Machinery of Male Violence: Embodied Properties and Chronic Crisis amongst Partners in Vietnam

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This article takes the notion of crisis as a helpful analytical entry point to unfold the temporalities and modalities of the machinery of violence as manifested in men's abuse of their female partners in Vietnam. Based on ethnographic research I conducted over the years, the article argues that some types of crises might be episodic, and thus a bracketing of daily life, while others, such as intimate partner violence, might settle as a crisis of chronicity; as a condition of prolonged difficulties and pain that surreptitiously becomes a new 'normal'. The machinery of violence, the article shows, refers to processes of symbolic and material transformations of a targeted woman, shaped in accordance with a perpetrator's essentialist imaginations about her embodied properties (e.g., gender, sexuality, age, ethnicity, and bodyableness). Such violence is invigorated by a patrilineal organization of society and a systemic permissiveness to male-to-female abuse. A battered woman is confined to an interregnum; a space in which the laws of protection do not apply and male violence is perpetrated with impunity. Yet, men's violence against their female partners also is combatted and resisted in Vietnamese society.

Keywords: Body; Gender; Intimate Partner Violence; Masculinity; Vietnam

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INTRODUCTION

In brutally crossing boundaries, the forces of violence are not unlike machinery. The ubiquitous ways in which violence inflicts damage upon those it is imposed resembles the menacing drive of a persisting engine. Yet, this is machinery without any ontological status because violence, as Hannah Arendt (1970) has reminded us, has no essence. Violence emerges as an instrumental means that needs justification through the ends it pursues, because the application of violent techniques "like all other tools, are designed and used for the purpose of multiplying natural strength" (Arendt, 1970, p. 46; see also, Schmidt & Schroder, 2001). The repertoires and techniques of abuse applied in direct violent encounters differ in character. The tools of violence are designed as the result of fantasies about a target's embodied properties including gender, sexuality, age, ethnicity, class, and bodyableness.

In this article, I focus on men's violence against their female partners, as a gendered and sexualized machinery of male violence.[1] I am considering how a

1 During various periods of anthropological fieldwork conducted in Vietnam, I have collected eth-

number of body typologies come into play when a woman or anybody else is violated as vehicles for processes of transformation of the phenomenological human body into an object of abuse; into dehumanized naked corporeality (Agamben, 1998, 2005; Mbembe, 2003; Rydstrom, 2012, 2015).[2] The World Health Organization (WHO) (2017) estimates that 35% of all women across the globe have experienced physical and/or sexual violence and intimate partner or non-partner sexual violence. 30% of this violence is perpetrated by an intimate male partner, while 38% of all murders of women are committed by a partner (see also, True, 2012).[3] In times of war, conflict, and catastrophes, intimate partner violence might be fueled, while violence against the female population in public spheres might increase.[4]

In obscuring the line between natality and mortality, violence exacerbates precariousness and insecurity. Violence ruins the foundation of lifeworlds (Stoler, 2013) by impairing the possibility for a return to how life used to be; hampering agency (Das & Kleinman, 2000; Kleinman, 2000); and imprinting a "poisonous knowledge" (Das, 2000, 2007) about the realities and perils of harm. The rupturing powers of violence provoke a state of crisis for the survivor, her household, and by extension for society at large (see United Nations Vietnam, 2012; World Health Organization, 2017). Crisis is a notion that provides a helpful analytical entry to unfold the modalities and temporalities of the machinery of violence, as manifested in men's violence against their female partners and the ruination it impacts on lifeworlds. While some types of crises are episodic and thus reduced to a bracketing of daily life, other types of crises grow into a more permanent condition (Rydstrom, 2019). Men's violence against their female partners epitomizes how a specific type of crisis can transmute into a "crisis of chronicity" (Vigh, 2008), which, however, can be challenged and even curbed (Roitman, 2014).

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nographic data on gendered and sexualized violence by unravelling the hierarchies, privileges, and powers with which gender based violence is imbued. Thus, from 1994 to 1995, I carried out fieldwork in a northern rural commune, which I call Thinh Tri, to study gender socialization. When conducting a second round of fieldwork in Thinh Tri from 2000 to 2001, I focused on violence and sexuality from an intergenerational perspective. In 2004, 2006, 2012-2013, and 2016, I carried out fieldwork in the larger region of Hanoi and in a northern semi-rural area, which I refer to as Quang Vinh, to study gender and harm. From 2004 to 2011, I was the Swedish coordinator of the *Rural Families in Transitional Vietnam* project under the frame of which data were collected in 1,100 households in the North, Center, and South of Vietnam. In 2015, I conducted fieldwork in coastal Vietnam in a community, which I call Long Lanh, to study climate disasters, gender and violence. In 2018 and 2019, I carried out fieldwork to examine the gendering of labor and harm in the industrial zones of northern Vietnam. All names of persons and communities are pseudonyms to protect the anonymity of those involved in my research.

2 "The term 'violence against women'", the United Nations (UN) (1993) Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women reads, "means any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life".

3 "Violence", according to the World Health Organization (2002, p. 5), "is the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against … another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, mal-development or deprivation."

4 "Intimate Partner Violence" (IPV) is a term which avoids any a priori gender categorization of perpetrator and victim in defining IPV as "an intimate partner or ex-partner that causes physical, sexual or psychological harm, including physical aggression, sexual coercion, psychological abuse and controlling behaviors" (World Health Organization, 2017).

To explore the ways in which the machinery of male violence is intrinsically gendered and sexualized, I consider various components that together provide the conditions which allow for the perpetuation of men's violence against their female partners. Hence, I will first, outline how violence manipulates the human body; second, introduce figures and debates on male-to-female violence in the Vietnamese context; third, address a masculinized organization of social life as a framework for male powers, privileges, and abuse; and last, highlight how men's violence against women and girls in the Vietnamese context is rejected and combatted.

DEHUMANIZED BODIES

Men's violence against their female partners is shaped through a perpetrator's essentialist and stereotypical fantasies about a woman's embodied properties (e.g., gender, sexuality, age, ethnicity, and bodyableness) (Rydstrom, 2012, 2015). The processes through which human beings are reduced to an object of abuse, a naked corporeality, or what Giorgio Agamben (1998) has conceptualized as "bare life", are tied to the ways in which a sovereign power takes biological life as its target, as corporeality upon which violence and death can be enacted (see also, Foucault, 1978; Mbembe, 2003). How lives are attempted to be laid bare by the means of violence, I argue, refer to symbolic and tangible processes of transformation undergone by the abused body (Rydstrom, 2012, 2015, 2017).

Violence is a direct attack on the physical and mental integrity of the *phenomenological body*; the first body typology, which is the foundation for our being-in-the-world and how we sense, feel, perceive, think, experience, and remember (Bourdieu, 1992; Grosz, 1994; Merleau-Ponty, 1996; Rydstrom, 2015). This body incorporates our life story and memories, including "poisonous knowledge" about pain and agony (Das, 1997, 2000; Scarry, 1985; Valéry, 1990). The *surface of the human body* materializes as a second body typology, as corporeality that meets the 'outside world'. This body is rendered intelligible and categorized by others due to its physical appearance, properties, and qualities (Merleau-Ponty, 1996; Rydstrom, 2015; Valéry, 1990). It emerges as a site upon which discursive socio-cultural powers operate in accordance with ideas about gender, sexuality, age, ethnicity, class, and bodyableness to establish ideas about privileges, hierarchies, and rights (Foucault, 1978; Grosz, 1994; Rydstrom, 2015).

The *violated body* is a third body typology, which concerns the ways in which the infliction of violence involves "thingification" (Barad, 2003) of the phenomenological body through the design of abusive techniques and repertoires of abuse. This body is wrought physically, mentally, and ethically as a result of the destructive ways in which a perpetrator transgresses the boundaries of the body and mind. Stereotypical and essentialist imaginations lie behind the dehumanization of the person upon whom the violence is perpetrated (Agamben, 1998; Butler, 2010; Rydstrom, 2015). *The body of fantasies* refers to a fourth body typology which appears as the vector of a "field of immanence of desire" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2002, p. 154). Such desires are modelled in accordance with fantasies about superiority over the bodies of others due to their gender, sexuality, age, ethnicity, class, and bodyableness. This body typology concerns the ways in which the distribution and projection of imaginations, including those which are profoundly violent, inform differentiated and specialized forms of harm (Braidotti, 1994; Deleuze & Guattari, 2002; Rydstrom, 2015).

These symbolic and corporeal body typologies are intimately intertwined with one another as volatile and dynamic processes that come into play when human bodies are subjected to the intrusive and destructive powers of a machinery of violence (Rydstrom, 2012, 2015, 2017, 2019). These processes result in the configuration of the emblematic figure which Agamben (1998) has conceptualized as *homo sacer.* Banned from society by a sovereign power, *homo sacer* is included by exclusion, captured in a space of impunity where it is "permitted to kill without committing homicide and without celebrating a sacrifice, and sacred life [i.e. *homo sacer*]—that is, life that may be killed but not sacrificed—is the life that has been captured in this sphere" (Agamben, 1998, p. 83; italics removed). Manipulated by techniques of violence, an abused woman is caught in a "zone of exception"; a space in which the rule of law does not apply and impunity prevails (Agamben, 1998; Mbembe, 2003; Rydstrom, 2012, 2015, 2017). Here, female life is defined by a machinery of male violence, which truncates the possibilities for agency and the potentialities for positive change (Vigh, 2008).

CRISIS OF CHRONICITY

As decisive moments, which forcefully can differentiate, select, and separate, crises can be seen as "conditions that make outcomes unpredictable" (Habermas, 1992/1976, p. 1). The term *crisis* is a Latinized form of the Greek *krisis,* which refers to "a turning point in a disease" (etymonline.com, n.d.; Merriam-Webster Dictionary, n.d.). For this reason, a crisis tends to be associated with a figurative purification, *catharsis,* understood in terms of an avenue to a new beginning (Endres & Six-Hohenbalken, 2014; Vigh, 2008; Walby, 2015). A crisis could lead to renewal, but it might as well open to a path fraught with difficulties and suffering (see, etymonline.com, n.d.; Merriam-Webster Dictionary, n.d.).

In disrupting coherency and augmenting uncertainty for future prospects (Habermas, 1992), a crisis could swiftly change from a *state of emergency* (Benjamin, 1999/1968) into a condition of *ahistorical permanence* (Bhabha, 1994). An episodic interaction of sudden harm might lead to repeated abuse (Das, 2000; True, 2012). Repeated intimate partner violence can over time transmute into a banality of daily life (Arendt, 1970; Rydstrom, 2017), and in doing so morph from a momentary crisis into a *crisis of chronicity* (Vigh, 2008). Such a crisis is characterized by stillness in the sense that "the crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear" (Gramsci, 1971, pp. 275-276). Approaching crisis as a chronic condition might appear as if it neither had a beginning nor an end (Roitman, 2014) as if freed "from its temporal confines" (Vigh, 2008, p. 9).

A crisis determined by a machinery of male violence precisely is characterized by not appearing as coming to a closure anytime soon. Temporality needs to be approached as a subjective phenomenon to capture the modalities and intensities by which specific types of crises are composed. In some tempo-spatial pockets, a crisis might pass quickly, while in others it might compartmentalize as a permanent situation, as if separated from predominant understandings of the progression of time. Repeated violence can create a parallel crisis universe, a zone of alternative tempi and speeds in which time seems to have stopped and the horizon been blurred. That is an

interregnum, an ahistorical permanence (Gramsci, 1971), in which there is no return to how life used to be prior to the violence and a violence-free life seems out of reach (Rydstrom, 2015, 2017, 2019).

REITERATED VIOLENCE

Gathering around small plastic tables squeezed into the shade of a cluster of trees for protection against the blistering morning sun, a group of men from Long Lanh in central coastal Vietnam were sharing their experiences of intimate partner violence. Several of the men told how they used to be abusive against their female partners and how they eventually had ended their violent behavior. One of the men, Van, suddenly stated that "women also beat men" (*phụ nũ cũng đánh đàn ông chứ*). This was not the first time that a man in the Vietnamese context had let me (a female researcher) know that not only men but also women are violent.[5]

Violence is harmful to anyone and abuse against boys and men renders the risk of being overlooked if gendered violence is equalized with women. The comment, however, does not reflect the realities on the ground in Vietnam, or anywhere else, but rather appears as a way of dealing with a legally, morally, and emotionally loaded problem (Kimmel, 2002). Joan Kelly and Michael Johnson (2008) thus have observed that "when advocates for men claim that domestic violence is perpetrated equally by men and women … they are describing situational couple violence, not coercive controlling violence" (p. 481). Kelly and Johnson (2008) have defined "coercive controlling violence", which is in the fore of my discussion, as various combinations of physical intimidation, asserting male privilege, coercion, and threats, emotional abuse, isolation, use of children, economic abuse as well as belittling, denying, and blaming a partner.

The symmetry argument, reflected in Van's comment, has been rebutted by figures on gender-based violence provided by various international organizations. According to the WHO (2017), statistics on male intimate partner violence vary from 23.2% in high-income countries to 24.6% in the Western Pacific, 37% in the Eastern Mediterranean region, and 37.7% in Southeast Asia. Mirroring such numbers, a study conducted by United Nations Women Vietnam (2012) shows that 34% of ever-partnered women in the Vietnamese context reported "lifetime experience of physical and/or sexual violence, with 9% experiencing physical and/or sexual violence in the last 12 months" (p. 13). These startlingly high numbers indicate that men's violence against their female partners is a problem of "pandemic" proportions (United Nations, 2018; United Nations Women, 2018), and the most prevalent human rights violation experienced by women and girls in the world today (United Nations Statistics Division, 2015; United Nations Population Fund, 2019).

According to a study carried out by Kathryn Yount et al. (2016) in northern Vietnam on intimate partner violence, 36.6% out of 522 interviewed men (18-51 years) reported that they had perpetrated some form of abuse, especially physical violence against their wife. A minority of respondents, only 0.2% of the interviewed men, said

5 The comment resonates with the symmetry debate which erupted in the 1990s, when men's organizations, especially in the USA, claimed that despite statistics intimate partner violence is experienced in equal proportions by both women and men (Kimmel, 2002).

that they had perpetrated sexual violence against their wife. In the same study, 12% out of 533 interviewed married women (18-51 years), however, reported that they had experienced sexual violence committed by their husband.[6]

Discrepancies in men's and women's reporting of sexual violence resemble earlier findings in Vietnam, according to which sexual violence "was seen as a problem to be tolerated by female focus groups, while the male groups did not consider it to be a serious issue" (World Bank 1999, p. 2). Hence, the conviction rate of men who have perpetrated violence against their female partners is remarkably low. While about 43% of violent crimes are referred to the police, only 12% of reported cases result in criminal charges, and as few as 1% of reported cases of men's violence against women lead to conviction (Duvvury, Carney, & Minh/United Nations Women, 2012; Khuyên, 2016).[7] Such findings epitomize how violence against women has become an integrated, and in that sense ordinary dimension of female life, which holds power to turn life into a chronic crisis defined by insecurity and danger (Arendt, 1970; Rydstrom, 2003b, 2017, 2019; Vigh, 2008).

In the Vietnamese context, men's violence against their female partners frequently has been associated with Vietnam's opening into the global economy; with the introduction of the *Đổi Mới* (renovation) policy in 1986 (Le, 1992, p. 263; Ljunggren, 1993). In the wake of the *Đổi Mới* policy in December 1995, the Vietnamese government launched Resolution 87 as a means to eliminate any "social evils" (*tệ nạn xã hội*); a label which refers both to illicit activities as well as morally condemned behaviors such as domestic violence, gambling, and drug addiction (Koh, 2001; Marr, 1981; Nguyen-vo, 2008; Rydstrom, 2006; Vijeyarasa, 2010). Jayne Werner (2008) has discussed how social issues with the introduction of the *Đổi Mới* policy increasingly have been defined as household problems and individual concerns. Well-socialized citizens would promote "equality of men and women" (*nam nữ bình đẳng*) (Hoang, 2002) and engage in the building of a "happy and harmonious family life" (*gia đình hạnh phúc hòa thuận*) which would not suffer from any conflicts or crises (Drummond & Rydstrom, 2004; Leskhowich, 2008; Rydstrom, 2003a, 2003b, 2009, 2017).

SILENCING MEN'S VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

International attention to men's violence against women, as highlighted by the United Nations General Assembly's Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (launched in 1993) and the Beijing Declaration (adopted in 1995 by the Fourth World Conference on Women, see United Nations, 1995), provide the backdrop for debates on men's violence against women in Vietnam. Prior to the introduction of the *Đổi Mới* policy, men's violence against women was not recognized as a problem (Khuat, 2004). The tendency to silence men's violence against women thus prompted Le Thi Quy (1992), an official voice of the National Women's Union (*Hội Phụ Nữ*),[8] to introduce the term "family violence" (*bạo lực gia đình*) and to explain the

6 For a definition of sexual violence, see World Health Organization (2017).

7 See also, General Statistics Office of Vietnam, 2010; Schuler, Lenzi, Hoang, Vu, Yount, & Trang, 2014; Vietnam Women's Union, 2017; Yount et al., 2016.

8 As one of the mass organizations, the Union is responsible for identifying women-specific problems in the household and in society at large (Endres, 1999; Rydstrom, 2016; Waibel & Glück, 2013).

visible as well as invisible harm violence inflicts upon women (see also, Pistor & Le, 2014). Following Le Thi Quy (1992), Le Thi Nham Tuyet and Ho Thi Phuong Tien (1996) highlighted the invisible features of male-to-female violence, while Doan Bao Chau (1998) drew attention to a public neglect of the silent female suffering caused by men's physical and sexual abuse (see also Le, 1998). Thus, these voices identified how corporeal properties of gender and sexuality in intersection with other parameters such as age inform male violence.

The study *Gender-Based Violence: The Case of Vietnam* (World Bank, 1999) provided an early empirical overview of the prevalence of men's abuse of women in Vietnam, and even indicated that the onus for male-to-female violence tended to be placed on the abused woman. In 2010, on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women (November 25), the General Statistics Office of Vietnam (GSO) published the large-scaled national study, *Keeping Silent is Dying: Results from the National Study on Domestic Violence against Women in Viet Nam,* which offered novel quantitative as well as qualitative insights into the ways in which men's violence against their female partners harmed women, ruined their lifeworlds, limited their participation in social and economic life, and sometimes even cost them their lives. The study indicates that women who have been subjected to a male partner's violence feel ashamed and worried about "losing face" (*mất mặt*) because of what they see as an inability to manage their family and marriage well. They would thus remain silent about the abuse and "endure the suffering" (*chịu đau khổ*). Sexually abused women even stated that there would be no solutions to end such abuse because of a wife's assumed obligation to satisfy her husband sexually. Some women, though, told in the report that they had encouraged their husband to consult sex workers and thereby transfer the problem to another realm (General Statistics Office of Vietnam, 2010, p. 92; see also Horton & Rydstrom, 2011).[9]

Vietnam's #MeToo movement has evolved as an attempt to interrupt the machinery of male violence and, in doing so, even the crisis of chronicity in which an abused woman is caught. The movement in Vietnam corresponds with a current global social media movement, which efficiently has drawn public attention to men's sexual abuse of women, called for recognition of the harm such violence inflicts upon women, and for legal punishment of sexual violence perpetrators. Under the hashtag *#ngungimlang/#ngừngimlặng* (stop staying silent), the tendency to mute and neglect men's violence against women has been critically debated on social media. In addition, female survivors of sexual violence have shared their testimonies on being sexually abused in the domain of the home or at the workplace (see also "Phong trào #MeToo liệu", 2018; "#MeToo, Vietnam", 2018; "Vietnam's #MeToo Movement Begins", 2018).

FROM LAWS TO PRACTICES

While an elaborated legislation on the prevention of violence is in place in Vietnam (Schuler et al., 2014; Yount et al., 2016), the law does not necessarily prevent violence taking place at home. The gap between the letter of the law to prevent and combat violence against women and the implementation of the law was epitomized at the

9 These comments accord with my own data from Vietnam.

Smiling Tears (*Nước Mắt Cười*) exhibition held in Hanoi in 2012 ("Everyday Items Used for", 2012). Focus at the exhibition was on men's violence against their female partners, and the explicitness of the exhibition was horrifying. Tools used by men to maltreat and injure their female partners were on display, including a saucepan and batons. In addition to these instruments of brutality, female survivors of partner violence shared their experiences of being abused and even told about the energy they had been able to muster to leave an abusive partner and terminate a life impaired by a crisis of chronicity encroached by a gendered and sexualized machinery of male violence (see also, Kwiatkowski, 2008, 2011; Rydstrom, 2003b, 2006, 2017).

According to the *Keeping Silent is Dying* report (General Statistics Office of Vietnam, 2010)

> it is of paramount importance to strengthen the enforcement and implementation of existing policies and legal frameworks related to violence prevention and response through enhancing the capacities of duty bearers (the National Assembly, the Government of Viet Nam and mass organizations) at all levels and developing structured multi-sectoral coordination mechanisms to improve the coherence of policies, laws and programs related to violence (p. 111).

Vietnam ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1982 and both the Penal Code of 1999 (No. 15/1999/QH10) as well as the Law on Marriage and Family of 2000 stipulate that the use of violence is prohibited. According to the Civil Code of 2005 (No. 33-2005-QH11) (National Assembly of Vietnam, 2005), the civil rights of a person entitles that person to request the court or other relevant agencies to protect them (Art. 9). In 2006, the National Assembly debated the draft law on preventing domestic violence, which was passed in 2007 as the Law on Domestic Violence Prevention and Control (No. 02/2007/QH12) (National Assembly of Vietnam, 2007). With the new law an important step was taken in the prevention and combat of violence in the household, and beyond. While the law does not call for criminal sanctions, it does encourage civil solutions, including reconciliation with the aid of third party mediators such as kin, health care clinics, or local reconciliation units; fines; prohibition orders; and the re-education of male perpetrators (see also, Duvvury, Carney, & Minh/United Nations Women, 2012; Kwiatkowski, 2008, 2011; Nguyen & Rydstrom, 2018; Rydstrom, 2017, 2019).

SCALES OF HARM

When domestic violence breaches the criminal law, Article 104 under the Penal Code of 1999 (No. 15/1999/QH10) may apply (see also, United Nations Women, Vietnam, 2012). The seriousness of violence is defined in accordance with a number of stipulated infirmity rates required for an action to be a criminal act.[10] Regarding the seriousness of abuse, Article 104 (Penal Code) (National Assembly of Vietnam, 1999) clarifies that

10 For details on the infirmity rate, see National Assembly of Vietnam (1999).

> those who intentionally injure or causes harm to the health of other persons with an infirmity rate of between 11% and 30% …[11], shall be sentenced to non-custodial reform for up to three years or between six months and three years of imprisonment.

The infirmity rate is determined by a medical examiner who issues a certificate to verify the level of harm. Such a document, however, does not always come without a cost. Those women who cannot afford a certificate or those who find unauthorized fees unacceptable will not be able to obtain the needed certificate (Borgstrom, 2012; General Statistics Office of Vietnam, 2010; Hakkarainen, 2014; Vian, Brinkerhoff, Feeley, Salomon, & Vien, 2012).

The infirmity rate sheds light on how the gravity of men's violence against women is understood legally at a systemic level and even how a culture of impunity is facilitated. When female bodies are manipulated from phenomenological fellow human beings into objects of abuse, into naked life, by the aid of repertoires and techniques of abuse, local authorities are in charge of determining the scale of harm. Serious cases of male-to-female violence are those which lead to hospitalization and/or have lethal consequences, according to a representative from the women's union from the northern Quang Vinh area. Local women's union units, health care clinics, and reconciliation units might dismiss a case of violence because the damage is determined to fall under the 11% infirmity limit. As it is both tedious and costly in terms of time, money, and dignity to approach relevant agencies to pursue a legal procedure, much abuse is never registered, thus not recognized, but rendered silent as an individualized problem and a chronic crisis to endure (General Statistics Office of Vietnam, 2010; Nguyen, 2011; Nguyen & Rydstrom, 2018; Rydstrom, 2003b, 2017; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2011).

The power to define violence can in itself be seen as a kind of harm, as a violence which "is built into the structure and shows up as unequal power and consequently as unequal life chances" (Galtung, 1969, p. 171). As a nexus of various societal inequalities (Farmer, 2004), this kind of violence is symbolically shaped and operates throughout the societal system as systemic harm (Nguyen & Rydstrom, 2018). Systemic harm fosters a machinery of male violence through larger socio-economic, cultural, and political structures as these serve to establish a political discourse of permissiveness and a culture of impunity (Derrida, 1990; Nguyen & Rydstrom, 2018). Systemic harm is intertwined with men's violence against women on the ground, as two types of violence in a socio-cultural continuum of harm. These types of violence capitalize upon and might even galvanize one another as "rebounding violence", which thus refers to a dialectical relation between these two levels of violence and how they perpetually interact with and inform one another (Bloch, 1992; Nguyen & Rydstrom, 2018). These dynamics of violence condition the production and reproduction of gender-based abuse as a justified practice, which is reduced to a banal dimension of the ordinary (Arendt, 1970).

11 That is, "or under 11% but in one of the following circumstances". These include, amongst others, using weapons, causing harm to more than one person, causing minor permanent damage to the victims, committing the crime more than once or against children, pregnant women, and other people considered to be weak, or against parents. For details, see National Assembly of Vietnam (1999).

PATRILINY, MASCULINITY, AND VIOLENCE

Patriliny informs social organization in the household and by extension society at large (King & Stone, 2010; Sandgren, 2009). In addition to a gender perspective, which provides a lens for critical assessments of how socio-cultural logics produce particular images, narratives, and practices with regard to men and women, the machinery of male violence encourages a focus on masculinity (Bourdieu, 2001; Butler, 2004; Schrock & Schwalbe, 2009). Even though not all men agree with an influential type of masculinity, they are under pressure to conform to influential ideas about men, maleness, and masculinity as are women to assumptions about women, femaleness, and femininity (Connell, 1987; Hearn, 1998; Horton, 2014; Horton & Rydstrom, 2011).

The patrilineal and heterosexual family remains common in Vietnamese society despite an increase in same-sex partnerships, single-headed households, and co-habitation prior to marriage (Braemer, 2014; Horton, 2014; Newton, 2012; Nguyen, 2015; Rydstrom 2016). The "pillar of the house" (*trụ cột gia đình;* literally the pillar of the family) is a role which the most senior male (in terms of age and status) of a household is supposed to hold. The continuation of the patrilineage is considered critical and male progeny therefore valued. As "inside lineage" (*họ nội*), sons enjoy privileges and powers which daughters do not. Descent traced along the male line means that daughters come to stand in a position of exteriority to the patrilineage as "outside lineage" (*họ ngoại*) (Rydstrom, 2003a, 2003b; Bourdieu, 2001; Sandgren, 2009).

A dichotomic and ontological way of rendering men and women meaningful prevails in Vietnamese society, meaning that men generally are associated with masculinity and women with femininity. Considered as the result of the merging of "physiology" (*sinh lý học*), "psychology" (*tâm lý*), and a person's "character" (*tính cách*), male bodies are understood as being related to the forces of *Dương* (Yang in Chinese) and female bodies with the forces of *Âm* (Yin in Chinese). The forces of *Dương* would make a man "hot" (*nóng;* also meaning bad tempered), while a female body would be "cold" (*lạnh*) due to the forces of *Âm* (see also, Sandgren, 2009). "Hot" bodies are associated with active and centripetal energies, or masculinity, and "cold" bodies with passive and centrifugal energies, or femininity. These two forces of the phenomenological body would ideally complement one another and ensure harmony in the household and by extension in society (Jamieson, 1993; Leshkowich, 2008; Ngo, 2004).

Women's inferior position is expected to be balanced through a sociality of femininity that is called *tình cảm* (sentiments/emotions/feelings) and the various qualities of which it is composed, including "respect" (*kính*), "self-denial" (*nhường*), "endurance" (*chịu*), and "holding back oneself" (*nhịn*). Even though, *tình cảm* also is appreciated in men, *tình cảm* is associated with female capacities thanks to which they can verify their "good morality" (*đạo đức tốt*) and navigate the asymmetrical reciprocity inherent to the patriliny.[12] The qualities associated with *tình cảm* ideally stimulate the fostering of "happy and harmonious family life" (*gia đình hạnh phúc hòa thuận*) (Rydstrom, 2003b, 2009, 2010, 2017).

12 Such a gendered asymmetrical reciprocity, furthermore, is illustrated by Confucian dictums such as the Four Virtues (*Tứ đức*), which dictate female behavior beyond *tình cảm* (Ngo, 2004). For a discussion of gendered asymmetrical reciprocity, see also Young (1997).

An official representative of the women's union in Quang Vinh, for example, emphasized that women need to be aware of the social hierarchies and behave accordingly.[13] In daily life, women are expected to navigate a patrilineal hierarchy and manage ideals regarding family happiness by practicing *tình cảm.* This capacity is recognized as a critical means by which women can attempt to prevent the "rice" from "boiling" (*sôi*); or more precisely hinder a male partner from being "enraged"/"mad" (*nổi khùng*) and maybe even from becoming violent (Rydstrom, 2003b, 2009, 2010, 2017).

HIERARCHIES, ENERGIES, AND POWERS

Composed of gendered energies, the phenomenological body interlocks with a patriliny, which creates "openings towards violence [and] towards misogyny" (Connell, 1987, pp. 185-186). This was illustrated by a Thinh Tri Health Care Clinic worker in northern Vietnam, who explained that "due to their hot character and hard work it is normal that men get angry". "Hot characters" contain "hot" blood which produces "strength" (*mạnh mẽ*) and "energy" (*năng lượng*) in men and boys. This does not only mean that they might be aggressive but even could "explode" (*hăng lên*) (see also, Dao, Hoang, & Kanthoul, 2012; General Statistics Office of Vietnam, 2010; Horton & Rydstrom, 2011; Martin, 2013; Pells, Wilson, & Nguyen, 2016; Yount et al., 2016).

In a similar vein, a Thinh Tri nurse explained that "women should hold back themselves and … not explode". If women were exploding, a conflict could easily escalate, and women are therefore expected to remain calm, or stay cool, if a partner becomes hot tempered. Not all women, however, are willing to cool down a "hot" partner by "enduring suffering". Bian, a young woman in her early twenties from northern Quang Vinh, for example, related how throughout her childhood she had witnessed violent encounters between her parents, thus remembering that,

> my father had extramarital affairs and my mother knew about it. When she complained, my father beat her. He did so instead of explaining and talking with her. But women talk too much. For instance, my mother brought up his extramarital affairs even if we were having a good time. Women often criticize [their husband]".

Even though Bian emphasized that she finds men's violence against women unacceptable, she also held her mother accountable for the repeated incidents of violence between her parents. Placing the responsibility for the violence to which women are subjected on the abused woman is not uncommon, as indicated by a male interviewee in the *Keeping Silent is Dying* study, who suggested that "women are often mean and often fuss about small things. That is why violence occurs. The main cause of conflict in the family is women" (General Statistics Office of Vietnam, 2010, p. 76). What is criticized as a woman's "grumbling"/"complaning" (*càm ràm*) attitude frequently is referred to as a reason for men's violence against their female partners. In this vein, Hiep from northern Vietnam stated that women do not understand their husband

13 This statement resembles the Confucian dictum "Showing respect for the superior and self-denial for the inferior" (*Biết kính trên nhường dưới*).

because they "have big mouths and talk too much" (see also, Dao et al., 2012; Horton & Rydstrom, 2011; Rydstrom, 2003b, 2006, 2010; Trinh, 2008; Yount et al., 2016).

Women who do not act with *tình cảm* tend to be looked down upon as incapable of balancing a "hot" partner by "cooling" him down appropriately. Such assumed feminine 'flaws' are frequently taken as justification for a man's beating of his wife by men, women, and even by official representatives. Thus, a woman who "grumbles/complains" would often be condemned in the Vietnamese context for her lack of ability to stimulate harmony in the household by showing *tình cảm* appropriately (Rydstrom, 2003a, 2003b, 2017; see also, Kwiatkowski, 2008, 2011; Yount & Krause, 2017).

Oanh, a woman in her late thirties who lives in central coastal Long Lanh, recalled an incident of abuse which she at the same time minimized by saying, "I was beaten once by my husband because I complained. It was not a big thing. He was drunk and hot-tempered and then he beat me". Oanh's comment illuminates how a man's violence against his female partner is downplayed and thereby serves to surreptitiously transform abuse into a common and even expected male practice. Giang, who also lives in Long Lanh and is about twice as old as Oanh, related in a similar vein how she had begun to "grumble/complain" due to the extramarital affairs of her husband and how the confrontations had resulted in him abusing her. On these occasions, Giang would flee to her parent's place together with the couple's children, but she would always return. After a particularly terrifying incident of abuse, Giang and her children, however, left and stayed to reside with her parents (Rydstrom, 2019).

Uyen, who lives in the same community as Oanh and Giang, belongs to the same age bracket as Oanh. Independently of Oanh and Giang, Uyen reiterated ideas about how women's behavior fuels conflict and violence in a marriage. She thus explained that her husband's violence had been spurred by what she saw as her "grumbling/complaining" behavior and "provoking" (*khiêu khích*) attitude (Nguyen & Rydstrom, 2018; Rydstrom, 2017, 2019). After getting married, Uyen's husband became violent, and she was, as she remembered, "hit many times". Also, Uyen would escape her husband's violence by fleeing to her parents' home where she would find safety. Uyen, however, was determined to divorce her abusive husband and therefore gathered information from the authorities about how to initiate a divorce process. The divorce plans, though, were put to rest due to the advice of close kin and neighbors, who suggested that she should not leave her husband but rather stay for the sake of their children. Blaming the survivor of violence for the abuse appears as a strategy, albeit self-destructive, which is employed by women to cope with the forces of a machinery of male violence and the ways in which it determines life as a chronic crisis.

CRISIS OF CHRONICITY INTERRUPTED

While men's violence against women in the Vietnamese context has mainly been restricted to the realm of the household, recent reports indicate a surge in the abuse of women in public spaces. Recordings shared on social media have caused alarm in Vietnamese society, including a clip which showed how a woman was beaten by her husband in central Hanoi, in close proximity to a cafeteria, and another one from the International Airport in Hanoi, which displayed how two men attacked a young woman on Vietnamese Women's Day (20 October). Another video clip showed how

a mixed group of young boys and girls were beating up girls on the streets in the province of Nghe An and in Ho Chi Minh City (i.e., former Saigon). Hoang Giang Son of the Institute for Studies of Society, Economy, and Environment (iSEE), a Hanoi-based NGO, concluded in connection with these incidents that "violence against humans, particularly against women, is escalating in our society" (Khuyên, 2016). Conveying footage of male-to-female violence to a global audience through social media platforms elucidates how secondary virtual types of abuse and humiliation can be added to first grade direct physical violence. Social media, however, at the same time has become an important means for international and national agencies as well as NGOs devoted to prevent men's violence against women in the domestic and public spheres. Social media offer a platform from which agencies and organizations can provide information to abused women to break their isolation and escape a crisis of chronicity. Organizations and agencies such as the Vietnam Women's Union have set up hotlines and platforms such as the Facebook page called "Families without Violence" (*Gia đình Không Bạo lực*) to reach out to women to inform them about anti-violence legislation, rights, and programs aimed at combatting men's violence against women (Domestic Violence in Vietnam, 2016; see also, Rydstrom, 2017, 2019).

As part of the international November campaign "Say NO – UniTE to End Violence against Women" launched by the UN Women, various activities have been initiated in Vietnam to mark opposition to men's violence against women. In 2016, for example, Vietnamese NGOs and institutes dedicated to mobilizing resistance against male-to-female violence organized events, lectures, and meetings as part of the national campaign "Say No to Violence" (*Nói Không với Bạo lực*). The "Say NO – UniTE to End Violence against Women" annual campaign has gained traction and broad public support in Vietnamese society. Many women – and men – wear clothes in the campaign's signature color orange when attending demonstrations and activities to end men's violence against women during the campaign month. The following year, in 2017, in connection with the UN Women "Say NO – UniTE to End Violence against Women" campaign, a large event called "Zumba Festival: Love's Steps" was held in the Thong Nhat Park in Hanoi. Thousands of girls and women participated in the demonstration, which encouraged female survivors to voice their experiences of male violence as a way of ending the silencing of male-to-female abuse.[14]

Such initiatives have become recurrent annual activities, as illustrated by the #HearMeToo campaign of 2018 (Doan, 2018). In response to the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence Campaign 2018, the UN Secretary-General's UNiTE Orange the World Campaign, the UN Women, and the UN's Gender Thematic Group, social media and videos were used to disseminate information across the country about men's violence against women. A national workshop on gender-based violence prevention and Safe City models was organized by the UN Women and the Department of Labor, Invalids, and Social Affairs (MOLISA) in Ho Chi Minh City to develop strategies aimed at tackling the problem of men's violence against women in

14 The Zumba event was launched by the Center for Studies and Applied Sciences in Gender, Family, Women, and Adolescents (CSAGA) in collaboration with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), Department of Gender Equality under the Ministry of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA), and Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union in Hanoi amongst others. Even international NGOs and agencies supported the initiative (Dance Campaign aims to Stop, 2017, December 3).

the home as well as in urban spaces. The workshop selected "Safer Cities for Women and Girls" as the action theme of the Vietnam Women's Union for the year of 2019, which might imply that the movement is driven by women located in the cities. While the majority of Vietnamese women live in the countryside, bridging between experiences from urban and rural spaces plays an important role in promulgating the impact and success of the anti-violence campaigns (United Nations Women, 2018).

CONCLUSIONS

Masculinized social structures and the ways in which these create a framework for the production of systemic harm are reciprocally connected with male-to-female violence perpetrated on the ground. In a patrilineally organized universe, where women are rendered inferior and men superior, the machinery of male violence is enforced to multiply strength in highly gendered and sexualized ways (Arendt, 1970). The design of repertoires, techniques, and tools implemented by men to harm a female partner is inseparable from masculinized hierarchies, privileges, and powers, as configured in the Vietnamese context.

The violence imposed by a man upon his female partner is shaped in specific encounters, I have argued, when a perpetrator's essentialist and stereotypical fantasies about a woman's embodied properties (i.e., gender, sexuality, age, ethnicity, class, and bodyableness) degrade the female phenomenological body into a corporeal object of abuse through processes of transformation between the first, second, third, and fourth body typologies. The male machinery of violence attempts to reduce the female body into "naked life" as the result of a process of what I have referred to as "thingification". A battered woman is in this sense dehumanized and constrained to a "zone of exception" (Agamben, 1998) where the laws of protection do not apply and male violence is perpetrated with impunity (Mbembe, 2003; Rydstrom, 2012, 2015, 2017).

Repeated violence inflicted by a man upon his female partner confines life to a tempo-spatial "interregnum" (Gramsci, 1971); into a "crisis of chronicity" (Vigh, 2008), which impedes agency and the possibilities for positive change. A "poisonous knowledge" about the realities of violence and the perils of harm thus holds power to ruin the very foundation of the lifeworld of an abused woman (Stoler, 2013). Yet, women do not passively comply with a violent male partner. As I have discussed, abused women resist and counter the violence to which they are subjected and the pain and damage they have experienced. Vietnamese agencies as well as national and international organizations offer support to abused women and raise public awareness about a severe and dehumanizing problem that has been, and even continues to be, silenced. In dealing directly with the ways in which a gendered and sexualized machinery of male violence manufactures a crisis of chronicity, organizational initiatives can provide critical support to abused women. Empowered women – anywhere in the world – might be able to eschew the stillness imbued in a crisis of chronicity defined by male violence. "Making time moving again" means to turn a crisis of permanency into a bracket which eventually could provide a path to positive change; a *catharsis* that might lead to healing and renewal beyond a life framed by a harmful machinery of male violence.

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