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Soldiering as an obstacle to manhood? Masculinities and ex-combatants in Burundi

The image of the warrior as the ultimate symbol of manhood is familiar across cultures and countries. There is a large quantity of research that demonstrates the connection between militarism and masculinity, and militarized masculinities have been argued to be the hegemonic form of masculinity, particularly in conflict-affected areas. Recently however there has been a calling for the rethinking of the connection between masculinity and violence. In this article, I explore the construction of masculinities among ex-combatants in Burundi. Based on participant observation, eighteen individual interviews and four focus group discussions, I argue that having served in an armed group has not had a significant impact on the masculinity ideas of my interlocutors. There is a weak connection between ideas of what makes a good soldier on the one hand and manhood in civilian life on the other. Marriage, fatherhood and being the provider are the most important factors in masculinity construction in Burundi. These all require economic capital. In addition, socio-economic status is important for the power and respect that it brings. The focus on socio-economic status as the locus of masculinity construction also applies to ex-combatants, but many of them are struggling to adhere to it. My interlocutors presented their time spent in the armed group as a time wasted that would otherwise have been used on education or starting a career, in other words on the pursuit to achieving manhood. The narrative given was thus of soldiering not being an avenue, but an obstacle, to manhood.

Keywords: ex-combatants; masculinities; Burundi; socio-economic status

Introduction

In a dusty field in the Burundian town of Maramvya a young man named Claude watches over the village's goats. A former lieutenant to Hutu chiefs in the aftermath of a civil war that ended in 2005, he still has the strong build of a fighter. But now he

wears tattered pants and women's sandals with a dirty plastic jewel at the toe: a

soldier with none of the power he once commanded (Wilson, 2011).

The above excerpt is the beginning of an article from the Guardian, written in 2011. It portrays a familiar image of an ex-combatant, someone that used to possess, but has now lost, strength and power. Judging from the extract, Claude seems also to have lost his masculinity, demonstrated by directing the reader's gaze towards his sandals that assumedly the journalist defines as women's sandals. Whether this is Claude's view is not clear.

Since the 1980s research on the relationship (or the lack thereof) between masculinity/men and femininity/women on the one hand and violence and armed conflict on the other has become more prominent (Cohn, 1987; Elshtain, 1987; Enloe, 1989; Ruddick, 1983; Swerdlow, 1982). The connection between masculinity and violence has since then gained increased attention within academia (Kirby & Henry, 2012), both within the feminist section of International Relation and within Masculinity Studies (e.g.Connell 2002; Enloe 2000; Hooper 2001; Zalewski and Parpart 1998).

Much of the work focuses on violence and combat as important, if not essential, in forming influential ideas of masculinity, including that of hegemonic masculinity. It is hence assumed that men with experience of combat would have aggressive, violent and militarized ideas of masculinity and attempt to conform to them. Theorizing on the extent of militarization of combatants' lives often holds this to be the case (Clarke, 2008; Daley, 2008; Dolan, 2003; Goldstein, 2001; Hinojosa, 2010; Morgan, 1994; Nye, 2007; Porter, 2013; Theidon, 2009).

However, there is also extensive literature that points to the diversity of masculinities constructed in relations to militaries and combat (Bulmer, 2013; Higate, 2003; Myrttinen, Khattab, & Naujoks, 2017; Sasson-Levy, 2003; Titunik, 2008). This

literature points to the many different, and sometimes conflicting notions of masculinities that can be connected to militaries and military-like institutions. These, often very large, institution thus do not construct simplistic, one-dimensional notions of masculinity, nor are they working in complete isolation from their surroundings. In addition, literature calling for the rethinking of the connection between masculinity and violence has emerged (Dietrich Ortega, 2012; Duncanson, 2015; Kirby & Henry, 2012; Parpart, 2015). This article builds on the above literature but goes one step further in not only problematizing the relationship between military experience and masculinity but arguing that in the case of Burundi there seems to be a negative relationship between the two. Not only is masculinity construction not based on military experience or ideas but there seems to be a somewhat negative relationship between the two since a number of my interlocutors claim that the time spent fighting in the civil war is the reason they struggle to adhere to notions of masculinity today.

There are a number of other aspects than militarization that affect and are important for masculinity construction, for combatants and non-combatants alike. One aspect is that of socio-economic status and man as the provider. This seems to remain a strong feature of masculinity construction in societies across the globe. Men are viewed as the breadwinners of their families, and failure in providing for your family converts to failure in manhood.

This article forms part of a larger research project on the reintegration of ex-combatants in Burundi. The focus of this particular paper is to address the masculinity ideas of these ex-combatants, given their experience of having been active participants in armed groups. Although a few women were interviewed the focus is on ex-combatants that identify as male and therefore how they make sense of their manhood and the expectations they meet as biological men. Although I by no means disagree with the

understanding of masculinity as something not confined to men rather than women, but indeed something that both women and men can adhere to, the focus here is on men and the expectations they and others have to them, as men. Militarized masculinities are contextual and have not been researched in Burundi until now. This paper considers what military ideas are important in Burundi, as well as what notions of masculinity are prominent among Burundian ex-combatants. I find that socio-economic status weighs more heavily in the masculinity construction of my interlocutors than military ideas do. Ex-combatants are not different to other Burundians in this regard, and they adhere to the same values and norms as their non-ex-combatant fellow Burundians.

I begin the article by discussing theories of masculinities and how these relate to ex-combatants. After providing a brief background of the Burundi context I then introduce my methodology. From there, I move to a discussion on what military ideas are considered important in Burundi, how these do not seem to be linked with manhood ideas of Burundian ex-combatants, and finally how socio-economic status seems to be the dominant notion of masculinity construction in Burundi.

Theories of masculinities

An important aspect of masculinity research is the acknowledgement of its plurality; there is always a multitude of forms of masculinity at play in every society (Connell, 1995). These differing forms of masculinity however relate to each other in dominance and subordination (Connell, 1995, p. 37), hence, although there are competing aspects of masculinities at play, they vary in their dominance in a given culture.

How masculinity is formed within armed forces and how this affects the whole gender order in wider society has been of interest to many scholars. It has been claimed that the image of the warrior is the strongest symbol of men and masculinity (Morgan,

1994, p. 165) and that being both a civilian and a man can be nearly impossible in times of conflict (Dolan, 2003; Nye, 2007). In American and European culture, and in conflict affected areas, militarized masculinity has been seen as the hegemonic form of masculinity, the most powerful one that overrides other forms of masculinity (Connell, 1995; Myrttinen et al., 2017). To explain this, the idea is put forward that war is a horrific scene that no one would willingly want to join, and stay in, unless offered something instead. Manhood is what is offered to those that make this choice (Goldstein, 2001, p. 253). Goldstein's theory is that to have men ready to fight, kill, and potentially die for their country, cultures must develop concepts of masculinity that motivate men to fight. Therefore, militarized masculinities affect all men, also those outside military structures (Barrett, 1996).

There is however recent research and theorising that questions the hegemony of militarized masculinity and calls for a more nuanced investigation of the concept (Bulmer & Eichler, 2017; Myrttinen et al., 2017; Zalewski, 2017). Eriksson Baaz and Stern (2008) have conducted research with Congolese soldiers and found that although some soldiers expressed their ideas of manhood in terms of strength and courage, there were a number of other competing views of masculinity among the soldiers interviewed. Amongst the male soldiers, the description of a successful soldier was an educated soldier with a desk job rather than a brave, strong, frontline fighting soldier. Similarly, Dietrich Ortega's (2012) research with former insurgent militants in Peru, Colombia and El Salvador demonstrates that the masculinities constructed within the groups offered comradeship between men and women and went beyond the predominant association of men with violence. Bulmer and Eichler (2017, p. 175) maintain that to understand the lived realities of ex-combatants, researchers should avoid putting them in pre-fabricated boxes such as that of a militarized masculinity, and Myrttinen, Khattab and Naujoks

(2017, p. 108) further warn against the conflation of hegemony, masculinity, violence and soldiers/militias, pointing towards the various analytical problems that accompany this.

A different construction of masculinity, but common, is one that is more closely related to economic capital. Besides being expected to be security providers, men are also expected to be providers of economic resources. This model of the male breadwinner in the global north is argued to go back to nineteenth century ideas of gendered spaces brought on by the industrial revolution (Coltrane & Adams, 2005; Creighton, 1996) establishing the dichotomy of the 'breadwinner' and the 'dependent'(Pateman, 2006, pp. 135–136). The idea of masculinity based on being a provider is also documented to be strong in many locations outside the global north, including in countries in the Caribbean (Chevannes, 2006), Latin America (Olavarría, 2006), and Sub-Saharan Africa (Barker & Ricardo, 2005). The relationship between masculinity and economic means remains strong globally and Connell (1998) has offered *transnational business masculinities* as the hegemonic form of masculinities globally.

The model of men as the breadwinners and women as the carers was to some extent imported into former colonies by their colonizers (Hunt, 1990; Lindsay, 1999) although the linking of economic capital and manhood was far from being foreign. However, what many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa have in common, distinguishing them somewhat from their former colonizers today is the central importance of marriage as an identity construction factor, and the economic capital needed for the marriage to take place (Amuyunzu-Nyamongo & Francis, 2006; Dolan, 2003; Groes-Green, 2009; Matlon, 2015; Sommers & Uvin, 2011; Utas, 2005b). In many countries, providing the funds needed for the bride-price, as well as for the marriage ceremony and household for the newlyweds, is becoming nearly impossible for men of lower socio-economic status.

In reaction to this, informal unions or cohabitations have become more common (Amuyunzu-Nyamongo & Francis, 2006; Silberschmidt, 2004; Sommers & Uvin, 2011). Not being able to legally marry leads to these men being stuck in the social category of youth, or as phrased by Utas (2005b, 150), as 'youthmen'.

The lack of flexibility in attaining manhood, or men's inability to adapt to new ideas of masculinity, has at times been blamed for men's violence (Amuyunzu-Nyamongo & Francis, 2006; Dolan, 2003), or even for armed conflict (Barker & Ricardo, 2005; Richards, 2005). Richards (2005), referring to the civil war in Sierra Leone, states that the inability to marry was sometimes a motivation factor in men's decision to join the war and that some men joined the factions in order to accrue the finances needed to marry. The Revolutionary United Front (RUF) kidnapped women to be given as 'wives' to the RUF male fighters (Richards, 2005, p. 204), thus exploiting this common problem of the inability to marry and consequently achieving manhood. Utas (2005b, pp. 140–141), writing on combatants in the Liberian civil war, similarly claims it possible that the likelihood of remaining unmarried may have served as an important reason for men choosing to join rebel forces. The Liberian civil war gave combatants the opportunity to secure a large number of 'wives'/girlfriends, something that had previously been impossible and was a sign of newfound status and power (Utas, 2005a, pp. 69–70).

Burundi's civil war and its aftermath

Burundi has been troubled with violence and civil unrest since independence from Belgium in 1962. Coups were the usual mode of change of government in the twentieth century when Tutsi from the same region took turns in ousting each other. At the same time acts of genocide occurred on a regular basis, often started as Hutu rebellions against oppression, only to be quelled, and disproportionally avenged, by a Tutsi military (Uvin,

2009, p. 9). Following the assassination of Burundi's first democratically elected President, Melchior Ndadaye, in 1993, a civil war broke out. The war formally ended in 2005 with the swearing in of a new President, Pierre Nkurunziza (Reyntjens, 2006, p. 129).

The hostilities were followed by several talks on cease-fires and power sharing modalities and in the year 2000 the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement (Arusha Accord) was signed. In the Arusha Accord provisions are made for a Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) Program. The program was set up to disarm, demobilize and reintegrate up to 55,000 ex-combatants into civilian life, based on the estimate that there were 60,000 ex-combatants in the country (World Bank, 2010, p. 59). By its completion in 2008 just over 26,000 ex-combatants had been demobilized (World Bank, 2010, p. 24).

Ex-combatants face various challenges in Burundi. One of the main challenges to the long-term reintegration of ex-combatants is the immense poverty in the country. This is partly related to high population density and hence the lack of land, but also due to other factors exacerbated by the civil war, lack and destruction of infrastructure, rising malnutrition and disease such as HIV/AIDS, and fall in school enrolment and food production. Burundi's poverty, which certainly existed prior to the war, has grown even deeper due to cutbacks in social services, shrinkage of government revenues and bigger proportions of expenditures going towards the military. It is therefore a tough environment that ex-combatants are expected to integrate into (Lemarchand, 2009, p. 163).

Optimism was in the air following the 2005 elections (Peterson, 2006) but unfortunately did not last long. The Conseil National pour la Défense de la Démocratie - Forces pour la Défense de la Démocratie (CNDD-FDD), the biggest rebel group during

the war, now the political ruling party, won the elections in 2005. The party also won the municipal elections in 2010 and the opposition claiming election fraud boycotted the legislative and presidential elections of 2010. This boycott only strengthened the CNDD-FDD's power hold. Tension rose in 2014 preceding the 2015 elections and when it was announced on April 25 2015 that Nkurunziza would be the CNDD-FDD's presidential candidate for his third term, protests broke out (Reyntjens, 2016). Two weeks into the protests, on the 13th of May, a coup attempt was made, but failed. Grenade attacks and shootings at night continued to be the norm in Bujumbura however, in particular in specific areas considered to be opposition strongholds.

Methodology

This research took place in Burundi from January until December 2015. The participants were individuals, mainly men, that took part in Burundi's civil war, either with the state army at the time; Forces Armées du Burundi (FAB), or with one of the two biggest rebel groups; CNDD-FDD or Forces Nationales de Libération (FNL). The main data of the research comes from participant observation. In addition, complementary 18 individual interviews and four focus group discussions were conducted. It quickly became apparent that the interviews and focus group discussions were only giving a superficial idea of what masculinity meant to the men spoken to. As may be expected when researching something as fluid and intangible as gender identity, it was not very common for people to explain their behaviour or views concretely. The many different factors that come together to construct ideas of masculinity in Burundi had thus to be interpreted from observed behaviour and other stated views. I conducted individual interviews with three women, but apart from that all interlocutors where men.

The first point of entry was a local civil society organisation (CSO) which had conducted work with ex-combatants and had several staff members that were themselves ex-combatants. This CSO provided assistance by identifying ex-combatants to interview as well as providing translation services for interviews with those that did not speak French or English. The main assistance received from the CSO however was to allow me to sit in the office and become part of the social network the office and its employees and affiliates provided, very often just referred to as the 'family'. As I was in daily contact with people at the office and several of the employees were ex-combatants, many of them became some of the main interlocutors of the research. To protect their anonymity I choose not to identify the CSO, and all names in this article are pseudonyms.

As fieldwork progressed I used my network in Burundi to contact ex-combatants that were not affiliated with this CSO, to limit somewhat its power and influence on the research. Interviews were conducted with participants from the former FNL group living at the outskirts of Bujumbura and with former state military soldiers. The former state military soldiers also became some of the main interlocutors of the research with regular meet-ups following the interviews.

Given that my Kirundi speaking abilities remained limited throughout the period of fieldwork the main interlocutors are all men that speak French or English. This means that the poorest, worst off ex-combatants are not represented, except through the interviews. It also means that data gathered through observation of how the men reacted and communicated with each other was limited. The bulk of the data was collected in individual conversations with the interlocutors. Sometimes these conversations were completely unstructured, as those among friends where relevant topics would come up by coincidence. Other times these conversations were more structured when I had a specific topic in mind that I wanted to discuss in more detail. The findings are based on data that

comes from these conversations, participant observation in general, as well as the interviews and focus group discussions.

Militarized masculinities in Burundi

What a militarized notion of masculinity may look like is contested as both masculinity and militarism are contextual and can be defined in various ways. Aaron Belkin points out that militarized masculinity varies across time and space, but offers the definition of it as 'a set of beliefs, practices and attributes that can enable individuals – men and women – to claim authority on the basis of affirmative relationships with the military or with military ideas' (Belkin, 2012, p. 3). Belkin brings up the important point that militarized masculinity is not necessarily confined to those that identify as men. This research however focused on men, and the pressure and expectations they are met with as biological men. Using Belkin's definition of claiming authority on the basis of affirmative relationships with the military, the conclusion would be that the masculinity ideas of my interlocutors were in no way militarized. The reason for this however is the stigma that ex-combatants in Burundi are faced with and that there are few occasions when associating yourself with active participation in the civil war is beneficial for them. This leaves us with 'military ideas'.

Given that militarized masculinities are multiple and contextual it is worth firstly exploring the narratives given by my interlocutors on soldiering to perceive of what military ideas may have been considered important in Burundi. Secondly, it is worth exploring in what way the ideas portrayed as important for soldiering are considered important and/or related to manhood in the post-combat life. It is worth noting that as I am a foreign, white woman what my interlocutors chose to portray and not to portray is likely to be somewhat influenced by my position. It is probable that some would be

hesitant to portray themselves as violent for example. In some instances, however, it was interesting to note the willingness in which many of my interlocutors were ready to share their vulnerabilities.

When discussing combatants, and what characterized good combatants, the by far most common answer centred around obedience. As was mentioned by one participant in one of the focus group discussion: 'Combatants are people that respect orders. They obey. They never say no.' These sentiments were echoed in many other interviews and conversations and were by far the most common attributes mentioned regarding what makes a successful soldier. This is in line with what has been documented elsewhere, such as in the DRC (Eriksson Baaz & Stern, 2008, pp. 72–75). Interestingly, this was also often mentioned as a reason why many of my interlocutors had not been interested in continuing a career in the military at the end of the civil war but opted for demobilization. Pierre, a former state military soldier, spoke about the relief of becoming a civilian again after demobilization

> Normally, civilians are, I wouldn't really say that they are free, but they are responsible for their own life. But us soldiers, when we wanted to go out, there was a form to fill, you have to ask for permission etc....in the army it is difficult to make decisions for yourself because we were trained in a way that there is always a person passing on orders, all you have to do is wait for decisions coming from above.

Elise, a former FNL combatant, also spoke of this lack of freedom as the reason for choosing to demobilize, she had chosen freedom rather than military life. Even though obedience and discipline came up very strongly as the most important attribute that defines a good combatant, this was not something that seemed to be highly valued in civilian life after the combatant days.

The second most common attribute that came up when discussing good combatants was that of being fearless/courageous. This was usually put forward as a simple matter of fact as Jean-Claude did: '[We were taught] to not be afraid of dying because dying can be a consequence of what we do'. How much fearlessness was valued in the aftermath of the war varied between individuals and situations. There was somewhat of a difference between those that were or had taken part in the popular protests taking place in 2015 and those that did not. This is perhaps not a surprise given that the active protesters were again in a situation where their life was on the line and they needed to face these fears. Others were much less concerned about hiding their fear about the escalating security situation. I learnt that perhaps my ideas of masculinity were more militarized than those of my informants when catching myself being surprised and somewhat concerned, the first time an interlocutor admitted openly his fear to me due to the escalating security situation.

In line with the messiness that relates to masculinity construction and how men choose to portray themselves in this regard, Didier had contradicting ways of expressing his fear or fearlessness. In a conversation he stated that 'military life taught me to be fearless. If something happens, I am not like other civilians…they [the police] shoot and I don't fear' only a couple of minutes later he said: 'I am scared because they [the government] ordered to kill. Not even arrest people, but kill them'. Didier thus jumped between portraying himself as fearless to admitting fear. Although there were certainly instances when my interlocutors stressed their fearlessness and sometimes related it to the fact that they had been active participants in the civil war, this was by no means the only portrayal they depicted of themselves and being afraid was not necessarily hidden from me, as one might expect if the values from soldiering days were still being thought to be important in identity construction.

Finally, the third most common explanation of what made a good combatant was perhaps the most unconventional. This was essentially to be a 'good people person'. The importance of being a good comrade in a military setting is not new. Claude explained this importance nicely 'We all came from different backgrounds and sometimes didn't get along, but when we were under threat we had to fight together for the sake of security and protection and our strength was to stay together.' Clearly, it was vital for survival to stay together in combat. Others however, pointed out to the need to be fair when sharing provisions, to get along with everyone, knowing how to manage a group and respect and assist others. This emphasis on being a good people person, helpful and respectful, also carried over to relations with civilians. The focus on not making use of your position as a combatant and maltreat civilians came up frequently but also the need to work well with civilians as stated by Alain, a former CNDD-FDD combatant:

> …also, when we're on the battlefield, we really need to communicate with the population, to collaborate with the community. A good soldier is also someone who knows how to approach people, to exchange, to cooperate, because sometimes we really need information from the population to know if there were plans to attack us, to know if tomorrow we were going to be attacked and know which way to go.

Pascal also explained this at a different occasion saying that the civilians of the area were the most important resource for an armed group, and vital for their success. This focus on people skills as important for combatants is also known within the western military counterinsurgency doctrine, where focus is now on living with local communities and 'winning hearts and minds'. Something that according to Kilcullen (2006, p. 31), is all about establishing trusted networks. Counterinsurgency has been presented as the soft, feminized option as opposed to military tactics focused on destroying the enemy with

more mechanized warfare (Khalili, 2011). My interlocutors do however not seem to make any such distinction. People skills were considered vital to complement aggressive types of warfare and defence, not as opposite strategies.

This, perhaps unconventional, attribute of what makes a good combatant was, as opposed to obedience and fearlessness, something that was still highly valued in civilian life in the aftermath of the civil war. When discussing reintegration, it was frequently emphasised that this was successful when the ex-combatant him or herself was good at reaching out to his or her neighbours, portraying that they had good intentions and being a visible and active community member. In addition, this was also what frequently came up when discussing what men are supposed to be like in Burundi. Jean-Claude summarized it thus: 'A good civilian man is the one who lives in harmony with others, who is patient, respectful, not short tempered and who always looks for ways of strengthening relationships with his neighbours.'

These attributes are thus both linked to military and civilian life. People skills are of importance for creating employment and business opportunities and what makes a good entrepreneur, thus closely linked to masculinity construction as the breadwinner, which will be discussed in further detail below. This indicates again that there is not a clear-cut differentiation between diverse versions of masculinity. Indeed, they mix and overlap in various different manners.

Soldiering an obstacle to manhood?
The sentiments towards the time spent in the armed group were also an example of ambiguousness. My interlocutors rarely spoke of longing for or missing their time as combatants, as has been reported elsewhere (e.g Utas 2004, 212). There were however instances when positive relations with the armed group were expressed. During a focus

group discussion with former FNL soldiers for example the whole group started laughing when asked whether they missed the power that having a gun gave them. The answer seemed obvious, no one objected to the idea that having a gun, and the power that accompanied it, was a good feeling they didn't mind having. Yet, when asked whether that life was something they would want to go back to they all became more serious and held that this was not something they would want to consider. One of them stated that:

> The reason why we can't go back is that we decided to go back to civil life, which means we wanted to live a normal life, with a family, just like normal people, because our experience in the military was not always pleasant.

It was more common to hear bitter accounts of the time these men spent actively taking part in the war. Their experience was usually quite different to what they had expected when joining and stories of hunger, hardship, death and grief were the usual answer to questions of how they viewed their time as combatants. Felix was particularly clear on his disassociation with anything to do with military life, 'I really hate guns now. When I see a civilian with a gun I report it immediately to the authorities… I cannot even buy camouflage clothes' he stated.

In fact, having had experience of combat had few positive connotations. On the contrary, it was portrayed as an obstacle to achieving manhood. Joseph was one of the more disadvantaged participants in this research. Putting food on the table for his wife and children was a daily struggle for him as he did not have a steady income. He described the state of ex-combatants as an in-between state, not soldiers but not full civilians either '…the problem is that we are going through a lot of poverty, we are neither civilians nor soldiers…'. When probed about what this meant, the answer went back to poverty and the meaning he seemed to be putting into the term civilian was more than just someone that was not a soldier. It was someone that was economically

independent and lived a dignified life. Joseph blamed his time in the armed struggle for why his life was not successful today. When asked what he thought his life, and that of the other men in the focus group, would have been like if they had not participated in the war he answered: 'We would be rich, would have gone to school and would have completed studies already; we would be strong business men.' This is perhaps not a realistic assumption, given the number of poor, uneducated and unemployed people in Burundi today, most of whom are not ex-combatants. The point is that Joseph, similarly to other interlocutors, never spoke fondly of the time in the armed group and never presented it as a time when he had an opportunity to conform to ideals of masculinity. On the contrary, given how socio-economic status is vital for the construction of masculinity in Burundi he presented this time as an obstacle for him reaching manhood.

This is similar to what others have concluded in Burundi. It has been previously concluded that firstly, attraction to military life was not considered important in the decision making of taking part in the Burundi civil war (Uvin, 2007, p. 4). Secondly, that armed groups in Burundi seem to have been unsuccessful in forming a dominant male identity based on being a member of these groups (Seckinelgin, 2012), if that was ever on their agenda. This research corroborates these previous findings but goes further. There is not only not a strong positive link between military ideas and experience on the one hand and ideas of masculinity on the other. In addition, there is a negative relationship between military experience and masculinity.

Masculinity only exists in relation to femininity and militarized masculinity is frequently constructed in opposition to a weaker or less respected 'other', women or civilians for example (Eriksson Baaz & Stern, 2008, p. 67; Holyfield, Cobb, Herford, & Ogle, 2017). View towards women as combatants was the only matter where there was a clear difference between former rebels, who had fought alongside women, and former

state military soldiers, who had not. It was only the former state military soldiers that expressed doubts of women's combat capacity. All the interlocutors that had fought with the rebel groups had fought with female combatants. They were all clear about their view that women made just as good soldiers as men. When probed about a possible difference in physical strength they either said that women could train to be as good as men or, more commonly, dismissed physical strength as being important for a competent soldier. In other words, they did not seem to relate combat capacity to being a man.

Gloria is an ex-combatant who used to fight with the FNL. She was taking active part in the popular protests against President Nkurunziza, which had been on-going for two months, when I met her in June 2015. She did confirm what many of the male ex-combatants had already said, that she, as a woman, had not been treated differently than men within the armed group and that the men that she commanded had never shown her anything but respect. '… They had to respect me because I was chosen by respected men' Gloria stated, pointing towards the hierarchy of the armed group as the reason why her authority was not questioned. Gloria was at this point in time however not only active in the on-going protests but taking on a leadership role in them. 'They have chosen me because I am a courageous woman and fearless' Gloria explained, using quite militaristic terms in explaining her leadership role in the protests. Since the end of the war Gloria has gotten married and had children. Contrary to the leadership role that she had been trusted with both within FNL and with the protest organization, her household is a conventional Burundian household, where her husband makes the decisions. Gloria didn't seem to want to dwell too much on this fact. She said that she was content with the fact that her husband was the one making the decisions, except when she disagreed with the decisions made. Gloria seems to have been able to climb the ladder both within the rebel group and within the organization of the protests without it threatening the masculinity of her fellow

rebel soldiers or protesters. Within the home there is a different story however. The dominance of the man seems very much still to be the norm and not to be challenged. This is in line with the accounts from male interlocutors, men that allegedly had no problems fighting alongside women or taking orders from them on the battlefield but made it clear to me that within their homes they were the ones in charge. Rigid ideas of masculinity seem to be stronger within the household than within rebel groups as the household is the locus of masculinity construction.

Being a man in Burundi

'Of course I have many different sources of income. I am a man. A man needs to have four different sources of income, just like a table needs four legs and a car four wheels'. This is the reply I got from a Burundian civilian when I commented on his several, and very different, types of sources of income. It indicates quite clearly the importance of income in masculinity construction in Burundi. When asked about what makes a good man or a real man, socio-economic status rarely came up in the interviews. Yet, participant observation suggests that this might in fact be the most important factor in masculinity construction in Burundi. Social status is evidently linked with wealth, being unemployed is not only difficult due to the lack of finances and the hardships that follow, but also because of the shame of it, as came up in many conversations with my interlocutors.

The clearest indicator of manhood in Burundi however is marriage. What differentiates *umuhungu* (boy), and *umugabo* (man) is marital status rather than age. Marriage is the milestone needed to reach to achieve manhood or womanhood (Berkmoes & White, 2014, p. 199; Sommers, 2013; Uvin, 2009, p. 125) and men should

ideally build a house as well as pay the bride-price before they marry (Sommers, 2013, p. 30; Uvin, 2009, p. 125).

One of my interlocutors, Claude, got married whilst I was in Burundi and I was able to share this important day with him. The next time I saw him I asked him how he was doing as a married man, whether he was a different person with a different life now. 'Yes, now I am a man' Claude exclaimed with a broad smile and hands in the air in a celebratory fashion. Claude was 45 years old at that time. Obviously, age, not to mention a 12-year career in the military, had not been enough to give him that much longed-for manhood that he had now finally obtained.

Getting married in Burundi however, as in many other places where bride-price is in place, is easier said than done and is far from being simply an exercise of finding a suitable companion. As previously mentioned, this can be incredibly expensive. Given the importance of marriage it can therefore be argued that in Burundi, men need to have economic means to reach manhood. Not all my interlocutors were as successful as Claude. Claude did not marry until the age of 45, but many others did not foresee being able to marry at all in their lifetime. Many of my interlocutors spoke of this with frustration and sadness. The financial difficulties with getting married lead to what they called illegal marriages, informal marriages where the bride-price has not been paid.

Informal marriages are common in Burundi (Berkmoes & White, 2014, p. 198). In a comparative research between Burundi and Rwanda, Sommers and Uvin (2011) argue that Burundi allows for more flexibility in straying away from normative masculinity. Young people live together in informal marriages rather than remaining single in their parents' houses, and when there are not enough funds to build a separate house, an extra room is sometimes simply added to the house of the man's parents. Berkmoes and White (2014, 198) argue however that even though informal marriages are

common, they are not approved of. These solutions are also not sanctioned by the government as became clear in May 2017 when the Burundi government ordered couples to legalize their marriages before the end of the year of 2017 ('Burundi presses unwed couples to marry', 2017).

This is in line with the narratives provided by my interlocutors. Those that were living in these illegal marriages expressed this as being shameful. 'As I said before, respect from the community starts in your family [depends on your performance within your household]. People cannot respect you if your marriage is illegal' one interlocutor stated.

Men are also expected to provide for their family (Sommers, 2013, p. 30; Turner, 1999; Uvin, 2009, p. 132), including children born outside marriage (Uvin, 2009, p. 128) ; another indicator of manhood clearly being related to socio-economic status. Being a good provider had for one interlocutor, Henri, helped win over the part of his wife's family that had originally not given their blessing for their marriage. Henri and his wife were of different ethnic backgrounds and this had been seen as problematic by some of his wife's relatives. Now, around 18 months after the wedding he said that things were much better. People saw what a good job he was doing providing for his wife and they were living a relatively good life. He had been accepted. In addition, Henri was looking at ways to create employment for his wife, thus taking the idea of the provider duties one step further.

Providing for the family seems to mean more than just providing for the wife and children. The better off interlocutors where helping siblings and relatives in any way they saw fit. This could be with finances such as school fees, taking in a younger sibling to live with them or helping with employment. As previously mentioned, the CSO where I spent much of my time was often referred to as a 'family'. As the year progressed it

became clear that this was not simply a name to describe the close relationship between the different staff members. Quite a lot of the staff members were indeed close family as the higher-level staff, all men, had helped give opportunities to relatives for some of the lower paying, temporary jobs. A good proportion of the projects also took place in the home commune of the President of the organization. No one ever spoke of these arrangements as a form of corruption as might be the case elsewhere. On the contrary, it seemed natural and expected that those men that have the means, help provide for others.

Besides being a good provider, socializing is an important aspect of men's lives in Burundi. In Burundi there are various bars and restaurants that need not be more than a small hut with corrugated iron roof and several white plastic chairs and tables surrounding it, filled with people enjoying refreshments. Although these places are far from being men-only zones and it is not uncomfortable or unusual for women to be part of the crowd, this kind of socializing is more common amongst men. Men being out too much was a common complaint from women.[1]

Pascal explained this socializing in terms of masculinity. In a conversation that took place an afternoon in September 2015, masculinity was not the topic of discussion but, as was usual at that time, the security situation and how it was forcing people to stay more at home. It was somewhat surprising when he pointed out the emasculating factor of the self-imposed curfew or travel restrictions that were in place in Bujumbura at that time. 'I don't know how to explain this to you' he started and after a short pause continued 'but a man in Burundi cannot come home at six o'clock. He is supposed to be out sharing beer with friends. At six the dinner is still being prepared and the man should not come home until it is ready'.

Thus, going out is not just a leisurely activity but is also significant regarding identity and masculinity construction, including being in the 'correct' space. This again

has financial implications since buying rounds is a common practice. The link between consumption and manhood has been documented elsewhere, for example in the United States (Holt & Thompson, 2002; Moisio, 2007), Mozambique (Groes-Green, 2009), and the Ivory Coast (Matlon, 2015; Newell, 2012). In these countries being the breadwinner is central to manhood, but difficult for many men to attain due to the lack of means, particularly in Mozambique and the Ivory Coast. Matlon (2011) argues that extreme consumerism connects marginalised men to the global economy as consumers, whilst remaining excluded as potential fathers and husbands.

I argue that in Burundi however this is rather related to social relations and the need to connect with other people. It was not unusual that when going out for drinks it would simply be stated that 'today I would like to share a beer with you' or 'today I would like to buy you a drink'. Hence the focus was often either on the sharing aspect (although drinks were not literally shared) or that you take turns in paying for each other, strengthening social bonds.

Finally, wealth earns respect in its own right. In a conversation about domestic animals with Pascal, who lived in Bujumbura, he stated his wish to acquire cows and goats. I found this a bit odd, coming from the city dweller. The reason he gave was his own, and his wife's, love of milk, 'but also that people look at a person that has these animals and think wow, this is someone important.' In line with this, he at a different time also stated that 'you need money also, not just to live but to have a voice… when you have money you are powerful. You are considered important, someone that contributes to society and therefore someone to listen to.'

It seems that among the many competing and overlapping factors that contribute to the making of masculinity in Burundi, socioeconomic status is the most prominent one. Peter Uvin's (2009) work on ex-combatants in Burundi portrays them as viewing the

ideal man as someone responsible, honest, trustworthy and wise. A man should also work and be the provider, a husband and a father, much as has been reported from non-ex-combatant Burundians. According to Uvin "Burundian masculinity centers on responsibility"(2009, 179).

To conclude, it seems that ex-combatants in Burundi think of masculinity in very much the same terms as their fellow non-ex-combatant Burundians. Marriage, being able to provide, and having money in general are of central importance to what it means to be a man in Burundi, ex-combatant or not. Militarized masculinity does not seem to be the dominant masculinity nor is militarized masculinity linked to aggression and violence. Men and women that are part of armed groups don't completely lose touch with the wider society and their gender construction is likely to be based on the normative ideas outside the armed institutions. There is thus a co-existence and overlap of militarized masculinities and other versions of masculinities. It is not my intention to replace one neat version of masculinity (militarized) with another (breadwinner focused). It is important to remember the 'messiness' of masculinities and that one version does not exclude another, but that different types of masculinities can both overlap, and different versions be acted out depending on variable social interactions and circumstances. In Burundi these versions of masculinity are not polar opposites, but where they differ the masculinity focusing on man as the breadwinner seems to be much more dominant, also among ex-combatants.

Conclusion

In this article, I have focused on broadening understandings of masculinity construction amongst ex-combatants. Using Burundi as a case study, I have examined how ex-

combatants conceptualize and construct their ideas of masculinity in light of their military or rebel experience. As my examination demonstrates, the widely held idea of hegemonic masculinity as that of the warrior figure cannot be sustained, at least not for Burundi. Normative manhood in Burundi rests heavily on marriage. That is by far the most dominant aspect of manhood and womanhood and it is difficult to see how alternative aspects could compete in a credible manner. In addition, being the provider and having economic capital is of central importance for masculinity construction. Many of my interlocutors were not of a particularly high socio-economic status and were thus struggling on a daily basis, not just to get by, but to adhere to the dominant masculinity. Many of them blamed their time in the war for the struggle they were now facing. They never depicted any indication of viewing the time as combatants as a time when they were conforming to ideas of masculinity, even though they were in a more powerful position at that time. Narratives produced on good soldiering also centred around obedience, fearlessness, and people skills, not violence or aggression. My interlocutors' old combatant identity did not seem to be of importance in their masculinity construction. Instead many of them argued that they had wasted their time in the war. This was time that they could otherwise have spent on finishing or furthering their education or starting a career. This would have been a better path to reach a position where they would be able to conform to the normative masculinity.

These findings are not dissimilar to other research from Burundi (Uvin, 2009), the DRC (Eriksson Baaz & Stern, 2008) and Latin America (Dietrich Ortega, 2012). As well as the growing literature calling for deeper examinations of the construction of masculinities among combatants, in post-conflict settings and the link between masculinity and aggression and violence in general (Kirby & Henry, 2012; Myrttinen et al., 2017). What differentiates this research is that it not only problematizes the

relationship between military experience and masculinity but holds that military and rebel experience is seen as an obstacle to reaching manhood, therefore suggesting a negative relationship between military experience and masculinity.

Masculinity construction is context specific. The role of militarization in masculinity construction is perhaps not as clearly related to conflict areas or personal experience of serving in an armed group as has been assumed. Militarized masculinity is also context specific and may not necessarily be linked to violence and aggression, as has been portrayed. This calls for the deepening of efforts to critically examine when and how militarism and masculinity interlink and when they do not, or do so to a lesser extent. What is it that in some areas and contexts contributes to militarism becoming a defining aspect of society, having, among other things, decisive effects on gender construction and identity creation? And why is it that in other context, as in Burundi, where war, combat and the military may be more visible than elsewhere and have played a larger role in people's lives, that militarism does not seem to have such a defining effect? Pursuing the answers of these questions would further benefit the understanding of masculinity construction amongst ex-combatants.

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[1] See for example the blog post "Married to Umurundi" on the blog *This Burundian Life*
https://thisburundianlife.bi/2015/10/09/married-to-umurundi/