Published on behalf of the Institute of Social Studies, The Hague

Moral Spaces and Sexual Transgression: Understanding Rape in War and Post Conflict

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ABSTRACT

When it comes to rape in war, evocative language describing rape as a 'weapon of war' has become commonplace. Although politically important, overemphasis on strategic aspects of wartime sexual violence can be misleading. Alternative explanations tend to understand rape either as exceptional — a departure from 'normal' sexual relationships — or as part of a continuum of gendered violence. This article shows how, even in war, norms are not suspended; nor do they simply continue. War changes the moral landscape. Drawing on ethnographic research over 10 years in northern Uganda, this article argues for a re-sexualization of understandings of rape. It posits that sexual mores are central to explaining sexual violence, and that sexual norms — and hence transgressions — vary depending on the moral spaces in which they occur. In Acholi, moral spaces have temporal dimensions ('olden times', the 'time of fighting' and 'these days') and associated spatial dimensions (home, camp, bush, village, town). The dynamics of each help to explain the occurrence of some forms of sexual violence and the rarity of others. By reflecting on sexual norms and transgressions in these moral spaces, the article sheds light on the relationship between 'event' and 'ordinary', rape and war.

INTRODUCTION

The main theories that dominate explanations of rape — during times of peace and in times of war — tend to downplay the role of individual sexuality, desire and libido or the more social meanings and work of sex in social and

This article has developed in conversation over the years with many brilliant scholars and friends, in particular many Acholi friends who remain unnamed, as well as Tim Allen, Ron Atkinson, Julian Hopwood, Martha Lagace, Anna Macdonald, Ben Mergelsberg, Ryan O'Byrne, Rebecca Tapscott, Kristof Titeca; it has also benefited from the constructive engagement of reviewers. This work has been supported at various stages by the FWO [PEGASUS]^2 Marie Sklodowska-Curie Fellowship with the Institute of Development Policy (University of Antwerp) and the Conflict Research Group (Ghent University), and the Firoz Lalji Centre for Africa of the London School of Economics and Political Science (in particular through its Centre for Public Authority and International Development ES/P008038/1; the Politics of Return PaCCS/AHRC AH/P005454/1; and the Trajectories of Displacement ESRC ES/P004911/1).

Development and Change 0(0): 1–24. DOI: 10.1111/dech.12499
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cultural contexts. Rape is often understood in relation to psycho-pathological models related to power under more ordinary circumstances as during peace time, or as a weapon in war used for political and strategic ends during times of conflict. When it comes to rape in the context of war, powerful and evocative language is now commonplace, describing rape as a 'weapon of war' and the female body as a 'battlefield' (Brownmiller, 1994; Card, 1996; Stiglmayer, 1994). Historically, rape was generally thought to be an almost inevitable by-product of the horrors of war, predicated on 'natural' male heterosexuality (Seifert, 1996). Refuting this more biological explanation of rape, the 'weapon of war' thesis emerged as a politically important move to de-link rape from 'natural' (heterosexual male) sex drive and to recognize instead the ways in which rape is used as a means to political and military ends (Alison, 2007).[1]

Without minimizing the importance of this move to de-normalize rape and assert its avoidability, the now-pervasive narrative has become problematically totalizing, despite increasing numbers of voices pointing to its limited explanatory value and to some of the unintended policy side effects (Eriksson Baaz and Stern, 2013; Hilhorst and Douma, 2018; Kirby, 2013). Many alternative explanations tend to view rape as a result of various exceptional circumstances of war or as part of a 'continuum' of gendered violence. War itself is often framed as outside of the normal peaceful state, as a state of exception where the norms of peace and social contracts are suspended (Agamben, 2005; Bauman, 1993). The analyses of rape within the bounds of war as distinct from peace point to ways that the context of war and exposure to violence 'spirals' and incites rape, fostering feelings of humiliation, shame, powerlessness, victimization and 'othering', all of which make the enactment of sexualized violence more likely (Staub, 1992). In war, it is argued, 'normal' societal mores are suspended, and rape is fostered by the drive to assert power and dominance in the face of the constant risks of victimization and defeat (Kalyvas, 2006; Kassimeris, 2006). Such factors may combine with access to 'vulnerable' women who are less protected than they might be under peaceful circumstances. Opportunities for sexual violence thus increase and 'normal' sexual outlets with wives and girlfriends may be infrequent or impossible (Cohen, 2016: 47). Some scholars have noted that rapes committed by soldiers under such circumstances are sometimes distinguished by whether they are motivated by 'evil' driven by anger or rage or 'lust' rapes tied to the male libido, with the former being more reprehensible and the latter more morally acceptable (Eriksson Baaz and Stern,

1. Two confessions at the outset. First, the research reflected here was focused on sexual violence against women, yet sexual violence against men and boys was a widespread practice of the National Resistance Army. For more on this, see Dolan (2014); Schulz (forthcoming). Second, although I am cognizant of the too-common fallacy of analysing sexual violence with an assumption of heterosexuality, the presentation of ethnographic material admittedly and problematically (even if not uncritically) reflects the heteronormative research context.

2009). Enloe outlines different types of militarized rape in the context of war including national security rape, systemic mass rape and 'recreational rape' (Enloe, 2000). Some rape then might be understood as 'carried out for private reasons rather than organization objectives' or as Wood has argued, some wartime rape might better be understood as a 'practice' rather than an explicitly adopted strategy (Wood, 2018).

Other scholars emphasize that rape in war is part of a continuum of violence against women. Cynthia Cockburn, and others echoing such insights, emphasize that the experience of violence for women does not begin or end with war (Cockburn, 2004). In her work in Mozambique, Carolyn Nordstrom found that the plights of war victims and of women harmed in their own homes and communities were qualitatively similar (Nordstrom, 1997; see also Boesten, 2014; Porter, 2017). Beyond a focus on sexual violence, more generally in feminist scholarship the binaries between 'war' and 'not war' have been challenged. Increasingly, analyses point to the need to see 'wartime' sexual violence not as exceptional but in light of continuities and linkages of gendered violence across time and circumstances (Boesten, 2017; Sylvester, 2013). Our understandings of sexual violence then should consider ongoing sexist discourse and practice that are not confined by the temporal dimensions of war.[2]

What appears unanswered, but a key issue to which this article speaks, is the relationship between rape in war and 'normal' sexual relationships — in other words, between 'the event' and 'the ordinary'. Veena Das captures the false comfort in categorizing these ways of looking at and understanding violence. Reflecting on the violence (including sexual violence) of the partition of India, she discusses how it was at once both event and ordinary. The magnitude and magnification of violence that took place during the partition — and, I suggest, during the war in northern Uganda — created something new (and in some ways exceptional) but that something did not come from nowhere. In both places it was 'anchored in imageries that already haunted' relationships (Das, 2007: 1, 23–30). Thus the 'normal' and 'exceptional' appear ontologically linked. But what is understood to constitute a norm or a transgression varies depending on where the acts occur within the imaginaries of moral landscape — a landscape deeply impacted by war.

In contrast to showing an absence of norms that would typically regulate sexual behaviour, this article shows how, even in war, sexual norms can be operative, constructed and actively maintained. It further shows how the dynamics of moral spaces shore up protections against certain forms of sexual violence while enabling others. Norms are not just suspended, nor do they simply continue: war changes the moral geography. The article

2. The discussion here necessarily glosses over much of the complexity and nuance in the vast and growing literature on sexual violence in wartime and is meant to be indicative rather than a more comprehensive critical review.

proceeds as follows. The next section provides a brief account of the research process and context in northern Uganda. The rest of the article is then structured around an exploration of moral spaces in Acholi, their associated sexual norms and transgression, and an analysis of how this contributes to an understanding of sexual violence. These moral spaces are typically delineated by temporalities that are associated with physical localities: (1) 'olden times' associated with 'the village'; (2) 'the time of fighting' which is often divided into two — the camp and the bush; (3) 'these days' which comprises 'home' and 'town'; and (4) an often-referenced imagined timeless ideal. This section explores the ways in which ideals are discussed and contested. In conclusion, the article offers some reflections on what all of this might mean for the broader questions of rape and war, sexual violence and sexual transgression.

A BRIEF NOTE ON METHODS AND CONTEXT

The analysis presented here draws on long-term ethnographic work on sexual violence in the Acholi subregion of northern Uganda (Porter, 2012, 2013, 2015a, 2015b, 2015c, 2017, 2018). Over the years this research has included an initial random sample and interviews of nearly 200 women in two villages about their experiences with forced sex; sustained interaction with key informants drawn from this group and their/my surroundings; another study focused on ex-combatant clients of a reception centre; discussions with men and public authorities; work in schools with teachers on sexual education; and over 150 'love-life' history interviews including formerly displaced people and ex-combatants.[3] The setting within which these specifics of research have been applied are chiefly living in northern Uganda from before the war ended through the transition from camps to re-settlement;[4] taking part in the everyday cycles of life; learning Acholi language; and deliberately not focusing enquiry and observation on the experiences of war alone. Indeed, in one of my first attempts to write a background section on northern Uganda, my Acholi interlocutors advised that the most crucial thing to convey was: 'how we eat' and 'how we marry'. The war, of course, impacted these and thus a brief note here may be useful to set the stage.

In 1986 President Museveni and the National Resistance Army/Movement (NRA/M) came to power in Uganda after a five-year guerrilla war against

3. Research has been approved by the Ugandan National Council for Science and Technology, the governing ethics body within Uganda, as well as by the ethics boards of the London School of Economics and Political Science and the University of Antwerp. Relatedly, quotations from interactions with women who have experienced sexual violence do not include information normally provided as part of interview references, in order to protect their identities.
4. I lived in northern Uganda for over 10 years, from 2005 to 2008 and from 2009 to 2016. Since leaving in 2016, I have spent two months there each year.

Milton Obote's second regime. Almost immediately, the new NRM government, made up primarily of Bantu-speaking southerners, launched a military campaign to stamp out expected opposition in the north, the home region of previous rulers in post-colonial Uganda. This had the opposite effect, sparking a number of armed rebel groups, the most enduring and devastating of which was the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). The Lord's Resistance Army is infamous for the abduction of civilians to acquire new 'recruits', particularly children. Although not a tactic unique to the LRA, between 1986 and 2006 they abducted an estimated 66,000 Ugandans (Annan et al., 2008). Consequences of the 20-year war are manifold, including the government of Uganda's policy, from the mid-1990s onwards, of moving civilians, often forcibly, from rural areas into squalid internally displaced persons (IDP) camps where the Ugandan People's Defence Force (UPDF) could 'protect' them (Republic of Uganda Ministry of Health, 2005). At the peak of conflict it was estimated that a million or more people in the Acholi subregion (some 90 per cent of the population) were being kept in wretched conditions in 'rural prisons', with camp residents subject to both government and LRA violence.[5]

Although at the time of writing the LRA continues to operate within nearby central African countries, and the Final Peace Agreement (negotiated between the LRA and Government of Uganda between 2006 and 2008) was never signed, camps have since closed, most people have returned or resettled elsewhere and northern Uganda has enjoyed relative peace since 2006 (Atkinson, 2010). Despite this, many people continue to experience a sense of fragility even fearing an eventual return to war. Many mourn the profound ways that war is seen to have unsettled the moral foundations of Acholi ways of life, pointing to economic devastation, lost educational opportunities, land grabs, high alcohol consumption, depression, domestic violence and other social ills that are seen to follow in the wake of the war. In terms of the prevalence of sexual violence, in the two Acholi villages where I conducted most of my research I found that nearly 40 per cent of women aged 16 and above in a random sample reported having experienced forced sex, some multiple times, by different people, and over prolonged periods of time. The vast majority of these took place within the context or aftermath of war, although only 10 per cent were perpetrated directly by combatants in the conflict (Porter, 2017).

The importance of moral spaces has been a recurring refrain, but one which has become increasingly pronounced and distilled in conversation with key informants in recent years. Perhaps this is because in the temporal space of 'these days' there is an evident move to put distance between desired futures and assertions of moral identities and the deprivations of life in the 'time of fighting'. The interpretations offered here are the product of

5. For overviews on the war, see Allen and Vlassenroot (2010); Atkinson (2010); Behrend (1999); Branch (2011); Finnström (2008).

'participant reflection' (Finnström, 2008: 19), a process of interaction and evolving understanding in discussion with key Acholi informants that has clarified and deepened insight into both the temporal and spatial dimensions of how people order and make sense of their experiences, and particularly how these shape sexual norms and notions of transgression.

MORAL SPACES

In this article I posit that norms and hence transgressions vary, depending on the moral space where acts occur, and that within one society or culture, more than one moral space exists. This has implications both for our understanding of the logics that animate sexual violence and for practical endeavours to prevent or respond to it. This article also presents and elaborates a way of conceptualizing the empirical realities of Acholi life which are meaningful beyond the issue of sexual violence. In Acholi, as elsewhere, people often categorize experiences, norms and ideas of appropriate behaviour in ways that can relate to time and physical space and that take on powerful disciplinary functions in popular imagination. Distinguishing such spaces in relation to actions serves to assert moral probity, as modes of governance and as ways of making sense of the choices and actions of oneself and others.

Moral spaces have associated norms, including sexual norms — and transgressions against them — that I focus on here. As described below, each of these spaces offers some, though insufficient, protections against certain forms of sexual violence. At the same time, these spaces contribute to an environment that is especially conducive to other forms of sexual violence. In each space, then, some sexual violence is understood as 'ordinary', that is, conforming to the everyday norms in these moral spaces. Other, more shocking, sexual violence that constitutes a significant transgression of these norms is understood as an abnormal 'event'. In each of these spaces, the experiences of women who were raped (whether the sexual violence was constitutive of a norm or a transgression) and the logics that animate this violence vary. By mapping ideas of what constitutes sexual norms and sexual transgression onto these moral spaces, this article sheds light on the relationship between event and ordinary, rape and war, and the ways in which rape serves to rupture or reinforce these norms.

Of course, the boundaries between such spaces are not as neat as the subheadings below seem to suggest: not least, these descriptions are complicated by the regular movement of people between moral spaces. Even the imagined boundaries are porous. Nor are views on norms within them homogeneous: often there are pervasive ideas about what the norms *are* and contestation about whether this is/was as it *should* be. Yet the way in which people from across common divides of men and women, young and old, make reference to these moral spaces in everyday speech, relate their experiences to them and make judgements on others in relation to them, suggests

that these imaginaries of moral geographies are central to their ordering and making meaning of experiences.

Olden Times: Kare Macon

Village Homestead

The 'olden times' in Acholi — sometimes associated with the pre-colonial past, sometimes any time before the most recent war affecting northern Uganda — are primarily associated with a rural village setting.[6] The village as a moral space is accompanied by activities that go on there, digging, weeding, harvesting, drying, brewing, bodily praxis: 'cooking a meal, performing a ceremony, lighting a fire, hunting, all of these carried out in concert with others, between men and women — activities which unite the living with the living and the living with the dead' (Jackson, 2009: 148). Often the imagined village of the past stands as an example of Acholi ways of life and is held up as a reference point, a kind of 'North' of the Acholi moral compass towards which all other spaces look for orientation. As such the norms of this space are often projected onto other situations to comment on disjuncture or to assert 'right' ways of being. An integral aspect of this for Acholi is the value of social harmony. Social harmony refers to a state of 'normal' relations among the living and the dead, linked to an idea of cosmological equilibrium and a social balance of power and moral order (Porter, 2017).

As with any social or cultural ideal, such a balanced equilibrium is something to be strived for, even if never fully achievable. It encompasses Acholi concepts of *piny maber,* or 'good surroundings', which Sverker Finnström (2008) contrasts with *piny marac* ('bad surroundings') of the northern Uganda war, and which Okot p'Bitek depicts as 'when things are normal, the society thriving, facing and overcoming crises' (p'Bitek, 1986: 27).

In relation to sexual norms, for most Acholi the payment of *luk* (customary payments which recognize and formalize sexual access), or the intention of payment, is a key distinction between socially acceptable sex that contributes to social harmony and that which damages it.[7] Sex that is completely outside the structure of *luk* — such as female adultery, defilement (of pre-pubescent girls in particular), sex in 'the bush', and same-sex sex — is reacted to strongly, as it is perceived to threaten the well-being and boundaries of the moral community. Conversely, sex, whether forced or consensual, within

6. Olden times would also include the 'bush', *lum* — accessed for hunting, firewood and other resources — discussed in the next section. For more on the village homestead, see Girling (1960).
7. There are several types of *luk* which correspond to the degree of belonging that the woman and her offspring will have with a man and his clan. It is paid from the man/boy and his kin to the woman/girl's kin (Porter, 2017: 97–101).

the structure of *luk,* does not pose such a threat. Consent happens between two people. *Luk* happens between two kin groups within the same moral community, and establishes the foundation of acceptable Acholi love and belonging.

If all is functioning well in the society — that is, when there is social harmony — sexual violence that transgresses these norms should be rare, while sexual violence that does not is effectively condoned. The idea that 'rape never used to be there' in the olden times (*kare macon*) is a common response by both men and women when I tell Acholi about my research. This does not mean that sexual violence was lacking, but that women's choices regarding their bodies and sex (particularly in the context of courtship and marriage) were de-emphasized in understandings of what constitutes sexual norms and wrongdoing. In this context, the notion of rape lacked a prevalent notion of choice and consent on which to rest (Porter, 2018).

The reactions of some of the oldest women I interviewed are illustrative. One of them was about 100 years old. She laughed at my questions about rape and forced sexual experiences and said they were 'very useless. It is hard to even say whether a man forced you to have sex when you never even thought that refusing was an option and you were never asked if you agreed'. She was speaking in particular about the man who became her husband. Another elderly woman also laughed and had the same opinion of my queries as 'very useless'. Her explanation was that she and her age mates didn't know what 'rape' was in those days, although, she added, of course, men used to force them. In such instances, when discussing sexual violence, women might describe a sexual experience as physically violent — indicating beating, for example. Or they might use an adverb, *tek tek* — literally 'strong strong/hard hard' — as a description of the manner in which a man had sex with them rather than to signify a crime or category of wrongdoing.

Whatever their age when interviewed, women in my research who conceived due to rape often married the man who raped them. The internal logic of this is made clear through the understanding and meanings of sex in the Acholi context. Sex is seen less for (female) pleasure and more for creating children and social belonging of both men and women; women's primary social roles are as mothers and wives, while men's are to produce children and (to a lesser extent in practice) to take social and material responsibility for the woman they marry and the children they create. Marriage then is a way of taking responsibility for the 'consequences' of the man's actions. This logic is even more powerful if a child results from the rape, as parenthood and children are central means to establish full social roles for both men and women. If, through sexual transgression, social order is subverted, this can be 'put right' by the man making requisite customary payments in marrying the mother of his offspring and taking responsibility for her and the child. Failure to do so would compound the wrongdoing.

Thus sexual violence without customary payments in this moral space can be understood as dismantling 'the orderly exchange of women' (Das,

2007: 21), and can be remedied by the rightful reinstatement of proper kinship: women under fathers and husbands. Or, as Levi-Strauss termed it, the 'reinstatement of correct matrimonial dialogue of men' (Lévi-Strauss, 1969: 30–33, 231).

The Time of Fighting: *Kare Me Lweny*

The war dramatically ruptured village life and the ideal homestead within it, violently dividing it into two moral spaces — the camp and the bush.

Camp

During the war the vast majority of the Acholi population were confined in squalid, disease-ridden internally displaced persons' camps (Republic of Uganda Ministry of Health, 2005). At the peak of displacement it was estimated that a million or more Acholi were living in camps (most as part of a government policy of forced displacement).[8] The conditions were appalling. There were devastating fires in the dry season, flooding in the wet season, a near total lack of protection from LRA and NRA/UPDF (initially National Resistance Army, later renamed Uganda People's Defence Force) violence, and shocking crude mortality rates.[9] All of this prompted some to call the policy of 'protected villages' genocide (Otunnu, 2009; Whitmore, 2010). Although most outside observers were either less extreme in their views, or perhaps questioned the usefulness of applying the genocide label, the fact that so many thousands of people suffered for up to two decades in conditions that far surpassed emergency thresholds generated extensive criticism (Weeks, 2002). Chris Dolan described life in the camps as 'social torture' (Dolan, 2009). In 2004 the situation prompted Jan Egeland, the UN's chief humanitarian officer, to call it 'the biggest neglected humanitarian emergency in the world'.[10]

Although life in the camp lasted for decades in some instances, the entirety of this period is considered by many Acholi as an 'event' — a horrifying aberration of Acholi ways of life. In people's recollections, there were transgressions happening constantly and there was nothing or very little that could be done about it. Perhaps the most dramatic way that sexual norms were interrupted in the moral space of the camp is that formal marriages through

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8. Numbers of the displaced varied, but UNOCHA (2007) estimated the internally displaced in Acholi that year, following the end of overt violence the year before, at nearly a million — over 90 per cent of the Acholi population. In the bordering areas of Lango, Teso and Madi, some three-quarters of a million were displaced.
9. See, for example, the report by Human Rights Focus (2002). A joint Ministry of Health and UN report likewise estimated an average of over 1,000 excess deaths per week (Republic of Uganda Ministry of Health, 2005: ii).
10. Egeland's comments have been reported widely: see, for example, *The Guardian* (2004).

the exchange of customary payments became nearly impossible. I have been unable to find anyone who was resident in a camp who married during the time of displacement. Yet people continued to have sexual relationships, to fall in love, to begin families and to co-habit. Although marriage is not in most cases a one-time event, but often a series of processes and movements between clans involving customary payments, it seems virtually all of the new relationships or casual liaisons in the camp took place outside of this structure.

The consequences of a rapid decline in the ability to make bridewealth payments to more clearly formalize partnerships continue to unfold and go beyond our focus at present. But it is important for our discussion on sexual norms and transgressions in the moral space of the camp to note that the system of customary payments to sanction sexual relationships was virtually impossible. The normal processes of establishing kinship ties were disrupted and thus gerontocratic control of youths' sexuality weakened. Often people refer to intimate relationships in the camp as 'less stable'. The new partnerships provided less social protections from in-laws and natal kin but they also afforded more individual freedoms and flexibility. The result was new vulnerabilities to sexual violence and exploitation coupled with greater sexual autonomy. At the same time, NGOs with a human rights agenda and women's rights discourse flooded the scene. In practical terms, none of the women in my study who were resident in the camps and who experienced sexual violence during this time accessed or benefited from NGO services targeting such women (Porter, 2015c). Nonetheless, the activities of such groups evidently impacted the imaginaries of sexual transgression. 'Rape' as a phenomenon tethered to a legal concept entered common vocabulary. It became understood as something which should be reported and to which there should be some response. As these dynamics coincided with existing moral frameworks, rape became further associated with violent encounters with strangers.

My research (among others) indicates that during this time there were greater opportunities for 'stranger rape', enabled by more anonymity and highly constrained options for how to respond (Hovil and Okello, 2007). People often lamented the alienation from ancestral lands, inability to cultivate and produce food according to custom, and proximity to 'strangers' (particularly soldiers both from within and outside Acholiland) as morally destructive factors in the camp. Parents at the time expressed desperation at their inability to raise children well under such conditions. Youth often echoed similar dynamics but then might also note that they enjoyed more sexual freedom beyond the control of their kin. Furthermore, many people were separated from or had lost relatives as a result of the conflict. Some relatives who would normally have provided social support or protection were unable to do so in the highly constrained context of war and displacement. Even when crucial family members were present, avenues of redress were hampered. One woman who was raped by a stranger in an IDP camp

narrated how he raped her near a well — an act which is considered an abomination.[11] Her parents wanted to 'cleanse' her and the location where it occurred but the ritual requirements were inaccessible in the camp. They thought that trying to pursue a legal case against the man in court was useless. She decided to begin co-habiting with a different man not long after this, even though she was only 14 years old, because she felt she needed the protection of a man to prevent such things from happening again.

Another woman who was raped by a stranger in an IDP camp lamented the lack of protection and inability to respond in the circumstances:

> When I was in the camp I was raped during the night. I don't even know who it was. It was two of them who came, so they kept me from making an alarm and one of them raped me. I made an alarm as soon as they let me go, but they ran away then before people could come. I told my mother after it happened, but she was someone who is saved [meaning 'born-again' Christian] so she told me to just leave the issue, to forget about it and forgive the person. Also since I didn't know the person, I couldn't do anything.

A commonly stated wartime concern (particularly by men) in the camps was the exploitation of women and girls by soldiers — not just in terms of possible sexual violence but also sex outside the social sanctioning and structures of customary payments. Men's provision for women is widely considered integral to Acholi notions of masculinity and of ways of showing affection (Porter, 2015b, 2019; Tapscott, 2018). Camp life undermined this dramatically and men were unable to fulfil masculine norms in relationships, particularly when compared to wage-earning soldiers (Dolan, 2002). One woman told me that she had never been raped, but she then looked thoughtful and added that her 'first husband was a soldier'. She went on to describe how their relationship began:

> On the first day he took me to his place; maybe that was rape. He took me there by force but what we did there I don't think it would be called rape (*tek tek*). He had talked to me [before] but I was not interested in him. I stayed with him after that and didn't go home. I was pulled on the way by my [future] husband forcefully. But once I was already in his house I stopped resisting. My father is a very rude man. That man [the soldier] locked me inside from midday to midnight. So I knew that if I left at that time and went back to my father so late my father would beat me. So I just accepted that I would now need to be the wife to that soldier. I could not tell anyone. There was nothing that I could do. Who would I report to? He was a soldier.

That she would not call what occurred in the soldier's bedroom 'rape' is illustrative of what was mentioned above: prior to the camp this term was less a category of wrongdoing and more a description of the physical forcefulness (or not) of the act of intercourse itself. She would not have used the adverb *tek tek* or 'hard hard' to describe the sexual aspect of their first encounter despite the coercive circumstances. When he returned to his room where she was held captive she had decided to 'accept' sleeping with him and to become his wife. As for many others who experienced heightened

11. Any sexual act — whether consensual or not — near a water point is considered an abomination and the cosmological risks are grave.

vulnerability to sexual violence in the moral space of the camp, her options for recourse and survival were highly constrained.

In the moral space of the camp, rape by strangers or combatants was a major moral concern even if — or perhaps partially because — very little could be done about it. Pre-existing marriages carried the norms of mutual obligation to sexual access but were strained by insecurity, negligible privacy, a lack of work and plentiful alcohol. New sexual relationships were entered without customary payments and often without oversight of elders, with the dual effect of weakening patriarchal kinship ordering and expanding the space of sexual freedom of youth.[12] While sexual norms were not suspended, transgressions abounded and people were increasingly confronted with the need to reconcile contradictions between norms and harsh realities.

The Bush

According to Acholi custom, the bush — *lum*, literally ‘grass’ (Crazzolara, 1938: 297) — is outside the moral world of humans and is governed by capricious and sometimes malevolent powers that, echoing Riesman (1998: 257) represent ‘a force truly other than and independent from man as intelligent being’.[13] People enter into this world sometimes voluntarily but with some trepidation to gather firewood, hunt, retrieve a wandering animal or find ritual material. During the war, all of the LRA activity is considered by those outside of it to have taken place in the bush. This is a familiar variation on a recurrent theme in Africanist scholarship of bush and village/town representing antithetical metaphors for nature and culture. The relationship between the moral order of people and ‘the wild’ are juxtaposed (Jackson, 2009: 148) and bridged with deep ambivalence (Jackson, 2017: 162), and were famously contrasted by Lévi-Strauss in *The Raw and the Cooked*

12. Gerontocratic concern about the diminishing control over young people’s sexuality was greatly amplified in the camp, even if it echoes a common and historically noted concern, as the fieldnotes of Paula Hirsch Foster taken amongst Acholi in the late 1950s reveal (P.H. Foster, Ethnographic Fieldnotes in Northern Uganda 1954–58, Boston University African Studies Library; see also Lagace, 2018: 95–100).
13. Crazzolara defines bush and grass as both *lum* and *tim* (1938: 396), saying it is veldt, uncultivated and uninhabited country. His interpretation, however, overlooked both the dangers and opportunities of hunting grounds and thus their ambiguous moral space that in Acholi thought sometimes combines notions of wilderness and wildness. It seems Crazzolara’s usage of *tim* may have been more prevalent in the past (Atkinson, 2010). These days, *tim* tends to refer to a place distant from home or a foreign place where a person who goes voluntarily is certain to be tested, echoing the general concept of bush in Africanist anthropology (see, for example, Jackson, 2017; Lagace, 2018: 129; Riesman, 1998). This includes inhabited places, such as Kampala or London. In the same vein, bushy places within Acholiland are referred to as *lum* and not typically called *tim*. *Tim* as an inhabited foreign place might also have been analysed as a moral space yet this would have required study amongst Acholi diasporic communities, which this research did not include.

(1964/1983). With parallels that will be immediately apparent to anyone who has visited Las Vegas, it is a common saying (particularly of those in hunting parties): 'what happens in the bush stays in the bush'. Mergelsberg (2010), similarly, writes of former LRA returning to life in the camp and how they were caught between the 'two worlds' of bush and camp.

The location where sex occurs, consensual or otherwise, is integral to Acholi understandings of sexual transgression and acceptable sexual behaviour. Sex 'in the bush' is considered particularly dangerous. Not only does it occur in this wild space of cosmological forces but it is antithetical to the project of building a home. Women who had been raped 'in the bush' whether by rebels, soldiers or non-combatants had fears of cosmological consequences, and often they or those close to them interpreted subsequent misfortunes as resulting from this transgression. In the context of the northern Uganda war, fighting in the bush, displacement, and the practice of night commuting[14] all provided many more opportunities than usual for sex, in the wrong places, to happen.

All sex that happened in the context of the LRA, even if it occurred within huts in the more permanent LRA camps, is considered (by those outside of the LRA) to have taken place in the moral space of 'the bush'.[15] Yet, Joseph Kony and other LRA leaders are known to have very purposefully/strategically constructed their own moral space. In fact, many of my informants who are former LRA (particularly if they were quite senior) were adamant that they would not have referred to the LRA camps as *lum*. *Lum*, as noted, is a wild, uninhabited and uncultured place, while the LRA was highly structured with a moral code reinforced in a host of ways.[16] After the NRA came to power in 1986, Acholi society was thrust into a time of moral and political crisis and the resistance of the LRA was in many ways a response to both, providing a moral order within and an outlet for violent resistance to a common enemy (Behrend, 1999; Branch, 2011: 25). The manifest functional and strategic value of rituals, music, worship and a strong moral code of conduct — supported by a system of strict punishments and rewards — governed even the most mundane aspects of life in the LRA, including sexuality (Titeca, 2010).

In relation to sexual norms and transgressions, the LRA has had a pattern of strictly regulating sexual conduct within its ranks (Baines, 2017; Carlson and Mazurana, 2008). Women or girls were distributed to one man, with whom the female should have a monogamous relationship. Men were not supposed to sleep with a girl until after she had menstruated at least four

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14. During the war, 'night-commuting' was a common phenomenon: young people would leave their homes, or more often the camps, to sleep wherever they could in the relative security of towns or trading centres.
15. For an interesting comparative example, see Coulter (2009) on Sierra Leone.
16. They commonly referred to LRA camps/settlements as *tim,* a foreign, possibly inhabited place with dangers as well as opportunities.

times. Many former male LRA whom I have talked with about this said that they were told if they broke the rules governing sexual behaviour a bullet would hit their genitals in battle. If a man suspected of having HIV died, his wives were often released to prevent the spread of disease.[17] This seems to have limited the types of sexual violence which women and girls experienced, providing them with some protection from sexual violence by men outside of their forced marriages.[18]

For many women who became 'forced wives' in this moral space, a kind of normalcy governed the rules of that moral space. One young woman who had been abducted by the LRA and given as a 'wife' to a top commander (with whom she lived for eight years before her eventual escape) described her living situation this way: 'It was a typical African home'. She, like other women who experienced sexual violence within the LRA, often distinguished between the more ordinary 'everyday' rape of the forced marriage and rape that was a transgression of LRA sexual norms. They would single out, for instance, men who raped them after they were abducted and before they were distributed as wives; instances of men forcing sex on young girls before they started their periods; or when their 'forced husband' slept with more than one of his 'wives' in quick succession and in the presence of another, particularly if it was done as a punishment. An illustrative example is one woman, in her mid-30s at the time of writing. She was abducted as a child and given to a man within the LRA before she started her period. Her forced husband got sick and died after they had been together for three years in the LRA. He was believed to be HIV positive, so she, along with some of his other younger wives, were released to prevent the virus from spreading.

> We were really young. He slept with us at once. I think that was not normal. I think that was his own idea. The older wives, he used to sleep with them one at a time but the young ones he liked to do it two at a time. He changed wives every day. Sometimes the spirits stop you from killing people. The spirit never wanted that [indicating the rape of young girls]. When I came back elders explained to me that the spirits didn't even want him [Kony] to abduct children. It is not good because first of all the men are as old as our parents. It is not proper/fitting [*perwate*]. That is *Lajok* [something destructive and abnormal — para-human and anti-social[19]], that is what we would call it if it happens at home but there they look at it as normal.

From the vantage point of other Acholi moral spaces, sex in the LRA in the context of forced marriage was broadly looked upon as sexual transgression — *perwate* (not fitting/appropriate), as this woman expresses. It all

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17. In fact, according to a former wife of Joseph Kony, some of the senior LRA commanders' wives were taken to Juba for HIV testing before the 'marriages' were consummated (Amony, 2015).
18. Baines has argued that these forced marriages comprised an integral part of Kony's larger political project to create a 'new Acholi' (Baines, 2014).
19. Commonly referred to as 'wizard' in English, meaning 'an evil person, a witch, a night dancer' (Adong and Lakaraber, 2009), or as O'Byrne (2015: 38) writes, a dangerous entity 'driven to emit evil deeds through greed, jealousy, and frustrated desire'.

took place in the bush, outside of the structure of *luk* and other customary payments, and transgressed the ideal Acholi norm of sexual relationships with age-mates. Notably, she reflects on her experience of sexual violence in the LRA from both vantage points. From within the LRA she experienced sexual violence which was a contravention of the wishes of the spirit, saying, 'that was not normal' — a transgression of LRA norms and 'his own idea'. She also experienced sexual violence which conformed to LRA regulations and 'wishes of the spirit', which was looked at 'as normal' by 'them', yet from the vantage point of home was transgressive, as her elders explained upon her return. The entirety of her sexual experiences in the bush were understood by outsiders as an event. Yet this woman's experience shows how, from within the moral space of the LRA's bush, some of the sexual experiences of her forced marriage became 'ordinary' while others ruptured prevailing sexual norms.

These Days: *Kare Ni*

Town and Home

In the period since the cessation of hostilities agreement (June 2006), the dismantling of the camps, and the withdrawal of many NGOs and humanitarian actors, people have been moving toward a new normal and contesting what that ought to look like. Some moved back onto or near ancestral lands, others moved or stayed near towns and trading centres.

Although many people live or have houses in towns and trading centres, 'home' as used here and as Acholi commonly use it is evocative of a different space. Acholi in town often differentiate where they live from their 'real' home. If you ask them where their home is (*gangi tye kwe?*), the answer is rarely town. More typically, it is the ancestral village home on land to which they may still have some communal claim. Home in this sense is the place where a person feels they belong, where they have kin, could seek refuge from struggles or failures in town, where they will be buried, where they might send their children during school holidays. It is where they would go to mark life transitions or to pursue (ritual) remedies for hardships encountered in life.

It is difficult to write about these spaces in the current context of a tumultuous post-war period. The written word seems to concretize something which is by nature unbounded, unfinished and constantly evolving. Of course this is how it always is. Culture is, as Fox writes, 'in a constant state of becoming'. It 'always is', but, 'it has always just become so' (Fox, 1985: 13, 138). Practices are influenced by lived experiences and oral history is derived from a specific locality, by particular circumstance, and by the social positions and power dynamics among the people concerned. The war and displacement ran concurrently with rapid urbanization, an influx of NGOs

(with HIV/AIDS prevention, family planning and reproductive health campaigns, etc.), and increasing exposure to an array of other cultural forces such as TV (e.g. Big Brother Africa and South American soap operas), film (Hollywood and Nigeria), music (African as well as popular US country music, R&B and rap), government post-war reconstruction programmes, and Christianity (particularly growing Pentecostal Christianity). At home and in town, intimate relationships are impacted by the drastic reduction of formal marriages in the period which preceded.

Town and home are spaces characterized by contestation over norms and the public authorities that attempt to regulate them. At the same time, movement between the two is often a regular, even daily occurrence.[20] What is appropriate (or in the case of town, at least practised) in one place is not deemed appropriate in the other. This is not to suggest a shared consensus on moral equivalency between the two. As mentioned, the village of olden times is held up as a moral gold standard by many and the discrepancies between this and the lived realities of current town and home circumstances are regularly noted. In the re-establishment of 'home' in the village, the notion of 'home' itself becomes the site of contestations. Those in town who are considered more 'exposed' to many of the cultural forces mentioned above may look at villagers as poor, uneducated and superstitious people. It is not uncommon to hear people in town deride rural dwelling Acholi as 'peasants' and 'backward'. Similarly, some in rural areas call themselves 'Acholi A', asserting their 'traditional' prowess, whereas Acholi who have become out of touch with their roots and do not follow customs closely are graded 'Acholi B', or worse — 'Acholi C' (Porter, 2019). Yet, again, people move back and forth between these spaces and inhabit the moral worlds of both, often with flexibility. One often dresses, cooks, eats, behaves, and has sex differently in town than at home.

This is evident in distinctions many people make between what are deemed more 'modern', urban — or as many Acholis put it, more 'exposed' — manifestations of love and sex and those that are more common in villages. At home, feminine expectations of sexuality are generally passive. Shyness and feigned resistance are the norm whereas in town sexual initiative (if not aggressiveness) is more accepted. Foreplay is more common in town. More casual sex without kinship involvement and prior to customary exchanges is more common and accepted (so long as no one from 'home' knows about it and it does not result in pregnancy).[21]

An example of the differences between town and home sexual norms is how women indicate they want to have sex. A common refrain both in town

20. Thanks in part to the increasing numbers of motorcycles and motorcycle taxis, *bodabodas* (Lagace, 2018).
21. It should be noted that urbanized youth experience various, often constrained circumstances. Particularly for those facing extreme poverty, life in town often exposes them to forms of exploitation including sexual.

and 'at home' is that 'You see it in the eyes'. As one man commented on the differences between the more 'exposed' girls in town and girls from home:

> You have to know the girl that you are seducing. Of course, if your girl is from the village and she has not gone to school she will look shy and down at the floor when she wants you and she will struggle when you try to take her. But if an educated girl from the town, then you can expect her to look at you with those take-me-to-bed eyes.[22]

Similarly, the imperative to play hard to get and feign resistance (particularly in the first sexual encounter) is not the same. Okot p'Bitek describes how, in a first sexual experience, the girl must often be dragged into the boy's hut, after which a 'love fight' ensues, even suggesting that at times the boy may need to call a friend to help hold the girl's legs apart (p'Bitek, 1964). In my research, I found that a much less forceful approach is the norm (Porter, 2017).[23] However, when the two are alone together and planning to 'meet' sexually for the first time, the girl is still generally expected to protest and a milder form of the love fight ensues. Although there is some evidence that there is increasing contestation over whether this *should* be the norm, even amongst youth in rural settings, young women I spoke with indicated that they and their peers feigned and were expected to feign resistance. In courtship among those who are more 'exposed', young men described a surprisingly formulaic and seemingly widespread dating sequence which still involves the girl playing hard to get but not the imperative of a 'love fight'. Many young women concurred, saying they did not need to fight and refuse — but that they should look reluctant and not appear too eager. In the space of town, it seems, women have more freedoms and yet navigate a space fraught with ambiguities and with few social (not to mention legal) protections.

Imagined Timeless 'Ideal' of What *Is* Acholi

The idea of a moral north was raised above and will be elaborated here. This moral space is not lived so much as imagined and it is rooted in imaginaries of the village homestead of olden times. Acholi regularly refer to how it 'is' in Acholi, as a continuous imagined ideal of Acholi identity and way of life. This is often an assertion of moral identity that is above history and a vision of a kind of continuous static past. It is an idealized picture of how Acholi society 'is' at its best and with all social protections functioning as they are meant to. There is an evident disjuncture between the imagined ideal and most current lived realities of intimate relationships in town and home. Yet the imaginary of what 'is Acholi' persists as a way of saying 'this is who we really are' — and of asserting an 'essential' identity in the

22. Man, Amuru District, 7 December 2012.
23. See also the archive collection of P.H. Foster, Ethnographic Fieldnotes in Northern Uganda 1954–58, Boston University African Studies Library.

face of perceived vulnerability in Uganda and in the world at large. It is less a statement of lived reality or historical fact and more an expression of widely shared Acholi values and ideals. While there is a high level of consensus on what the vision *is*, there is contestation over whether and to what extent it corresponds with individual aspirations for the future. Acholi are, of course, not alone here. The paradox between African social values that emphasize cohesion and desires for individual security and prosperity are a long-standing and widespread concern (Isichei, 1997).

In terms of gender relations as they are associated with sexual norms, this vision might be considered a 'benign' patriarchy (if that were possible): that women should be protected from sexual violence and rape should not happen if all is healthy in the community. In this imagined ideal, women are daughters and sisters who are protected by fathers and brothers until the time when they choose another man as a partner they rather like, are sexually satisfied by, with whom they can bear children, and who respects and abides by bridewealth expectations. As a wife and mother, a woman in this view has full standing — through marriage and childbirth — in her husband's clan; her husband and in-laws are her safeguard. But in this scenario, violence and sexual violence in particular exist as an ever-present possibility. Patriarchy is fundamentally structurally violent, even if/when it functions at its best and prevents excessive physical violence. Women are written into this notion of social harmony as essentially sexual and reproductive beings under the male heads of households and male relatives.

This vision is rooted in the imagined ideal village of olden times, and its closest contemporary is the ancestral home described in the previous section, where birth rites and burials take place. The power of this imagined moral space, as all others are held against it, is eloquently expressed by Jackson, writing about 'homeplaces':

> The compression of experience at *times* of birth and death has an exact analogue in the way we regard the *places* we hold dear to us and make central to our lives. We speak of intense experience in terms of mass. Images of bedrock and stone stand for what is real, while water, air, and sand suggest what is ephemeral. *Homeplaces are the spatial correlatives of the moments that have changed our lives.* These places of orientation, from which we perpetually start out and to which we perennially return in our imaginations, are steeped in the memory of births and deaths. (Jackson, 1995: 135, italics in the original)

This idealized version of the past is regularly contrasted with the other temporal and geographic spaces as a way of evoking the Acholi moral imagination and of disciplining behaviour. Yet the imagined Acholi ideal as a place of orientation is also contested, at times between generations, sexes, home and town, religious and self-proclaimed 'traditionalists'. Different people have lived through some or all of the moral spaces described here. And while most seem to agree on a rather homogenate version of what *is* Acholi, in line with my description of the timeless ideal, there is less agreement about whether the timeless imaginary of Acholi identity coincides

with how they want to live their lives — whether the notions of Acholi home represent the home they aspire to in their own lives and families.

CONCLUSION

The story I have told here is a very human story. It is a common human tendency to think of the past as better, to reminisce about the 'old days' that were so much simpler, purer, perhaps less violent, and where values that are still held dear (particularly by those who benefited from them) are imagined to have been less contested, and more fully expressed. It is also human to take moments of rupture (even those which last for decades) and to cordon them off, label them an aberration and not grapple with the ways in which they may express something unsavoury about ourselves or those around us that we are loath to confront and which perhaps existed in some form all along. It is easier to ignore the ways that, perhaps, these times distorted or exaggerated already present, real forces that have haunted us and continue to do so.

People carve out moral spaces to assert moral probity, as modes of governance, and as ways of making sense of the choices and actions of themselves and others. Deliberate distinctions of such spaces work to separate 'events' from asserted essence and actions from morality. To ignore the ways that moral spaces shape the occurrence of sexual transgression impoverishes attempts at theorizing rape. The moral spaces we have examined each provide protections against sexual violence that contravenes the dominant norms. They each also normalize violence (and sexual violence in particular) under certain circumstances. The ways that women inhabit these spaces are of course as diverse as the individual women themselves, yet some common patterns emerge.[24]

Women often talked about rape as something normal, something that 'happens'. Or for those who had not experienced sexual violence, especially young women, many of them said that it had not happened to them 'yet'. The subjective consciousness expressed by these women — of the female body as either already raped or always rapeable — deserves to be recognized and acknowledged, however contentious such a perspective may be on normative or theoretical grounds.[25] Normalizing (even if not excusing

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24. Drawing on Kandiyoti's (1998) notions of bargaining with patriarchy, elsewhere I have written about different ways that women often inhabit the patriarchal dimensions of social harmony and carve out spaces of agency for themselves, moving beyond simplistic binaries of resistance or submission, for instance through respect, instrumentalization and experimentation (Porter, 2017: 30–40).
25. This perspective has also been problematized in feminist and anti-rape literature; see, for example, Marcus (1992).

or accepting) violence that one experiences seems to be a common coping mechanism.

The different moral spaces described here are also a mode of separating off transgressions (even the entirety of the camp, the bush, and to some extent town) from the ideal — from a 'true' moral core. The acts which one has committed, been witness to, or experienced — if they took place in the states of 'exception' — can be closed off from projected/believed identity. One can assert that the terrible things they have done or that have been done to them do not emanate from a true and immutable essence of character or cultural identity (Dresh, 2012: 20, 34). They could be the result of terrible circumstances — of 'bad surroundings' (Finnström, 2008). Or if the wrongdoer is seen to have transgressed norms in multiple spaces and is deemed morally rotten in an essential way, he or she might be expelled from the moral community to remove a destabilizing presence (Macdonald and Porter, 2016). As Hannah Arendt points out: 'Neither violence nor power is a natural phenomenon, that is, a manifestation of the life process; they belong to the political realm of human affairs whose essentially human quality is guaranteed by man's faculty of action, the ability to begin something new' (Arendt, 1970: 82). The question now is: what kind of space is tomorrow becoming? How will it be characterized, as people grapple with recovering from a long and devastating war and the precarity of everyday life?

Coming back to the question posed at the beginning of this article — the relationship between rape in war and 'normal' sexual relationships — it is now clear that this depends very much on the moral space in which such acts occur. Different expressions of rape in some instances are a rupture in the status quo, while in others they might be considered 'ordinary' to gender relations — even if exaggerated or distorted. We cannot really understand or appropriately take action to prevent or respond to rape if it is simplistically understood as either a rupture of norms, such as in the weapon of war or stranger rape regimes, or as a continuation of violence against women, as in the 'micro-strategies of patriarchy' concept (Marcus, 1992).

There is a tendency in responding to sexual violence (both within moral communities where it takes place as well as by outside policy actors) to only or primarily give attention to sexual violence that constitutes a rupture. That which shocks the conscience is that which manifestly transgresses widely shared norms. Yet much of the sexual violence that women experience takes place within the bounds of prevailing norms. A more fulfilled expression of our humanity becomes possible when we recognize that the 'times' and 'spaces' we draw boundaries around constitute integrated parts of our whole. When we draw on the resources of village, camp, bush, town and home — and when we bring to light and critically examine destructive norms that pervade each of these — this might perhaps enable re-imagining the 'ideal'. In the meantime, our understandings of the causes of sexual

violence would do well to reflect the contours of the moral worlds people inhabit.

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