

# RAPE AS A WEAPON OF WAR IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

By

Carly Brown

Advised by

Dr. Christopher Bickel

SOCS 461, 462

Senior Project

Social Sciences Department

College of Liberal Arts

CALIFORNIA POLYTECHNIC STATE UNIVERSITY

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### **Research Proposal**

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, rape has become a notorious weapon of war. As the conflict of the country rages on, women are experiencing a conflict of their own as sexual violence is waged upon their bodies. Rape of this magnitude has seldom been seen in the history of conflict, yet it continues, as few are aware of its existence. The goal of this research project is to not only bring to light the terrible atrocity that is rape as a weapon of war, but also to analyze it, taking into the context sociological implications that create an environment in which facilitates its existence and allows it to thrive on such a massive scale. A greater understanding of rape in the Congo needed, and the plight of its victims realized. Research will be done by reading journal articles regarding the Congo conflict as well as the accounts of sexual violence that have been documented by various humanitarian organizations.

### Annotated Bibliography

Baaz, M.E., & Stern, M. (2009). Why Do soldiers rape? masculinity, violence, and sexuality in the armed forces in the Congo (DRC). *International Studies Quarterly*, 53, 01-24.

-Rape in this sense is seen as serving a triple purpose: it represents the “spoils” of war, and it is a symbolic message of dominance to the conquered (men) and to all women (498).

-A “spiral of violence” incites rape: those who feel humiliated, mistreated, and victimized by the enemy (or even through the context of warring more generally) become more prone to enact violence

-Most scholars who address rape, and especially militarized rape, de-link rape from biologically “natural” sex drives and (re)frame it as an act of violence and aggression that builds upon sexist discourses at play in society more generally (498-499).

Pratt, M., & Werchick, L. (2004). Sexual terrorism: rape as a weapon of war in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. *USAID/DCHA Assessment Report*, 01-30.

-Perceived as a particularly effective weapon of war and used to subdue, punish, or take revenge upon entire communities, acts of sexual and gender-based violence increased concomitantly (6).

-The perpetrators have come from among virtually all of the armies, militias and gangs implicated in the conflicts, including local bands and police forces that attacked their own communities (6).

-Community leaders noted that the frequent and extreme brutality committed with impunity during wave after wave of armed occupation has resulted in the disintegration of the moral and social fabric in many localities. Social stigma has left large numbers of rape victims and children born of rape rejected by their families and communities (6).

-Rape and associated violence against civilians (women, men, girls, and boys) have been widely employed as weapons in the multiple regional and civil wars that have plagued the eastern provinces of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Such violence was noted in cross-border hostilities in 1991 but became more frequent in 1994 in the context of regional conflicts stemming from the Rwandan genocide and the pursuant exodus of Rwandan civilians and armed groups into eastern DRC (7).

-Victims of sexual violence range in age from four months (a very recent case of attempted rape in Ituri) to 84 years of age (7).

-As a doctor at Panzi Hospital explained, “[The rape] is done to destroy completely the social, family fabric of society.”(8).

-Patricia Rozée has identified various categories of rape, including: *punitive rape* (used to punish to elicit silence and control); *status rape* (occurring as a result of acknowledged differences in rank—master/slave, nobleman/commoner; etc); *ceremonial rape* (undertaken as part of socially sanctioned rituals or ceremonies); *exchange rape* (when genital contact is used as a bargaining tool or gesture of conciliation or solidarity); *theft rape* (involuntary abduction of individuals as slaves, prostitutes, concubines, or spoils of war); and *survival rape* (when young women become involved with older men to secure goods and/or services needed to survive (quoted in Penn and Nardos 2003:54-55) (8-9).

-Some rapes are used to punish individuals, families, and communities for allegedly sympathizing with or supporting the ‘enemy’ (9).

-Sexual violence has also been used to subjugate populations as a means of gaining access to valuable or scarce assets (9).

Now, the world is without me. (2008). *Human Humanitarian Initiative*, Retrieved from <http://www.oxfam.org/en/policy/now-world-without-me>

-Rape is an extremely effective wartime weapon. It is strategically used to shame, demoralize and humiliate the enemy. By systematically raping women and girls, armed groups assert power and domination over not only the women, but their men as well. The results are devastating. Rape survivors in Eastern DRC face multiple medical problems including HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infections. Pregnancy, infertility and genital mutilation are common consequences of rape in this context (1).

-The psychosocial consequences of being raped are also devastating. Fear, shame, insomnia and nightmares are frequently noted among sexual violence survivors (1).

-In Eastern DRC, rape is highly stigmatized and social sequelae include spousal abandonment, inability to marry and being ostracized by the community. Spousal and community abandonment lead to isolation and homelessness (1).

-Study conducted at Panzi Hospital in Bukavu, South Kivu Province (1).

-Just over half of all perpetrators (52%) were identified as being armed combatants. Although another 42% were identified only as “assailants”, analysis of the patterns of violence, strongly suggests that this group is also comprised largely of armed combatants. Thus, the sexual violence in South Kivu is largely militarized (2).

-Military rape in South Kivu is marked with a predominance of gang rape, which was described by almost 60% of sexual violence survivors presenting to Panzi Hospital (2).

-As highlighted in the qualitative analysis, sexual violence survivors experienced a host of physical symptoms following rape, including pelvic, lumbar and abdominal pain as well as reproductive abnormalities such as infertility and premature labor and delivery. Women often

expressed concern about infections, particularly HIV, after being raped. Psychological symptoms following sexual violence were also common. Women described sadness, anger, fear, anxiety, shame and misery. Many women also suffered significant losses such as the death of family members, spousal abandonment and loss of personal valuables as a result of the attack (2-3).

-Use of sexual violence as a weapon of war is usually strategic and systematic. Rape is used to terrorize civilian populations, causing people to flee and leave their homes, their belongings and their fields (5).

-In other conflict settings, mass rape is used during cultural and ethnic cleansing as a means of polluting bloodlines and forcibly impregnating women to produce “ethnically- cleansed” children (5).

-Rape is strategically used to inflict shame, suffering and humiliation. For women who have been raped, the capacity to care for their children and to participate in community life is greatly diminished. They find that the potential for re-integration into their relational social networks is starkly reduced. Because the stigmatization and humiliation can last for decades, widespread infliction of sexual violence may effectively destroy the cultural and social bonds of entire communities (5).

-Sexual violence, as the ultimate display of power and dominance, is used by the opposing force to signify the weakness and inadequacy of the men in the targeted social grouping or community. These men absorb this message, perceiving their inability to protect women against assault as their own final humiliation in the war (5).

Clark, M. (2009). Congo: Confronting rape as a weapon of war. *Christian Science Monitor*, 3.

- Hundreds of thousands of men in eastern Congo are in the same position: The stigma of rape compels them to hide what happened and shun their wives, compounding a horrible situation.

-This is what war looks like in what has been called "the rape capital of the world," where the weapon of sexual violence is so commonly used that people seem numb to it. Doctors and activists call it an "epidemic." Five million people have died, and an estimated 50,000 to 100,000 women have been raped in the past decade of tangled conflict among ethnic militias and regional militaries fighting for Congo's mineral riches

-"Even in a wartime setting, Congo is unusual and exceptional," says Michael Van Rooyen, the director of Harvard's Humanitarian Initiative and an emergency physician with experience in international disaster zones. And, he says, it appears that "rape is becoming part of the culture."

- In an empty room in the countryside, a former militiaman - now a colonel in Congo's Army, who doesn't want to be named - pulls his hat over his face and explains to the Monitor on video camera why he used to rape: "I did it because we were in the bush for many months at a time. It was rare to meet women.... We wanted to seize the opportunity." He "only" raped twice, he says,

and doesn't remember the details, because he was high on marijuana at the time. Drug use is common among militiamen, and getting high makes it easier to raid and pillage villages, he says.

-Other rebels in his group raped to punish women whom they thought were spies. "I witnessed men raping to punish," says the colonel. "We did it for revenge. It happens all the time. "When we were going to fight, maybe 150 rebels would go with only 10 guns," he says. "Sometimes 50 of us would be killed in one battle. So I could be happy that I raped, because I could tell the other militiamen: 'At least I raped one of their women.' "

-It's not just militias. Government soldiers rape, too - a lot, he says. "Sometimes women were used to lure soldiers to fall in love with them, so they could pass intelligence to the rebels they were collaborating with," says the colonel. "So Army men raped to discourage this."

Nutt, S. (2004). Living in fear. *Maclean's*, 117(7), 23-25.

-UNICEF estimates that the prevalence of HIV infection in the Congo may be as high as 20 per cent

-The International Rescue Committee (IRC), a charity that funds sexual assault treatment programs at Panzi hospital in Bukavu, says that rape cases range from babies to frail women in their 80s. Some victims have been raped and tortured in front of their families. In addition to the risk of infection and the psychological trauma, the stigma attached to rape often means that women will face rejection in their homes, perpetuating a cycle of destitution and despair

-And the extreme violence of some of the rapes leaves many women with vaginal fistulas -- a condition where the walls between the vagina, rectum and bladder are destroyed, and which requires exhaustive and painful reparative surgery. Few regions of the Congo have gynecologists trained in such procedures, leaving victims with no alternative but to hope that someday they'll receive help

to another town, but the soldier returned only a few months later (60)

ICC, Elements of Crimes, International Criminal Court, ICC-ASP/1/3(part II-B), September 9, 2002, [http://www.icc-cpi.int/NR/rdonlyres/9CAEE830-38CF-41D6-AB0B-68E5F9082543/0/Element\\_of\\_Crimes\\_English.pdf](http://www.icc-cpi.int/NR/rdonlyres/9CAEE830-38CF-41D6-AB0B-68E5F9082543/0/Element_of_Crimes_English.pdf) (accessed June 4, 2009).

Article 7 (1) (g)-1 Crime against humanity of rape

1. The perpetrator invaded the body of a person by conduct resulting in penetration, however slight, of any part of the body of the victim or of the perpetrator with a sexual organ, or of the anal or genital opening of the victim with any object or any other part of the body.

2. The invasion was committed by force, or by threat of force or coercion, such as that caused by fear of violence, duress, detention, psychological oppression or abuse of power, against such

person or another person, or by taking advantage of a coercive environment, or the invasion was committed against a person incapable of giving genuine consent.

3. The conduct was committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against a civilian population.

4. The perpetrator knew that the conduct was part of or intended the conduct to be part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against a civilian population.

Soldiers who rape, commanders who condone. (2009, July 16). Retrieved from <http://www.hrw.org/en/node/84366/section/1>

-Research for this report was carried out between January and April 2009 in North and South Kivu, Congo. We interviewed victims and witnesses of sexual violence, relatives of victims, representatives of churches and NGOs, staff of international agencies, and government representatives. We also interviewed military officials, military prosecutors, and military judges

-Tens of thousands of women and girls in Congo have become victims of sexual violence during the past 15 years

-The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the agency coordinating work on sexual violence in Congo, reported that 15,996 new cases of sexual violence were registered in 2008 throughout the country. In the eastern province of North Kivu alone, there were 4,820 new cases. UNFPA also reported that more than 65 percent of victims of sexual violence during the same period were children, the majority adolescent girls. An estimated ten percent of victims are children less than ten years old

“-According to one estimate, less than 50 percent of women who are raped are able to access health centers

-Sexual violence was widespread and sometimes systematic, a weapon of war used by all sides to deliberately terrorize civilians, to exert control over them, or to punish them for perceived collaboration with the enemy. Armed groups also abducted women and girls and used them as sexual slaves

-Women said the war was being fought "on their bodies."

-In recent years, acts of sexual violence by civilians have also notably increased. This has been attributed to an increase in demobilized combatants who have reintegrated into society with minimal rehabilitation measures, and to the brutalization of society that eroded previous protective social norms

#### *International Law*

-Congo is bound by international humanitarian law ("the laws of war") and international human rights law. Both bodies of law prohibit acts of sexual violence. International humanitarian law,



largely derived from the four Geneva Conventions and their protocols, sets out protections for civilians and other non-combatants during both international and internal armed conflicts. It implicitly and explicitly prohibits both states and non-state armed groups from committing rape and other forms of sexual violence

-When crimes of sexual violence are committed as part of armed conflict, they can be prosecuted as war crimes. States have an obligation to investigate alleged war crimes committed by their nationals, including members of the armed forces, and prosecute those responsible

### *Congolese Law*

-In 2006, Congo's parliament passed a new law on sexual violence. For the first time, the law specifically criminalizes acts such as the insertion of an object into a women's vagina, sexual mutilation, and sexual slavery. It defines any sexual relation with a minor as statutory rape. Penalties for rape range from five to twenty years, but are doubled under certain conditions, for example when committed by a public official, by several persons together, with use or threat of a weapon, or in situations of captivity

-The Congolese national army, the FARDC, was formed after the installation of the transitional government in June 2003. It brought together soldiers from all of the main rebel groups as well as the former government army into a new force with officer and command positions divided up between them

-Since its creation in 2003, the FARDC has been one of the main perpetrators of documented sexual violence in Congo. Army commanders have frequently failed to stop sexual violence and punish those responsible

-Although other armed groups have also committed many brutal acts of sexual violence against women and girls, the sheer size of the Congolese army and its deployment throughout the country make it the single largest group of perpetrators.

-FARDC soldiers continue to commit gang rapes, rapes involving injury and death, and abductions of women and girls. In 2007, MONUC found that 54 percent of all sexual violence cases reported in the first six months of that year were committed by the FARDC soldiers

### *The 14<sup>th</sup> Brigade*

-The 14th brigade was created in 2006. The majority of its soldiers were former combatants of the Congolese Rally for Democracy-Goma (RCD-Goma), one of the main, Rwandan-supported rebel groups that fought the national government during Congo's second war. In addition, the brigade also included former Mai Mai combatants (an armed group that opposed the RCD-Goma) and members of the former government army, the Forces Armées Congolaises (FAC)

-Acts of sexual violence were often carried out at the same time as looting activities, a trend seen in many other parts of eastern Congo where Congolese army soldiers are based

-Soldiers also abducted women and girls and kept them under their control as sexual slaves for extended periods

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-A soldier of the 14th brigade described the situation in March 2009: "There is a lot of forced marriage, where soldiers will say, 'if you don't marry me, I will shoot you"

-Soldiers in the 14th brigade were able to commit abuses without consequence partly because of confusion over chain of command and because commanders made aware of the problems did not take action against those responsible

-Poor living conditions of soldiers cannot justify any of the sexual crimes committed by the Congolese army. But efforts to improve access to basic necessities and look after soldier's families might ultimately contribute to civilian protection

Bell, M. (2006). *Democratic republic of congo*. Child Alert. Retrieved January 20, 2011 from <http://www.unicef.org/childalert/drc/>

-The International Rescue Committee has estimated that 1,200 people die each day in the DRC as a direct or indirect cause of the conflict. Over half of them are children.

- Gang rapes, mutilation, rape involving the insertion of objects into the victim's genitals and forced rape by one victim upon another are not uncommon in this largely ungoverned eastern part of the country.

-The victims include those who are forced to witness these atrocities against their spouses, parents, children, relatives and friends

-Martha (not her real name) is 14. She comes from a religious family in North Kivu Province. When she was 13, her mother sent her to buy a dress for her own baptism. On the way home, and as darkness fell, she was attacked and gang-raped by some people from her neighbourhood. As a consequence of the rape, she gave birth to twin boys born 28 days prematurely. They lie beside her in an incubator at the Heal Africa Hospital in Goma. At first, she hated them. But for the moment, she says, she loves them. She is one of many victims of rape receiving care and counselling at the hospital. The chief surgeon, Dr. Kasereka Lusi, says: "It's a terrible experience. They all become mad, really furious mad. They would rather be dead than live like this. At first they see the child as the enemy within. They try to smack it and kill it. To heal them, you need the whole community to counsel them to accept the baby."

(2008). Atrocities beyond words. *Economist*, 387(8578), 57-58. Retrieved from Academic Search Elite database.

-Some men, says a worker for the UN's Children's Fund (Unicef), have been forced to simulate having sex in holes dug in the ground, with razor blades stuck inside

-Local aid workers and UN reports tell of gang rapes, leaving victims with appalling physical and psychological injuries; rapes committed in front of families or whole communities; male relatives forced at gunpoint to rape their own daughters, mothers or sisters; women used as sex slaves forced to eat excrement or the flesh of murdered relatives.

-Some women victims have themselves been murdered by bullets fired from a gun barrel shoved into their vagina

-Sometimes the motive is revenge for attacks by rival militias, sometimes it is ethnic cleansing and on other occasions an effort to undermine the morale of the enemy by spreading shame, injury and disease.

-In eastern Congo up to 80% of reported fistula cases in women are thought to result from rape attacks

Carlsen, Erika(2009) 'Rape and War in the Democratic Republic of the Congo', Peace Review, 21: 4, 474- 483

-[rape] forcibly separates a woman from her sense of self, security, and community

-Many women and girls suffering from obstetric fistulas are socially stigmatized due to incontinence and infertility

-Human Rights Watch observers and Doctors Without Borders have documented that women and girls are tortured before, during, and after the rapes take place, with estimates that as many as 30 percent of women are sexually mutilated.

-Tosh and Chazan attribute the continuation of massive sexual violence to impunity and collapsed and ineffective judicial system

*Theories (opportunistic, strategic, militarized)*

-Opportunistic sexual violence theory claims economic gain is the motivation for widespread sexual violence during wartime. This theory explores the relationship between sexual violence against women and the allocation of resources. Combatants use sexual violence as a means to ensure their own economic survival and establish control over lucrative resources. War, secessionist conflicts, and conflicts driven by ethnic tensions often place soldiers in economically desperate conditions. As a result of these conditions, combatants and soldiers are encouraged to loot resources during raids and post-combat operations, taking advantage of unequal power relations between women and men. The survival of rebel forces, militias, and militaries often depends on access to resources and material goods obtained through looting. In the often encouraged and condoned looting of goods, women are treated as another resource to be looted.

-Economic desperation motivates much of the sexual violence in the DRC. Soldiers and rebel forces in eastern Congo live in notoriously squalid conditions. As a result of these impoverished conditions, soldiers and armed combatants use rape to steal women's material and productive goods

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-The military and the police are both implicitly expected to fend for themselves. With scant economic opportunities, soldiers are trapped in a cycle of poverty and live off of the local people to ensure their daily survival.

-According to one RCD–GOMA soldier interviewed by International Alert, “Militias rape and pillage because many of them are not properly organized. The fighters wait four months to get paid. They’ve got nothing to eat, they have to cope as best as they can.” Like government soldiers, armed combatants’ rape of women and girls is motivated by economic conditions.

-International Alert documented numerous incidents of rape and looting during months marked by the busy harvesting of coffee, cassava, and bananas. Rapes also took place the day before major market days. Women en route to the market to sell their harvested goods were raped on their journey and their goods were stolen

-Women’s reproductive labor is key to the survival of guerrilla troops

-The strategic violence theory recognizes that soldiers use sexual violence to accomplish strategic objectives. These objectives may include but are not limited to: genocide, inciting terror, and retribution for perceived past wrongs. According to the strategic violence theory, rape during wartime is a weapon of war, and not simply a byproduct of it

-Rape is a weapon, which terrorizes a population and encourages that population to flee, allowing combatants to occupy and gain control of an area previously inhabited by a civilian population

-The fulfillment of strategic objectives motivates sexual violence in the DRC. Soldiers use rape as a means of sowing terror and instilling fear in communities. When armed combatants rape women and girls, the rapists destroy not only the personal security of the victims, but also the security of the community because women’s bodies physically and symbolically provide the backbone of their communities. As militias and armed groups pursue their strategic objective of control over lucrative natural resources and land, new grievances between groups develop. These groups use sexual violence to terrorize and force communities to accept their control or to punish them for supposed loyalty to other force

-Genocidal rape is an assault against the victim with the aim of undermining a community’s sense of security and cohesion. Soldiers and combatants engage in sexual violence against women because women’s bodies physically and symbolically represent their community, state, and nation. By raping women, combatants and soldiers figuratively rape and dilute the community and nation

-Providing another motivation for sexual violence during wartime, the patriarchal militarism theory proposes that sexual violence during wartime motivated by the desire to exert control and power over women and men who are perceived as feminine. Sexual violence during war is a by-product of a system of patriarchy where power relations are hierarchal and motivated by masculinity. Rape is then an extension of everyday misogyny, a violent enforcement of the

patriarchal hierarchy between men and women. This relationship between rape, misogyny, and patriarchy is manifested in the military and its exercise of power

- Commanders allow sexual violence to become endemic and often encourage it as a reward for battle or for troop morale. According to soldiers' testimonies, fighters were "expected" to rape or their food rations would be withheld or reduced.

-Child combatants are especially forced to engage in rape, as commanders use sexual violence to continue their quest of brutalizing and desensitizing abducted children

Bartels, S. , Scott, J. , Leaning, J. , Mukwege, D. , Lipton, R. , et al. (2010). Surviving sexual violence in eastern democratic republic of congo. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 11(4), 37-49.

-Use of sexual violence as a weapon of war is often strategic and systematic. Rape is used to terrorize civilian populations, causing people to flee and leave their homes their belongings and their fields.

-In other conflict settings, mass rape is used during cultural and ethnic cleansing as a means of polluting bloodlines and forcibly impregnating women to produce "ethnically-cleansed" children.

-Finally, rape is strategically used to inflict shame, suffering and humiliation. Because the stigmatization and humiliation can last for decades, widespread infliction of sexual violence may effectively destroy the cultural and social bonds of entire communities

-Using a non-systematic convenience sample, Panzi Hospital nurses conducted interviews on sexual violence survivors as they presented to hospital in 2006

-These symptoms included pelvic pain (22% of women), lumbar pain (11%) and abdominal pain (7%). Six percent of the women reported that they became pregnant as a result of the rape.

-26% of women reporting that they continue to experience anxiety about the sexual violence that they had endured. Women who reported sexual slavery or gang rape were 1.6 times more likely to report psychological symptoms than were women who reported rape

-Twenty-three percent reported loss of the family's valuables (most commonly cash, food, clothing, or livestock) secondary to pillaging by the assailants

Mullins, C. (2009). 'We are going to rape you and taste tutsi women': Rape during the 1994 rwandan genocide. *British Journal of Criminology*, 49(6), 719-735

-When women are property, women are plunder. Women have historically been considered spoils of war

-Taken together, the cultural and structural research on rape establishes that within a civilian context, sexual assault is organized and regulated within a social order, as it reinforces male beliefs about sexual privilege and access

-In the post-colonial African context, rape has been as pervasive as in any conflict

-Militia and regular army routinely rape women and girls once a village is taken; some of them are forced into marriages or held in sexual slavery for months or years at a time

-Genocidal rape is defined as a systemically organized military tactic of terror and genocide. It is used to generate fear in a subdued population, humiliate the population (both men and women), derogate women (through spoilage of identity) and create a cohort of mixed-ethnic children to maintain the humiliation/spoilage/domination. Such a use of sexual assault is an orchestrated tactic of warfare

-Often, men were made to watch as their wives and daughters were assaulted; isolated reports of soldiers forcing men to rape their own daughters have also emerged (see Chang 1997 for a discussion of this in China). Such actions are vivid demonstrations of the newly found powerlessness of men in the combat zone. Having to either actively or passively participate in this process is an assault on the masculinity of husbands and fathers; due to long-standing patriarchal value systems, these men and women simultaneously experience the destruction of their ability to enact enforced gender norms

-Opportunistic rapes are those sexual assaults that arise out of the general chaos and confusion of a military engagement (Wood 2006). In contrast with genocidal rapes, these assaults are motivated by individualistic drives, not as part of the military campaign itself per se

-(Sexual enslavement)Some rapes were more than single episode events. Sexual enslavements occurred when a woman was detained

-Genocidal rapes are those whose motivation and consequences go beyond more mundane catalysts for sexual assault. These violations are part of a broader attempt to eliminate a category of people in whole or in part, with the sexual violence being only one of many tactics used

-War and other forms of mass violence are a behavioral context in and of themselves, with normative and expected behaviors for social actors being strongly different from daily life

-(In relation to the Rwandan genocide) Some of the rapes during the genocide grew out of pre-existing interpersonal grievances. The ongoing genocide and the widespread prevalence of rape made these events possible and provided impunity for the actions. Individual males carrying unrequited desires or humiliated by rejection found themselves able to exact revenge on a specific woman due to the impunity provided by the broader genocide event

-(Rwanda) the rapes function to add socio-cultural insult to physical injury for the victim and the ethnic group itself. Not only will the population be destroyed —the ultimate goal of any

genocide —but, before the destruction occurs, all dignity and rights held by the population will be removed. Thus, rape can be seen as a way to tarnish the reputation and memory of a people before killing them off — ensuring that not only are the final experiences of the population horrible by nature, but the way in which they are remembered by others is also fixed on those end moments (i.e. a nude woman laying along the side of the road with her throat slit and a tree branch inserted into her vagina). Not only is the population itself eliminated, but the final memories of the people's existence are tarnished

-Rape itself is infused with gendered power dynamics; scholars have long acknowledged that rape is as much about power as it is about sex

International Alert (2005) *Women's Bodies as a Battleground: Sexual Violence Against Women and Girls During the War in the Democratic Republic of Congo* —  
Reseau des Femmes pour un Developpement Associatif

-South Kivu

-According to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), 10–30% of the population of South Kivu suffer from severe malnutrition. This situation is caused by two factors. Firstly, the soil is exhausted through over-exploitation and, in some areas of high population density, especially the mountainous areas of South Kivu, it has to sustain too many people. Secondly, this food shortage has been exacerbated by strain on local communities caused by the huge influx of Rwandan refugees following the 1994 genocide and the unprecedented displacement of people fleeing the endless fighting between the various political factions

-It is estimated that 60% of the population of South Kivu has been displaced since war broke out in 1996

-The insecurity that rapidly took hold in all areas of the province has led to acts of violence – pillaging, killing, rape, setting fire to houses – indiscriminately perpetrated by members of the various armed groups involved in the conflict

-The position of women in South Kivu is characterized in economic terms by the 'feminization of poverty', exacerbated by the lack of any policies or mechanisms for women's advancement, and in socio-cultural terms by the persistence of customs, practices and legislation that discriminate against women. These factors make women vulnerable in a situation of armed conflict. Not only do they make gender-based violence more likely, but, in the eyes of the abusers at least, they even legitimize it

-Women had already been made vulnerable by the dysfunctional state structures and the lack of viable economic and social infrastructures caused by 30 years under the dictatorial regime of President Mobutu

-The burden of finding survival strategies has increasingly fallen on women, while the lack of economic and social development has meant the impoverishment of the female population,

especially in rural and semi-urban areas

-The war has produced a large number of widows and displaced women who have become heads of household without their having had any preparation for this role. They live below the poverty line and depend largely on food aid (when it is available) for their survival. There are high rates of HIV/AIDS, partly owing to the widespread incidence of rape committed against women by forces fighting on the ground

-War and poverty have also forced many women and girls into prostitution as a means of survival, and this makes them particularly vulnerable to sexual violence. This has been described as 'survival sex' and creates conditions "... in which abusive sexual relations are more widely accepted and where many men, both civilians and combatants, regard sex as a service that is easy to obtain by means of coercion"

-Certain customs, practices and laws constitute an obstacle to women in getting access to property, education, modern technology and information

-But most communities stigmatize women who have been raped and hold them equally responsible for the shame and humiliation that they have suffered. This is why many women victims of rape prefer to keep quiet about what has happened to them

-Four types of rape have been identified: individual rape, gang rape, rape in which victims are forced to rape each other and rape involving objects being inserted into the victims' genitals. In many cases, the rape victims were tortured and others were murdered

1. Individual rape: where a single perpetrator rapes a single victim; of the 492 informants, 105, or 21.3% had been subjected to this type of rape

2. Gang rape: 390, or 79% of the women interviewed had been raped by at least two attackers, either one after the other or simultaneously. The number attackers ranged from 1 to 20, giving an average of 4.5 attackers per victim. Thirty per cent of the victims of gang rape were raped by two attackers simultaneously. Some women also said how, sometimes, during these gang rapes, after one man had finished raping the victim, the attackers would insert the end of a rifle, wrapped in a cloth soaked in water, into the woman's vagina, so as to 'clean' it ready for the next attacker

3. Forced rape between victims: Often, after having committed gang rape, the attackers would force members of the same family to have incestuous sexual relations with each other: between mother and son, father and daughter, brother and sister, aunt and nephew. Families were also forced to watch the gang rape of one of their members, usually the mother or sisters. They were then made to dance naked, to applaud, and to sing obscene songs, while the rape was going on

4. Rape involving the insertion of objects into the victim's genitals: Of the 492 informants, 61, or 12.4%, had experienced this atrocity. The objects mentioned as having been used were sticks, bottles, green bananas, pestles coated in chilli pepper and rifle barrels

-A number of these rapes were accompanied by torture, especially if the victims resisted: 71.7% of the interviewees were tortured while the rape was being committed, especially when they put



up a fight. They were beaten, wounded with machetes, or they had their genitals mutilated or burnt with drops of plastic melted by a flame. Some women, after they had been raped, were killed by a shot fired into their vagina

-Seventy per cent of the victims declared that their attackers were in a normal and lucid state of mind, even while meting out such cruel treatment. The other 30%, however, noted that their attackers displayed extreme nervousness and irrational behaviour, which made them think that they were acting under the influence of drugs

-Rape and pillage nearly always went hand in hand. The attackers came with a specific aim in mind: to terrorize, loot, rape and then leave, taking with them the goods they had stolen (livestock, agricultural produce, kitchen utensils, farming implements, etc.)

-Thirty-eight per cent of the women were raped in a public place and in the presence of witnesses who, in most cases, were close members of the family or of the woman's immediate circle. By contrast, 61.8% of the informants were raped in a place that was at a distance from the village, and without any witnesses.

-Given the scale and nature of the sexual abuse, and the devastating consequences for the women and their communities, the DRC is faced with a serious public health problem. This violence has also contributed to the erosion of the economic and social fabric of rural communities and the impoverishment of the most disadvantaged social groups in South Kivu

-The majority of victims – 91.5% of the sample – suffers from one or more rape-related physical or psychological problems.

-It is estimated that nearly 60% of combatants involved in the war in the DRC are HIV-positive "

-Almost all (91%) of the interviewees claimed they were suffering from behavioral problems. The most frequently cited were latent fear and shame but they also mentioned self-loathing, excessive sweating, insomnia, nightmares, memory loss, aggression, anxiety, sense of dread, and withdrawal into themselves

Lives blown apart, crimes against women in times of conflict. (2004). *Amnesty International Publications*. Retrieved January 15, 2011 from <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/ACT77/075/2004>

### Psychological

-It is the universal weapon deployed to strip women of their dignity and destroy their sense of self.

-In some acts of collective violence, rape is used systematically and deliberately to drive out one group of people and empty the land of its settled population. The attack may be highly gendered – while men are killed, women are subjected to rape and other forms of sexual assault.

-They are attacked as bearers of the next generation – their reproductive capacity is either destroyed or harnessed through forcible impregnation to carry the child of the enemy.

-It is estimated that fewer than 30 percent of Congolese have access to even basic healthcare. Because of the destruction of the healthcare infrastructure in the east, most women suffering injuries or illnesses caused by the rape – some of them life-threatening – are unable to access appropriate medical treatment

-Many survivors of rape suffer: infection with HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases; uterine prolapses (the descent of the uterus into the vagina or beyond); fistulas and other injuries to the reproductive system or rectum, often accompanied by internal and external bleeding or discharge; urinary or faecal incontinence; a broken pelvis; infertility; psychological trauma and difficulties in maintaining normal sexual relations; difficult pregnancies and births; and prolonged menstrual periods accompanied by severe pains.

Csete, J, & Kippenberg, J. (2002). The war within the war. *Human Rights Watch*, 1-128.

-The war which has ravaged this region intermittently since 1996 has destroyed the local economy. Driven by desperate poverty, women who provided the resources to keep their families alive continued going to the fields to cultivate, to the forest to make charcoal, or to markets to trade their goods even though doing so put them at risk of sexual violence.

-In many cases, combatants abducted women and girls and took them to their bases in the forest where they forced them to provide sexual services and domestic labor, sometimes for periods of more than a year.

-Some attacked girls as young as five years of age or elderly women as old as eighty

Autesserre, S. (2008). The trouble with congo. *Foreign Affairs*, 87(3), Retrieved from <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/63401/s%C3%83%C2%A9verine-autesserre/the-trouble-with-congo>

-According to the International Rescue Committee, over a thousand civilians continue to die in Congo every day, mostly due to malnutrition and diseases that could be easily prevented if Congo's already weak economic and social structures had not collapsed during the conflict.

-Control over land, especially, has historically been a major bone of contention in rural areas because the stakes are high and the interested parties numerous. Land matters because for many people it is the key to survival and feeding one's family. For many more, it is both a primary method of gaining the social capital needed to integrate local structures and a means of securing natural resources.

-Congo has massive reserves of gold and diamonds, most of the world's columbo-tantalite and cassiterite (essential materials for most electronic equipment), and many deposits of rare

minerals. Since the end of the war, most of the local ethnic militias in northern Katanga, which are known as the Mai Mai, have regrouped around mining sites throughout the region and fought among themselves or against soldiers of the national army for their control

- Access to resources means the ability to buy arms and reward troops, and thus to secure political power; political power, in turn, guarantees access to land and resources.

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## **Rape as a Weapon of War in the Democratic Republic of the Congo**

The Democratic Republic of the Congo is accurately referred to as “the rape capital of the world” (Clark, 2009). John Holmes, the under secretary general for humanitarian affairs for the United Nations said “the sexual violence in Congo is the worst in the world. The sheer numbers, the wholesale brutality, the culture of impunity – it’s appalling” (Gettleman, 2007). With more than five million dead, tens of thousands of women raped all within the past decade, doctors and activists have called it an “epidemic.” Michael Van Rooyen, director of Harvard’s Humanitarian Initiative, has had experience in international disaster zones. He says, “even in a wartime setting, Congo is unusual and exceptional... Rape is becoming part of the culture” (Clark, 2009). Such a reality is frightening and difficult to imagine, yet it is what the Congolese wake up to every day. This large-scale magnitude of sexual violence has potentially made the Congo the worst place on earth to be a woman. This paper will analyze various contexts and how they relate to rape in the Congo, specifically looking at war, poverty, and patriarchy, as well as the physical and psychological effects of sexual violence. For there to be any hope of change for women in the Democratic Republic of Congo, rape as a weapon of war must be addressed.

“Soldiers Who Rape, Commanders Who Condone” is a report by Human Rights Watch that documents the sexual violence committed by the military in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Their research, done in North and South Kivu, consisted of interviews with victims, witnesses, members of NGOs and churches, staff of international agencies, and representatives from the government. This study is crucial to understanding the methods and effects of rape by those in the armed forces and the unique culture of sexual violence it creates. Human Rights Watch reports that during the past fifteen years, “tens of thousands of women and girls in Congo have become victims of sexual violence.” The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)

reported that in 2008 there were “15,996 new cases of sexual violence” registered throughout the country. In North Kivu alone there were 4,820 cases. The UNFPA “also reported that more than 65 percent of victims of sexual violence during the same period were children, the majority adolescent girls.” Children less than ten years old comprise an estimated ten percent of victims (“Soldiers who rape,” 2009). Unfortunately, the conflict rages on as ethnic militias government militaries fight for control of the country’s precious minerals, and hundreds of women continue to suffer every day as the war is being fought “on their bodies” as many rape victims have described the brutality endured during rape (“Soldiers who rape,” 2009).

### *Background*

In order to gain a better understanding of rape as a weapon of war, it is essential to begin with looking at the conflict in which it occurs. Sadly, conflict has plagued the history of the Democratic Republic of the Congo from when it achieved independence from Belgium in 1960 until today. Much of the conflict in the country today can find its roots in the aftermath of the Rwandan genocide in 1994. When the genocide ended, Rwandan Hutu militias, known as the Interahamwe, fled into Congo when the Tutsi’s took control of the Rwandan government. These militia groups used Hutu refugee camps in eastern Congo as bases for their ongoing attacks against Rwanda.

As a result, troops from the Rwandan Patriotic Army entered the Congo two years later in hopes of disintegrating the Hutu militias. At the same time, the Alliance des Forces Democratiques pour la Liberation du Congo-Zaire (AFDL), an armed coalition under the leadership of Laurent Kabila, and supported by Uganda and Rwanda, entered the country to forcibly remove the dictator Mobutu Sese Seko from power. After much conflict and failed



peace talks, Mobutu fled the country in exile in 1997. Laurent Kabila then rose to power as president of the Democratic Republic of Congo (U.S. Department of State, 2010).

A year later, Kabila cut relations with his Rwandan supporters, which sparked another conflict. This second civil war would become far more infamous than the first as neighboring countries got involved, which would brand this conflict as “Africa’s first world war”(“Congo,” 2009).

In 2001, President Kabila was assassinated and his son Joseph rose to power. With his newfound authority, Joseph Kabila reversed a number of his father’s destructive policies. Within the year the United Nations deployed a peacekeeping mission into the country known as the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC), and political negotiations on peace proceeded, known as the Inter-Congolese Dialogue (U.S. Department of State, 2010). As the United Nations got involved and talks occurred, neighboring nations involved in the conflict began to leave the country, as seen at the end of 2002. Angola, Namibia, and Zimbabwe withdrew from the country. Rwanda followed suit after the Pretoria Accord was crafted in July 2002. However, “there were continued, unconfirmed reports that Rwandan soldiers and military advisers remained integrated with the forces of an RCD splinter group” in the eastern provinces (U.S. Department of State, 2010).

Throughout the following years, despite the peace agreements that were signed and international peacekeeping groups that intervened and provided assistance in the name of diplomacy, fighting still waged on, especially from a rebel group led by Laurent Nkunda. General Nkunda claimed his goal was to protect the Tutsi ethnic group in the Congo from the Hutu extremists who fled into the country after the Rwandan genocide in 1994. Even the largest U.N. peacekeeping mission failed in 2008 to protect the atrocities committed not only by the

rebel groups, but also by government troops and homegrown militias, such as the Mai Mai. The involvement of various groups only adds the complexity of the conflict as well as the number of attacks on civilians. While some progress has been made, as seen with the arrest of General Nkunda in 2009, the population still lives under the uneasiness and lingering threat of being attacked (“Congo,” 2009).

Unfortunately, the war still rages on, especially with the vast amount of rare and valuable natural resources in the Congo. Such incredible reserves of diamonds, gold, coltan, and cassiterite, is one of the primary reasons many of the ethnic militias are still in the country. In “The Trouble With Congo,” an article published in *Foreign Affairs*, Severine Autesserre writes about what has fueled the involvement of the many different ethnic militias in the conflict, and how the conflict has been able to persist. In regards to the fighting over these valuable minerals, he writes, “access to resources means the ability to buy arms and reward troops, and thus to secure political power; political power, in turn, guarantees access to land and resources” (Autesserre, 2008). While so many resources appear to be up for grabs, people will continue to die. It is important to consider the West’s dependence on such minerals that, in turn, make them so valuable. Many of these minerals are used in the manufacturing of many electronics that are used daily. If such a need did not exist, would the minerals be fought over for such a high price?

Enough Project is an American-based organization whose mission is to bring to light crimes against humanity being committed around the globe. Their extensive research has uncovered many of the underlying causes of the conflicts of the day. In the Congo specifically, they have investigated the pivotal role these “conflict minerals” play and how their existence is perpetuating the crisis. Many of the buyers of these resources are located in Europe and Asia, such as Thailand-based Thaisarco and the Malaysia Smelting Corporation, which both happen to

be the world's leading tin smelters. Purchase of the minerals by international companies feeds money into these armed militia groups controlling the extraction areas in the Congo. With the money they are able to buy more weapons and equipment, increasing their control as well as their power within the conflict (Sullivan & Atama, 2010).

Autesserre adds that during this war, "over a thousand civilians continue to die in Congo every day, mostly die due to malnutrition and diseases that could be easily prevented if Congo's already weak economic and social structures had not collapsed" (Autesserre, 2008). In addition to that startling statistic, Nicholas Kristof of *The New York Times* said it is estimated that more than 6.9 million people have been killed in the ongoing conflict in the Congo since 1998 (Kristof, 2010).

With a foundational understanding of the conflict raging on in the Democratic Republic of Congo, we can then address the basic components of rape and how it has been seen in the country. What is important to know is that rape and other forms of sexual violence were first "noted in cross-border hostilities in 1991 but became more frequent in 1994 in the context of regional conflicts stemming from the Rwandan genocide" (Pratt, & Werchick, 2004). While wartime rape is nothing new to the Congo, it has only increased dramatically over the past decade. Therefore, such knowledge about rape is essential in grasping the bigger picture of the different ways rapes are committed, not to mention how rape is legally defined, in order to gain a greater understanding as to how sexual violence in conflict has continued to exist.

### ***Rape and War***

First, we will begin with how rape is described according to the International Criminal Court (ICC). Rape is considered a crime against humanity and is composed of four elements.

The first describes the perpetrators' invasion of an individual's body "by conduct resulting in penetration, however slight, of any part of the body of the victim or of the perpetrator with a sexual organ." The penetration can be done by "any object or any other part of the body."

Element number two states that "the invasion was committed by force, or by threat of force or coercion," which could have been caused by several factors. Some of these factors include detention, duress, violence, and psychological oppression, among others. The third and fourth element explain that the sexual acts committed were done so "as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against a civilian population," and that the perpetrators were aware of these intended motives (ICC, 2002).

While these elements are pivotal by providing the legal qualifications of rape, especially as agreed upon on the international scale, there is one other essential fact that must be understood. Christopher Mullins examines the nature and implications of sexual violence in armed conflict in his study called "We Are Going to Rape You and Taste Tutsi Women." He looks particularly at the sexual violence that occurred during the Rwandan genocide in 1994, gaining information from testimonies given at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR). Though the location of this research is a different country, the use of rape is similar to that of the Congo. The effects are equally as haphazard and devastating. In his study of rape, Mullins makes this point: "rape itself is infused with gendered power dynamics; scholars have long acknowledged that rape is as much about power as it is about sex" (Mullins, 2009; 732). What can so easily be assumed is that rape is solely driven by the desire for sex. And while that desire may play a part in influencing an individual to commit rape, the drive for power is equally as influential, if not more so in some cases.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, Marion Pratt and Leah Werchick conducted a three-week assessment, “Sexual Terrorism: Rape as a Weapon of War in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo,” on the sexual terrorism that is so prevalent in this region. They found that not only is wartime rape a common reoccurrence in the Congo throughout the many conflicts it has endured, there are also different categories of rape committed by virtually all the armed groups and militias involved. From their research they found that sexual and gender-based violence increased concurrently due to its effectiveness as a weapon of war. Together, these acts could “subdue, punish, or take revenge upon entire communities”(Pratt & Werchick, 2004; 6). What is increasingly startling is they found that the victims of sexual violence range in age from four months to 84 years old (Pratt, Werchick, 2004; 7).

“Women’s Bodies as a Battleground,” a study done by International Alert in the province of South Kivu, four types of rape were identified through interviews with victims and even some members of the armed forces involved in the conflict. The four types are “individual rape, gang rape, rape in which victims are forced to rape each other, and rape involving objects being inserted into the victims’ genitals.” Individual rape occurs when a victim is raped by one perpetrator. Of those interviewed, slightly over twenty percent had endured this type of rape. Gang rape, which 79% of the women interviewed had been subjected to, occurs when a woman is raped by at least two men, simultaneously or one after the other. Some victims of gang rape have said that in between rapes, the attackers would “clean” the woman by inserting the end of a rifle that had been wrapped by a soaked cloth into the woman’s vagina. Forced rape between victims is pretty self-explanatory. Usually occurring after a gang rape, the perpetrators would force family members to have incestuous sexual relations with one another. Sons were forced to rape their mothers, fathers their daughters, and sometimes brothers and sisters were forced to

commit sexual acts. The fourth type identified, rape involving the insertion of objects into the genitals, included some objects such as bananas, rifle barrels, pestles covered in chili pepper, bottles, and sticks. More often than not, the victims were tortured and murdered during or after the rape. Around 70% of rape survivors who partook in the study said they had been tortured during the rape, especially when they attempted to fight back. Some were beaten, had their genitals mutilated or burned, or were wounded by machetes. After being raped, some attackers killed the women by firing shots into their vaginas (International Alert, 2005). There is clearly no single way to commit rape. Unfortunately, the more types of rape there are, the more victims there will be.

### ***Rape and Poverty***

So what creates this kind of environment that allows such atrocities to be committed, especially with seemingly minimal accountability? The most obvious answer would be the war that has ravaged this country for over a decade. Although, further analysis opens our eyes to see that so many other factors playing a role in the perpetual use of rape in the Congo. This conflict has created dire circumstances within the country that have also perpetuated the existence of rape as a wartime weapon. The widespread effects of poverty on the population have created a culture of desperation. For instance, in the eastern parts of Congo, the war “has ravaged this region intermittently since 1996 [and] has destroyed the local economy.” As a result, women who are the providers for their families must continue “going to the fields to cultivate, to the forest to make charcoal, or to markets to trade their goods even though doing so puts them at risk of sexual violence”(Csete & Kippenberg, 2002). During these times of war, women are especially vulnerable. The burden of survival has fallen upon them, as they struggle to keep not only themselves but also the rest of their families alive. The lack of economic infrastructure and social

development in the country only furthers this impoverishment of women, especially in semi-urban and rural area (International Alert, 2005).

In South Kivu, where approximately 60% of the population has been displaced as a result of the conflict, the position of women in economic terms is described as the “feminization of poverty,” which is worsened “by the lack of any policies or mechanisms for women’s advancement.” All of these factors greatly increase a woman’s vulnerability as well as help to legitimize gender-based violence (International Alert, 2005). This subordinate view of women fuels the use of rape as a weapon of war and magnifies the devastating effects it has on women, not just physically but socially and psychologically, all of which will be discussed in more detail later on.

Another ripple effect of poverty is that armies are unable to adequately pay their soldiers. This creates a build-up of frustration and restlessness among soldiers in the camps as they wonder how they will provide for their families or anyone else who is dependent upon them. In an article about rape in the DRC titled “Rape and War in the Democratic Republic of the Congo”, Erika Carlsen uses theoretical frameworks to help understand why women and girls are raped so indiscriminately in this conflict. She writes, “economic desperation motivates much of the sexual violence in the DRC. Soldiers and rebel forces in eastern Congo live in notoriously squalid conditions”(Carlsen, 2009; 477). With such limited options, soldiers result to using rape to steal whatever goods the woman may possess. These combatants may go months without pay, if they are ever paid at all, and are thus have no choice but to fend for themselves. This creates a terrible cycle of poverty as they find themselves stealing from local people just to survive each day, which in turn causes the locals to fall deeper into poverty, hindering economic development for the region. A member of the Congolese Rally for Democracy-GOMA (RCD-GOMA), one of

the many armed groups operating in the Congo, stated in an interview with International Alert that “fighters wait for months to get paid. They’ve got nothing to eat, they have to cope as best they can” (Carlsen, 2009; 478).

These dire economic conditions greatly influence not only the occurrence of rape in general but also the frequency with which it occurs. For instance, countless incidents of rape and looting documented by International Alert took place “during months marked by the busy harvesting of coffee, cassava, and bananas. Rapes also took place the day before major market days.” The day before the major market days are when the women would travel to the market with all their goods they planned to sell, thus making them ideal and vulnerable targets for hungry and needy soldiers. Though there are many motives for rape, as many as there are perpetrators, the poverty within the armed forces plays a significant role in its existence. In no way does this justify committing these sexual crimes, but it is important to consider that if such depraved circumstances were to be non-existent, the use of rape as a weapon of war could look drastically different in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In other words, improving a soldier’s access to basic necessities and allowing them to look after their families could be incredibly beneficial and contribute to civilian protection (“Soldiers who rape,” 2009). Removing the depravity these soldiers live in might remove the need for them to loot, which creates the opportunities for them to rape as well.

The sexual violence that occurs in this context falls under one of the major theories on wartime rape known as the opportunistic theory. According to this theory, the primary motivation for sexual violence in wartime is economic gain. It “explores the relationship between sexual violence against women and the allocation of resources.” As mentioned earlier, many soldiers involved in the war are grossly underpaid and underfed. This



creates a kind of depravity that results in men using sexual violence in order to acquire and control resources to survive. Looting is encouraged as men thrive on the power advantage they have over women (Carlsen, 2009). Conflict creates desperate conditions where men rape women to sustain themselves to continue fighting. Oftentimes, it is through women that food and resources are acquired the easiest for there is little risk of retaliation. Rape is not so much about sex as it is the power of men to get what they want in order to survive another day.

### ***Rape and Patriarchy***

An additional factor to consider would be the cultural view of women. As stated earlier, the effects of poverty greatly increase the subordination of women. But what must also be considered is how women are viewed in the context of their society. Culturally, their inferiority is furthered “by the persistence of customs, practices, and legislations that discriminate women.” Furthermore, these “customs, practices, and laws constitute an obstacle to women in getting access to property, education, modern technology and information” (International Alert, 2005). Women are denied the necessary tools and resources that would not only benefit their individual well-being, but also that of their communities and provinces. From his research in Rwanda Mullins writes,

Taken together, the cultural and structural research on rape establishes that within a civilian context, sexual assault is organized and regulated within a social order, as it reinforces male beliefs about sexual privilege and access (Mullins, 2009).

This view of women within the cultural context is important in how it relates and shapes these beliefs about the sexual privilege of males. Mullins also points out “when women are property, women are plunder. Women have historically been considered spoils of war” (Mullins, 2009). Women are dehumanized to the point of being considered

property. Such a mindset can, therefore, easily justify the abuse and violation of women for they are considered either less than human, or something that is owned and can thus be used however the owner desires. If women were viewed in a more positive, human light, how would these beliefs of sexual entitlement change? Again, the cultural view of women does not justify raping them, but it provides a helpful insight as to why men are able to commit such atrocities against women. How men view women significantly shapes how they treat women.

Such a patriarchal view towards rape is exemplified in the patriarchal militarized theory. Carlsen describes this theory succinctly in that the sexual violence occurring during wartime is “motivated by the desire to exert control and power over women and men who are perceived as feminine.” The rape that occurs during conflict “is a by-product of a system of patriarchy where power relations are hierarchal and motivated by masculinity” (Carlsen, 2009). Rape serves as a type of reminder of the women’s place in society and men’s power over them.

As a result of this patriarchal society prevalent in the Congo, wartime rape is also very strategic. *Explaining Wartime Rape*, written by Jonathan Gottschall, analyzes the historical and ethnographical societies in which rape has occurred. In this article, the strategic rape is simply explained as “a tactic executed by soldiers in the service of larger strategic objectives” (Gottschall, 2004). There is a deliberate intention behind rape that transcends the physical and into the psychological and sociological. Human Rights Watch provides further insight into this systematic use of rape, addressing that it was “used by all sides to deliberately terrorize civilians, to exert control over them, or to punish them for perceived collaboration with the enemy”

("Soldiers who rape," 2009). In this sense, rape is used as a mechanism to instill fear and terror into the minds of civilians, to discourage any interaction with the enemy.

Oxfam International and the Harvard Initiative teamed up to investigate this catastrophic use of sexual violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo. They conducted a study at Panzi Hospital, one of the major hospitals in the Congo that cares for victims of sexual violence, interviewing survivors about what they had endured. This study adds great insight into the culture of sexual violence in the Congo and the disastrous implications it can have upon the individual and community levels.

During their study, they found that "[rape] is strategically used to shame, demoralize and humiliate the enemy. By systematically raping women and girls, armed groups assert power and domination over not only the women, but their men as well" ("Now, the world," 2008). This use of rape sends a powerful message to the men of the community of which the rape victims belong. Mullins writes that rape is an assault on the husband's or father's masculinity. As a result of these "long-standing patriarchal value systems, both the men and the women simultaneously experience the destruction of their ability to enact enforced gender norms" (Mullins, 2009). It highlights their inability to protect their women from attack, essentially calling into question the men's usefulness and masculinity. What this study also revealed collaborates with this idea. They found that sexual violence "is used by the opposing force to signify the weakness and inadequacy of the men in the targeted social grouping or community. These men absorb this message, perceiving their inability to protect women against assault as their own final humiliation in war" ("Now, the world," 2008). Rape sends a psychological message to men through the physical brutalization of women.

In order to understand how significant this message rape sends to men, the societal implications of rape in the Congolese culture must be realized. The stigma attached to rape is incomprehensible. The men are humiliated as their masculinity is called into question by their inability to protect their women. Unfortunately, the consequences women face are much more devastating. Since rape is so highly stigmatized, victims are often abandoned by their spouse or are unable to be considered for marriage. Many are ostracized by their community- forced to leave their homes and families with an unbearable burden of shame on their backs. As a result, women are left homeless and isolated, many shunned by their own husbands. Furthermore, as this stigma disintegrates families and disturbs community life, social and cultural bonds are at risk of being destroyed as the effects of the stigma live on (“Now, the world,” 2008). Through her examination, Carlsen found “women’s bodies physically and symbolically provide the backbone of their communities” (Carlsen, 2009). So as women are forced to leave, communities lose reproductive power but also the symbolic significance that motherhood provides, whether it is the role of raising the children or acquiring resources for the household. Wartime rape has clear ripple effects that extend far beyond the victim herself.

Unfortunately, not only are communities at risk of disintegration but cultures themselves are also in danger. A group of researchers from the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative surveyed the victims of sexual violence at Panzi Hospital in Bukavu, located in the South Kivu province. In the article, “Surviving Sexual Violence in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo”, they analyzed the demographics of rape survivors and the physical and psychosocial consequences experienced in the eastern region of the DRC. According to their research, “mass rape is used during cultural and ethnic cleansing as a means of polluting bloodlines and forcibly impregnating women to produce ‘ethnically-cleansed’ children” (Bartels, Scot, Leaning, Mukwege, Lipton, &

VanRooyen, 2010; 39). Through the rape of women, “soldiers split the familial atoms of which every society is composed.” The enemy may impregnate these women, they may suffer physically and psychologically, their families may abandon them, or they may die. All of these could “degrade the ability of a culture to replenish itself through sexual reproduction.”

There is also the notion of “genocidal rape [which is] designed, whether with full consciousness or not, to annihilate a people and a culture” (Gottschall, 2004). Continuing with this notion, Carlsen points out “genocidal rape is an assault against the victim with the aim of undermining a community’s sense of security and cohesion.” She goes on to say that combatants who rape are aware of their physical and symbolic representation of women’s bodies not just in their community, but in their state and nation as well. Thus, by way of raping women, “soldiers figuratively rape and dilute the community and nation” (Carlsen, 2009). When rapes from differing ethnic groups result in pregnancies, the offspring is no longer of one ethnicity and culture but two. One ethnic group could eventually start to dissolve as mixed offspring are produced from mass rape. This is very strategic, as it can wipe out entire groups without over time without firing a single gunshot. The passing down of the culture and heritage of the group will start to slowly fade as fewer “pure” children are born.

In addition to the strategic rape theory, the feminist theory can also be applied in light of this patriarchal society. Feminist theory takes into account the gender inequality and gender roles that could be used to explain the provocation and use of rape. While there are many distinct genres of feminist theory, the one that seems to be most applicable is that of socialist feminism. Looking specifically at the feminist models of rape, Kimberly Martin, Lynne Vieraitis, and Sarah Britto look at how gender equality and rape rates are related. In their article, “Gender Equality and Women’s Absolute Status,” the absolute status of women together with gender equality is highly

influential in the presence of rape in a society. In addition, they emphasize “the unique role of women as a class within the economic structure” (Martin, Vieraitis, & Britto, 2006). In other words, a woman’s status, both socially and economically, plays a significant role in their victimization of rape.

Dr. Samantha Nutt of War Child Canada examines the unsettling challenges many women and girls face in the Congo. In her article, “Living in Fear,” Dr. Nutt points out, in the Congo, as with many other countries in the world, the society is largely male-dominated (Nutt, 2004). Thus, in this patriarchal society, women are treated as less, which could facilitate an environment that allows men to treat women harshly with little reprimand. Socialist feminists refer to this sexual hierarchy that gives women further disadvantage (Martin, Vieraitis, & Britto, 2006).

This subjugation of women creates a clear pathway for men to exploit and abuse women. Larry Baron, of the University of California Los Angeles, and Murray Straus, of the University of New Hampshire, produced an article called, “Four Theories of Rape: A Macrosociological Analysis”, that provided incredible insight regarding the feminist theory and rape. They point out that men are able to use the fear of rape and rape it self as a means of establishing and maintaining their status and power in the system of gender stratification already at play in society. Furthermore, “rape is more likely to occur in societies where women are regarded as the sexual and reproductive possessions of men” (Baron, & Straus, 1987). In societies such as these, men are able to maintain their power and privilege by means of threatening sexual violence or by the forcible acts themselves.

The main points behind the feminist theory on rape are that it serves as a means of exercising power and dominance over women. Under this theory, Gottschall explains, “rape in war, like rape in peace, is identified not as a crime of sexual passion but as a crime motivated by

the desire of a man to exert dominance over a woman” (Gottschall, 2004). In a war setting, the dominance of men and weakness of women is further exemplified. It is an exercise for soldiers to overpower women, to remind them of their place, and to force them into submission. More often than not, women have no choice but to endure. In a subcategory of this theory, known as the pressure cooker theory, the socialization of men in these patriarchal societies ingrains in their minds this need to not only dominate women, but to distrust and despise them also. Soldiers who are “rapists ‘vent their contempt for women’ while enforcing and perpetuating patriarchal gender arrangements from which all men benefit”(Gottschall, 2004). In this case, it is not so much a message to men as discussed earlier, but about exemplifying the domination men have over women by physically overpowering them and abusing them.

It may not be about a woman in particular, but instead may be about releasing frustration upon women. Such contempt for women may arise from men being forced to fight away from their homes and their families, risking their lives, while women are able to stay behind. But only the soldiers themselves know the roots of such disdain. Most scholars who have analyzed rape, “especially militarized rape, de-link rape from biologically ‘natural’ sex drives and (re)frame it as an act of violence and aggression that builds up upon sexist discourses at play in society” (Baaz & Stern, 2009). In essence, these theorists argue,

Rape in war is deemed as a result of a conspiracy, not necessarily conscious but still systematic, of men to dominate and oppress women. While men may fight on different sides and for different reasons, in one sense they are all warriors on behalf of their gender – and the enemy is woman (Gottschall, 2004).

Again, women are seen as objects, forced to bear the brutalization of men’s frustrations, usually stemming from this conflict that has raged on for far too long. Women are taken advantage of in their weakness, suffering the consequences that these men will feel themselves.

Instead, men are able to walk away in satisfaction for their anger released while women are left scarred, humiliated, and physically damaged.

### ***Physical and Psychological Effects of Rape***

So far the social effects of rape in conflict have been described, but the physical and psychological effects make it all the more traumatic. In her article, Carlsen discusses the documentation retrieved by Human Rights Watch and Doctors Without Borders that found that “women and girls are tortured before, during, and after the rape takes place, with estimates that as many as 30 percent are sexually mutilated” (Carlsen, 2009). It seems that in such horrific attacks of sexual violence that is distinctive of wartime, physical and mental scarring are both present. For instance, International Alert found that in their sample of survivors interviewed, an overwhelming majority of 91.5%, “suffers from one or more rape-related physical or psychological problems (“Women’s bodies as,” 2005).

Considering that such results from rape are as numerous as the women who survive them, the most prevalent will be discussed. One of the most common injuries are fistulas. *The Economist* published an article titled, “Atrocities Beyond Words,” that discussed the existence of rape in Congo and its devastating consequences. This article reports that in the eastern region of the DRC, “up to 80% of reported fistula cases in women are thought to result from rape attacks” (“Atrocities beyond words,” 2008). Fistulas, as described by Dr. Nutt, occur when the walls between the vagina, rectum, and bladder have been destroyed, leaving the victim with practically no control over her bowels. Such devastating damage can only be undone by “exhaustive and painful reparative surgery,” which strikingly few women have access to since there are so few gynecologists in the Congo trained in the procedure (Nutt, 2004). Furthermore, “women



suffering from this have to wear sanitary towels constantly or in most cases, because of the poverty in which most of them live, just a piece of cloth.” Not only that, but women with fistulas are often forced to live apart from their communities because of the horrible smell of their excrement (“Women’s bodies as,” 2005). An incredible stigma is accompanies women with fistulas due to the incontinence and infertility they cause (Carlsen, 2009).

Another health concern for victims to consider is acquiring HIV from the rapist. An estimate from UNICEF says that the HIV infection rate in Congo may be as high as twenty percent of the population (Nutt, 2004). International Alert reports an estimated 60% of combatants involved in this Congo conflict are HIV-positive (“Women’s bodies as,” 2005). For women, this statistic is frightening and is certainly not in their favor. Every time they are raped, they have a 60% chance of acquiring a death sentence and the stigma that comes with it. So not only do they have to suffer through the social isolation from the rape, if they get HIV, they will then have to endure that alone.

In Oxfam International and the Harvard Initiative’s survey of survivors being treated at Panzi Hospital in Bukavu, a number of other physical symptoms were mentioned. Through their analysis, a number of women experienced “pelvic, lumbar, and abdominal pain as well as reproductive abnormalities such as infertility and premature labor and delivery.” Concerns about infection, especially with HIV, were also expressed (“Now, the world,” 2008). Amnesty International provided more specific physical trauma reported by rape survivors. Many of the women they interviewed suffered from:

Infection with HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases; uterine prolapses (the descent of the uterus into the vagina or beyond); fistulas and other injuries to the reproductive system or rectum, often accompanied by internal and external bleeding or discharge; urinary or fecal incontinence; a broken pelvis; infertility; psychological trauma and

difficulties in maintaining normal sexual relations; difficult pregnancies and births; and prolonged menstrual periods accompanied by severe pains (“Lives blown apart,” 2004).

The brutality these women’s bodies are subjected too is unreal. Many are forced to live with they physical consequences for the rest of their lives, unable to get access to the proper medical care they are so desperate for. As a result of the conflict, the healthcare infrastructure in the east region, where most of the conflict occurs, is practically destroyed, leaving less than 50% of rape victims with access to basic medical facilities, reports Human Right Watch (“Soldiers who rape,” 2009). Thus, victims are left with little hope but to endure the unbelievable amount of pain from their injuries, many of them life threatening. However, death has many faces. *The Economist* reports that some women have “been murdered by bullets fired from a gun barrel shoved into their vagina (“Atrocities beyond words,” 2008). The savagery of these acts is difficult to comprehend. The sheer violence of these rapes proves that not only is the conflict being waged on Congo soil, but also on the bodies of the Congolese women. And while the land will one day recover from the degradation that has occurred, many women will never experience such relief.

Not only are physical symptoms a concern but also the psychological impacts that result from such a traumatic experience. Again referring to the study done by International Alert, “almost all (91%) of the interviewees claimed they were suffering from behavioral problems.” The most common ones being fear and shame, but insomnia, memory loss, anxiety, aggression, self-loathing, sense of dread, excessive sweating, nightmares, and withdrawal into themselves were also mentioned (“Women’s bodies as,” 2005). More specifically, Harvard Humanitarian Initiative reports that from their interviews with survivors, 26% of the women expressed the continued anxiety they experience about the sexual violence they had been subjected to. Those who had been gang raped or kept as sexual slaves “were 1.6 times more likely to report

psychological symptoms” than the women who were endured a single instance of rape (“Surviving sexual violence,” 2010). As can be expected, gang rapes and sexual enslavement imply repeated rapes, which increases magnitude of psychological trauma than can result.

Aside from the feelings of anger, shame, anxiety, and sadness, “many women also suffered significant losses such as the death of family members, spousal abandonment and loss of personal valuables as a result of the attack” (“Now the world,” 2010). The fact that these women are living in a country of war must not be forgotten. In war, family members are killed, possessions stolen, the daunting feelings of uncertainty are ever-present, only to add upon the trauma from sexual violence. In some cases, the psychological distress from rape is not limited to the women who are violated. According to *The Economist*, rapes were “committed in front of families or whole communities; male relatives forced at gunpoint to rape their own daughters, mothers or sisters; women used as sex slaves forced to eat excrement or the flesh of murdered relatives” (“Atrocities beyond words,” 2008). It is hard to imagine how disturbing it must be when fathers are forced to rape their daughters or brothers their mothers, especially before an audience of the whole community. Without adequate support and counseling, the emotional scarring of such events could cause major devastation for those forced to participate. The fabric of the family is disintegrated, as those involved are haunted by insurmountable feelings of guilt and shame. Entire communities are torn apart, unsure of how to recover from what they had all just experienced. As mentioned earlier, the stigma attached to sexual violence only furthers the separation, which only makes things worse.

It is clear that the psychological implications resulting from rape undeniably add to the strategy of its use as a weapon of war. Amnesty International acknowledged that “[rape] is the universal weapon deployed to strip women of their dignity and destroy their sense of self”

("Lives blown apart," 2004). While other family or community members could be affected, it is women who bear the full impact of it all. Women alone are forced to suffer the stigma and humiliation. They alone feel the indescribable pain as their bodies are ruthlessly violated, and oftentimes left permanently damaged. They are cast out from the very support systems that are crucial in such times of crisis, with minimal access to medical attention that could potentially restore their bodies, and even save their lives. Apart from ending this horrendous conflict, the stigma associated with rape must be obliterated. Isolation only aids the enemy, destroying communities and those who are forcibly cast out. The emotional and tangible support that comes from family and community members is pivotal if any sort of healing to be achieved, both psychically and psychologically.

### ***Conclusion***

With such a topic as this, it can be easy to get lost in statistics or try to separate ourselves from the gruesome reality than so many women face on a daily basis. In an attempt to put a name to facts, a personal account can help connect the processing of the mind to the feelings of the heart. Martin Bell, UNICEF UK Ambassador for Humanitarian Emergencies traveled to eastern Congo and produced a report about children caught up in the war. With many case studies of personal testimonies, Bell uncovers how children have been so dramatically affected by one of the worst crises to hit the African continent.

One of his case studies of a fourteen-year-old girl named Martha (not her real name) that represents one of tens of thousands of women who have been raped during this conflict. This is her story:

[Martha] comes from a religious family in North Kivu Province. When she was 13, her mother sent her to buy a dress for her own baptism. On the way home, and as

darkness fell, she was attacked and gang-raped by some people from her neighborhood. As a consequence of the rape, she gave birth to twin boys born 28 days prematurely. They lie beside her in an incubator at the Heal Africa Hospital in Goma. At first, she hated them. But for the moment, she says, she loves them. She is one of many victims of rape receiving care and counseling at the hospital. The chief surgeon, Dr. Kasereka Lusi, says: 'It's a terrible experience. They all become mad, really furious mad. They would rather be dead than live like this. At first they see the child as the enemy within. They try to smack it and kill it. To heal them, you need the whole community to counsel them to accept the baby' (Bell, 2006).

Martha was so young when her body was violated and her mind permanently scarred. Her childhood was ruthlessly taken from her, as she was forced to experience things no fourteen-year-old girl should ever have to know. For the rest of her life she will bear the marks, both physically and mentally, of the traumatic experienced to which she was so brutally subjected. This epidemic of rape but end. It must no longer be seen as a strategic weapon of war, enabling soldiers and combatants steal from the women they violate so they may live to fight another day. It must no longer be used to break up families and communities. Genocidal rape committed against rival ethnic groups must no longer be tolerated.

While writing about the brutality they endure is one thing, experiencing firsthand it is a whole other story, one that many of us are fortunate to never have to experience. That does not mean, however, that we cannot stand up for these women or give ear to their cry for help and justice. It begins with being educated. Awareness is the first step towards change. This paper was written in the hope of bringing to light the atrocities long hidden in the darkness of ignorance and apathy. The rape occurring in the Congo was discussed in relation to the war, poverty, and the patriarchal system evident in the country's culture. Effects of rape on both the body and the mind were also emphasized in order to bring greater understanding to the devastation sexual violence is capable of. No woman

deserves to experience the horror the Congolese women have known. Awareness, then, must lead to action for a better world to be possible. No country should ever be known as “the worst place on earth to be a woman.”

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