

Militarized masculinity and the paradox of restraint: mechanisms of social control under modern authoritarianism

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Recent years have witnessed the rise of strongmen rulers around the world, often in states that also maintain democratic institutions, such as a nominally free press, separation of powers and regular elections. These rulers have moved beyond the direct repression and vertical domination of classical despotism, instead managing their populations through complex arrangements of patronage and coercion.¹ However, how such rulers bridge the gap between elites and ordinary citizens to implement their executive authority at a local level remains poorly understood.² Taking up this question, this article shows how national-level authoritarian power is produced and diffused into society through gendered local encounters. These local encounters both mirror executive power and reproduce it, not by dominating subjects and rendering them submissive as in authoritarian regimes of the past, but instead by enacting tensions and ambiguities between restraint and impunity. Confronted by these ambiguities, ordinary citizens learn to ‘live with’ authoritarian power in their everyday lives.³

Scholarship on new forms of authoritarianism is dizzying in its depth and breadth: countless studies consider and refine distinctions between democracies that display elements of authoritarian regimes and autocracies that sustain democratic institutions.⁴ Rather than contribute to this project of categorization, this article seeks to identify and describe the *mechanism* by which national-level executive power reaches ordinary people. I am particularly concerned with contexts characterized by what I term a ‘paradox of restraint’, in which tactics that appear

* Different versions of this article have received helpful feedback over several years. I owe particular thanks to Raphael Kerali for his assistance during fieldwork. The article further benefited from the thoughtful comments of Deval Desai, Corinna Jentzsch, Joschka Philipps, Holly Porter and Elisabeth Prügl, as well as constructive feedback from three anonymous peer reviewers and the editors at *International Affairs*. Any errors are mine alone. The research was supported by the Centre for Public Authority and International Development at the London School of Economics (ES/Poo8038/1).

¹ Jennifer Gandhi and Ellen Lust-Okar, ‘Elections under authoritarianism’, *Annual Review of Political Science* 12: 1, 2009, p. 408.

² Marie-Eve Desrosiers, ‘“Making do” with soft authoritarianism in pre-genocide Rwanda’, *Comparative Politics* 52: 4, 2020, pp. 557–79; Marlies Glasius, ‘What authoritarianism is ... and is not: a practice perspective’, *International Affairs* 94: 3, May 2018, pp. 515–34.

³ Simukai Chigudu, ‘The politics of cholera, crisis and citizenship in urban Zimbabwe: “People were dying like flies”’, *African Affairs* 118: 472, 2019, pp. 413–34; Desrosiers, ‘“Making do” with soft authoritarianism’.

⁴ Matthijs Bogaards, ‘How to classify hybrid regimes? Defective democracy and electoral authoritarianism’, *Democratization* 16: 2, 2009, pp. 399–423.

liberal and compliant with the rule of law are used to loosen checks on the ruler's arbitrary power. For example, in 2011, under the leadership of Viktor Orbán, Hungary passed a new constitution that, among other things, changed the jurisdiction of the Constitutional Court to flood it with politically insignificant cases. The effect was to weaken the court by expanding its remit.⁵ Such moves are paradoxical because they repurpose the very elements of liberal democracy to undermine checks on executive power. The paradox of restraint heightens the stakes of exercising social control for today's authoritarians: the continued presence of at least partially independent democratic institutions, such as elections and courts, offers citizens repeated opportunities to express dissent and challenge their ruler's legitimacy.

This article's main contribution is to identify and elaborate militarized masculinities as a key mechanism of social control for today's authoritarian rulers. When state agents perform militarized masculinities, they enact the paradox of restraint, thereby reproducing and magnifying the ambiguities of modern authoritarianism. In this way, local encounters between citizens and state authorities can transfer national-level authority into the everyday lives of ordinary citizens through gendered idioms.⁶ Militarized masculinities are therefore especially well suited to bridging the gap between elites and ordinary people in contexts characterized by the paradox of restraint. The article's second contribution is to recast the conceptual utility of militarized masculinities. Scholars have long recognized that this concept harbours an uncomfortable incongruity between ordered discipline and unaccountable violence. Most studies have sought to reconcile this contradiction; in contrast, I make it central to my analysis, revealing that it is a source of tension that produces and projects power, giving militarized masculinities special potency as a mode of social discipline.

Drawing inspiration from feminist International Relations, I employ grounded and ethnographic research to 'generate first-hand knowledge of authentic forms of living, relations of power, embodied states and social actions'.⁷ The primary data and analysis draw on over ten months of research conducted between 2014 and 2018. My research focused on the informal security sector primarily in northern Uganda, including non-participant observation, semi-structured interviews and life histories, mainly with young men. Returning to the same communities over a period of four years allowed me to develop relationships with key respondents, offering deeper insight into their gendered political and social lives.⁸

The argument proceeds in three parts. First, when rulers perform *militarized masculinities* they enact *the paradox of restraint*. I define these terms in the following

⁵ Kim Lane Scheppele, 'Understanding Hungary's constitutional revolution', in Armin von Bogdandy and Pál Sonnevend, eds, *Constitutional crisis in the European constitutional area* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2015), pp. 124–37.

⁶ As Pearson explains, masculinity has social and political effects not only through 'particular men because of who and what they are, but through a matrix of gendered relations produced in space and productive of that space': Elizabeth Pearson, 'Extremism and toxic masculinity: the man question re-posed', *International Affairs* 95: 6, Nov. 2019, pp. 1259–60.

⁷ Wanda Vrsti, 'The strange case of ethnography and International Relations', *Millennium* 37: 2, 2008, pp. 279–301 at p. 286.

⁸ The research was conducted in association with the Justice and Security Research Programme at the London School of Economics, and received ethical approval therein.

two sections of the article and explain how they share inherent tensions that are politically productive. Second, enacting the paradox of restraint underscores the ambiguities of modern authoritarian rule. I develop this claim with examples from the regimes of Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines and Vladimir Putin in Russia. Third, local-level performances of militarized masculinities replicate national-level executive power, which subsequently becomes inscribed onto the gendered identities of ordinary people. Militarized masculinities are thus a key mechanism of social control in today's authoritarian regimes. In the third part of the article I elaborate on these ideas through a micro-level case-study undertaken in northern Uganda. I use the case to identify and describe the pathways through which performances of militarized masculinities both mirror the militarized masculinity of the president and shape the gendered identities of ordinary citizens.

Arbitrary violence and the rule of law: understanding the paradox of restraint

The paradox of restraint reflects the seemingly contradictory coexistence of democratic institutions and authoritarian control. These democratic institutions are more than a façade. They retain their institutional form, and at times restrain the executive's power, creating regular opportunities for opponents to challenge or criticize the regime. At the same time, maintaining democratic institutions can benefit savvy authoritarian rulers, for instance by offering channels through which to co-opt elites and distribute patronage, and legitimating the regime both domestically and internationally.⁹ The resultant tensions between democratic institutions and arbitrary power require continuous management if incumbents are to maintain control.

This paradox appears in various regime types, from Scheppele's 'legal authoritarianism' to Levitsky and Way's 'competitive authoritarian regimes'.¹⁰ It has also been described as a tactic, for example by Bermeo, who uses the term 'executive aggrandizement' for situations in which rulers strategically adopt institutional reforms that weaken checks on executive power and arbitrary violence.¹¹ For instance, Mohammed Morsi's Egypt and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's Turkey used technocratic judicial reforms—such as expanding the courts' jurisdictions or lowering the judicial retirement age—to pack their courts with regime-friendly judges.¹² Others—such as Hugo Chávez in Venezuela and Rafael Correa in Ecuador—used procedurally correct constitutional reforms to expand their presidential powers.¹³ This type of authoritarian creep is not confined to the global South; on the contrary, scholars have increasingly noted that once paradigmatically democratic regimes are adopting many of the same tactics to hollow out democracies

⁹ Gandhi and Lust-Okar, 'Elections under authoritarianism'.

¹⁰ Kim Lane Scheppele, 'Autocratic legalism', *University of Chicago Law Review*, vol. 85, 2018, pp. 545–83; Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way, *Competitive authoritarianism: hybrid regimes after the Cold War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

¹¹ Nancy Bermeo, 'On democratic backsliding', *Journal of Democracy* 27: 1, 2016, pp. 5–19.

¹² Scheppele, 'Autocratic legalism'.

¹³ Bermeo, 'On democratic backsliding'.

from the inside—for example in Hungary under Orbán and in Donald Trump's United States.¹⁴

The paradox of restraint means that though citizens can join protests or opposition parties, and even make legal appeals for protections from the state, they face the constant threat of arbitrary state violence. While victims nominally can seek redress, rulers ensure plausible deniability. For instance, in Hungary and Poland, the ruling parties use rhetoric to instigate violence not only against religious and ethnic minorities, but also against members of the judiciary or political opposition groups.¹⁵ In Uganda, the regime supports vigilantes and militias that intimidate its political opposition while distancing itself from their actions.¹⁶ In these contexts, citizens' encounters with such regimes are ambiguous and unpredictable: though citizens retain the formal ability to use the law and state institutions to challenge the regime and hold it accountable, these pathways are shaky and precarious.¹⁷

Disciplined order and the will to kill: conceptualizing militarized masculinities

'What work is gender doing' in International Relations, and what are the implications for the everyday lives and security of ordinary people? Feminist scholars of International Relations have long asked these questions,¹⁸ exploring how gendered hierarchies shape security, sovereignty and revolution, privileging 'men and hegemonic masculinity while subordinating women'.¹⁹ This scholarship recognizes gender as multiple and complex, and at times overlapping and contradictory. The foundational role of the military in the identity of the nation-state has made militarism and militarized masculinities an important subfield of this literature, which calls on scholars to expand studies of militarization from geopolitics to the everyday, 'to unmask power as it emerges and circulates at the level of micropolitics—shaping borders, boundaries, subjects and spheres'.²⁰

¹⁴ Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, *Cultural backlash and the rise of populism: Trump, Brexit, and authoritarian populism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019); Kim Lane Scheppele, 'Autocracy under cover of the transnational legal order', in Gregory Shaffer, Tom Ginsburg and Terence C. Halliday, eds, *Constitution-making and transnational legal order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 188–233.

¹⁵ Edit Zgut, 'New and old enemies: Hungary and Poland', *Visegrad Insight*, 6 Feb. 2020, <https://visegradinsight.eu/new-and-old-enemies-hungary-poland-minorities-judiciary/>. (Unless otherwise noted at point of citation, all URLs cited in this article were accessible on 26 Aug. 2020.)

¹⁶ Paul Omach, 'Political violence in Uganda: the role of vigilantes and militias', *Journal of Social, Political, and Economic Studies* 35: 4, 2010, pp. 426–49; see also Sabine Carey, Michael Colaresi and Neil Mitchell, 'Governments, informal links to militias, and accountability', *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 59: 5, 2015, pp. 850–76.

¹⁷ Rebecca Tapscott, *Arbitrary states: social control and modern authoritarianism in Museveni's Uganda* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021).

¹⁸ Marysia Zalewski, "'Well, what is the feminist perspective on Bosnia?'" *International Affairs* 71: 2, 1995, p. 341; for a contemporary application, see for example, Penny Griffin, 'The everyday practices of global finance: gender and regulatory politics of "diversity"', *International Affairs* 95: 6, Nov. 2019, pp. 1215–34.

¹⁹ Swati Parashar, J. Ann Tickner and Jacqui True, *Revisiting gendered states* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), p. 3.

²⁰ Marsha Henry and Katherine Natanel, 'Militarisation as diffusion: the politics of gender, space and the everyday', *Gender, Place and Culture* 23: 6, 2016, pp. 850–56.

Following Enloe,²¹ I conceptualize militarized masculinities as processes of socialization, rather than ideologies of militarism, that—like gender—are enacted and performed. Militarized masculinities encompass contradictory traits. On the one hand, militarization produces ‘manly warriors’ who will voluntarily kill on behalf of the state;²² militarized masculinities prize ‘dominance, assertiveness, aggressiveness, independence, self-sufficiency, and willingness to take risks’.²³ On the other hand, militarized masculinities also value sacrifice, compassion and cooperation.²⁴ These characteristics—associated with femininity by many, including both people who oppose and people who support an imagined hyper-masculine military—are also necessary for a well-functioning military force.²⁵ Rather than engaging in individualized performances of bravery and aggression, soldiers must sublimate themselves to the whole for the overall success of the military enterprise. In this way, militarized masculinities are characterized by a foundational tension, resulting from the contradiction between unrestrained violence (or the will to kill) and disciplined order.

Recognizing this tension, scholars have sought to reconcile it. Some *combine* these contradictory qualities to identify new types of masculinities. In these mixed types, the machinery of masculine supremacy adapts to absorb more inclusive values while remaining hegemonic. Examples include the ideas of ‘tough and tender’ soldiers, ‘softer’ militarized masculinities, ‘nanny masculinity’ found in ISIS video propaganda, and ‘muscular humanitarianism’.²⁶ Other scholars reframe militarized masculinities as *relational*, forged not through oppression and domination, but rather through empathy, interdependence and respect, thereby melding opposing values into processes of engagement.²⁷

In contrast, I propose *not* to reconcile these contradictory aspects of militarized masculinities. Drawing on Higate, militarization and masculinity can be conceptualized as mutually constitutive but not fused.²⁸ The two elements can relate in various ways, reinforcing one another, acting as a dialectic, remaining opposed, or—as I emphasize—sustaining a productive tension. Seeing militarized masculinities as composed of elements that are discrete and tensile enables the concept to harbour unresolved contradictory elements. For example, Fujii examines the political effects of ‘extra-lethal violence’, in which the discipline of the military

²¹ Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas, beaches and bases: making feminist sense of international politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014).

²² Paul Higate, ed., *Military masculinities: identity and the state* (New York: Praeger, 2003).

²³ Madeline Morris, ‘By force of arms: rape, war, and military culture’, *Duke Law Journal* 45: 4, 1996, p. 701.

²⁴ Regina Titunik, ‘The myth of the macho military’, *Polity* 40: 2, 2008, pp. 137–63.

²⁵ Titunik, ‘The myth of the macho military’, p. 147.

²⁶ See, respectively, Steve Niva, ‘Tough and tender: new world order masculinity and the Gulf War’, in Marysia Zalewski and Jane Parpart, eds, *The man question in International Relations* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1998), pp. 109–28; Sandra Whitworth, *Men, militarism and UN peacekeeping: a gendered analysis* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2004); Manni Crone, ‘It’s a man’s world: carnal spectatorship and dissonant masculinities in Islamic State videos’, *International Affairs* 96: 3, May 2020, pp. 573–91; Anne Orford, ‘Muscular humanitarianism: reading the narratives of the new interventionism’, *European Journal of International Law* 10: 4, 1999, pp. 679–711. See also Claire Duncanson, ‘Hegemonic masculinity and the possibility of change in gender relations’, *Men and Masculinities* 18: 2, 2015, pp. 231–48.

²⁷ Duncanson, ‘Hegemonic masculinity’.

²⁸ Higate, ed., *Military masculinities*.

is ruptured by acts of extreme and excessive violence, such as publicly torturing, raping or humiliating victims before killing them.²⁹ While Fujii focuses on the logic of display for graphic effect, my contribution is to illustrate how such moments of rupture—and the possibility of them—are key to the power of both militarized masculinities and the paradox of restraint, and in fact reinforce one another. The sustained contradiction between restraint and impunity produces particular and politically productive tensions. Performing and prizing militarized masculinities therefore helps today's authoritarian rulers foreground their potential for overwhelming and unaccountable violence, both symbolically and materially.

Military masculinity and the paradox of restraint

To illustrate how gendered tensions produce the power of modern authoritarians, I consider two cases: Duterte's Philippines and Putin's Russia. I selected these strongman rulers purposively as exemplars of the same dynamics that nevertheless illustrate two very different approaches to governing with the paradox of restraint. I use this comparison to develop militarized masculinities as a mechanism that produces, replicates and diffuses executive power. In doing so, I show that these performances reinforce the strong association between the executive and the military (the state's prototypical violent institution), while also enacting the fluid and yet tense relationship between the rule of law and arbitrary violence. The cases have the added benefit of offering substantial cultural and historical variation, illustrating that the mechanism may have broad applicability.

In the Philippines, Rodrigo Duterte—elected president in 2016—has been described as displaying a 'militant form of masculinity' and employing 'machismo populism' based on the degradation of women.³⁰ During his 2016 election campaign, Duterte was photographed kissing young women seated on his lap; he has joked about rape and equated women's value to their vaginas.³¹ Duterte's regime has been classified as hybrid,³² characterized by the arbitrary exercise of violence under the cloak of legality. Duterte has framed extrajudicial killings of alleged 'drug dealers' and detention of dissenters without trial as prioritizing law and order over procedural justice for criminals. He has received support from Duterte Youth, whose leader advocated military training for all Filipino youth.³³ Under Duterte's leadership the legal system has been weaponized against his opponents: key opposition politicians have been arrested and detained on spurious charges, and lawsuits have been filed against the former president and

²⁹ Lee Ann Fujii, 'The puzzle of extra-lethal violence', *Perspectives on Politics* 11: 2, 2013, pp. 410–26.

³⁰ Ana Santos, 'The price of "machismo populism" in the Philippines', *The Atlantic*, 7 June 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/06/duterte-kiss-philippines/562265/>; Joshua Roose, 'Non-western new populism: religion, masculinity and violence in the East', in Gregor Fitz, Juergen Mackert and Bryan Turner, eds, *Populism and the crisis of democracy* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), pp. 111–29.

³¹ Santos, 'The price of "machismo populism" in the Philippines'.

³² Glasius, 'What authoritarianism is ... and is not'.

³³ Patrick Winn, 'Critics call him "serial killer". But Duterte is still a hit in the Philippines', *The World*, 3 July 2017, <https://www.pri.org/stories/2017-07-03/critics-call-him-serial-killer-duterte-still-hit-philippines>.

former budget secretary.³⁴ In 2017, Duterte authorized martial law to counter violent extremism.³⁵ In 2018, the Supreme Court used legal procedures to remove its own chief justice. At the same time, human rights lawyers have initiated legal cases for police accountability,³⁶ demonstrating that they still hope that the law will be upheld.

In Russia—a ‘world innovator in nondemocratic practices’³⁷—Putin has been described as macho, physically potent and fearless. Images circulate widely of a bare-chested Putin horse-riding through the wilderness, hunting and holding weapons, and engaging in extreme sports. Goscilo describes Putin’s persona as modelled on the Machiavellian prince and Hollywood action heroes: a ‘masterful, self-confident alpha male, apparently in full control of both himself and the nation’, who ‘projects an aura of self-restraint’.³⁸ Putin’s regime employs both legal and illegal means of managing political opposition. For instance, it has filtered candidates and supported parties that express multiple viewpoints but remain loyal to the regime; it has also resorted to ballot-box fraud.³⁹ The regime has backed the Nashi youth group, likened to the Hitler Youth by critical commentators both in Russia and abroad, pointing to the militarized symbolic world of Putin’s regime.⁴⁰ The existence of critical media outlets, though marginal, creates a veneer of free speech. However, the Kremlin intervenes strategically to shape media narratives, for example orchestrating changes in ownership, pressurizing investors or using legal means to censor unfavourable news coverage.⁴¹

Though Duterte’s flamboyant machismo contrasts with Putin’s stoicism, both strongmen rulers perform culturally and historically resonant versions of militarized masculinity. Each ruler also contends differently with the challenges posed by democratic institutions. While Duterte calls explicitly for extralegal violence in the name of law and order, Putin is paradigmatically restrained, using more subtle strategies to hollow out democratic institutions. The two cases show how the contradictions fundamental to militarized masculinities enact and reinforce the paradox of restraint. Other scholars have similarly noted that contradictions in masculine narratives can help produce a ruler’s authority. For instance, Eksi and Wood describe a ‘Janus-faced masculinity’, wherein populist rulers such as Erdoğan and Putin make the transition from a bullying machismo, adopted to

³⁴ David Timberman, *Philippine politics under Duterte: a midterm assessment* (Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2019).

³⁵ Maria Tanyag, *Duterte and governing through hypermasculinity in the Philippines* (Brisbane: Australian Institute of International Affairs, 2018).

³⁶ Antony Loewenstein, ‘Only the law can stop Duterte’s murderous war on drugs’, *Foreign Policy*, 28 Feb. 2018.

³⁷ Nikolay Petrov, Maria Lipman and Henry Hale, ‘Three dilemmas of hybrid regime governance: Russia from Putin to Putin’, *Post-Soviet Affairs* 30: 1, 2014, p. 2.

³⁸ Helena Goscilo, ‘Putin’s performance of masculinity: the action hero and macho sex-object’, in Helena Goscilo, ed., *Putin as celebrity and cultural icon* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), pp. 184, 187.

³⁹ Petrov et al., ‘Three dilemmas of hybrid regime governance’; see also Luke March, ‘Managing opposition in a hybrid regime: just Russia and parastatal opposition’, *Slavik Review* 68: 3, 2009, pp. 504–27.

⁴⁰ Julie Hemment, ‘Nashi, youth voluntarism, and Potemkin NGOs: making sense of civil society in post-Soviet Russia’, *Slavic Review* 71: 2, 2012, pp. 234–60; James Jones, ‘Putin’s youth movement provides a sinister backdrop to Russia’s protests’, *Guardian*, 8 Dec. 2011, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2011/dec/08/putin-russia-elections>.

⁴¹ Petrov et al., ‘Three dilemmas of hybrid regime governance’, p. 9.

establish their ruling bona fides, to a paternalistic dominance once they consolidate power. These strongmen can thus paradoxically frame themselves as ‘outsiders-yet-insiders, bad-boys-yet-good-fathers’, establishing themselves as ‘the same as other men and also different from them, standing above the citizenry, mediating and fostering a conservative political order’.⁴² This scholarship also links the cult of the popularly elected leader to the paradoxical coexistence of universal suffrage and repressive politics. However, it leaves open the question of how such national-level performances are translated to the local level, where they reproduce executive power and allow authoritarians to exercise social control. In the following section, I take this next step. Using the case of Yoweri Museveni’s Uganda, I show how national-level masculine performances can be reproduced at a local level and transcribed onto ordinary citizens’ gendered identities.

Militarized masculinity: translating national-level authority to the grass roots

To understand how militarized masculinities transfer national-level authority and power into the daily lives of ordinary citizens, I turn to a micro-level case that reveals everyday interactions between soldiers and civilians in contemporary Uganda. These interactions occurred at a community security meeting, held to adjudicate a dispute between a soldier and a civilian over a civilian woman. The military is a paradigmatic institution of authoritarian control; the association between the military and executive power means that encounters with soldiers conjure the authority of the ruler. The case illustrates how the soldiers’ gendered performances mirror and reproduce the militarized masculinity of the ruler, and how civilians encounter and respond to these performances. This event occurred in the conflict-affected north of the country; however, it was not an instance of military coercion, but rather a negotiation over social and cultural aspects of ordinary life. As Wibben reminds us, ‘militarism as an ideology is actualized in everyday lives of those touched directly by the military, as well as society at large’.⁴³ This point of contact between the soldiers and society reveals antagonisms between civilian and militarized gendered practices, accentuating the dynamics by which gender works as a mechanism to produce political subjects.⁴⁴ It is thus an ‘extreme case’,⁴⁵ in which the dynamics between militarism, the state and society are particularly salient.⁴⁶

⁴² Betül Eksi and Elizabeth Wood, ‘Right-wing populism as gendered performance: Janus-faced masculinity in the leadership of Vladimir Putin and Recep T. Erdogan’, *Theory and Society* 48: 5, 2019, pp. 733–51; see also Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, ‘Vox populi or vox masculini? Populism and gender in northern Europe and South America’, *Patterns of Prejudice* 49: 1–2, 2015, pp. 16–36.

⁴³ Annick Wibben, ‘Why we need to study (US) militarism: a critical feminist lens’, *Security Dialogue* 49: 1–2, 2018, p. 138.

⁴⁴ These antagonisms could be contrasted to sites of synthesis between civilian and military gendered identities, for example as documented in peacekeeping operations. See Claire Duncanson, ‘Forces for good? Narratives of military masculinity in peacekeeping operations’, *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 11: 1, 2009, pp. 63–80.

⁴⁵ Jason Seawright and John Gerring, ‘Case selection techniques in case study research: a menu of qualitative and quantitative options’, *Political Research Quarterly* 61: 2, 2008, pp. 294–308.

⁴⁶ There is a trade-off between the clarity offered in extreme cases (such as the direct interaction between soldiers

Masculinity and the nation in Museveni's Uganda

Uganda's ruling National Resistance Movement (NRM) has given formal but limited recognition to the rule of law, such that sometimes liberal democratic institutions prevail, while at other times the state's security forces carry out executive orders with impunity. Museveni has held power since 1986, when he took Kampala after waging a five-year guerrilla insurgency. Under Museveni, Uganda has seen numerous liberal reforms that have in effect centralized executive control. For example, the regime's ambitious programme of decentralization has fragmented autonomous sources of political power.⁴⁷ Likewise, the country's return to multiparty politics in 2005 allowed the NRM to discipline critical voices by threatening them with expulsion.⁴⁸ At the same time, Uganda continues to hold elections with universal suffrage, has implemented democratic government at the grass roots and maintains a relatively free press.

Since colonial times, military power has been central to political control in Uganda; Museveni, like his predecessors, continues to rely on armed forces to safeguard his rule. On several occasions, the military has intervened in the judiciary and parliament, including in 2005 and 2007, when government security forces re-arrested opposition politicians who had been granted bail. Human Rights Watch described this as a way of 'intimidating the civilian courts', while the chief judge of the High Court called it a 'rape of the judiciary'.⁴⁹ Military officers hold positions in the legislature and executive, and the regime sometimes prosecutes civilians in military courts despite condemnation by human rights organizations.⁵⁰ Though the regime has held regular elections since 1996, security forces have often intervened, for instance arresting and detaining members of opposition parties, and recruiting and training civilian militias.⁵¹ The government further offers free military training for civilians from all walks of life, promoting these programmes as a stepping-stone to employment.

Like Duterte and Putin, Museveni has cultivated his own particular form of militarized masculinity. Keeping his identity as a soldier at the forefront of his persona, Museveni often dons military fatigues and sleeps in military barracks when he travels around the country. He has been described as bridging opposites,

and civilians) and the more nuanced ways in which militarized masculinities appear in other sites (e.g. Hollywood performances; see Michael Messner, 'The masculinity of the governor: muscle and compassion in American politics', *Gender and Society* 21: 4, 2007, pp. 461–80). As Welland notes, 'a stable and coherent militarised masculinity is exposed as a fiction, [but] the violent effects of this fragile subjectivity remain violently "real"': Julia Welland, 'Militarised violences, basic training, and the myths of asexuality and discipline', *Review of International Studies* 39: 4, 2013, pp. 881–902 at p. 882. In other work, I trace a nuanced story of how different masculine norms interact to turn young men into malleable political subjects. See Rebecca Tapscott, 'Policing men: militarised masculinity, youth livelihoods, and security in conflict-affected northern Uganda', *Disasters* 42: S1, 2018, pp. S119–S139.

⁴⁷ Elliott Green, 'Patronage, district creation, and reform in Uganda', *Studies in Comparative International Development* 45: 1, 2010, pp. 83–103.

⁴⁸ Sabiti Makara, Lise Rakner and Lars Svåsand, 'Turnaround: the National Resistance Movement and the re-introduction of a multiparty system in Uganda', *International Political Science Review* 30: 2, 2009, pp. 185–204.

⁴⁹ *Uganda: government gunmen storm High Court again* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 5 March 2007).

⁵⁰ Stephen Kafeero, 'Army officers take over key state affairs', *Daily Monitor*, 7 July 2019.

⁵¹ Rebecca Tapscott, 'Where the wild things are not: crime preventers and the 2016 Ugandan elections', *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 10: 4, 2016, pp. 693–712.

as ‘a synthesis of soldier and intellectual’,⁵² adopting a ‘secularized puritanism’.⁵³ In his analysis of Museveni’s 1997 autobiography, Kassimir writes that logic, sangfroid, control, discipline and ‘a self-consciously “scientific” approach to both resistance and rule’ emerge as key personality traits.⁵⁴ Often referred to as the father of the country, Museveni has likened Uganda to a banana plantation that he himself has cultivated and that is only now bearing fruit.⁵⁵ He thus patches together different elements of masculinity, linking militarism and strength to an idealized notion of restraint and discipline.

The regime, state institutions and the military are deeply intertwined with Museveni’s rule, such that militarized masculinities are associated with the state and the regime, and inflected with the authority of both. This militarization of the public sphere means that performances of gender that correspond to militarized masculinities are frequently associated with preferential access to resources and power. In his work on policing in Uganda, Kagoro has described a ‘warriorized field of power’ wherein the merging of the military with politics imbues symbols and objects of militarism—uniforms, guns, rank, training—with political authority.⁵⁶

Masculinities in the everyday: negotiations and contestations in northern Uganda

Northern Uganda is marked both by military intervention and by the nation’s culture of militarism; however, this has not destroyed local notions of masculinity so much as it has become entangled with and constricted them. The British colonial army recruited almost exclusively ethnic Acholi from the north, contributing to what has been described as the ‘ethno-military identity’ of the Acholi.⁵⁷ For many years after Ugandan independence, the country was ruled by a northerner, Milton Obote, who stacked the government and military with co-ethnics. Museveni, who comes from the south-west of the country, effectively reversed the political fate of northerners, whose historical proximity to state power threw their marginalization into stark relief.⁵⁸ An ensuing war between Museveni’s new government and the Lord’s Resistance Army—a rebel group led by ethnic Acholi—ebbed and flowed between 1986 and 2006, further exacerbating these dynamics.

For many, this war rendered unattainable the basic tenets of masculinity—including formalizing marriage, fathering children and raising a respectable

⁵² Ronald Kassimir, ‘Reading Museveni: structure, agency and pedagogy in Ugandan politics’, *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 33: 2–3, 1999, p. 650.

⁵³ Michael Twaddle, cited in Kassimir, ‘Reading Museveni’.

⁵⁴ Kassimir, ‘Reading Museveni’, p. 651.

⁵⁵ ‘Yoweri Museveni: Uganda’s president profiled’, BBC News, 17 Feb. 2016, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-12421747>.

⁵⁶ Jude Kagoro, *Militarization in post-1986 Uganda: politics, military and society interpretation* (Berlin: Lit, 2015), p. 123.

⁵⁷ Ruddy Doom and Koen Vlassenroot, ‘Kony’s message: a new Koine? The Lord’s Resistance Army in northern Uganda’, *African Affairs* 98: 390, 1999, pp. 5–36. Colonial ‘civilizing missions’ further shaped African gender identities in relation to European notions of modernity and development. See Sylvia Tamale, ‘Nudity, protest and the law in Uganda’, inaugural professorial lecture, School of Law, Makerere University, 28 Oct. 2016.

⁵⁸ Adam Branch, *Displacing human rights: war and intervention in northern Uganda* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

family—through what Schulz describes as ‘layered harms’.⁵⁹ Particularly in its early stages, civilians—especially men—were arrested, tortured and killed.⁶⁰ Later, the government forcibly moved much of the civilian population to ‘protected’ camps, where they were denied access to their farms and other livelihood activities.

In the overcrowded camps, it was difficult to build a proper home, seen as the centre of family life. Many social rituals that had been key to maintaining intergenerational and ancestral connections—such as those around marriage, birth and death—were abandoned during this time because they could not be properly performed without access to land.⁶¹ Gender relations were placed under further pressure as government soldiers, seen as outsiders, took civilian women as wives and sexual partners. Instances of rape and gender-based violence against civilian men have also been documented as a way to communicate ‘survivors’ disempowerment and subordination vis-à-vis the perpetrators’ power, dominance and hyper-masculinity’.⁶² For Acholi residents of northern Uganda, these experiences further entrenched the ethnically inflected bond between the military and the NRM regime. Today, the identity of these soldiers—many of them ethnic southerners—continues to embody important power asymmetries.

Despite this complex history, civilian notions of masculinity in northern Uganda continue to reflect longstanding values and practices. Emphasis is placed on being a good arbitrator: being even-handed and fair, and helping to solve people’s problems peacefully. In addition to establishing a proper household with a wife and children, and protecting and providing for one’s family, respondents highlighted qualities like sharing, honesty and forgiveness, at times illustrated in seemingly banal day-to-day activities:

A real man should be a person who cares about the wellbeing of his household ... [He] should not buy *muchomo* [roasted meat] in the [trading] center and eat alone ... [instead] he should bring it home and share with his family. Secondly, a real man should not sleep endlessly [or] early ... [He] should first study the environment to ascertain that security is okay. A man should not be a liar ... A man should have some rules which he lives by.⁶³

The respondent emphasizes sharing and being a productive member of society, underlying the social priority given to the collective over the individual.⁶⁴ This is further reflected in the Acholi concepts of *dano adana* and *bedo dano*, which refer to being a real or good person, and stress that ‘a singular person can only exist in relation to a community of people’.⁶⁵ Onyango’s detailed analysis of Acholi masculinity similarly emphasizes that a real man can ‘influence decisions; win

⁵⁹ Philipp Schulz, *Male survivors of wartime sexual violence: perspectives from northern Uganda* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2020).

⁶⁰ Philipp Schulz, ‘Displacement from gendered personhood: sexual violence and masculinities in northern Uganda’, *International Affairs* 94: 5, Sept. 2018, pp. 1101–19.

⁶¹ Holly Porter, ‘Moral spaces and sexual transgression: understanding rape in war and post conflict’, *Development and Change* 50: 4, 2019, pp. 1009–32.

⁶² Schulz, ‘Displacement from gendered personhood’, p. 1110.

⁶³ Author interview, middle-aged male, Gulu, 6 Oct. 2015.

⁶⁴ See also the notion of ‘social harmony’ elaborated in Holly Porter, *After rape: violence, justice, and social harmony in Uganda*, International African Library (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

⁶⁵ Schulz, *Male survivors of wartime sexual violence*, p. 83.

over respect and be able to move things one's own way', not as an individual but as part of a social body.⁶⁶ Dolan, who has written extensively about masculinity in northern Uganda, notes that Acholi masculinity offers no rubric for the use of violence—rather there is a 'loud silence'.⁶⁷ Though scholars frequently emphasize the mutability of gender norms, many ideals related to marriage, having and raising children, and familial and social expectations have remained the same in Acholi over decades.

Drawing on this context of masculinities in northern Uganda, I analyse a community security meeting that I attended in 2015 to show how the local performance of militarized masculinities produces gendered tensions that infuse everyday life with executive authority. I selected this case as a fairly typical instantiation of the dynamics between soldiers and civilians. The meeting took place in a village on the outskirts of Gulu town, the largest urban centre in northern Uganda. The village abuts Gulu's Fourth Division barracks, where soldiers and civilians live in close proximity. These barracks do not serve a peacekeeping role, nor are they part of a post-conflict settlement. They were built before Museveni took power, and have been a site of central state authority representing multiple regimes over nearly half a century.

Ad hoc security meetings are often called in communities across Uganda to address general security concerns, for example theft or fighting. This particular security meeting was called to resolve a violent confrontation between a soldier and a civilian. The men had fought over a woman, both claiming her as a 'wife'. There was shared concern among soldiers and civilians that the men might kill one another if the matter was left unresolved. I attended the meeting with a male Acholi research assistant, who translated while I took notes, from which the account below is drawn. The case shows how the tensions within militarized masculinities replicate the tensions that characterize the Ugandan regime and its paradox of restraint. When these tensions interact and conflict with local gender norms, the effect is to project the regime's power into the everyday lives of ordinary Ugandans. Communities seek to resolve these contradictions themselves, to manage the ambiguities of authoritarianism and to deter violent intervention by the regime.

The 'Box Market' security meeting: tensions in practice

The meeting took place on a family compound, next to a small vegetable market, colloquially called 'Box Market'. This market, along with several drinking and music joints, catered to soldiers, whose monthly salaries contributed a significant influx of cash into this poor peri-urban community. 'Box Market' was named after its sex workers, who are said to place their earnings in a small box for safe keeping. In an attempt to police the drinking, fighting and sex work associated with the presence of soldiers, the community had implemented by-laws requiring bars to

⁶⁶ Eria Olowo Onyango, 'Manhood on the margins: failing to be a man in post-conflict northern Uganda' (Brighton: Microcon, 2012), p. 8.

⁶⁷ Chris Dolan, 'Collapsing masculinities and weak states: a case study of northern Uganda', in Frances Cleaver, ed., *Masculinities matter! Men, gender and development* (London: Zed, 2002), pp. 57–83.

close at 10 p.m. and prohibiting prostitution. Before the barracks were built, the land had been communally owned.⁶⁸ Although the land was now fenced, civilians continued to farm there and to agitate for compensation.⁶⁹ On the day of the meeting, approximately 30 civilian women sat on mats, while 15 or so civilian men sat around the perimeter on wooden benches. Seven soldiers—some in uniform, others in civilian dress—sat on chairs facing the civilians.

Though both soldiers and civilians initially emphasized the need to promote peace and harmony, the overall tone was hostile and the discussion riddled with threats, some of which were implied while others were markedly direct. Throughout the meeting, participants commented on the poor attendance by civilian men; they said that more men should have been present to make collective decisions and discipline the civilian women. Much of the conversation focused on chastising unnamed women for infidelity and prostitution, and accusing these faceless perpetrators of 'bringing death' and shame to the community. 'Bringing death' referred both to women catalysing fights between soldiers and civilians, and also to the spread of HIV. Another strand of the conversation focused on the nature of community members' livelihoods. Some of the soldiers spoke in Acholi, while others used Swahili, the official language of the military. The conversation shifted erratically among perspectives, with each speaker asserting his or her own vision of how the community should assess future conflicts, rather than directly engaging with the concerns raised by other speakers. I trace the general arc of the conversation below.

After the locally elected village representative (referred to as the local councillor or LCI) officially opened the meeting, a soldier spoke first in Acholi, telling the community members to report issues of concern, whether to the local councillor or to the soldiers, and admonishing them not to fear soldiers:

The community should inform the LCI of problems ... If it's problems from the soldiers—[for example, if] they come and borrow something and don't want to pay. So you should tell the LCI. You should not cause the problem of fighting.

Guns, fists and so on are the causes of insecurity. The problem is the army commanders are not informed because the community fears them. But the community should not fear. There is no relationship between the community and the soldiers. This should change. We should sit down and figure out how to compromise.

A second soldier then spoke in Swahili, another soldier translating his comments into Acholi so the community could understand:

We have come to keep the peace. We are not peacekeepers, but we should try as neighbours. As a civilian, how can you pick a stick to bring to a soldier? You think that you're the only one with energy? If he [the soldier] goes into the barracks with energy, what will happen? The higher authorities are concerned if a soldier beats and steals from a

⁶⁸ Author interview, soldier, Gulu, 22 Nov. 2015; also see Denis Athocon, 'UGX 650 million earmarked for renovating UPDF hangar in Gulu', Uganda Radio Network, 27 May 2014, <https://ugandaradionetwork.net/story/ugx-650million-earmarked-for-renovating-updf-hangar-in-gulu>.

⁶⁹ Jackson Kitara, 'Gulu residents want compensation for army barracks land', *New Vision Uganda*, 19 Oct. 2017, http://www.newvision.co.ug/new_vision/news/1464019/gulu-residents-compensation-army-barracks-land.

civilian. So don't take the law into your own hands. If I steal your groundnuts, don't fight, go and report it to the [army intelligence officer] ... The day we schedule to come here, if they [the problem causers] don't come, we'll block the road to their garden because if they don't want a good relationship, why should they survive? We should act before a soldier or a civilian dies.

The soldier first asserts that soldiers are not peacekeepers; therefore, trying to make peace requires them to act outside their role. He further establishes that soldiers are agents of violence with access to guns and 'energy'—a term also associated with sexual prowess—and the innuendo-laden claim that a civilian's stick is no match for the soldier's gun.⁷⁰ At the same time, he notes that the 'higher authorities' are concerned if a soldier infringes on a citizen's rights. He encourages civilians to use the military's systems to make complaints rather than resorting to violence, highlighting the military structure's potential order and discipline. The soldier then suggests that if the citizens do not turn over the woman responsible for the conflict, the soldiers might restrict civilians' access to their gardens inside the barracks—both as a warning to families that rely on subsistence farming and in rejection of the civilians' patrilineal claims to that land. The soldier concludes by urging the community members to act before a soldier or a civilian dies. The juxtaposition of this comment with his depiction of soldiers' superior access to force points to the potential for lethal violence associated with the military. In this way, the soldier places responsibility for the conflict with the civilians, proposing that if a soldier resorts to a hyper-masculine expression of violence, the state's institutions will grind into action—but this will be too late to contain the damage.

After the soldier, a middle-aged civilian woman spoke:

The soldiers are our children. Why do they do such things? If a soldier dies, we also feel it ... If you have a husband and deceive others that you don't, that's wrong. We should get rid of that person. Otherwise, it will cause death. The soldiers will get annoyed and pick their gun.

The woman asserts notions of civilian masculinity over the soldiers, linking them to the community and its familial values. But she also notes their access to weapons and propensity to kill. Shortly thereafter, another soldier offered a rebuttal, stressing that soldiers follow their own moral code, that they are capable of and even prone to lethal violence, but that their commitment to discipline and order could move them to commit suicide if they were to take such action:

[S]oldier[s are not] fighting ... civilian[s] ... Soldiers follow their law. The community is trying to cause problems among them. The soldier might kill, and then he feels he should commit suicide because he has killed.

The soldier invokes his capacity to exit via suicide, thereby rejecting the woman's efforts to frame soldiers as children of the community. For Acholi, suicide

⁷⁰ The Acholi term *kero* translates as both energy and power, and is also used as an expression of masculinity during sex, thus alluding to a masculine and sexual power: see Porter, *After rape*, p. 127.

is extremely shameful and weak, and thus antithetical to manliness. Moreover, the threat of suicide makes a soldier's potential violence unaccountable and unresolvable—a dead man cannot be disciplined by the state or by the community; he cannot atone for or repair damage caused by his actions.

Later, an elderly man spoke, first recalling the chaos of the war years, and reiterating his view that soldiers have superior access to violence. He then invoked the president and his role in granting the civilians access to land in the barracks, following this with the proposition that the local councillor (LCI) should negotiate with the soldiers as necessary:

A soldier believes in his energy and the energy is the gun. What will you do? ... I am praising Museveni. He has given civilians access to get land. The LCI should not be fearful, he should go to the barracks to talk ...

I am cautioning the bar operators. If you are selling for education of a child, [it is] okay. An educated family is strong, and you should give a helping hand by training those who are wrong. We should not call her *Malaya* [prostitute]. Maybe she is looking for a place to sleep or eat. If you have a worker in your bar, register her name with the LCI.

The man refers again to the 'energy' of the soldiers and thanks the president for giving civilians continued access to land that used to be theirs. In emphasizing children's education, the man echoes an element of Acholi masculinity—providing for the family and raising respectable and well-cared for children; he also acknowledges that catering to the desires of the soldiers, however unsavoury, is one of few options for civilian employment, and thus may be a necessary bad in the effort to lead a good life.

A soldier spoke next, addressing the civilian women:

If you have a husband, why go loving another man? It will bring lots of death. Soldiers have guns. Soldiers will say you've been cheating him. Love is a gift of God. We hate hearing of civilian death. We don't want to fight civilians.

The soldiers are passed out—they know they can kill a mother, a child—soldiers are bad. If they change their colour, they can kill ... The LCI should be informed. He has the sole responsibility of punishing. No one is above the law.

The soldier emphasizes the inherent violence of soldiers: they have been trained and 'passed out' (completed initial training in the armed forces) so that they can kill without remorse even the most vulnerable in society, namely women and children. This is a particularly stark statement, because for civilian men, one of the basic tenets of masculinity is providing for and protecting women and children. At the same time, his threat is sandwiched between a statement reflecting a duty of care to civilians, and the conclusion that no one is above the law.

A male civilian youth then spoke, noting that soldiers have become more organized and disciplined in the post-conflict years—but that their financial superiority to civilian men injects disorder into the community.

In the past, if you try to deceive the soldiers, to eat his money, he'll just shoot you. But in these days, the soldiers are more organized. Some women are not respectful to themselves. This can make problems and cause diseases. You find a mother loving a young man, and

then that young boy will love her daughter—you'll give HIV to your own daughter. Most soldiers in Uganda have been [to the barracks here]. They have the mentality, if you come to this detach [barracks], you'll have another wife. The soldiers have lots of money—even women who are already married see the money and they change their behaviour. Soldiers should take care ... The soldiers have the advantage of getting salary at the end of the month. The ladies can go and stay in the barracks for three days.

The youth notes that soldiers no longer use unrestrained violence as they did during the war. Now, they are 'more organized'. But his comments also highlight how militarized masculinities cause chaos when they interact with civilian life. He likens this to the social chaos created during the conflict, in which he says socially unacceptable sexual relationships contributed to the spread of HIV/AIDS.⁷¹ He describes an environment where the social order is overturned, for example with a 'mother loving a young man and then that young boy will love her daughter—you'll give HIV to your own daughter'. He concludes that the soldiers should 'take care' when engaging in sexual relations with women, a lightly veiled threat that they may contribute to their own undoing by contracting sexually transmitted diseases. His comments suggest that militarized masculinities can unravel the very social fabric of civilian society.

The youth also emphasizes the ability of soldiers, with their superior access to resources, to lure civilian women into the barracks and keep them outside the reach of the community, as well as the soldiers' power to determine which civilians can access their farms inside the barrack fences, thereby regulating civilians' access to livelihoods. He notes that civilian men are financially precarious compared to soldiers, who—because of their connection to the regime—have salaries and homes independent of their own family ties and social relations. They can thus tempt civilian women to stay in the barracks for days without committing to marriage or raising children.

The soldiers left the meeting officially planning to reconvene the following week. After they had left, the community identified a woman in their midst whom they accused of enticing civilian women to meet soldiers for sex. They also alleged that she was HIV positive and had infected her family with the disease. As accusation upon accusation was raised, she sat in the midst of the group and wept. After nearly an hour of denunciations, the community concluded that she should be held responsible for the conflict and be punished accordingly. Because she had no money, she was forced to 'sell' her phone to one of the market women, and use the proceeds to buy snacks for the meeting's attendees. She was then expelled from the market, and threatened with exile from the community. The follow-up meeting with the soldiers never took place; the accused woman eventually went to live with a soldier in the barracks.

⁷¹ The reference to HIV resonates with memories of the conflict, when it was believed that relationships between soldiers and civilians helped spread HIV among the civilian population. See Chris Dolan, *Social torture: the case of northern Uganda, 1986–2006* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn, 2009), pp. 178–84.

Vectors of transmission: livelihoods, the home and bloodlines

Returning to the central question of this article, how do today's authoritarian rulers overcome the gap between elites and ordinary citizens to manage society? The Box Market meeting highlights three vectors by which militarized masculinities project the paradox of restraint—and concomitantly the ambiguities of modern authoritarianism—into society. These are livelihoods, the home and bloodlines. I call these 'vectors' because of their directionality, allowing state power to penetrate the everyday lives of ordinary citizens. These vectors—which are distinct but interrelated—reflect key routes through which politics can enter and infuse everyday (gendered) life, linking citizens to the regime.⁷²

Livelihoods

The local economy of Box Market is structured by the soldiers' income, and their 'masculine' desires for sex and alcohol. While these desires correspond to hyper-masculine and aggressive characteristics associated with militarized masculinities, they also directly contradict Acholi notions of masculinity, which eschew drunkenness and prostitution. The resultant micro-economy of Box Market is defined by a tension between pursuit of livelihoods and local notions of a good life. The market exists because of the soldiers—and thus accommodates their demands for sex and alcohol. In meeting these demands, the economic interests of the community become intertwined with the insalubrious desires of the soldiers, placing pressure on local ideals of a good life. To address this concern, civilians attempted to separate economic activities from the local social order. For instance, the village chairman described the soldiers' payday as a discrete moment in time when prostitution occurs, thereby placing temporal limits on the indiscretion and seeking to isolate it from everyday life. In this way, the chairman's comments can be read as condemning prostitution, while endorsing the market and other small businesses. Similarly, the elderly man argued that if a civilian has a morally good motive for operating a bar—like raising a proper family—it should be seen as an exception. The man hierarchizes aspects of a 'good life', subordinating certain values (respectable employment) to others (educating children). Soldiers, for their part, have resources that attract civilian women, even those who are already married.

The home

The structure of the economy, paired with the nature of soldiers' movements, injects the tensions described above into the home. Movement and space are essential to the making of a proper Acholi home: a compound should be built on clan land, to which access is determined patrilineally. It should be set apart from the compounds of others, to allow for a certain degree of privacy. Wives should 'come from far'; the movement to and from the home of a prospective partner is

⁷² Elzbieta H. Oleksy, ed., *Intimate citizenships: gender, sexualities, politics* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

key to courtship rituals.⁷³ As Schulz notes, the word for ‘women’ in Acholi (*dako*) derives from the word for ‘migration’ (*dak*), reflecting the expectation that a wife should move from her paternal home to her husband’s home.⁷⁴ Soldiers upend these ideals: they are regularly transferred to different posts across the country, and are thus disembedded from the community, lacking a connection to land and clan. Even the language they speak—Swahili—is that of the state, not the people. Because their income comes from the state, they are not tethered to the land as a means of economic production. Rather than locating wives and bringing them home to their fathers’ land, soldiers travel and take women they find along the way. Though they may engage in sexual relations with civilian women, it is not as the first step in building a proper household. They are unrestrained by the social and familial networks that dictate behaviour for civilian men. Instead, their first loyalty is to the Ugandan state, which itself is fused with the ruling regime. During the meeting, the civilians’ comments revealed their concerns—for example, when they argued that there should be clearer guidance or regulations around how women access the gardens in the barracks, and when they seek to categorize some relationships with soldiers as legitimate and others as illegitimate.

Bloodlines

Bloodlines in Acholi help determine access to land as well as appropriate conjugal relations. In northern Uganda, there is a tradition of oral history delineating marital ties among clans, reinforcing clear regulations around appropriate sexual relations. The importance of blood in reproduction, belonging and social order was revealed in the meeting: for instance, when the young man describes how HIV may spread through improper relations between mothers and young men, and young men and daughters. In addition to HIV—which was seen as a major health crisis in Uganda in the 1980s and early 1990s—there are two further interpretations of this narrative undercurrent in the security meeting. First, a focus on HIV frames the threats to the community arising from sexual impropriety as an embodied danger located within female blood and sexual organs. This transforms a broad and amorphous external threat to the local social order into a concrete and localized vulnerability that can be managed, through either discipline or expulsion from the community.⁷⁵ Second, the threat of HIV becomes a harm that could imperil military men via their masculine desires, thereby becoming a possible source of local retribution for the disruptive actions of the soldiers in the community. Retribution for soldiers’ actions that is housed in the female body further illustrates the fragility of civilian men’s grasp on their role as providers and protectors. The civilian men cannot ‘pick a stick to bring to a soldier’; instead, they are placed on the sidelines, unable to prevent the possibility that soldiers will

⁷³ Porter, ‘Moral spaces and sexual transgression’.

⁷⁴ Schulz, *Male survivors of wartime sexual violence*, p. 85.

⁷⁵ Allen has written about communities that exile witches to ‘heal’ the community, analogizing the practice to the removal of a cancerous growth for the well-being of the whole body: Tim Allen, ‘The violence of healing’, *Sociologist* 47: 2, 1997, pp. 101–28.

bring disease and disorder into the community. In this scenario, the retribution available to civilian men is passive and subordinate to the actions of both soldiers and civilian women.

Militarized masculinities and social control

Drawing on feminist scholarship on gender and the state, and linking it to recent research on modern authoritarianism, this article started from the premise that the ruler's performance of militarized masculinities enacts the paradox of restraint. This enactment is particularly potent in regimes where the military is directly associated with the authority of the ruler. A comparison of the personas of Duterte in the Philippines and Putin in Russia emphasized that, despite their distinct cultural and social contexts, both these rulers' performances of militarized masculinities replicate and enact the unpredictable relationship between the rule of law and arbitrary state violence.

Having established militarized masculinity as an important mechanism by which today's authoritarian rulers project power at a national level, I turned to micro-level data in one such regime—Museveni's Uganda—to demonstrate how this mechanism also works to bridge the gap between elites and ordinary citizens, thereby translating executive power to the grass roots. I showed how local-level instantiations of militarized masculinities, performed in encounters between soldiers and civilians, mirror the national-level gendered performances of the president. The adoption and performance of militarized masculinities by state actors—in this case, government soldiers—embody two equally compelling versions of state authority: first, as a powerful but disciplined order-maker; second, as a capricious and unpredictable agent of violence. When civilians encounter these performances, they are both confronted with the tensions of militarized masculinities on their own terms and engaged in producing militarized masculinities as set apart from local ideals about proper gendered identities and order.

I further traced how this reproduction of executive power is then transmitted and transcribed into the gendered identities of ordinary citizens through what I have termed 'vectors of transmission'. The findings link national-level executive power to everyday experiences of authoritarianism, depicting gendered encounters as key to the exercise of authoritarian social control. As the case illustrates, militarized masculinities offer numerous points of contention with local gendered ideals: I highlighted the dimensions of livelihoods, home and bloodlines. These vectors illustrate the processes by which militarized masculinities present the regime's authority and integrate it into the lived realities of ordinary citizens. The result is a political subject who engages with the regime—imagining it as a potential source of order-making and development—while simultaneously feeling violated and threatened by that same regime. Similar dynamics have been described in other contexts. For instance, Chigudu describes a similarly productive tension in the political subjectivities of Zimbabweans after the 2008–2009 cholera outbreak, with people retaining aspirational views of citizenship based on

an expectation of democratic rights and representation, while also being cynical, fearful and distrustful of a negligent state.⁷⁶

I have elaborated on tensions emerging from a particular masculine ideal-type—militarized masculinities—and illustrated how these tensions foreground the paradox of restraint, and related ambiguities of authoritarian power, in the daily lives of ordinary citizens. This tension, fundamental to militarized masculinities, is an underexplored mechanism for translating national-level authoritarian power to the grass roots, simultaneously emphasizing the regime's capacity for capricious and unaccountable violence and the continued relevance of the rule of law. This in turn helps to foster the impression that arbitrary violence enacted by state authorities is under the command of the ruler, such that arbitrary acts of violence come to reinforce rather than undermine the authority of the regime. It further contributes to a public perception that rulers must at times exhibit arbitrary and unrestrained violence; that manly, heroic, volatile and potentially overwhelming strength is necessary to produce orderly rule over a chaotic society. Thus a degree of responsibility for the regime's arbitrary violence is internalized by the policed population. The result is a kind of occupation of society, where militarized masculinities come to pervade daily life. This analysis helps to explain how today's authoritarian rulers project and sustain power, even as they struggle to balance elite demands and societal discontent within an institutional setting that allows both to air grievances.

⁷⁶ Chigudu, 'The politics of cholera'.