

The Vulnerability of the Penis: Sexual Violence against Men in Conflict and Security Frames

Men and Masculinities

2019, Vol. 22(5) 778-800

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DOI: 10.1177/1097184X17724487

journals.sagepub.com/home/jmm



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Abstract

Sexual violence remains a persistent scourge of war. The use of sexual violence against men in armed conflict, however, remains underresearched and is often sidelined. As an explanation, this interdisciplinary article situates the issue of sexual violence against men within a new analytical framework. It does so through a focus on the core subtext which this violence reveals—the vulnerability of the penis. Highlighting critical disconnects between what the penis is and what it is constructed as being, it argues that the vulnerable penis destabilizes the edifice of phallogentric masculinity, and hence it has wider security implications. Conflict-related sexual violence has increasingly been securitized within the framework of human security. The concept of human security, however, is deeply gendered and often excludes male victims of sexual violence. This gendering, in turn, reflects a broader gendered relationship between sexual violence and security. Sexual violence against women manifests and reaffirms their long-recognized vulnerability in war. Sexual violence against men, in contrast, exposes the vulnerability of the penis and thus represents a deeper security threat. Fundamentally, preserving the integrity and power of the phallus is critical to the security and integrity of phallogentric masculinity and thus to maintaining a systemic stability that is crucial in situations of war and armed conflict.

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Keywords

bodies, conflict, hegemonic masculinity, performativity, violence, war

One of the interrogators was keen on beating my testicles time and again, as a result of which I fainted more than eight times—words of a Palestinian ex political prisoner. (cited in Punamaki 1988, 88)

They started torturing me here [gesturing toward his genitalia]. They were also beating me and there was a guard behind me turning the electricity on. I passed out. They were beating me and shocking me. The interrogator was beating me with a cable over my whole body. I still didn't have any clothes on . . . they asked me every thirty minutes if I would confess—words of a Syrian soldier. (cited in Human Rights Watch 2012)

During the first interrogation, the official in military fatigues forced me to undress. He tried to have oral sex with me. He forced himself on me and raped me. During questioning, the officials would squeeze my penis. They would force me to masturbate them. One of them masturbated me. I was severely tortured when I resisted —words of a Tamil man in Sri Lanka. (cited in Human Rights Watch 2013)

Within academia and policy discourse, men who suffer conflict-related sexual violence (including rape) are often sidelined and marginalized. Their stories and trauma remain secondary to the central thematic of male perpetrators and female victims. Numerous factors sustain this gendering of sexual violence. The coding categories used in some jurisdictions, for example, deny the very existence of male rape. The Sudanese Criminal Code is a case in point (Ferrales, Brehm, and McElrath 2016, 571). Men may also struggle to see themselves as victims and to thus acknowledge what has happened to them (Levine 2006, 128). Quintessentially, the notion of victimhood sits uncomfortably with “social expectations of what it is to be a man in our society—as strong, tough, self-sufficient, and impenetrable . . .” (Weiss 2008, 277). The operationalization of these social expectations, in turn, contributes to the critical underreporting of sexual violence against men (Dolan 2014a, 81). Men may feel ashamed of coming forward (Oosterhoff, Zwanikken and Ketting 2004, 70); they may fear other people's reactions (Javaid 2016, 287); they may worry that their stories will not be believed (Capers 2011, 1274). In jurisdictions where homosexuality is illegal, moreover, a man who reports rape might expose himself to considerable risk (Vojdik 2014, 932),¹ the “taint” of homosexuality transforming his victimhood into a guilty and culpable act (Sivakumaran 2005).

In a recent report on conflict-related sexual violence against men, Kapur and Muddell (2016, 26) argue that “Greater consciousness about the existence of male victims of sexual violence and their likely vulnerabilities is essential to enhancing their access and participation in processes aimed at achieving acknowledgement, accountability, and reform.” A key aim of this interdisciplinary article is to contribute to building this “greater consciousness,” by positioning sexual violence against men within a new analytical framework. Specifically, this research focuses on the

critical subtext which these crimes expose, namely, the vulnerability of the penis. This “side” of the penis is rarely seen. Within contemporary discourse on sexual violence (see, e.g., House of Lords Select Committee on Sexual Violence in Conflict 2016, 22), the penis is typically framed as a weapon. It is a hard, aggressive object that penetrates and tears, causing pain and suffering. In an international climate of “no impunity” and increased attention to the use of sexual violence in conflict, this war functionality of the penis necessarily takes center stage. However, there is also a more fundamental reason why the organ’s vulnerability remains frequently hidden. Namely, the exposure of this vulnerability challenges phallogocentric masculinity by stripping the phallus of its power and strength—and hence dominance. As Thompson and Holt (2004, 316) point out, “As a biological marker of maleness, the penis serves as a metonym for patriarchal privilege.” Yet, the “signifying phallus” (Lipset 2011, 28) is more than this. It also represents stability and order, the maintenance of something solid. Quintessentially, norms about what it means to be a “real” man “serve to reproduce a particular political system in which the categories of ‘men’ and ‘women’ are stable and unproblematic” (Ostberg 2010, 47). The reality of sexual violence against men, thus, is deeply destabilizing, particularly in situations of war and armed conflict. These crimes weaken the “fortress” of phallicism (Elise 2001, 499); and if men’s bodies are penetrable and vulnerable, so too is the fortress itself. The vulnerable penis, in short, is an abject that “disrupts identity, system, order” (Kristeva 1982, 4), and hence it is also a wider security “signifier.”

The issue of conflict-related sexual violence has been securitized through the recognition that these crimes have implications for international security. This securitization, however, is heavily gendered. According to Waever (2011, 472), “Securitization ultimately means a particular way of handling a particular issue, processing a threat through the security format. Thus, the security quality does not belong to the threat but to its management.” This research argues that far less attention has been given to managing the security threat posed by conflict-related sexual violence against men because it presents a more elemental threat. In the field of computer science, preserving the integrity of the operating system kernel “is critical to the security and integrity of a computer system” (Baliga, Kamat, and Iftode 2007, 246). Preserving the integrity and power of the phallus, similarly, is critical to the security and durability of phallogocentric masculinity and thus to maintaining a systemic stability that is crucial in situations of war and armed conflict. It is important, however, not to essentialize the penis as a vulnerable organ and to acknowledge the social contextual fluidity of vulnerability (Delor and Hubert 2000, 1564). This article accordingly examines both the “everyday penis” and the “war penis.”

The Quotidian Vulnerability of the Penis

Vulnerability, according to Levine (2004, 398), is an “extraordinarily elastic concept, capable of being stretched to cover almost any person, group, or situation, and

then of being snapped back to describe a narrow range of characteristics like age or incarceration.” Illustrative of this “stretching,” the concept is widely discussed in multiple and diverse contexts from disasters (Bankoff 2001; Wisner et al. 2004), mental health (Raphael, Stevens, and Pedersen 2006; Haddadi and Besharat 2010), and research ethics (Levine et al. 2004; Lange, Rogers, and Dodds 2013). When the notion of vulnerability is invoked in relation to sexual violence, it is typically “snapped back” to describe the particular gendered vulnerability of women (Humphrey and White 2000; Dartnall and Jewkes 2013).² Their bodies and genitalia are penetrable and vulnerable. This narrow gendering of vulnerability, however, neglects the reality of the penis’ own vulnerability.

In everyday life, the penis is vulnerable both socially and biologically. Socially, “No other human organ receives as much verbal attention as the penis” (Francken et al. 2002, 426). Phallogentric conceptions of masculinity and the importance that is attached to penis size³ mean that there are huge pressures on the penis to satisfy and “perform.” Sexual performance, in turn, is intrinsically linked to the performativity of hegemonic masculinity—and thus to the social construction of masculine hierarchies. In effect, “One’s place in the peer hierarchy is heavily determined by success at sexual conquests, by sexual adroitness, and by leadership in sexual encounters” (Hyde et al. 2009, 248). Unrealistic expectations of the penis, however—which pornography⁴ and the media have significantly fueled—make the organ vulnerable to failure; and this vulnerability, by extension, renders the owner of the penis potentially vulnerable to low self-esteem and negative body image. To cite Veale et al. (2014, 90), “. . . if a man believes that he is abnormal in his penis size then he is likely also to believe that others will evaluate him negatively and may reject or humiliate him.”

It seems that elevated expectations of the penis, moreover, remain intact even when the organ is “unwell.” According to a study by Bullen et al. (2010), for example, a major concern among men with penile cancer was that they would no longer be able to sexually satisfy their wives or future girlfriends (936–37). Ultimately, the study participants’ fears and insecurities surrounding performativity exposed how “men’s sense of masculinity and of self can be deeply undermined by the experience of the disease” (Bullen et al. 2010, 939). The “aging” penis similarly faces strong pressures to perform, satisfy, and “stay hard.” It is no longer permitted to quietly grow old or even to take semiretirement. The message that is continually relayed—in the media and by manufacturers of products such as Viagra—is that “To the extent that men can demonstrate their virility, they can still be men and stave off old age and the loss of status that accrues to that label” (Calasanti and King 2005, 16).

In addition to its social vulnerability, the penis is biologically—and hence inherently—vulnerable. The first reason is due to its external position (Diamond 2015, 66). As one illustration, the anthropologist Helliwell spent twenty months working with the Gerai community in Indonesian Borneo. She recounts how, on one occasion, a local woman chased an intruder from her house during the night. When

Helliwell (2000) expressed her concerns that the intruder might have tried to rape the woman, the latter asked with surprise: “How can a penis hurt anyone?” (p. 790). Among the Gerai, the penis and male genitalia, far from being seen as threatening and potentially harmful to women, are viewed instead as vulnerable—and more vulnerable than women’s genitalia—because they are outside the body. According to Helliwell (2000, 808–9), “This reflects Gerai understandings of ‘inside’ as representing safety and belonging, while ‘outside’ is a place of strangers and danger, and it is linked to the notion of men as braver than women.” The externality of the penis, moreover, means that in some cultures, it is viewed as vulnerable to “theft.” During a Koro⁵ epidemic in southern China in the 1980s, for example, Mattelaer and Jilek (2007, 1511)—a urologist and clinical psychiatrist, respectively—were told that “genital-robbing female fox spirits had been seen roaming the area.” This information sowed widespread fear among local people, causing the epidemic to “spread” from village to village (Mattelaer and Jilek (2007, 1511).

A second biological reason for the penis’ vulnerability is its internal structure. An erect penis can become fractured during sexual intercourse, which can subsequently lead to infection, urethrocutaneous fistula, and sexual dysfunction (Chung, Szeto, and Lai 2006, 199; Lehmler 2014, 67).⁶ Paradoxically, therefore, the penis is most at risk when it is “performing.” Erection enables the execution of masculinity, yet also “converts the safe, flaccid penis into a vulnerable organ” (Godec, Reiser, and Logush 1988, 124). Conditions such as erectile dysfunction further expose the penis as vulnerable. If it cannot stay “hard,” it becomes ineffective and inadequate, unable to do its job. To cite Potts (2000, 87), “It denotes the deficiency of a man—his failure robustly to represent the phallus.”

In an everyday context, thus, the primary performative role of the penis is a sexual one. In situations of war and armed conflict, however, the notion of performativity assumes a higher-level, meta importance. War is the ultimate expression of phallogocentric masculinity, and the penis is required to perform in a way that upholds and defends the phallogocentric—and heteronormative⁷—status quo. This, in turn, protects and defends those who are “vulnerable,” namely, women and children. What is seldom acknowledged, unsurprisingly, is the organ’s own vulnerability.

The Vulnerability of the Penis in War and Armed Conflict

Rape is frequently described as a “weapon of war” (Card 1996; Diken and Laustsen 2005; Bergoffen 2009). By extension, thus, the penis itself is typically conceptualized and framed as a weapon (Mullins 2009; Wachala 2012). This image of the combative, aggressive penis is synonymous with power and might. In the words of Brownmiller (1975, 49), rape “is the quintessential act by which a male demonstrates to a female that she is conquered—vanquished—by his superior strength and power.” Such one-dimensional portrayals of the penis, however, are problematic and perpetuate a gender-specific victimology that prioritizes and elevates female victims of sexual violence in conflict. In its safety recommendations for researching,

documenting, and monitoring sexual violence in emergencies, for example, the World Health Organization focuses exclusively on female victims. Sexual violence, it notes, can include “violent acts against the sexual integrity of women, including female genital mutilation and obligatory inspections for virginity” (World Health Organization 2007, 5). Specific forms of sexual violence against men, including blunt trauma to the male genitals (Carlson 2006) and castration, are not mentioned. When sexual violence against men in armed conflict is acknowledged, it is often done so in a cursory way⁸ and frequently “limited to an observation that the numbers are unclear and male victims are underreported” (Refugee Law Project 2013, 12).

Some feminist scholars have also played a part in downplaying the use of sexual violence against men. If, as Halley (2008, 114) argues, rape has become a “discourse of equivalents,” inevitably it is always compared to something else. Crimes committed against men thus recede into the background, particularly when conflicts are themselves portrayed as “wars against women.” Giving the example of the Soviet army’s campaign of destruction during World War II, Halley (2008, 114) maintains that “To frame this campaign as a ‘war against women’—no matter how many rapes it included, and there were hundreds of thousands of them—would be a historical travesty . . .” The discourse of equivalents, thus, is a distinctly gendered discourse that contributes to explaining differential levels of seriousness attached to sexual violence, depending on whether the victims are male or female. Some feminist scholars have also promoted the idea that rape specifically targets women’s reproductive capacities (see, e.g., MacKinnon 1994; Allen 1996). The resultant notion of genocidal rape further reinforces the discourse of equivalents and its inherent comparative logic. Discussing feminist scholarship on the use of rape in the former Yugoslavia during the 1990s, for example, Jaleel (2013, 126) notes that “The emphasis on both female reproduction and forced pregnancy as a war crime, a crime against humanity and a genocidal strategy, helps explain why the sexual abuse of men during the conflict barely rates a mention.”

The truth is that sexual violence against men in conflict is an uncomfortable reality that fundamentally goes “against the grain” by challenging dominant gendered scripts of who does what to whom in war (Baaz and Stern 2013, 36; Vojdik 2014, 940). According to Lacan (1995, 285), “the phallus is a signifier, a signifier whose function, in the intrasubjective economy of the analysis, lifts the veil perhaps from the function it performed in the mysteries.” The phallus is a particular signifier in situations of war, the ultimate environment in which “uber-masculinity” and virility are demanded (Goldstein 2001). Sexual violence against men necessarily problematizes and undermines these demands by “lifting the veil” on the penis’ vulnerability in war.

The Suffering Penis

The recurrent use of sexual violence in war has inevitably given rise to a wealth of different causal theories (see, e.g., Brownmiller 1975; Thornhill and Palmer 2000;

Turshen 2000; Leatherman 2011; Skjelsbaek 2012). More recently, there has been a shift in focus as some scholars have sought to explain critical *variations* in the use of conflict-related sexual violence (see, in particular, Wood 2006, 2009; Butler, Gluch, and Mitchell 2007; Cohen and Nordås 2015). Although as yet these efforts have not extended specifically to explaining variations in sexual violence against men, Wood's work is nevertheless particularly relevant in this regard. According to her, two key variables critically determine whether or not an armed group engages in sexual violence, namely, the decisions taken by the group's leaders and their enforceability, and the combatants' own norms regarding the use of violence against civilians (Wood 2009, 136). These two variables highlight the fact that sexual violence can be used strategically (top-down dynamic) or more opportunistically (bottom-up dynamic). The following examples, drawn from a variety of different conflicts, indicate that the utilization of rape and sexual violence against men often serves a strategic purpose.

After Algeria achieved independence from French colonial rule in 1962, Algerian nationalists from the *Front de Libération Nationale* (FLN)—which was established in 1954—sought revenge against pro-French Algerians known as *harkis*. The latter were viewed as dangerous traitors who needed to be punished for their disloyalty to the Algerian cause. The FLN's violence against the *harkis* included acts of castration (Evans 2017, 90). The motive, however, was not solely punitive. It was also about diluting the security threat that the *harkis* posed to the newly independent Algerian state. To cite Evans (2017, 101), "This was violence which aimed at personal humiliation through bodily mutilation, in particular sexual humiliation through emasculation of men . . ." Although the emasculation of the *harkis* was primarily a symbolic way of addressing the ongoing danger that they were seen to represent, it was linked to a clear strategic rationale. The pursuit of state security thus created extreme insecurity for the *harkis*, whose "treachery" rendered the male organ deeply vulnerable.

This vulnerability leitmotif was similarly in evidence during the nine-month Liberation War in Bangladesh in 1971. The Pakistani army performed body checks on Bengali men to ascertain whether they were Muslims, and it did so specifically by requiring them to expose their penises. As the anthropologist Mookherjee (2012, 1588) notes, "If anyone was found to be non-circumcised, they were deemed to be Hindus and would be killed."⁹ In this example, therefore, it was the noncircumcised penis that was especially vulnerable. The absence or presence of a foreskin could make the critical difference between life and death in the particular nationalist context of the war. It is noteworthy that the relationship between nationalism and gender is frequently conceptualized as aggravating female vulnerability (see, e.g., Snyder et al. 2006, 188). The rape of enemy women becomes a concomitant and extended "symbolic rape of the body of that [enemy] community" (Seifert 1996, 39). The example of Bangladesh, however, illuminates an important dynamic between nationalism and sexual violence against men. In this case, the contours of the male body and of the nation intertwined. The penis became a corporeal delineator of the

“in-group” and “out-group” and thus a core marker of an individual’s identity and loyalties. This nationalist context both rendered the circumcised penis critically vulnerable and heightened the utility of sexual violence in conflict. To cite Alison (2007, 81), “The ethnonational element means that symbolically the victim’s national identity is also feminised and humiliated.”

If a Bengali man’s penis *provided* important information about him, in Sri Lanka, during the twenty-five-year civil war between government armed forces and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), sexual violence against men was used as a way of *extracting* vital information from them. According to Human Rights Watch (2013),

Rape appears to have been a key element of broader torture and ill-treatment of suspected LTTE members and others believed linked to the LTTE. This torture was intended to obtain confessions—whether accurate or false—of involvement in LTTE activities, obtain information on others including spouses and relatives, and, it appears, to instill terror in individuals and the broader Tamil population.

The LTTE were a formidable military opponent,¹⁰ and part of the government’s multipronged approach to crushing the insurgency movement was to build intelligence against it. Sexual violence against Tamil men (and women)—including forcible masturbation, genital beatings, and oral/anal rape—thereby became a weapon of war that facilitated the government’s intelligence-gathering efforts. Even after the LTTE’s defeat in 2009, government forces continued to use sexual violence against Tamils in order “to obtain information about any remnants of the LTTE since then [the end of the conflict], whether in Sri Lanka or abroad” (Human Rights Watch 2013).¹¹ During the protracted war in Sri Lanka, therefore, it was the instrumental utility of the penis (and more precisely the Tamil penis) that made it vulnerable.

While the use of sexual violence against *harki* men in Algeria, Bengali men in Bangladesh, and Tamil men in Sri Lanka served a clear strategic purpose, it is difficult to discern any such purpose in the sexual violence inflicted on men in the Omarska camp in Bosnia–Herzegovina (BiH) in 1992. Located in the northwest of BiH, in the municipality of Prijedor, the Omarska camp operated from May until August 1992 and held up to 3,000 prisoners (Bosnian Muslims and Bosnian Croats) at one time. The prisoners were overwhelmingly male but included at least thirty-six women (*Prosecutor v. Tadić* 1997, §155). These women were repeatedly subjected to sexual violence (Cigelj 2006). One of the most shocking incidents of sexual violence committed in the camp, however, involved the sexual mutilation of a male prisoner. In the first case at the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia to deal with sexual violence against men, the Trial Chamber described how G and Witness H were ordered to jump into an inspection pit. Another prisoner, Fikret Harambašić, who was naked and bloodied from various beatings, was made to join them. According to the judgment,

... Witness H was ordered to lick his [Harambašić's] naked bottom and G to suck his penis and then to bite his testicles. Meanwhile a group of men in uniform stood around the inspection pit watching and shouting to bite harder. All three were then made to get out of the pit onto the hangar floor and Witness H was threatened with a knife that both his eyes would be cut out if he did not hold Fikret Harambašić's mouth closed to prevent him from screaming; G was then made to lie between the naked Fikret Harambašić's legs and, while the latter struggled, hit and bite his genitals. G then bit off one of Fikret Harambašić's testicles and spat it out and was told he was free to leave.¹² (*Prosecutor v. Tadić* 1997, §206)

The sexual mutilation of Harambašić was gratuitous rather than strategic. It served to humiliate a group of men who were already suffering¹³ and to reinforce their utter powerlessness (*Prosecutor v. Tadić* 1997, §232). In this case, therefore, the vulnerability of the penis and genitalia existed within a broader context of prisoner vulnerability. Living and sanitary conditions in the camp were appalling, and acts of brutality and violence were an everyday occurrence; "... detainees were beaten constantly by the guards, at the slightest perceived provocation, and some were beaten to death" (*Prosecutor v. Karadžić* 2016, §1760).

Men are not only sexually tortured, abused, and mutilated in war; they are also raped (Sivakumaran 2007, 2010; Storr 2011; Natabaalo 2013; Refugee Law Project 2013). Although male rape targets the anus, it further exposes the vulnerability of the penis. A penis, as Edley and Wetherell (1995, 9) underscore, "*means* masculinity or manhood." In war, therefore, the ultimate way in which to overpower enemy men is to target their masculinity—and hence their sexual organs. Fundamentally, the penis must be subjugated and feminized, and this is one of the functions of male rape (Refugee Law Project 2013, 13). The penis is ordinarily required to be active and to penetrate. As Jackson (2006, 113) argues, "... the heteronormative assumption that women and men are 'made for each other' is sustained through the commonsense definition of vaginal penetration by the penis as 'the sex act.'" Male rape denies the penis this penetrative role¹⁴ and pacifies it, reducing it from a phallus to a piece of flesh. It thus disables the "'legitimate' deployment" of the penis (Gough and Edwards 1998, 417), which in turn has wider implications.

The Destabilizing Vulnerable Penis and Its Security Implications

As a construct, masculinity takes diverse forms.¹⁵ However, scholars have frequently identified a hegemonic masculinity, "in relation to which images of femininity and other masculinities are marginalized and subordinated" (Barrett 2001, 79). This hegemonic masculinity can be more specifically defined as phallogocentric masculinity (Stephens 2007, 85), which, because of its association with dominance, elevates an image of the penis that is deeply at odds with the organ's vulnerability. To cite Potts (2000, 88), "Masculine sexuality is valorized for being hard and fast; it

strives to achieve the powerful proportions and positions of the phallus.” The juxtaposition of the phallus with vulnerability thus appears oxymoronic, the result of an erroneous slippage. More elementally, because it exposes the concomitant “vulnerability of masculinity and manhood” (Scarce 1997, 9), it is deeply destabilizing. In short, the reality of the organ’s own vulnerability is discordant with its required metafunctionality in maintaining the edifice of phallogentric masculinity and heteronormativity. Through the reconfiguration of the male body as the “penetrated” rather than “penetrator,” the boundary between interiority and exteriority becomes blurred and thus unstable. As Guss (2010, 135) argues, “The image of the closed anus, repelling invasion, protecting the interior, and resisting territorialization, is based in a sense of the self that is discrete and bounded; violation of this fictive self-containment is threatening because it endangers a particular type of masculinity.” The implications of this endangerment, in turn, are especially acute in situations of war and armed conflict.

War is an “invitation to manliness” (Mosse 1985, 34) and the ultimate arena for the manifestation and expression of hegemonic masculinity. It is where men are expected “to represent the virility, strength and power of the family and the community” (Sivakumaran 2007, 268) and to protect both themselves and others. The use of sexual violence against men not only disrupts and disturbs traditional war dynamics but also reveals the ease with which the penis can be disempowered—and its owner “demaskinized.” This reality sharply conflicts with the masculine ideals associated with warfare; the frequent gendering of the nation as female cements the heroic role of men as combatants who fight to defend and protect “her” (Mookherjee 2008, 41).¹⁶ Within this framework, there is little scope for an acknowledgment of masculine vulnerability, and hence this vulnerability is marginalized. It is women’s bodies that are visible in warfare—and women’s bodies that ultimately matter (Grey and Shepherd 2013, 122). The gendered securitization of conflict-related sexual violence has further reinforced this.

Sexual violence is increasingly recognized as constituting a security threat. The *United States National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security*, for example, underlines that “Sexual violence in conflict is a security issue that must receive the same level of attention as other threats to individuals in conflict situations” (White House 2016, 7). In the United Kingdom, similarly, a recent report by the House of Lords Select Committee on Sexual Violence in Conflict (2016, 29) emphasizes that “Sexual violence in conflict is a human rights violation and is contrary to international law. It jeopardises international peace and security, accentuates gender discrimination and prevents postconflict societies achieving sustainable peace.”

There has also been a series of United Nations (UN) Security Council Resolutions addressing women, peace, and security. The first to explicitly frame sexual violence in war as a security issue was Resolution 1820.¹⁷ According to this, sexual violence is a dimension of broader gender discrimination and violence against women that erodes their “capacity and legitimacy to participate in post-conflict public life,” thereby negatively impacting on “durable peace, security and reconciliation” (UN

Security Council 2008). UN Security Council Resolution 1889 similarly recognizes that “the marginalization of women can delay or undermine the achievement of durable peace, security and reconciliation” (UN Security Council 2009); and Resolution 2106 “affirms” that the political, social, and economic empowerment of women is a crucial part of “long-term efforts to prevent sexual violence in armed conflict and post-conflict situations” (UN Security Council 2013). The recognition of conflict-related sexual violence as a security issue, in other words, is situated within a broader agenda linking security with women’s inclusion/exclusion. This, by extension, is connected to the anti-impunity project in international criminal law. If the inclusion of women is a necessary part of this project, so too is the prosecution of sexual violence in conflict, which quintessentially translates as prosecution—and “exclusion”—of the “aggressive penis threatening the vulnerable vagina” (Guss 2010, 125).

The securitization of sexual violence has primarily occurred within a human security framework. The concept of human security was first introduced in 1994 in the Human Development Report, which emphasized the changing nature of security threats in the post–Cold War world and the quotidian security concerns that many people face in their lives. According to the report,

For most people today, a feeling of insecurity arises more from worries about daily life than from the dread of a cataclysmic world event. Job security, income security, health security, environmental security, security from crime—these are the emerging concerns of human security all over the world. (UN Development Programme 1994, 3)

The UN General Assembly (2012, §3) subsequently outlined a comprehensive definition of human security as “an approach to assist Member States in identifying and addressing widespread and cross-cutting challenges to the survival, livelihood and dignity of their people.” According to this definition, human security encompasses, *inter alia*, “people-centred, comprehensive, context-specific and prevention-oriented responses that strengthen the protection and empowerment of all people and all communities” (UN General Assembly 2012, §3(b)). Although the concept of human security has its critics (see, e.g., Paris 2001; Buzan 2004), there are good reasons for positioning conflict-related sexual violence within a human security framework. The emphasis on human insecurities, for example, draws attention to the wider contextual matrix of instability, displacement, and war strategy in which sexual violence occurs; and, by extension, the focus on “cross-cutting threats” is an inherently intersectional approach cognizant of the “multiple inequalities” that facilitate gender-based violence (Strid, Walby, and Armstrong 2012, 558). Furthermore, the “people-centeredness” that ostensibly defines human security is a predominantly bottom-up approach that, potentially, can provide valuable insights into the diverse and complex needs to which sexual violence in conflict gives rise (Denov 2006, 332).

Human security, however, has become a gendered concept centered on the security of women. As Hoogensen and Stuvøy (2006, 216) submit, “. . . an apparently

objectively defined concept is used to identify insecurities experienced by women, and that appears to suffice.” This “feminization” is particularly evident in the fact that conflict-related sexual violence against men is seldom explicitly discussed within a human security framework. The marginalization of men’s security needs, in turn, contributes to the marginalization of male victims. Emphasizing this point, Carpenter (2006, 86) insists that “. . . much of the ‘human security’ discourse in international institutions is based upon a highly gendered understanding of who is to be secured, characterized by the exclusion of civilian males as subjects of ‘protection’ or as victims of ‘gender-based violence.’”

While some scholars have thus called for a broader and more gender inclusive approach to human security (see, e.g., Romaniuk and Wasylciw 2010, 36), this article argues that the gendering of human security reflects a broader gendered relationship between sexual violence and security. Fundamentally, sexual violence in conflict raises different issues depending on whether it is committed against women or men. Sexual violence against women manifests and reaffirms their long-recognized vulnerability in war, which feminists situate within a wider context of vulnerability created by structural violence and gender inequalities (see, e.g., Brownmiller 1975; MacKinnon 1994; Card 1996; Nordstrom 1996; Pankhurst 2003). Sexual violence against men, in contrast, exposes the vulnerability of the penis and, hence, the vulnerability of hegemonic masculinity. It thus represents a more systemic security threat.

A medical analogy is useful for illustrating the point. Cancer cells are prone to nuclear envelope instability, and they can ultimately suffer nuclear envelope rupture. Such a rupturing severely disrupts the cells’ architecture and induces genome instability. According to Lim, Quinton, and Ganem (2016, 3212), “. . . nuclear envelope rupture is permanent, leaving the chromosomal contents therein completely exposed to the surrounding environment . . .” The use of sexual violence against men, it is argued, can be likened to a form of nuclear envelope rupture. The cellular architecture of the phallus, and phallic masculinity, is thereby damaged and destabilized, leaving it weak and exposed. This, moreover, critically alters the meta “security constellation” (Buzan and Waever 2009, 253). If “. . . deep understandings of processes of securitisation demand a concept for the larger social formation” (Buzan and Waever 2009, 257), phallic masculinity provides such a concept. Yet, when the phallus is decoupled from masculinity, insecurity replaces security. The vulnerable penis, in short, puts both men and women at risk of violence and thus symbolizes a common condition of “shared helplessness” (Segal 1998, 33). If this supports the need for a more gender-neutral approach to human security, it also underlines that an expanded approach to human security could create new insecurities by drawing attention to the vulnerability of the penis. In a world of growing security threats, including from global terrorism and religious fundamentalism, the “veiling” of this vulnerability is therefore essential for preserving the power of the penis and all that it represents. In the words of Žarkov (2001, 78), “Because the phallic power of the penis defines the virility of the nation, there can be no just retribution for its loss.”

One approach to this problematic vulnerability would be to reverse “the centrality of the penis” (Stephens 2007, 85). Aside from the practical issue of how to bring about this reversal, however, the decentering of the penis and its decoupling from masculinity would be doubly destabilizing, both “emasculating” the concept of phallogentric masculinity and creating a new and anchorless liminal masculinity linked to performativity. Masculinity has to be performed (J. Butler 1988, 527), but what would this performance look like without the penis? If “masculinities and femininities are things that people ‘do’” (Sa’ar and Yahia-Younis 2008, 307), what can men do with a penis that is vulnerable and bears a closer resemblance to feminine sexuality? (Potts 2000, 97). This is not to suggest that a vulnerable penis can never perform masculinity. The point, rather, is that within the meta-framework of hegemonic masculinity, the penis performs a preordained role. To quote from J. Butler (1988, 526), “Just as a script may be enacted in various ways, and just as the play requires both text and interpretation, so the gendered body acts its part in a culturally restricted corporeal space and enacts interpretations within the confines of already existing directives.” The vulnerable penis necessarily pushes these boundaries.

Conclusion

The dominance of the phallus can be challenged in many different contexts. Erotic dancers, for example, “tease” it and utilize it in their own performances, simultaneously arousing and controlling/resisting it. This strategy enables dancers to “perform their position as both virgin and whore, to use this position as a site of resistance instead of acquiescing to phallic exchange and phallogentric fantasy” (Egan 2003, 113). In rural Zimbabwe, wives can purchase “husband-taming” herbs designed to control their spouses’ behavior—and in particular infidelity (Goebel 2002, 463). If these herbs are misused, they can effectively emasculate a man. According to one healer, “. . . the penis will disappear with all the testicles. Everything will go inside, no penis plain, and the husband will become very fat that same day” (cited in Goebel 2002, 481).

This article has primarily focused on the penis in the context of war and armed conflict. War is a dual arena that both demands the expression of phallogentric masculinity yet also challenges it. Critically, the use of sexual violence against men in conflict exposes the vulnerability of the penis which, by extension, reveals deeper vulnerabilities in the edifice of phallogentric masculinity and heteronormativity. This adds a new security dimension. While the use of sexual violence against women in conflict is increasingly framed as a human security issue, the use of sexual violence against men raises more systemic security issues that contribute to causally explaining the marginalization of the organ’s vulnerability. If, as Lehman (1998, 124) argues, “the penis is and will remain centered until such time as we turn the critical spotlight on it,” the issue of its vulnerability is precisely a critical spotlight.

This vulnerability, however, should be acknowledged and addressed as part of the process of postwar reconstruction and peace building. According to Brickell (2005, 40),

Meaningful subversion of dominant forms of masculinity will remain difficult . . . However, fissures within hegemonic patterns do permit acts and cultural forms that leave the way open for a reconfiguring of selves and their contexts, initially at the microlevel of society.

These fissures are most likely to emerge when societies are in transition and recovering from armed conflict. When men return to civilian life and the demands of militarized masculinity decline, this is the time for societies to engage in debates on what it means to be a real man and to develop new understandings of masculinity. In 2007, for example, CARE International created the “Young Men Initiative” in the Western Balkans¹⁸; in 2011, the Ministry of Women’s Affairs in Cambodia launched the “Good Men” campaign¹⁹; and in 2006, a group of men in Rwanda founded the Rwanda Men’s Resource Centre.²⁰ By challenging gender norms and seeking to promote more positive forms of masculinity that are decoupled from violence, physical strength, and virility, innovative projects such as these have the potential to raise greater awareness of sexual violence against men in conflict. What this article has ultimately sought to emphasize, through its thematic focus on vulnerability, is the disconnect that exists between what the penis *is* and what it is *constructed* as being; and addressing this disjuncture is an important part of the global fight against sexual violence in conflict. Quintessentially, sexual violence is, in part, an expression of men’s attempts to live up to the myth of the “potent phallus” (Schneider, Cockcroft, and Hook 2008, 140).

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Notes

1. According to Dolan (2014b), “When a “real man” is defined as strong and in control and invulnerable, it is easy to assume that if he was engaged in a same-sex act, then surely *‘he must have wanted it.’*”
2. Morash et al.’s (2012) study of men’s vulnerability to sexual assault in prison is one of the notable exceptions.
3. It is important to emphasize, however, that the notion of “big is better” has not been historically fixed. For the ancient Greeks, for example, “. . . the large or priapic penis

symbolized a sexual excessiveness and licentiousness dangerous to their self-perception as rational and self-controlled” (Stephens 2007, 88).

4. Segal (1998, 50), for example, underscores that the “hominoid penis is anything but permanently erect, anything but endlessly ready for unencumbered sex, anything but triggered by the nearest passing [person].”
5. Koro refers to a condition of intense anxiety about the penis—and specifically to fears that the penis is shrinking, detracting, or even disappearing. According to Srivastava and Pandit (2013, 37), “The term koro is thought to derive from the Malay word kura which means ‘tortoise,’ with symbolic meaning that the penile retraction is compared with the retraction of the head of the tortoise into its shell. “Several countries, including India, Thailand, and Nigeria, have experienced “koro epidemics” (see, e.g., Choudhury 1998).
6. Historically, moreover, ejaculation was viewed as dangerous to men. According to Stephens (2007, 95), “. . . as medical treatises such as Tissot’s *Onanism* warned, men who relinquished themselves to ‘excessive’ ejaculation would wind up at least emasculated, more probably insane, and possibly dead.”
7. Jones (2006, 451) defines heteronormativity as “culturally hegemonic heterosexuality.”
8. The *International Protocol on the Documentation and Investigation of Sexual Violence in Conflict* states, for example, that “It is important to recognise that women, men, girls and boys can all be victims of sexual violence. Nevertheless, the historical and structural inequalities that exist between men and women, and the different forms of gender-based discrimination that women are subjected to all over the world, contribute to women and girls being disproportionately affected by sexual violence in conflict settings” (Foreign and Commonwealth Office 2014, 15).
9. It is estimated that 200,000 women and girls were raped during the Bangladesh Liberation War (Jahan 2009, 303). Yet, as Mookherjee (2012, 1580) points out, “The constant evocation of the rape of women during the Bangladesh war stands in contrast to the silence relating to male rapes and violation during the war.”
10. Beehner (2010, 3) notes that “Unlike most violent non-state actors, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) fielded an army of 20,000 well-trained conscripts, a full-flung navy, and even an air force. The Tigers purchased GPS systems to accurately target its missile projectiles well before the Sri Lankan military did. They were adept at both guerilla and conventional types of warfare.”
11. In contrast to government forces, the LTTE themselves did not use sexual violence during the conflict. Wood (2009, 143) seeks to explicate this “puzzling absence of sexual violence in the LTTE’s repertoire of violence.”
12. Duško Tadić was the president of the local board of the Serbian Democratic Party in Kozarac, a village in Prijedor municipality. In 1997, he was sentenced to twenty years’ imprisonment for crimes against humanity and violations of the laws or customs of war (on appeal in 1999, he was further convicted of graves breaches of the Geneva Conventions) committed in Omarska. He was sentenced to twenty years’ imprisonment and was granted early release in July 2008.

13. The *Guardian* journalist Ed Vulliamy (1992) visited the camp in August 1992 and described how “The internees are horribly thin, raw-boned; some are almost cadaverous, with skin like parchment folded around their arms; their faces are lantern-jawed, and their eyes are haunted by the empty stare of the prisoner who does not know what will happen to him next.”
14. It is important to note, however, that there is some recognition within international criminal law that a male victim may be forced to penetrate the rapist with his own penis. According to the International Criminal Court’s Elements of Crimes, for example, which define rape as both a crime against humanity and a war crime, rape occurs, inter alia, when “The perpetrator invaded the body of a person by conduct resulting in penetration, however slight, of any part of the body of the victim *or of the perpetrator* with a sexual organ, or of the anal or genital opening of the victim with any object or any other part of the body” (International Criminal Court [2002] 2010, article 7 (1) (g)-1(1), article 8 (2) (b) (xxii)-1(1), emphasis added).
15. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005, 852) underline that “Masculinities are configurations of practice that are constructed, unfold, and change through time.”
16. This gendering of the nation as female, however, is not a constant. Hagemann (1997, 206), for example, notes that “In monarchical Prussia, as earlier in revolutionary America and France, the modern nation was . . . conceived of from the beginning as a male-dominated space shaped by military values.”
17. Anderson (2010, 246) maintains that the significance of Resolution 1820 “lies in the simple fact that to include an issue on the security agenda is to accord it priority.”
18. See http://www.care.org/sites/default/files/documents/YE-2012-Balkans_Young_Mens_Initiative.pdf.
19. See [http://countryoffice.unfpa.org/cambodia/drive/GMC-cover\(Oct2015-approvedversion\).pdf](http://countryoffice.unfpa.org/cambodia/drive/GMC-cover(Oct2015-approvedversion).pdf).
20. See <http://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2013/11/in-rwanda-men-work-to-change-attitudes-and-confront-violence>.

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