

# Why Do Soldiers Rape? Masculinity, Violence, and Sexuality in the Armed Forces in the Congo (DRC)

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This article explores the ways soldiers in the Congo speak about the massive amount of rape committed by the armed forces in the recent war in the DRC. It focuses on the reasons that the soldiers give to why rape occurs. It discusses how the soldiers distinguish between “lust rapes” and “evil rapes” and argues that their explanations of rape must be understood in relation to notions of different (impossible) masculinities. 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 warzones.

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Rape (...) there are different types of rape. They are all forbidden. There is the rape when a soldier is away, when he has not seen his women for a while and has needs and no money. This is the lust/need rape [viol ya posa]. 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 (Male, Lt.).

The pressing problem of rape in wartime has, at long last, evoked worldwide concern (United Nations Security Council 2007).<sup>1</sup> Accounts of the cruelty and massive amount of sexual violence committed by both government forces and members of the rebel groups in the Congo (DRC) have certainly alerted both global policymakers and advocate groups to the scope<sup>2</sup> and lasting terror of sexual violence in the context of armed conflict and peace-building. Although a peace treaty was signed already in 2003, officially ending the (c. six year long) intense armed conflict, and general elections were held in 2006, general insecurity increased in the East during 2007. Furthermore, sexual violence at the hands

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<sup>1</sup> In 1993 and 1994 sexual violence was specifically recognized for the first time as an independent crime within the statutes of the International Criminal Tribunals for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and for Rwanda (ICTR).

<sup>2</sup> Between 1996 and 2004 more than 36,000 rapes were reported in the DRC (Horwood 2007; Schroeder 2005).

of armed men persists, and has possibly even increased.<sup>3</sup> Hence, despite recent attention, “rape in war,” as part of a globalized problematic and as it has occurred and continues to occur in the specific local context of the DRC, remains under problematized.

Rape is often generally and simply referred to as a “weapon of war,”<sup>4</sup> which is presented as somehow self-explanatory through its implied universalized storyline of gender and warring (to be further explained below).<sup>5</sup> While the desperately needed reframing of rape as a strategy of war surely deserves the dignity of attention afforded it by its newly won status on the international policy playing field, continuing questions about how and why rape is used and how and why it has become an almost naturalized aspect of warring in diverse contexts (as well as what it may mean in these context) warrant further scrutiny. Moreover, reports on the sexual violence in the DRC tend to recycle and reinforce familiar colonial images and racialized fantasies. The acts of rape that have occurred in the DRC are often understood as a result of the supposed animal-like bestiality of the rapists. For instance, a recent *New York Times* article reporting on the sexual violence in the East, warns us that the gorillas native to Congo’s national parks have been “replaced by much more savage beasts” (Gettleman 2007). Furthermore, 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, however, has been paid to understanding the ways in which the perpetrators, themselves, understand their violent crimes.<sup>6</sup>

In this article, we therefore analyze discourses about sexual violence and masculinity within one of the main perpetrators itself in the DRC: the new integrated State Armed Forces: Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo (FARDC). In particular, we explore the ways in which soldiers in the DRC speak about the instances of rape committed by members of the armed forces. (Many of the respondents made it clear that, although they may speak more generally, they also were speaking from personal experience). Our main aim is to examine the dominant discourses (co)constitutive of rapists and rape as they were represented in the soldier’s texts. Although it is widely accepted that the FARDC is responsible for a large proportion of the sexual violence committed by armed men,<sup>7</sup> an accurate estimation of the exact numbers, however, is extremely difficult.<sup>8</sup> Statistics compiled by different UN and other international

<sup>3</sup> According to the data compiled by MONUC, 14,000 new cases were recorded in 2005 and 13,000 in 2006. In all, 4,500 cases of sexual violence were reported between January and June 2007, in South Kivu alone (Ertürk 2008). As most observers conclude, it is nearly impossible to get information on the real number of cases. Most assume that the real number is much higher than those cited here, since many victims live in inaccessible areas and many women are afraid to report rapes because of the stigma and fear of revenge from the perpetrators (Ertürk 2008). However, at the same time it is difficult to say for sure whether sexual violence has actually increased, as is suggested by the statistics available, or if the increasing rates are a reflection of more cases now being reported.

<sup>4</sup> Indeed, one of the most well-cited reports on sexual violence in the DRC: Human Rights Watch (2002), as well as the subsequent report (Human Rights Watch 2005) describes the widespread sexual violence in the DRC as a “weapon of war.” See also Card (1996), Ohambe et al. (2004), and Pole Institute (2004).

<sup>5</sup> See Stern and Nystrand (2006) and Stern and Zalewski (2009) for an account of this storyline. See also Wood (2006) for a discussion of the variation of instances of sexual violence in distinct war contexts.

<sup>6</sup> For other works that address violence from the perspective of the perpetrators, see for example Brett and Specht (2004), Hatfeldt (2005), Horwood (2007), Keen (2004), Utas (2005).

<sup>7</sup> Most often sexual violence is committed by men against women/girls, although there is increasing evidence of men committing sexual violence against other men/boys (Horwood 2007, 56). There are also some accounts that women soldiers have participated in sexual violence against men and women, although these claims have not been substantiated in our research or in other available sources. For a discussion of this see Horwood (2007) and, for a report of women’s involvement in another context, namely the genocide in Rwanda, see African Rights (1995).

<sup>8</sup> As noted above, estimating the numbers of sexual violence in general is exceedingly difficult. Speaking about sexual violence is often considered to be taboo. Furthermore, being a victim of sexual violence is often associated with dishonor and shame; the consequences of openly admitting to being a victim are grave. The occurrence and effects of rape are therefore often shrouded in silence. See D’Costa (2006) in Ackerly, Stern, and True (2006) as well as Horwood (2007).

agencies are incomplete and often contradictory. Nonetheless, figures from MONUC suggested that the FARDC was responsible for about 40 percent of the sexual violence in the first part of 2007 (23 percent by the Police Force and 37 percent by militia groups and others) (MONUC 2007).

The article will proceed as follows: In the first section, we provide a brief overview of ways to understand rape in war. We then introduce the context in which the soldiers are living and discuss our methodology. The second section of the article explores how the soldiers represent masculinity/femininity and sexuality as connected with their notions of self as soldiers in the FARDC. We briefly address the idealized forms of masculinities (as represented in the interviews) that the soldiers drew upon in their attempts to explain—and even normalize—sexual violence.<sup>9</sup> Their experiences and performances of masculinities were both multiple and incoherent, perpetually evoking a sense of failure at ever arriving at being “masculine” (Parpart and Zalewski 2008; Stern and Zalewski 2009; Witworth 2004). As we will see, the soldiers explicitly linked their rationale for rape with their inability (or “failures”) to inhabit certain idealized notions of heterosexual manhood. The soldiers posited the discord between their embodied experiences and their expectations of themselves as soldiers (men) in the armed forces as a site of frustration, anxiety, negotiation and an underlying incitement to sexual violence.

Next, we turn to a discussion of how the soldiers differentiate between and simultaneously refer to two intertwining discourses of rape: one in which rape is essentially sexual, driven by the male libido; and a different discourse according to which rape is not about sexual desires but is instead an expression of anger and rage. We discuss how the soldiers discriminate between these different “types” of rape. In sum, the soldiers distinguish between rapes that are somehow more “ok,” morally defensible, ethically palatable and socially acceptable (and therefore, arguably not *really* rapes in their eyes), and those that are “evil,” and not acceptable—but still “understandable.” These distinctions, however, are blurry. As we shall see, the soldiers convey ambivalence in the ways in which they make sense of the norms and codes which determine ethical and acceptable behavior.

Importantly, the ambivalences and struggles around questions of ethics in their testimonies also underscore their sense of themselves as agents and therefore ethically responsible for the rapes they commit. Agency and attendant ethical responsibility reside in the ways in which we act (and how those acts effect others) when navigating and mediating different governing discourses (Braidotti 2006, 14; Campbell and Shapiro 1999). If we accept that “failure” to be absolutely hailed into the subject positions allotted us as inevitable (such as that of masculine, sexually potent fighter and provider), what we “do” with this failure is a matter of ethical responsibility (Jabri 1998, 2004). We are therefore in no way trying to map a causal relation such that power/context leads to certain action. Instead we consider the interrelationship between the soldiers’ sense of themselves (as they represent themselves to us in their texts), the acts of violence which they describe and explain, the prevailing relations of power which circumscribe their subjectivity and realm of possible action—and importantly, choices—and the attending ethical deliberations which trouble their stories.

To be able to place the soldiers’ testimonies in a wider context, we now turn to a brief overview of possible ways to understand rape in war. As we shall see, the soldiers’ testimonies resonate with understandings of militarized rape in other global contexts. Nevertheless, their stories also complicate these explanations and reflect the particular context of the DRC “warscape” (Nordstrom 1997; Utas 2005).

<sup>9</sup> For a more elaborated account of masculinity in the context of the DRC and the FARDC see Eriksson Baaz and Stern, unpublished data.

*Understanding Rape in War*

Throughout history, rape (when acknowledged) has been commonly seen as an expected, even inevitable aspect of warring, which has connoted revenge and triumph for the winning side (Card 1996; Seifert 1996; Vikman 2005). Rape as “war booty” in terms of rewarding the victorious soldiers (male) with the rape of the women of the vanquished (the male enemies) figures as a common narrative of warring (Card 1996). 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 (Card 1996).

Beneath these accounts underlies an understanding of men’s (hetero)sexuality as a driving force, which, when unleashed by the climate of warring in which “normal” societal controls are suspended and the rules of warfare reign, easily results in rape. This “sexual urge” explanation (Seifert 1996, 35) comes in different guises; some even cast all men as potential rapists because of their biological make-up (Paglia 1993; Thornhill and Palmer 2000). Read in this light, society “normally” acts as a hindrance to male’s natural bestial sexual behavior—a hinder which is often removed in the climate of warring. Rape then becomes a “regrettable side effect” of war (Seifert 1996, 36). As we shall see below, similar understanding of men’s unassailable sexual needs punctuate the soldier’s stories.

Other research focuses on how 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 (Horwood 2007; Kassimeris 2006; Weiner 2006). Violence loses its edge of taboo; the more violence one witnesses, suffers from, or inflicts, the easier it is to become “morally disengaged” from those whom one sets out to harm and torture (Frésard and Muñoz-Rojas 2004; Staub 1992). Facets of such a spiral include the perpetrators viewing themselves as victims, finding “justification” for violent behavior (i.e., they “deserve” it and therewith it is “right” to seek revenge),<sup>10</sup> shifting blame away from oneself, and distancing oneself from ones victims through processes of Othering (Frésard and Muñoz-Rojas 2004; Staub 1992). Demands for group conformity, hierarchical structures, and the dictates of loyalty, which are integral to the ethos of the military as a globalized institution, further facilitate collective action for which individuals are seemingly not accountable (Enloe 2000, 108–52). Furthermore, the prevalent use of drugs and alcohol enables the perpetrator to feel even more removed from a sense of agency and responsibility (Kassimeris 2006). Explanations of *sexualized* violence build upon these theories and place the incitement for rape in a complex web of contributing factors: the particular intermingling of violent spirals, suspended “normal” societal morays, aggression, sense of power and dominance, “access” to vulnerable women, and sexual desire (Horwood 2007; Nadelson 2005). In these accounts, rape is also seen as a byproduct of war, albeit a more complicated one which also is about violence, aggression, humiliation, and power, intermingled with sexual need and desire. This explanation also resonated in the soldiers own sense of the reasons for their colleagues’ (and their) participation in rape—particularly in the “evil rapes,” explored below.

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

<sup>10</sup> Weiner (2006), for example, describes through the disturbing detail of soldiers testimonies, how members of the ‘Red Army’ explained how they sought revenge on the German people through the mass and brutal rape and torture of German women (Weiner 2006, 114–115). See also Moffett (2006).

aggression (Brownmiller 1976) that builds upon sexist discourses at play in society more generally.<sup>11</sup> Sexist discourses, which arguably underpin the occurrence of rape, become particularly toxic and pervasive when intermeshed with other power relations making up the climate of masculine violence inherent to militarization and armed conflict. Importantly, studies in various contexts (and time periods) show a clear indication that militarized sexualized violence must be seen in light of globalized discourses defining militarized masculinity and heterosexuality (Connell 1995; Ehrenreich 1997; Enloe 1990, 2000, 2007; Goldstein 2001; Higate and Hopton 2005; Morgan 1994; Shepherd 2007; Stern and Nystrand 2006; Witworth 2004).

Instead of seeing the military as a venue through which boys can achieve their natural potential as men, research underscores how men/boys (and women/girls) *learn* to be “masculine” and violent in the military through methods specifically designed to create soldiers who are able (and willing) to kill to protect the state/nation (see e.g., Connell 1995; Ehrenreich 1997; Enloe 1990, 2000, 2007; Goldstein 2001; Higate and Hopton 2005; Morgan 1994; Pin-Fat and Stern 2005; Price 2001; Shepherd 2007; Stern and Nystrand 2006; Stern and Zalewski 2009; Whitehead 2002; Witworth 2004). In sum, militarization requires the production of different heterosexual violent masculinities (including both generals and foot soldiers); racial, ethnic, and class hierarchies are “woven into most military chains of command” (Enloe 2000, 152; see also Higate 2004; Higate and Hopton 2005). The masculinities that are fostered and that are ultimately acceptable within the military have very strictly delineated contours and content, which must be known and “fixed” for the logic of militarization to work (Witworth 2004, 166). Militarized (and mythologized) masculinities (and the attendant promises and entitlements associated with inhabiting these masculinities), however, rarely resonate with soldiers’ sense of self, lived experiences, or with the actual conditions of militarized men’s lives (Witworth 2004, 166). The fragility and indeed impossibility of militarized masculinity therefore requires continual concealment through the military institutional practices, and in the individual expressions of such masculinity. As we shall return to below, such efforts are often fraught with failure.

Women and (and “the feminine”) are stereotypically associated with a need for protection, with peacefulness, and life-giving; these associations serve as the necessary counterpart to the supposed “masculinity” of protecting, warring, and killing (Enloe 1990; Goldstein 2001; Higate and Hopton 2005; Pin-Fat and Stern 2005). Importantly, such associations render women/girls particularly vulnerable to the logics of rape as a weapon of warfare. Indeed, all that is associated with femininity is seen as corrosive of the required militarized masculinities. Therefore, violence is also directed inwards toward the “others within”; killing the “women in them” becomes necessary for soldiers in their attempts to live up to the myths of militarized manhood’ (Witworth 2004, 176). Furthermore, if citizen-soldiering is constructed through the *production* of a certain heterosexual male violent masculinity, it is not surprising then that even women soldiers can be (sexually) violent in similar ways that men are (African Rights 1995). Militarized masculinity becomes, in this sense, unsexed. Given the above, how can one make sense of the different ways in which rape is used as a (globalized) weapon of warfare?

Cynthia Enloe has outlined three main “forms” of militarized rape, the first of which, “recreational rape,” clearly also resonates with the soldiers accounts in our research (Enloe 2000, 111). As we shall see, the other forms of rape,

<sup>11</sup> See for example Alison (2007), Card (1996), Card (1997), Enloe (2000), Goldstein (2001), Horwood (2007), Seifert (1996), Skjelsbaek (2001), Stern and Nystrand (2006), Stern and Zalewski (2009), Vikman (2005). See also Gottschall (2004) for alternative classifications of explanations for rape in wartime.

“national security rape” (Enloe 2000, 123) and systematic mass rape (Enloe 2000, 132)—surprisingly, given the way in which sexual violence in the DRC has been commonly portrayed—do not neatly figure in the soldiers’ testimonies. Although globalized, these forms of rape, are neither ahistorical, nor universal, but instead are deeply political, the product of relationships between people, institutions, and discourses, and the result of specific decisions (Enloe 2000, 127). Enloe argues that a belief in men’s (heterosexual) biological need for sexual release (the sexual urge explanation discussed above) underlies the rationale for the first form of rape—a rationale that has surely underpinned the commonplace occurrence of prostitution rings around military bases throughout history and in diverse global contexts, including UN peace-keeping missions (Higate 2004; Higate and Hopton 2005; Witworth 2004). “National Security rape” is systematically used by governments and militaries to “ensure what they thought to be national security” (Enloe 2000, 123). This form of rape violently enacts many intersecting and mutually constitutive power relations, such as local patriarchy and nationalism. It is often used to punish, humiliate, torture, seemingly “subversive” women for threatening national security (and identity) through their perceived challenges to strictly defined notions of femininity and masculinity (Enloe 2000; Stern 2005, 86). “Systematic mass rape” (such as in Rwanda and Bosnia) is an instrument of ethnically specific oppression and generalized terror that “makes sense” through the workings of gendered nationalist discourses (see Human Rights Watch 1996; Snyder et al. 2006; Stiglmeier 1994). Systematic (mass) rape in war time can be seen as a particularly effective means to humiliate (feminize) enemy men by sullying “his” women/nation/homeland, and proving him to be an inadequate protector (e.g., Enloe 2000; Goldstein 2001; Stern and Nystrand 2006; Yuval-Davis 1997). Rape of “enemy” women aims at destroying the very fabric of society, as women often are cast as the symbolic bearers of ethno-national identity through their roles as biological cultural, and social reproducers of the community (e.g., Enloe 2000; Goldstein 2001; Stern and Nystrand 2006; Yuval-Davis 1997).

#### *A Brief Overview of the Congolese Warscape*

From the time of the Congo Free State, the Congolese population has derived little—if any—benefit from its vast natural resources. Instead, they have suffered an unbroken succession of extremely brutal colonial rule and then military dictatorship during the 32-year long U.S.-supported Mobutu regime. When Laurent Kabila toppled Mobutu’s government in May 1997 with the aid of Rwanda, Uganda, Angola, and Burundi, hopes were high for improvements. Unfortunately, the situation deteriorated and already in 1998 Kabila’s major allies—Rwanda and Uganda—turned against him.<sup>12</sup> The country found itself in the midst of what came to be the deadliest conflict since World War II, involving seven foreign armies and several militia groups. The external and internal competition for Congo’s vast natural resources, the gradual collapse of state functions and the formal economy over the last 40 years, as well as rampant poverty, contributed to the escalating conflict, often referred to as Africa’s “first world war” killing an estimated 5.4 million people (IRC 2008).

Violence increased in the eastern parts of the DRC in the post election period, resulting in a new wave of displaced people. A pervasive sense of insecurity is fostered by remaining militia groups mainly in the East, mainly FDLR<sup>13</sup> (the

<sup>12</sup> The meddling of Uganda and Rwanda in the DRC is partly explained by their interest in the vast natural resources of the DRC (cf. Human Rights Watch 2005; UNSC 2002). The April 2002 Report of the UN Panel of Experts shows how both countries have benefited substantially by exploiting the natural resources of the DRC.

<sup>13</sup> Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda.

Rwandan/Hutu militia fighters who fled to the DRC after the genocide), and until recently, General Nkunda's CNDP<sup>14</sup> (who claims he is defending his ethnic Tutsi community against attacks by the FDLR) and the Mai-Mai. Most of the armed groups profit from the extraction of natural resources that make their way to international markets. However, the State Armed Forces themselves (FARDC) are largely responsible for the violent climate in the Congo, as they have engaged in harassment of the civilian population, in addition to military clashes with the militia groups.

The interviews upon which this article is based were conducted between September 2005 and October 2006 (the majority) and 2008. The major data collection phase was during the time of "the transition"—the time between the signing of the Peace Accord in July 2003<sup>15</sup> and the parliamentary and presidential elections held in 2006. During the transition period, the armed group signatories of the Peace Accord (*inter alia* the FAC, MLC, RCD-N, RCD-ML and the Mai-Mai) (at least in theory) converted themselves into political parties and shared power in the transitional government. Concurrently, the transitional government also embarked on the process of DDR and Military Integration/the rebuilding and integration of new State Armed Forces (*Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo*/FARDC) on the basis of the armed group signatories of the Peace Accord.

Military integration has been highly problematic and is reflected in multiple and parallel chains of command. The units often remain responsive to the former and current belligerents, and not to the integrated command structures. Relatedly, those integrated in the FARDC—especially officers—receive inadequate training, further exacerbating the problematic military integration. Moreover, no effective mechanism has been developed that identifies and excludes combatants and soldiers who have committed serious human rights abuses (Amnesty International 2007).

Importantly, the FARDC is facing substantial difficulties in providing equipment and support to the soldiers; salaries are both too low and often delayed if they are paid at all and there is a persistent lack of food and other support. The lack of support does not only hamper the FARDC's military power, it also contributes to the general climate of violence as FARDC soldiers prey upon the local population for survival. Dissatisfaction and frustration among the soldiers is great. Similarly, their loyalty towards leaders and superiors, in particular senior officers, whom they see as responsible for their situation, is very low. One soldier explained:

There are no bad soldiers. It is our leaders/superiors [mikonzi] who are bad. They don't care about us. We don't get anything, no food, no training.... instead they send their children to school in Europe. I even bought this uniform, the one that I wear, with my own money! They are bad. And if there is one rotten orange in a bag, it will make all oranges in the sack rot [soki lilala moko epoli, ekopolisa sac mobimba] (Male Sgt. cited in Eriksson Baaz and Stern 2008, 77).

The situation of senior officers, in particular, appears far superior when juxtaposed to that of the soldiers. While officers' salaries are also comparably low, their position and status both within the army and outside tend to provide them

<sup>14</sup> National Congress for the Defense of People.

<sup>15</sup> In July 2003, in Sun City, South Africa, a global and inclusive accord was signed among all armed and unarmed factions allowing for the establishment of a transitional government with a President and four Vice Presidents. This accord was a compromise between the five main armed groups: Joseph Kabila's Forces Armées Congolaises (FAC, the old government army); Jean-Pierre Bemba's Mouvement de La Libération du Congo (MLC); Azarias Ruberwa's Rassemblement Congolais pour la Démocratie-Goma (RDC-G); Mbasa Nyamwisi's Rassemblement Congolais pur la Démocratie-National (RCD-N), and Mai Mai.

with greater possibilities to engage in different, both legal and illegal, income earning activities.

While surely, in general, the politicization of ethnicity has increased during the war, this has occurred mainly in specific areas, especially the Kivus, Ituri, and Northern Katanga and was rarely reflected in the interviews with the government forces. This relative absence of politicized identity politics should probably be seen in the context of the political strategy during the Mobutu era. While Mobutu's U.S.-supported "kleptocracy" brought the economy and state institutions into ruins it was a fairly regionally equal in the sense that representatives of most regions were given the possibility to enrich themselves by having their time—however short and insecure—in government institutions. Moreover, Mobutu tended to rely mostly on leaders from smaller ethnic groups. While his own area received disproportionately generous donations and was overrepresented in the government and the army, the resulting group was not significant enough to create tensions along "ethnic" lines. This, together with his general emphasis on Zairian national identity, contributed to a general downplaying ethnicity during the Mobutu period (Schatzberg 1988; Williame 1992; Young 1985, 2002). This may offer a (partial) explanation as to why, as we shall see below, the soldiers accounts of rape rarely reflect the type of typical reasoning (summarized above) found in other conflicts explicitly informed by the violent drawing of ethnic/national boundaries (as was the case, for instance in Rwanda). Explicit ethnic identification appeared rarely in the interviews.

While sexual violence appears not to have been committed on a massive scale by the military before, the staff of the Security Sector often harassed the civilian population. Indeed, it must be remembered that the security sector in the DRC has been dysfunctional for a very long time. Such harassment, including the imposition of illegal taxes and fines, outright stealing from the population, and physical violence, can also be traced back to the time of Mobutu, especially the last years of the regime when the conditions for the military and the police deteriorated rapidly (i.e., they no longer received salaries, etc.). The military and the police were more or less explicitly encouraged to fend for themselves, epitomized in the expression *civil azali bilanga ya militaire*, "the civilian is the [corn] field of the military." Indeed, and in contrast to what is sometimes assumed, in the areas not affected by the war, harassment by militaries and the police was probably more rampant during the latter part of the Mobutu era than it is today. As a result of the long misuse of power by security sector staff, the police and military enjoy very little legitimacy in the eyes of the civilian population. Policemen and soldiers are often referred to simply as *miyibi* ("thieves"). This meager legitimacy has a negative impact on the morale of newly trained staff and, in combination with the difficult economic situation of the soldiers, feeds into a negative spiral increasing civilian-military hostility.

Researching sexual violence in the DRC today raises important questions about the relationship between armed conflict and sexual violence both generally, and in terms of the specifics of the Congolese warscape. Did sexual violence similarly occur before the armed conflict? Although important for understanding the relationship between gender discourses in peace time and those in war, as well as local patterns of sexual violence in peace time or civilian space as opposed to those immersed in armed conflict, these questions are very difficult to answer because of the absence of research in this areas before the war. The actual reporting of rape cases was very low.<sup>16</sup> However, this absence cannot be read as a reflection of particularly low levels of sexual violence. Surely, sexual

<sup>16</sup> This point was made during interviews and discussions with Human Rights and Women's Organizations in Kinshasa and Goma/Bukavu during 2007. Those interviewed were primarily representatives for RAF, RFDP, Woman for Woman and FCDD.

violence constituted a problem in the DRC before the war, as in all societies. There is, however, nothing that suggests that sexual violence was especially severe in the DRC before the war compared to other countries. Most of the local women and human rights organizations we consulted attribute the vast numbers of incidents of sexual violence to the armed conflict.<sup>17</sup> Additionally, they also point to the disintegration of traditional authorities and communal structures following the war as one contributing factor to the high levels of sexual violence. While most rape cases before the war—as now—never reached the courts, rape was (according to these local NGOs) considered a serious crime in most parts of the country. The crime of rape was seen as directed not only (or even primarily) against the individual woman or girl, but against the family and the community (if the perpetrator was an outsider) and was punished in different ways (compensation and shaming processes). After the outbreak of the war, these traditional systems have disintegrated and been replaced by total impunity at all levels, surely also contributing to the normalization of sexual violence in the communities. As documented in recent reports, an increasing amount of sexual violence is now committed by civilians (Ertürk 2008).

*FARDC Soldiers Tell Their Stories: A Discussion of Methodology*

The research project on which this article is based was funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida-Sarec). As noted above, the interviews were conducted in the Kinshasa area mainly<sup>18</sup> with FARDC soldiers with the background in the previous government forces [some having joined the *Forces Armées Zairoises* (FAZ) during the Mobutu period and most later, after Laurent Kabila took power in 1997, when the armed forces were renamed the *Forces Armées Congolaises* (FAC)]. Many of the ex-FAC interviewed are ex-child soldiers who, for various reasons, have remained in the military.

Because most of the sexual violence and human rights abuses by army personnel were committed in the conflict areas, we chose to focus on soldiers and officers with recent experience from the “front” areas (approximately 80 percent of those interviewed). Except for this basic limitation/selection, our intention was to include military personnel with a variety of experiences in terms of rank, age, gender and ethnic backgrounds. Approximately half of the interviews were conducted with officers (both senior and sub officers) and the rest with soldiers. Approximately 20 percent of the soldiers and officers interviewed were women (women have been present in the armed forces in the DRC (Zaire) since 1966).<sup>19</sup>

The interviews were organized as semistructured group interviews (groups of 3–4 persons) with soldiers/officers from the same unit with the same rank and gender. In the initial stages we tried to conduct some individual interviews; however (in our estimation), the person interviewed felt quite intimidated in the interview context. Instead, the group interviews—following the structure of the army itself with people from the same rank who also knew each other—turned out to be very fruitful. The interview sessions often turned into open discussions and debates within the group itself. The interviews were conducted by Maria Eriksson Baaz in the local language Lingala (which is also the language of the Army), without an interpreter. In total we conducted 49 group interviews, involving 193 people.

The semi-structured interviews addressed how the soldiers themselves saw their role in the armed forces, as well as in relation to civil-military relations. The first

<sup>17</sup> See previous note.

<sup>18</sup> While most interviews were conducted in the Kinshasa area some were also conducted in Kitona and South Kivu. We also interviewed a few ex-Mai-Mai and ex-RDC-Goma and did not note any major differences in their testimonies. The next phase of our research project focuses on these two groups of soldiers.

<sup>19</sup> According to estimations from the Ministry of Defence, approximately 2.6 percent of the army are women.

part of the interviews focused on what they thought was *required* to be a good or successful soldier, as well as what it meant to be a successful/good soldier *to them*. The second part concentrated more specifically on exploring their understandings of masculinity and femininity in relation to soldiering, and ended with a discussion of sexual violence. The soldiers responded to our questions about sexual violence in a general manner and never directly admitted to themselves committing such crimes (nor did we deem it fruitful to pose the question of their involvement directly). Nonetheless, the ways they spoke about specific instances of rape indicated that they were speaking from personal—or at least close—experience.

While there were some differences in how the officers (especially the senior officers) talked about and explained sexual violence—in particular in the way that they positioned their own complicity (to be developed below)—there were no major differences (even among the women)<sup>20</sup> in terms of how they represented masculinity. All those interviewed touched upon both sexual violence and masculinity.

The researcher's position vis-à-vis the respondent clearly informs the text of the testimonies; the respondent's story is circumscribed by a myriad power relations, including those that determine what the respondent wants the interviewer to know (Ackerly, Stern, and True 2006; Stern 2005, 60–64). As mentioned above, the interviews were conducted by Maria Eriksson Baaz whose position could be defined as “an outsider within” (Hill Collins 1999). This “outsider within” position was reflected in the interviews and she was positioned and repositioned differently depending on the discursive contexts in the interviews (sometimes as Congolese, sometimes as a “foreigner”). Given the tense civilian-military relations, this ambivalent position probably ultimately facilitated the interviews. The soldiers appeared to view the interview occasion as a long-awaited opportunity to talk about their problems to somebody who was neither (fully Congolese) civilian, nor military, and who was perceived as having contacts with influential people (i.e., the international community and international donors). Surely, the “truths” the soldier's told Maria were constructed for her particular audience; different “truths” would certainly have been recounted in another situation. That said, the stories they told convey “truths” that are both meaningful and relevant for better understanding militarized rape in the DRC.

On the whole, the soldiers represented images of themselves that adhere to universalized military codes, and laud their role as protectors of the population and human (even women's) rights. Yet, also, in places in their texts, references to these standards were absent or quite distant. Indeed, as we shall see, the texts reflect ambivalence and blurriness regarding the moral codes and standards which govern the soldiers' behavior. To be clear: we do not subscribe to the idea that contradictions and ambivalence are to be understood as veiling the truth and that the role of the researcher is to reveal this “real” and “true” attitude or identity of the respondents. Rather, we view identities as discursively constituted. Language can be seen as *productive* of identities and thoughts (see e.g., Butler 1990; Hall 1996). Because experiences and identities are constituted within discourse, and discourses are open-ended, identities and experiences are often articulated in contradictory ways. Depending on the context and the discursive fields in which we position ourselves and are positioned within, different identities are “activated” (Eriksson Baaz 2005). In our analysis of the soldiers' texts, we have drawn on such conceptualizations of identity.

### Explaining Rape—Normalizing Rape

Our focus on the reasons that the soldiers give to why rape occurs and to what *they tell us* rape *is* allows us to query into some of the governing discourses—and

<sup>20</sup> We explore this further in Eriksson Baaz and Stern, unpublished data.

the subject positions designated through the workings of these discourses—which are reflected, reproduced, and renegotiated in their texts.

Surely, there are many competing discourses at play in any discursive field; discourses demand continual reinforcement because of the inevitable contestations they incite (Weldes et al. 1999, 9). Subjects are “disciplined” through the repetition of certain codes of intelligibility (and their corrective systems of punishment and reward) that delimit individuals’ capacity to think and act (Foucault 1991). Subjects are “hailed into” the subject positions allotted them in these discourses; similarly, they also invest in these positions (Hall 1996). However, the absolute success of such hailing is always impossible. Through exploring how discourses and the subject positions they fashion are “performed” and repeated, we can consider the effects of the inevitable “failure” to repeat properly, or in following Witworth (2004, 162), to inhabit the mythologized and fixed identities demanded in the military.<sup>21</sup>

Such “failure” can indeed be fraught with violence and suffering. As we shall see, the soldiers located the impetus to rape in the mismatch of the “embodied performances” of their masculinities with their expectations of their masculinity—within the constraints of the generalized climate of violence and poverty in the DRC as well as the particular institutional framework of the armed forces (Connell 2000; Witworth 2004). They thus identified their “failure” at being properly “hailed into place” (and to invest) in the rigidly defined subject positions (idealized forms of heterosexual masculinity) they imagine as *should be* belonging in the FARDC. These idealized masculinities were crafted out of the dominant gendered discourses at play in the FARDC—and surely also reflective of the gender discourses which were crafted in the confluence and disjunction between military and civilian zones.

#### *The Sexually Potent Fighter and Provider*

The main ideal of masculinity which the soldiers drew upon to explain sexual violence was that of the (hetero)sexually potent male fighter. Male’s “sexual need’s” emerged as a given, known, natural driving force which required “satisfaction” from women whose role it is to satisfy these needs—a depiction of masculinity, as we saw above, which is familiar and similar in many other military institutions worldwide.

While the soldiers sometimes stated that women had a role to play in the army, this role belonged to the “feminized” sphere of the armed forces (e.g., health, social services, administration, cooking etc.) (Enloe 1990, 1993, 2000). Commanding and combat, male soldiers explained, demanded qualities that were considered stereotypically masculine and belonged decidedly in the military sphere: that is being courageous, level-headed, tough killers (see also Braudy 2003; Goldstein 2001; Nadelson 2005).<sup>22</sup> Constructing the zone of commanding and combat as masculine (and fundamentally heterosexual) required making sense of women’s presence in this space in a manner that did not threaten the main logic upon which this notion of masculinity and male heterosexuality depended. The soldiers therefore recast women soldiers as either “masculine,” or as unworthy, devalued feminine. They accomplished this move in a number of associated ways: denying women soldiers’ femininity, as it is understood in the civilian sphere (e.g., docile, submissive, chaste etc.) and thereby rendering women soldiers “men”; casting them as sexualized opportunists, instead of as soldiers or (“they are only hookers looking for clients”); and finally, by denying

<sup>21</sup> See also Stern and Zalewski (2009) on “failure.”

<sup>22</sup> For a more elaborate discussion on the feminization of the army in the DRC and its malcontents see Eriksson Baaz and Stern, unpublished data.

that women soldiers are real soldiers who can “handle warfare” (e.g., they are “poor widows in search for a living”) (see Eriksson Baaz and Stern, unpublished data). Through these interrelated strategies, the narrators attempted to “reverse” the feminization (and the attendant threat of emasculation) of the zone of combat, posed by the inclusion of women in military space (see Eriksson Baaz and Stern, unpublished data). They thus rendered “comfortable” the discursive pairing of “women” and “soldier” and their masculinity therewith remained unthreatened by the presence (and the prospect) of women’s bodies in the zone that they deemed to be reserved for heterosexual men and that which is “masculine.”

The absolute masculine heterosexuality of the zone of combat required that its brave fighters were not distracted by their “natural” sexual urges. Brave fighting necessitated, then, sexual relief. In a few cases,<sup>23</sup> the male soldiers spoke of women’s presence in the combat zone as desirable, because of their very function as sources for sexual gratification in the persistent dearth of “normal” sexual encounters. One male sergeant likened being in battle to being in a “desert”; the thirst of male sexuality combined with the absence of women renders soldiers parched and wanting. He explained as follows:

In general, especially at the front it could also be good [with women soldiers]. Because women are like flowers, and she could also satisfy my needs [sexually]. When you have been in a battle it is like a desert, then she could help you with that (Male, Sgt.).

The possible sexual distraction from the duties of soldiering that the presence of women posed was counteracted by the sexual relief that they promised. The flowers beckoned with their beauty; it is only natural, the texts explain, that the soldiers should “pick them.” Once relieved, the sergeant implies, the soldier could redirect his energies to soldiering.

When asked to reflect directly on how women’s presence in the armed forces impacted upon the amount of rapes committed by male soldiers, the respondents interpreted the question in an entirely different vein than we had anticipated.<sup>24</sup> The question was posed in relation to the views that an increased “feminine” presence in the military might have the effect of reducing the drive to “prove” one’s manhood through violent sexual conquest, or alternatively, that the energy of the male soldier is directed to protecting and saving (when taken as POWs) “the women soldiers within” rather than engaging in combating the enemy. Instead, almost exclusively the soldiers interpreted this question as if we were implying that the rate of rapes would diminish because women soldiers would satisfy the sexual needs of the male soldiers, and hence there would be no “need” for them to rape.<sup>25</sup> Almost all of the respondents then elaborated, explaining that such a strategy would not work for a number of reasons: the women are too few; the women might not want to have sex with them; it would create conflicts among the men; that they do not want to have sex with women soldiers because they are like men; they have diseases (HIV/AIDS). All of these reasons, although surely different, attest to a belief that rape stems from frustrated sexual desire and rely on a representation of the male soldier as virile heterosexual. The masculinity implied in this notion, however, is revealed to be quite fragile and fluid, as it can not sustain its coherence when juxtaposed with “femininities” that spill over the preconceived molds noted above (Witworth 2004, 161).

<sup>23</sup> Four out of 171 soldiers expressed this view.

<sup>24</sup> At the end of most interviews, Maria Eriksson Baaz asked: “Some people think that having women in the army is good because it will diminish the number of rapes. What do you think?”

<sup>25</sup> See also Enloe’s (2000, 111–19) discussion of “recreational” rape and prostitution.

The interview texts thus do indeed present a picture of the macho, male, virile, potentially violent soldier whose sexual desire is barely controllable. The specific zone of combat and command in the military, the texts tell us, remained a particular sort of male domain (Pin-Fat and Stern 2005; Witworth 2004, 166)—a place where the feminine does not belong except as a temporary intruder who serves as an outlet or receptacle for male sexual lust. Indeed the Feminine, in all of its known forms (i.e., prostitute, Eve, flower etc.) must ultimately be exorcized in order for this macho man to be effective and to respect the “chain of command” and his allotted position in the male hierarchies of the military structure.

Another theme that emerged in the interviews and that was used to explain sexual violence was the link between “manhood” and money and material wealth. (Heterosexual) manhood was intimately connected to being a provider—not only of money and gifts to a more temporary lover, but for the family. Moreover, the interview texts elicit the sense that the man’s value, superiority and right to decision making in the family is intimately linked to his role as provider. A man who does not fulfill his obligations is not only somehow deprived of his manhood, he is also not considered as having the same rights to demand submission from his wife. One male major explained:

If you look at the Bible, it says “man, love your wife” and “wife be submissive to your husband.” (...) Here, a lot of people do not know conjugal life well. You will not ask for submission [from the wife] if there is no love. You impose obligations but there are no rights. That is not good. If you do not give your wife money, she has not eaten, also the children have not eaten, can you then come home in the evening and ask her: did you wash the clothes? Here [in the Congo] the man looks for money and gives to the wife. But many times they give her nothing but still ask her to do a hard job. That is not how it was supposed to be (Male, Major).

The soldiers repeated that their harsh living conditions made it difficult for them to fulfill their supposed role as “the head and provider of the family.” They recurrently maintained that, for this reason, “their wives do not love them anymore” (“alingaka ngai lisusu te”). “Love” as it is expressed here, connotes respect for the man’s subject position as “provider,” as well as his attending position of superiority; it also connotes the wife’s willingness to perform conjugal obligations, such as washing clothes, as well as to be faithful and have sex with him.

Indeed, many of the soldiers (but not many officers) often articulated a fear that their women/wives meet other men in order to make ends meet. This suspicion and frustration of “not being able to be a real man and provider for the family” and (as they put it) “keep the woman faithful” is manifested in a negative and sexualized image of women. Women, in general, were portrayed as unreliable and opportunistic. The soldiers tell us that if a woman sees that other better opportunities present themselves, she will leave, cheat or, if she is a fellow soldier, betray one to the enemy:

[A good soldier] is someone who knows discipline. But how can we do a good job when we are hungry, when you haven’t eaten something for the whole day, when our children are hungry and don’t go to school and when you could not leave any money to your wife in the morning so she can cook for the children? What is she to do? [my wife] She is unhappy. When I come home and want to be with her she is upset and says “don’t touch me” [azosepela te, azoyebisa ngai: simba ngai te]. What should I do? If it continues, after three days and I have no money to give for food she will get tired and when I am at work she will give her body to another man just to get a little something to feed the children [akopesa nzoto na ye na mobali mususu po azwa mua quelque chose po aleisa bana].

What else should she do? But women are also weak [faible]. You cannot trust them [po ozala na confiance na bango—ezali mua pasi] (Male, Sgt).

The male soldiers thus established a normative ideal of heterosexual masculinity that was premised by successfully performing a masculine role as economic provider for women and children as well as sexually potent fighter. This precarious masculinity is coupled with a femininity that is at once weak, subordinate and treacherous. In so doing, the soldiers set the stage for making sense of the sexual violence they commit.

In the following paragraphs we will address how the soldiers struggled to explain, make sense of and even normalize sexual violence. How did they struggle with the discrepancy between the governing moral codes surrounding rape (which they identify in their texts) and their acts? How did their deliberations both re-inscribe and unsettle the idealized subject positions that they struggled to inhabit? As we will see, poverty and suffering is written as the main reason for sexual violence. However, poverty intervenes in their stories in different ways: as an obstacle hindering them from having sex and forcing them to use force; as frustration and anger that is manifested in an urge to harm and destroy. They also speak about the “craziness of war” that finds an outlet in a generalized wish to destroy and sully, and that takes sexualized forms in the idealized heterosexual masculine zone of combat.

Importantly, making sense of the rationale behind *why* soldiers in the DCR rape(d) belies simple and reductive reasoning. The soldiers’ narratives display both ambiguity and ambivalence in terms of how they sometimes justify the act of rape as “normal” given the context of want and suffering in that they find themselves, and in other instances, “evil” and wrong. Their ethical deliberations center around their attempts to distinguish between two different “types” of rapes: the normalized “rape” that stems from lust and want, and which in the narratives, is represented as (almost) morally acceptable, and the rape which is evil, inhuman, and connected to brutality and violence (yet also “understandable” given their circumstances and therewith ultimately beyond their individual responsibility). Indeed, the immediate response to the question of “why sexual violence?” was “there are different types of rapes” or “they are not all the same.” In many of their accounts, clear differences between these two “types” of rapes, however sometimes blur. The soldier’s nonetheless attempt to maintain lines of distinction between these “types,” and therewith to re-establish themselves and their colleagues who commit “lust rapes” as “normal,” given their circumstances, while distancing themselves from the “violent/evil” rapes.<sup>26</sup>

#### *Viol Ya Posa: Lust Rapes/“Normal” Rapes*

The soldiers explained that the most common type of rape is a result of lust/sexual needs and desire, *viol ya posa*. While, as we saw above, the soldiers portrayed women’s sexuality as driven by economic need/opportunism rather than physical needs, men were described as having unequivocal physical sexual needs. Furthermore, the texts tells us that the particular circumstances of being a

<sup>26</sup> While the soldiers often expressed their personal feelings and experiences, the officers—especially senior officers—often explained why their soldiers rape, hence situating themselves outside the act of sexual violence. While there is no aggregate statistics available on the proportion of sexual violence committed by ordinary soldiers in comparison with their officers, many of the rapes reported are committed also by officers (MONUC Human Rights Division, Human Rights Watch 2002, 2005). The officers also tended to emphasize the predominance of the “normal rapes” more than the “evil rapes.” Although the difference between soldiers and officers surely warrants further research, one can surmise from the testimonies that the officer’s deemed that their masculinity depended, in part, on differentiating between themselves as educated, superior officers, and their representation of the inferior, crass, brutish soldiers who had little discipline (see Enloe 2000: 152; Eriksson Baaz and Stern 2008).

solider in the FARDC provides the context where soldiers are “forced” to rape instead of engaging in the more “normal” sexual behaviors organized through civilian life. Hence, according to this line of reasoning, a man cannot be without sex for any sustained time; it is “somewhat unavoidable” that a man—who in any way is denied sex—eventually will take a woman by force. “Lust” rapes occur, they explained, because a man must release sexual tension. In a discussion with three FARDC colonels, they explained rape in the following ways:

*Male Lt. Col. A:* Rape is a problem of organization of society.... If there is not a lot of poverty and suffering you will not see a lot of rape. If the soldiers have their money, he can go out, see a woman, buy her a soda and (...) And it is also about organization. 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. That is not normal. You have to have leave: some go and after three months another one comes, like that. Then the soldier can go home for a bit, sees his normal friends, family, and his wife/woman [mwasi na ye]. It is a problem of organization. But secondly, it is a problem of suffering/poverty [pasi]. A soldier, if he has no possibilities, no money so that he can go the normal way [voie normal]... 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.

*Male Col. B:* Yes, especially for those in combat situations

*Male Lt. Col. A:* Yes especially for those in combat. Because if you look at it, it mostly happens in war. It is mostly those in combat situations who rape. In normal life, you don't see it much.

Col. A stipulated that “rape is a problem of the organization of society,” explaining that if there is no poverty and suffering, then there will be less rapes. Furthermore, if the organization of the (military) in society allowed for a soldier to have leave and relieve his sexual needs in the “normal” way, then there would be no need for taking a woman by force. He thus linked the instance of rape directly to the poor distribution of resources and organization of the military. He also distinguished between normal life and the life of combat which lies outside “normal” life. He presented combat as a suspended state in which “normal” societal solutions governing men's natural needs no longer exist. Inhabiting the subject position of provider who receives “love” and regularly relieves his natural sexual tension is impossible in the zone of poorly organized combat; similarly the soldier must seek sexual satisfaction if he is to be able to stay in this zone and perform his duties.<sup>27</sup>

Women soldiers also tended to reproduce prevailing constructions of masculinity when speaking of sexuality and rape (of civilian women). It should be noted that rape, according to the women soldiers interviewed, does not constitute a big problem *within* the army. They explained that while women soldiers frequently are subject to sexual harassment, the rape of female soldiers is quite rare. They also repeated (and even defended) male soldiers' right to satisfy their sexual needs, and linked the instance of rape with the lack of “normal” relations, which are dependent on the male being economically solvent and enjoying regular access to women so as to relieve his sexual tension.

*Female Major A:* If they want the work of soldiers to work/be good/end indiscipline [soki balingi mosala ya soldat ebonga], 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.” The normal way, the official way.

<sup>27</sup> See also Enloe (2000, 111–119) on militarized prostitution.

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.

*Female Major B:* Amen

*Female Major A:* If you like a woman you give her, her 1000 FC [2 USD]. Just look at the Zimbabweans when they were here, all the women were following them, because they had money—dollars. So, the way our soldiers are raping, it is because of lack of money. Maybe he has not been with a woman for 3–4 months and has no money on his pockets. What is he supposed to do?

These accounts underscore how sexuality, money and gifts were intimately linked in discourses of sexuality in the army—both among men and women. As one male corporal explained, “Sex and money go hand in hand. If you have no money, you will have no sex.” Implied in this linkage lie further connections between having resources, acting as a “normal” heterosexual man, who *needs* to have sex, and being a (self) respected provider—which, the soldiers also explained, the circumstances in the armed forces prohibit. The “rape” ensuing, although perhaps unfortunate, is written as not morally wrong, and the “rapist” is exonerated from any crime other than, perhaps, being a victim of circumstance.

While the intimate relation between sex and money can be found in the Congolese society at large, it is important to underscore that the “normalization” of rape as it is reflected here emerges in relation to the ways in which the soldiers reconfigure discourses of sexuality and masculinity in relation to their position in the military institution. In this sense, they recast that which in “normal” circumstances is “abnormal” (i.e., sex by force) as “normalized” in the military setting through discourses of disempowerment and unfulfilled masculinity. The idea that a man, “if he is suffering or deprived of having sex the normal way,” in some sense “has the right to rape,” is arguably constructed within the armed forces through the ways in which power and the lack thereof become uniquely entwined. It is through this normalizing reasoning that rape becomes a possible performative act of masculinity.

#### Viol Cruel/Mabe: “*Evil*” Rapes

The soldiers are seemingly clear in their depictions of “evil” rapes (*viol cruel* or *viol ya mabe*) as different from the “normal” rapes described above. “Evil” rape, they explained, stems from a sense of moral disengagement that accompanies the climate of warring and violence in which they have been living; previously unthinkable behavior becomes conceivable and even dedramatized through the process of dehumanizing and “normalization” of violence and killing. In this sense, the reasons the soldiers give to their actions also resonate with the notion, explained above, that violence seems to create its own momentum and construct its own moral economy. The soldiers deemed this rape as “evil” because of the level of brutality and, most importantly, because of the intentions behind the act. “Evil” rapes are the particularly brutal acts of sexual violence, involving mutilations and sometimes the subsequent killing of victims. “Evil rapes” are often motivated by “a wish to humiliate the dignity of people,” or “to sully people”—a sentiment that also resonates with some aspects of Enloe’s (2000) depiction of “national security rape” and even “mass rape,” yet seemingly without reference to any (in)security discourse or explicit notions of Othering along the lines usually drawn through identity politics.

*Male soldier B:* There are different kinds of rape. Some rapes are about lust. But some are criminal. Well all are forbidden. It is bad [ezali mabe]. You cannot be with a woman without her consent. Even in the house. Also in the house, if your

woman does not want to, you cannot force her. But in the sense that I am talking now, that rape is in two sorts, what do I mean? Because if it is only lust, then why do you sometimes kill her? Also if it is about lust, you will use the organ that you have. Why would you put a stick in her? We see that a lot. It is happening a lot in the East, in Kalemie. That is not about lust. It is not about the physical needs [posa ya nzoto]. That is from a need to destroy, to destroy the dignity, the human dignity of a person [...] rapes is committed at both these levels. It is also about lust—it is like if you are hungry—it is the same with the body/sexual needs. And if you have the possibility—you are also stronger than women, it can happen. But it is bad [ezali mabe].

*Male soldier C:* The way that some rape, the women ... They rape them, that is not lust, that is to sully them [kosalir bango], it is not lust.

Here we can see how the soldiers distinguish between how rape is committed at “both these levels”: the one being primarily about sexual needs and the other about the need to destroy. While the soldiers were clear in their delineations about what makes “evil” rapes evil, “lust” rapes and “evil” rapes seem to intermesh when they explained how rape, poverty, frustration, power (having a “gun”), and the “craziness” of war are “all connected.” In the following interchange, the soldiers underscored that sexual violence was not only an expression of unfulfilled sexual need. Here rape was primarily a result of frustrations and anger that follows from poverty and neglect:

*Male Cpl. A:* We soldiers commit rape, why do we commit rapes? Poverty/suffering [pasi]. When we are not paid, or not paid at all. We are hungry. And I have a gun. In my house my wife does not love me anymore [mwasi alingaka ngai lisusu te]. I also have a wish to have a good life like you [nakoma bien lokola yo].

*Maria E-B:* But that is a different thing, no? I asked about rape, not stealing [vol/viol].

*Male Cpl. A:* I understand, I understand. I am getting to it. I am not finished yet. Rape, what is that? It is connected to all that—stealing, killing, it is all in that [ezali nionso na cadre wana].

*Maria E-B:* So, it is anger [kanda] then or what?

*Male Cpl. A:* Yes, it is anger [kanda], it is creating, the suffering [pasi] is creating (...) You feel you have to do something bad, you mix it all: sabotage, women, stealing, rip the clothes off, killing.

*Male Cpl. B:* You have sex and then you kill her, if the anger is too strong [soki kanda eleki, obomi ye].

*Male Cpl. A:* It is suffering [pasi] which makes us rape. Suffering. If I wake up in the morning and I am fine, I have something to eat, my wife loves me [mwasi alingaka ngai], 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 [bamikonzi] are cheating us. We don't have anything (cited in Eriksson Baaz and Stern 2008, 77).

The soldiers thus situated rape in a “general wish to destroy” that arises from “suffering” and “frustrations.” In the soldier’s narratives, poverty, and the general feeling of neglect (including “not being loved” by ones wife and being “cheated” by superiors) and frustration play an important role in explaining—even partly excusing—this kind of sexual violence.<sup>28</sup> Failed notions of “the provider” and “the sexually potent fighter” thus haunt the “sense” made of rape here.

Furthermore, in developing their explanations of sexual violence committed against the civilian population, the soldiers often focused on “the spirit and

<sup>28</sup> This resonates with what Groth and Birnbaum (1979) classified as “anger rape,” which is characterized by a particular brutality.

craziness of war” and the use of drugs. One soldier described the effects of war in the following way:

War is crazy, it destroys the minds of people [ezali kobebisa mitu ya bato]. Some people just go crazy [bakomi liboma]. Rape is a result of that too, especially the bad rapes. It gets too much.... Also, a lot is because of drugs. If you take drugs, drink, or other things—it is not good. And many, many ... most take drugs (Male Capt. cited in Eriksson Baaz and Stern 2008, 78).

This explanation resonates with more generalized notions of warfare and the psychological trauma that afflict many soldiers in diverse situations.<sup>29</sup> This soldier seems to imply that violence, rape, etc. becomes an outlet for the “spirit” of war, alluding to how warring is an *unnatural* and extreme state which precipitates “going crazy” and “bad rapes.” The reasons for the violence, he tells us, lie outside of the soldiers’ “normal” character; instead, violence is induced by drugs and the craziness of war which “destroys” the otherwise healthy “minds of people” and, we would add, disallows the fulfillment of their supposed role as men.

### The Ethics of Rape

As we have seen above, the soldiers offered 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 circumstance of the deprived warscape which they inhabited. The soldiers’ accounts served to thus seemingly abdicate them from ethical responsibility. This strategy, however, did not fully work. They also repeated and openly struggled with the overarching sense that rape was both forbidden and “wrong”—even “lust” rapes. In some of the soldier’s accounts, this sense of ethical wrongdoing was internalized; in other it seems to remain a moral code, which was acknowledged, but seemed to be placed outside of the speaker in his reflections. Nonetheless, almost all of their accounts of rape included a statement that rape is bad and forbidden, both in military and civilian life. Some of the soldiers’ stories of rapes featured a cautionary lesson or warning, thus conveying that the immoral act of rape (in any of its hybrid forms) is universally wrong:

Yes, rape is about lust/sexual needs [posa] (...) you go and you see a woman in the forest (...) It is bad. The woman that you are raping is somebody’s woman [mwasi ya batu]. Also, we saw in some areas that they put a band around their women’s wrists. If another man takes her, he has to die. We also saw that. One soldier went into the forest where he met a woman and raped her. When he came back, water/liquid started to pour from his body [mai ebandi kobima ye na nzoto]. We took him to the hospital, there they asked him “what, tell us what is this, what did you do?” “I went to the forest and I raped a woman.” Just when he said that he died. So you see, rape is something bad. If you rape you will not live long in this world [okoumela na mokili oyo te] (Male Cpl.).

Importantly, by articulating “deviant” behavior, the soldiers reinforced and produced the ideal of the “norm”—a norm with which they were sometimes unable to comply. The soldiers conveyed an overarching, even universalized sense that sexual violence was wrong. However, the (ambiguous) ways in which they reflected what was deemed proper behavior (including when sex became “lust rape”) must be also understood in relation to the ideal models of

<sup>29</sup> Experiences of U.S. soldiers in the Vietnam war provides perhaps the most explored case of how the “craziness of war” coupled with the use of drugs perpetuated both violence and the trauma associated with it.

masculine subject positions discussed above. The inability to comply with the moral codes tied to the subject positions was a site of struggle in their texts. An account of a gang rape that took place near Matadi, presents a good example of the ambivalence embedded in different discourses of rape among the soldiers:

An example in Matadi, one section [section moko] was patrolling. It was in the night, they saw a woman and she started “ohh, don’t you have any money?” So, they just decided, let’s rape her. The whole section raped her, this one raped her, then the other one and the other one and the other one and so on [oyo alali, oyo alali, oyo alali, oyo alali]. But the woman they raped was somebody’s woman [mwasi ya batu]. Even if she was a whore [ndumba] she has a right, she has her family (...) What is her right? She could have said, ok one, one of you, I can sleep with one of you, or two. But the way that they all raped her, then she has a right to press charges [kofunda bino]. It is bad [ezali mabe]. It is bad. It is bad. Rape can give you many years in prison. It is forbidden for soldiers. Even in civilian life it is forbidden (Male Sgt.).

This sergeant explained that the woman had rights, but at the same time he implied that she should/could have accepted to have sex with one or two of the soldiers. Hence, while women have the right to say no, soldiers, and especially soldiers that do not receive any (or sufficient) salary, and thereby are denied the right to have a woman “the normal way” (i.e., by giving money or gifts), also have rights. These rights often tend to be greater than that of the woman. Hence, he implied that while rape is condemned, it is at the same time also defended.

The soldiers texts tell us that while both are forbidden, the “lust rape” it still “more ok” than the “evil rape.” The “lust rape” simply reflects the “inevitable” consequence of what happens when a real man is deprived of the possibilities to have sex (no money and no leave): he must use force to embody that masculinity—even though partial and failed. The evil rape, by contrast, is written as also following a different logic. It is not a reflection of sexual needs, but of frustrations arising from hunger, poverty, neglect and the craziness of warring. While the frustrations are presented as normal and understandable, the intentions—and the brutal manifestations of this kind of rape (i.e., mutilations and the use of sticks etc.) were inscribed by most not only as bad and evil—but also as “abnormal,” albeit an exception and somehow outside of the soldier’s control (and therewith ethical responsibility). Indeed, the “evil” rape in most interviews emerged as connected to abnormal and deviant masculinity (in relation to the ideal notions of masculinity discussed above)—a manifestation of what happens to a man totally emasculated by his sufferings and no longer using “his organ.” One corporal explained: “Those who do that are not normal men anymore. A real man uses that which God has provided him with [akosalela oyo Nzambe apesaki ye]” (Male Cpl.).

### **Making Sense of the Soldier’s Narratives: Concluding Thoughts**

We began this article with the intention of listening closely to the voices of the soldiers in FARDC, some of the main perpetrators of sexual violence in the DRC. As we explained in our introduction, our aim was to examine the dominant discourses (co)productive of rapists and rape as they were represented in the soldier’s texts. We hoped that by paying attention to the various ways in which the soldiers mediate and navigate among these discourses, we could contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the connections between sexual violence and militarization in the context of the DRC, as well as more generally. In so doing we hoped to offer insight into more overarching questions about the

constructions of subjectivities and the enactment of violence through warring—questions that may help untie the tightly entwined knot of power in which rape in war is embedded. What then can we conclude from reading the soldier's texts?

The soldier's testimonies suggest that it is problematic to explain rape in the DRC in a reductionist way as either as an (almost) unavoidable aspect of warring or simply as a "weapon of war," as if this latter explanation often sufficed to understand the myriad relations of power which make up the context in which sexual violence occurs. According to the testimonies of the soldiers, sexual violence can not be understood primarily in terms of "national security rape" or "systematic mass rape" (Enloe 2000). It is important to point out here though that this article is based on interviews with a (certain and quite limited) group of soldiers and officers within the FARDC. While the FARDC is responsible for a large portion of the sexual violence, much is also committed by different militia groups (FDLR, CNDP, Mai-Mai, etc.) with also other interests and positions in relation to the conflict. It is therefore possible that testimonies of combatants in these groups would reflect other discourses, more informed by the violent drawing of ethnic/national boundaries.

The soldiers interviewed in our research explained that they understand the rape that they and their colleagues committed (both "lust" rapes and "evil" rapes) as "resulting"—although differently—from masculine heterosexuality and the attendant discourses according to which men have sexual "needs" that *must* be satisfied and where a man/soldier, if deprived, has the "right" to take women by force. They also understood both "types" of rape to be different yet related expressions of a deep-seated frustration connected to poverty, neglect and lack of support and the general climate of warring, etc. This frustration is manifested not only in rapes, but in a general violence against civilians (see Eriksson Baaz and Stern 2008).

Our analysis of their reasoning, however, complicates the seemingly cohesive narrative in which frustration and lack "lead" to violent expression in a maelstrom of violence which ultimately abdicates from responsibility both rapists and the logics and structures that are productive of rape as a possible channel for frustration. Indeed, the ways in which the soldiers draw lines of distinction between "lust rapes," which are (somewhat) more ethically palatable and "evil rapes" from which they distance themselves—as well as how these lines of distinction blur in their texts—allow entry into the logics through which rape becomes possible, and even "normalized."

Importantly, the logics that "explain" the sexualized violence the soldiers commit are crafted out of the (also globalized) discourses around heterosexuality, masculinity (and femininity) that prevail in the particular warscape in which the soldiers live and act. In this sense they must be understood as something produced within the military institutions and armed forces. These discourses posit impossible masculine subject positions (those that construct the *fighter* as well as the *provider*) and the attending degrading images of women with formative power.

As we saw, the soldiers locate the impetus for their resorting to violence in the mismatch between their embodied experiences and their aspirations to inhabit these impossible subject positions. In this "abnormal" state the soldiers still strive to achieve these impossible subject positions as "Men," otherwise their ultimate masculine identity as "soldiers" would be undermined. Rape here serves as a performative act that functions to reconstitute their masculinity—yet simultaneously symbolizes their ultimate failure to do so. Through the act of rape several key components of both the provider and the fighter are realized: the sexual relief "necessary" for the *fighter* is achieved, and the dominance and the heterosexuality of the *provider* is experienced, however temporarily. The act

of rape thus symbolizes a certain temporal realization of the soldiers' masculinity, while at the same time also symbolizes the ultimate failure to be truly "masculine," since the act itself is so clearly distanced from the "real" notions of masculinity that these soldiers articulate.

In the "abnormal" setting of soldiering, the act of rape thus constitutes a double failure. First, it is conditioned by the failure to act in a sexually "normal" way, and second, it symbolizes the failure of the performative effort to become masculine in the context of the "abnormality" of war and poverty. (Importantly, we by no means imply that rape is determined by the abnormal setting in which the soldiers live, and that rape is the only symbol of fulfilled masculinity available, however it becomes a possible act of performativity—given the normalizing discourse around lust rapes within the FARDC.) In sum, their "failure" to be "normal," they explain, precipitates the violence they enact, in part, in their efforts to *be* normal.

Attention to the intricate interplay between individuals and the discourses that (in part) produce them helps us see how very fragile even seemingly solid constructions of subjectivity (such as "heterosexual masculinity") are, as the "normal" conditions of life change so drastically in warscapes (Nordstrom 1997). It calls into question how the (forever elusive) "normal" also serves to constitute the "exception" of heinous war crimes, such as those which have been and are being committed in the DRC. Indeed, the soldiers' accounts trouble our notion of rape as aberration from the "normal," as the discourses which designate the "normal" are revealed to be constitutive of the logics which underwrite the reasons for rape. Furthermore, the acts of sexual violence reflected in the soldier's testimonies must be seen as product of the particular context of the DRC—a warscape which has its local particularities, but which must also be seen as reflective of the warscapes in diverse contexts which are crafted out of the increasingly globalized context of militarization and attendant notions of "normal" heterosexual masculinity.

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