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Why Do Soldiers Rape? Gender, Violence and Sexuality in the DRC Armed Forces

Maria Eriksson Baaz
Göteborg University

Maria Stern
Göteborg University

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... *Presentations and Discussions*

Why do soldiers rape? Gender, Violence and Sexuality in the DRC Armed Forces Maria ERIKSSON BAAZ et Maria STERN, Göteborg University

Despite recent attention, 'rape in war', as part of a globalized problematic and as it has occurred in the specific local context of the DRC, remains under problematised. Most research and reports on gender and war—specifically, in Africa and the DRC—focus on women as victims of war and sexual violence from the view of the women-victims themselves. Little attention has been paid to understanding the ways in which the perpetrators, themselves, understand their violent crimes. This article emerges from the need to analyze the discourses that produce sexual violence within the main perpetrator itself in the DRC: the Armed Forces. It explores the ways soldiers in the DRC speak about the horrific amount of rape committed by the armed forces in the recent war in the Congo.

Soldiers distinguish 'lust rapes' and 'evil rapes' and argue that their explanations of rape must be understood in relation to notions of different 'normative models' of masculinity as one of them says: "There are different types of rape (...) There is the rape when a soldier is away, when he has not seen his woman for a while and has needs and no money. This is the lust/need rape. But there are also the bad rapes, as a result of the spirit of war ... to humiliate the dignity of people. This is an evil rape."

The soldiers offer explanations for the occurrence for sexual violence and rape in their narratives which effectively both 'normalized' the violence committed and rendered it 'exceptional' and the result of the extraordinary circumstances as this soldier explains: "It is suffering which makes us rape. If I wake up in the morning and I am fine, I have something to eat, my wife loves me, will I then do things like that? No. But now, today we are hungry, yesterday I was hungry, tomorrow I will be hungry. They, the leaders/superiors are cheating us. We don't have anything."

The soldier's testimonies suggest that it is problematic to explain rape in the DRC in a reductionist way as either as unavoidable aspect of warring or simply as a 'weapon of war' which requires no explanation. The logics which 'explain' the sexualized violence the soldiers commit are crafted out of particular discourses around heterosexuality, masculinity (and femininity).

"Rape is a problem of organization of society.... For us for example, they send you on a mission and maybe you do not have leave for a long time, one year without leave (...) It is a problem of organization. But secondly, it is a problem of suffering/poverty. A soldier, if he has no possibilities, no money so that he can go the normal way ... if he has nothing in his pocket, he cannot eat or drink his coke, he has nothing to give

to a woman – he will take her by force. He will take a woman by force. Physically, men have needs. He cannot go a long time without being with a woman. It is very difficult to stop him ... So a soldier needs a bit of money on his pocket, and he needs to have leave. If that would happen it would reduce the rapes a lot."

It goes without saying that also women soldiers defend this kind of rape (of civilian women) as it is said by this female soldier: "If they want the work of soldiers to be good, to end indiscipline, they have to give the (financial) possibilities. If a soldier has his money he will think 'let's go and look for a woman and give her money so that I can be satisfied (...) But if he does not have money, he will look for an easier road, to get it for free. Then he has to wear a uniform to get a woman. Because, if you are to have a woman, what do you need? You need money."

The interviews invite us to question why violent acts are sexualized and suggest that dominant discourses of masculinity (and male heterosexuality) as they are re-produced in the context of the relatively disempowered FARDC at this violent moment in the Congo must be more closely explored. Rape must be seen as product of the particular context of the DRC—a warscape which has its local particularities...Rape must also be seen as reflective of the war-scapes in diverse contexts which are crafted out of the increasingly globalized context of soldiering.

In sum, the soldier's testimonies suggest that it is problematic to explain rape in the DRC in a reductionist way as either as an unavoidable aspect of (African) warring or simply as a 'weapon of war'. Ultimately, through reading the soldiers' words, we can glimpse the logics (arguably informed by the increasingly globalized context of soldiering) through which rape becomes possible, and even 'normalized' in particular wars capes.

