

**SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF
CONGO: THE ROLE OF MEN AND MASCULINITIES**

Master research paper

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PART I: INTRODUCTION

Since the last two decades, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) confronts a series of conflicts, which have had devastating impacts on men and women. As the conflict arises, so are the cases of sexual violence perpetrated against women. There is a widespread of reports depicting the conflicts in the DRC and the horrific incidents of rape and sexual violence, and almost complete impunity for the perpetrators of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). The DRC has been infamously described as the “rape capital of the world” and the “most dangerous place on earth to be a woman” by Margot Wallström, a UN Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict (Autesserre 2010).

Despite the rising attention paid to gender-based violence and the resources invested in trying to eliminate this phenomenon, records of sexual violence cases are still alarming and have not seen a decrease over time. A closer look indicates that the issue is far more complex and embedded into a broader context of unequal gender relations and general violence that is deeply rooted in masculinity norms prone to violence (Lwambo, D. 2013; Meger 2010; Freedman 2012, 2017).

Studies on sexual and gender-based violence have focused essentially on women as victims and men as perpetrators. Most of the dominant literature captures SGBV and its relation to women and their experience, which is without doubt, important to tackling the issue. However, more efforts and sustainable measures have to be put in place. Considering the stagnant result in reducing the cases of SGBV in the DRC, development and gender studies started to shift the focus on women and considering a more gendered approach. This emerging shift in thinking have highlights the key role of men and masculinities and the influence of gender identity as underlying causes for SGBV.

In light of the limited focus around the perspective and experience of men and masculinities in understanding the issue of SGBV in the DRC, I chose to explore arguments that consider gender relation more holistically: specifically, by looking at the experience of men perpetrators, to understand what leads to the act and the tolerance of SGBV.

The main questions that this research paper is trying to address are:

- Where are the men in the discourse of SGBV in the DRC?
- What is the role of the masculine gender in the sexual and gender-based violence?
- Is the dominant narrative of SGBV as a weapon of war an evidence?

While “rape as a weapon of war” has become a trademark element of reports on the DRC, the issue is far more complex and embedded into a broader context of unequal gender relations and general violence (Lwambo, D 2013). Understanding the prevalence of SGBV in the context of conflict requires understanding gendered power relations, specifically in the DRC. Sexualized violence serves as an important role in communicating norms of masculinity, virility, brutality, and loyalty (Cohen, D. K. 2017).

I analyze SGBV from a gendered lens and pointing out the relation between masculinity and the prevalence of sexual violence in the DRC. It seeks to explain what role men play in the prevalence of SGBV, why perpetrators commit such acts and how hegemonic forms of masculinities enable violence. I believe that it is crucial to grasp fully why SGBV is still prevalent in the DRC despite ongoing efforts to tackle the issue. Understanding the important factors of masculinities and its relation to sexual violence is essential to better inform policymaking and programs implementation.

The structure of this main research paper is as follows: Before starting the main discussion, I introduce the first chapter, which explains the history of conflicts in the DRC, and how SGBV is prevalent during these historical conflicts. This first chapter provides the basis to our analysis. The second chapter explores the main converging factors for the prevalence of SGBV and the main consequences for women. I emphatically point out how the factors of gender violence are complexly connected with pre-existing gender inequality and social norms. In chapter 3, I propose a reflection on the question of SGBV as a weapon of war, based on scholars Baaz and Stern’s arguments in their different rape studies in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (mostly 2010, 2013). I seek to challenge the dominant narratives that SGBV is employed systematically as a weapon of war and to include a nuanced perspective to demonstrate that all acts of violence exist on a continuum of violence facilitated by multiple factors. Chapter 4 focuses on the understanding of masculinities. The role that ideal of masculinities compared to the different reality lived by men causes a backlash and fuels behaviors, which leads to acts of violence, including sexual- and gender-based violence. I seek to prove that the influence of

gender roles based on patriarchal norms can have an impact on gender construction, thereby contributing to the formation of sexual-based violence and gender-based violence. This section will explore the interdisciplinary lens of psychosocial literature on masculinities. Chapter 5 briefly outlines the impact of such research on policy making and planning and provides avenues for reflection on ways to consider masculinities in further recommendations aiming at tackling SGBV in the DRC.

In conclusion, the study argues that understanding SGBV requires an in-depth analysis of gender relation and gender identities. Including men and masculinities is a necessity to bring to light the root causes of the issue of SGBV in the DRC.

CHAPTER 1: DEFINITION OF TERMS, METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

I. Definition of Main Terms

SGBV has been a topic well-documented in the recent decade among gender studies. For the case of the DRC, the term has been portrayed to describe the situation and consequences of warring in the country. Since the term “sexual and gender-based violence” is frequently referred to in the research paper, I use the following definition when addressing SGBV: It can be understood as acts of violence against a person’s will and is based on gender norms and unequal power relationships. It covers any threats of violence and coercion and can take several forms. It might be physical, emotional, psychological, or sexual in nature, and can take the form of a denial of resources or access to services (Freedman, 2017; UNHRC 2020).

A. Sex and Gender

I also refer to sex (men and women) and the use of gender and gender relation. Therefore, I offer a definition of sex and gender to make clear the differentiation between the two that is sometimes used interchangeably.

Sex refers to the biological difference between men and women or between male and female while gender refers to the condition and understanding of relationship between men and women and the perception of gender identities, relations and roles in the society (Whitworth 1997; Freedman 2017). Furthermore, gender relates to the social and cultural construction and

representation of masculine and feminine identities. This concept is constantly evolving across time and places. It can vary depending on the local context in which it is employed (Freedman 2017). Which means that gender is a social construct when sex refers the biological nature of a man or a woman.

B. Masculinities

The identities of masculinity shape behaviors, which are not in their essence always prone to violence. The turning point from where masculinities become hegemonic is when the pattern of practice and sense of identity is built out of domination of men toward women or other men with subordinate forms of masculinities. Hegemonic masculinity is a social construction of identities that perceive the identity and role of masculine through a lens that portrays domination of men over women. According to R. Collen (2005), a pioneer in research in the field of gender studies, hegemonic masculinity can be described as “the pattern of practice (i.e., things done, not just a set of role expectations or an identity) that allowed men’s dominance over women to continue”. The term also refers to the pervasive norms and institutions that work to maintain men’s domination over women and over subordinate forms of masculinities (Tosh, 2004) and represents an idealized image of man as a person who acts aggressively, takes risks, is independent, is sexually virile, is unemotionally rational, and is heterosexual (Connell, 1992).

Freedman (2017) argues that gendered relations and structures affect men as well as women. Specifically, constructions of hegemonic masculinities constrain the way that men behave and how they view their social roles. As mentioned earlier, masculinity and all genders ought to be understood as a dynamic and evolving concept that can take various forms based on the local context. The social construction of masculinity and its representation by society affects the behaviors and attitudes of men and boys toward SGBV.

Based on these definitions, the study will attempt to demonstrate the interrelation between the construction of masculinities in the DRC and issues of SGBV.

II. Methodology and Research Design

The paper is essentially the result of secondary data analysis collected through online data sources. The main field of studies were African studies, gender studies, men, masculinities, and studies of conflict and gender-based violence in the specific context of the DRC. Since the topic

is emerging, recurrent authors served our base of analysis. We explored reports from organizations; peer reviews articles, data interviews, research, books).

Using the deductive methodology, we go from the hypothesis that the prevalence of SGBV is the result of many complex interrelated factors including gender and power relations. We deduct that the perpetration of sexual and gender-based violence against women must be understood from an overall gender lens and through the study of the implication of men and masculinities in the issue. We aim to challenge overall narratives that focus on women by taking the approach of analyzing gender and power and its relationship with men identity and the behavior resulting from the construction of masculinities prone to violence. The study is focus on literature from most of the past two decades.

Most of documentation has depicted the eastern region since it is the most affected by the conflict. The focus has been to understand the impact of SGBV on women, but I also aim to illustrate the place and agency of men in the discourse of SGBV being prevalent in the DRC and SGBV being a weapon of war. I acknowledge that this master paper research is limited by its lack of field research. Engaging with women's organizations or other local civil society groups would provide a clearer picture of the present reality of violence related to masculinist norms in the DRC. Nonetheless, given current conflict in the country and lack of resources for travel, field research was not feasible. We also recognize that current situation has evolved from the period of literature we explored. Given the length of the paper, the section on recommendations and possible emerging policy and programming that align with the reflection of our study could not be explored.

PART II: SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE (SGBV) AND THE CONFLICT IN THE DRC

CHAPTER 2: THE CONFLICT IN THE DRC

I. The Context of the Country

The Democratic Republic of Congo is a country known for its wealth in natural resources, but also its history of conflict. The country bears a high level of economic potential. It carries extensive reserves of gold, diamonds, columbo-tantalite, which is used in most electronic equipment, as well as silver, cadmium, copper, zinc, cobalt nickel, and wolfram used in high technology industries (Autesserre, 2010). It is the largest country in sub-Saharan Africa (2,345 million km²); comparable to the surface of Western Europe. According to the World Bank, it has the potential to become one of the richest economies on the continent and a driver of African growth.

Despite this promising description of the country, the DRC is one of the poorest countries in the world (World Bank 2020). It faces a series of political unrest and conflicts over the last two decades that broke out around the 1990s. It also faces many socio-economic and development challenges, including corruption, social inequalities, lack of employment and economic poverty. Moreover, the battle against Ebola epidemics and nowadays, the corona virus pandemic is adding instability to the overall picture.

Furthermore, the illegal exploitation of the DRC's natural resources, the domestic and regional leaders' disputes over power, the grassroots antagonisms over land and power, and the persistence of corruption at all levels of the political, the economic system and widespread cases of sexual and gender-based violence have been at the core of the current instability of the country (Autesserre, 2010 and United Nations, 2003). The long-lasting series of conflict in the DRC has brought great attention to the country. The issue of SGBV has been the subject of many human's rights reports, feminist research, publications, the media and academic research. Gender and feminist studies, African studies, international relations and international development, peace and security have raised concerns about the situation.

The conflict is rooted in many complex and interconnected issues. According to Freedman (2017), many analysts (such as Autesserre, 2010; Lemarchand, 2008; Maindo Monga Ngonga, 2007; Prunier, 2008; Reyntjens, 2007) debated on the causes of conflicts in two ways. The top-down approach that establishes the root causes of the conflicts in national tensions, political instability, regional combats waged by foreign actors on the Congolese Territory, and the impact of illegal exploitation of resources. The second approach called "bottom-up" argues that conflicts

are a manifestation of micro-dynamic, personal disputes and score-settling. In the case of DRC, tensions at the local and micro level started before colonization that became more complex and have degraded over time. The conflicts were fuelled by decentralized antagonisms over land and political power at a community level. The local root of antagonism then triggered a large scaled of violence during and after the war (Freedman 2017). Nowadays, we can see how tensions over land has occurred at a regional and national level. The quest for power over land and natural resources is one of the reasons for the ongoing conflicts, especially with the interest of exploitation of natural resources.

II. History of the Conflict in the DRC

The multifaceted and complex protracted conflicts in the DRC involve many actors from all dimensions in the country. It has been a combination of an interplay between international, regional, national and local dynamics that makes it almost impossible to provide an overarching explanation for the continued conflict (Freedman 2016). A brief consideration of the history and the causes of the conflicts is nevertheless in order, focusing on the prevalence of gender-based violence. Several gender studies argue that SGBV is exacerbated in conflict-affected states, especially where there are pre-existing gender inequalities. Ertürk (2008) and Freedman (2016) noted that sexual violence was not restricted to zones of armed conflict but was rampant in the whole country. She argues that some research conducted in relatively peaceful and conflict-free areas in the DRC experience high level of SGBV committed by people that are not part of any militia, armed groups or armed forces (civilians).

The first major conflict was called the great African war. It emerged in the mid 1990s from the rise of local tensions and disputes over ethnic divisions and land rights that contributed to worsen and multiply the conflicts that began following the Rwandan genocide of 1994. During that time, “an increase in sexual violence has been recorded in the Eastern region of the country. This level of violence then took another dramatic increase in 1996, with the beginning of civil conflict. The rates of sexual violence have been consistently increasing in the East ever since” (Pratt, M et al., 2004). The country was under the ruling of the president Joseph Mobutu Sese Seko. In May 1997, Joseph Mobutu Sese Seko ousted from office of power to the benefit of his political rival, Laurent Désiré Kabila.

In 1998, the second major conflict called the great African war started and saw Laurent Désiré Kabila confront Rwanda, Uganda and Zimbabwe, former allies in his struggle against Mobutu (Maertens de Noordhout, F. 2013). The series of conflict embedded in chronic poverty and social inequalities contributed to increase the number of armed groups currently operating in the region, especially in the eastern Congo (Slegh et al., 2014). The multiplicity of rebel groups exacerbated the spread of rape and associated violence (Marion Pratt et al., 2004; Slegh et al. 2014). According to the International Rescue Committee, the second conflict has caused between 4 and 5.4 million deaths and an inestimable number of rapes on an estimated population of 69.9 million people.

In June 2003, a transitional government took place, with Kabila remaining as President, and four vice-Presidents from different factions. Faced with pressure from associations for the defence of human rights, the Parliament and government of the DRC adopted a law on sexual violence in 2006. Although this measure was a big step, the government and international actors have quickly realized that the root causes of violence needed to be addressed and that impunity needed to be dealt with in order to see the level of sexual violence against women decrease (Maertens de Noordhout, F. 2013). In March 2009, a peace agreement was signed in Goma and several rebel groups were fully integrated into the DRC national army (Forces armées de la république démocratique du Congo) but the conflict and instabilities continue, and the ongoing rage of conflict and attacks still have devastating impacts on the population in many ways. Gender-based violence also continues to plague the country. Humanitarian actors assist about 30,000 survivors a year. The reported cases of SGBV including rape, sexual slavery, and trafficking, forced/early marriage, intimate partner violence and sexual exploitation and abuse (UNFPADRC 2019).

CHAPTER 3: THE PREVALENCE AND IMPACTS OF SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN THE DRC.

I. SGBV in the History of the Conflict

Sexual violence existed in the DRC before the civil wars of 1996 and 1998, and even before the Rwandan genocide exodus in 1994. However, nearly all cases of SGBV took the form of

sexual assault from a male admirer and was not considered enough to inflict punitive measures on the perpetrator (Pratt et al., 2004). When denounced, the issue was frequently resolved between families through marriage of the victim and the perpetrator, or by requiring the perpetrator to pay restitution to the victim's family in the form of one or two goats (Pratt, M et al., 2004). This way of dealing with the issue in the community was partly due to women's low legal status in both the traditional and civil domains. Women were considered second-class citizens. Despite some improvement at the institutional level since the beginning of the first major conflict in mid 1990s, the status of women as subordinate to men remains in social norms and continues to influence gender roles and gender relations. The pre-existing gender inequalities and patriarchal culture and norms contributed to undermine the importance of addressing sexual violence (Freedman 2016). Social norms are embedded in the law, which supports the role of women and girls as dependent of men. For example, the Congolese Family Code requires that women obey their husbands who are recognized as the head of the household (Csete, J. & Human Rights Watch. 2002).

As conflict emerged in the DRC, cases of rape recorded in hospitals increased. This was reflected in the media and by international organizations that published research, empirical studies and reports on SGBV in the DRC. For instance, one may reference the UN Human Rights Council 2008 report, UN Special reports on the DRC, and UN security council reports on the DRC. According to the United Nations Human Rights report (2010), the two great wars in the DRC recorded an extreme and high level of brutal acts of sexual violence in the country. Many scholars working on the issue of SGBV rise that while rape has accompanied most armed conflicts throughout the world, rape in the DRC is known to be used as a weapon of war. Ertürk (2008) described sexual violence as a defining feature of the Congolese armed conflicts. She reported how extreme levels of sexual violence, perpetrated by non-State armed groups, State security forces and civilians persist and are reported in the country until today, especially in the eastern Congo where hostilities remain. The bodies of women have become a battlefield used to target and destroy the social fabric (Bihabwa Mahano and Mbenda Kangami, 2018).

Despite great attention to the issue, data collection and reporting has proven to be an issue. Researchers face practical difficulties related to logistical challenges of data tracking in the context of a country like the DRC. Difficulties include reaching rural areas, the collection of

reliable nationwide data, and the lack of coordination between organizations that collect data and publish reports. On another hand, there are social barriers related to stigma that refrain victims from reporting incidents of SGBV. According to a survey conducted by Médecins sans frontières in 2005 entitled “Access to health care, mortality and violence in the DRC”, the level of instability in the country, combined with the constant presence of men members of militias have an influence on how interviewees respond. The fear of reprisals has also been a significant barrier to good reporting and data analysis (Freedman 2017). Although there is a lack of empirical data, the existing number of cases reported are still alarming and requires great attention. A study conducted by Peterman et al. (2011) based on data from the Demographic and Health Survey of 2007, estimated that between 1.69 and 1.80 million women aged 15–49 have experienced rape in the whole of DRC. A new population census published in 2014 by the CIA shows that there are about 18 million of women between the ages of 15–49 in the DRC. This fact implies that more than 10 per cent of women in DRC have experienced rape, and the number has grown since 2007 (Rønsen, 2016). Since the beginning of the conflicts, SGBV took the forms of gang rapes, sexual slavery, purposeful mutilation of women’s genitalia, and killings of rape victims. These instances of SGBV are commonplace in eastern Congo, especially in the North Kivu where many cases have been reported as the conflict worsen (Wakabi 2008). According to Sow (2006), the United Nations Economic Commission of Africa estimated the number of rape cases to 40 thousand to 60 thousand victims of rape in Eastern DRC between 1996 and 2002. In addition, 25 thousand cases of rape reported in 2005 occurred in the eastern region, which is the most affected area by the conflict. In the case of DRC, acts of SGBV are particularly characterized by the brutality with which they are perpetrated. Many reports highlight how family members are forced by armed groups to watch and/or participate in their wives and/or daughters being inflicted sexual violence.

II. Factors Explaining the Prevalence of SGBV

Factors for the prevalence of SGBV in the DRC are as complex as the conflict itself. The fact that women are disproportionately victims of SGBV holds its roots in main cultural and social norms. Trying to understand the specific factors behind which women are the first to be targeted has been a long quest for feminist studies.

A. Why are Women the Target?

Throughout the breath of feminist literature that focuses on the issue of SGBV, the main reasons women are targeted as victims of SGBV lies in the combination of women's subordinate social status in their communities, along with gender roles and perceptions attributed to women by the society. As Ertürk (2008) explains, sexual violence in armed conflicts in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is fuelled by gender-based discrimination in society. Women face discrimination and oppression in virtually every sphere of their life. In parallel, women's role as the birth giver is deeply rooted in cultural and social norms, and religion. Women have the role of holding the fabric of the community together. They are the caregivers, the ones who provide food, the identity of mothers and sisters holds specific expected behaviours and roles to align with according to gender roles attributed by society and culture.

Paradoxically, the body of a woman is considered as sacred due to its valuable ability to bear life. The gendered role of women is linked with a feminine ideal of sexually purity (virginity). Social stereotypes associate the feminine gender as being weaker than the masculine one. According to stereotypes, feminine gender needs protection and to be accepted requires silence and obedience. Baaz and Stern (2010) explain that the very fact that women are often cast as the symbolic bearers of ethno/national identity through their roles as biological, cultural and social reproducers of the community. The role they play attribute the rape of women 'enemy' in the aim at destroying the very fabric of society. From that analysis, it is deductible that, while perpetrators understand the cultural value of a woman, they also consider women as being vulnerable. As such, they knowingly act with the intention of having a negative social impact by perpetrating sexual violence. As we have seen above, society identifies the ideal woman who holds great value for her community with the typology of a woman who is pure, peaceful, care giving, can reproduce, be submissive and respectful. Whether a woman fits within this projected typology, we will see that she is still vulnerable to stigma and/or SGBV.

"The humiliation, pain and terror inflicted by the rapist is meant to degrade not just the individual woman but also to strip the humanity from the larger group of which she is a part. The rape of one person is translated into an assault upon the community through the emphasis placed in every culture on women's sexual virtue: the shame of the rape humiliates the family and all those associated with the survivor. Combatants who rape in war often explicitly link their acts of

sexual violence to this broader social degradation.” (Human Rights Watch/Africa and Human Rights Watch Women’s Rights Project 1996).

Furthermore, women and girls are perceived as easier targets than men or boys. Several feminist scholars (such as Freedman 2016, Raven-Robert 2013, Enloe 2002, Baaz 2010, 2017) have argued that women are disproportionately impacted by conflict than men. One of the reasons argued for this consists in the position that women play in armed conflicts, notably that of civilians rather than soldiers or members of armed forces. Accordingly, they are less likely to be the ones in a physical position of strength compared to men, which make them more vulnerable to acts of rape.

B. The Three Converging Factors

In her study on “Understanding Sexual Violence in the Conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo”, Meger (2010) explains that there are three main converging factors to the prevalence of SGBV in the country. Hegemonic masculinities, particularly militarized masculinity converging with economic ambition and the general weakness of state.

1. Hegemonic Masculinity

The prevalence of SGBV in the DRC requires an explanation of the social context in which it is perpetrated and of the drivers of social norms that contribute to such acts. The social construct of masculinity influences the individual behaviours of men in the DRC. Feminist scholars have demonstrated that men’s gender identity in the DRC is deeply rooted in hegemonic masculinity. Members of the DRC armed forces found that most soldiers explained their perpetration of sexual violence by relying on ideals of masculinity and the “sexually potent male fighter”, which they explicitly contrasted with feminine qualities of ineptitude (perception of woman identity). These male members of armed groups, ideals of masculinities based on macho heterosexual norms. Through empirical research on the issue of SGBV in the DRC, Baaz and Stern (2017) reported from their interviews with male soldiers that men perceive libido as a positive virtue, which needs to be fulfilled through sex with women. This common response explains why soldiers deliberately choose to participate in the widespread abuse of women. According to interviews conducted by Baaz and Stern (2017), to some soldiers in the DRC, “a man cannot be without sex for any sustained period and it is ‘somewhat unavoidable’ that a man who is denied sex in any way will eventually take a woman by force”.

Sexual urges are not the only characteristics of hegemonic masculinity that can trigger recourse to SGBV. There is also the fact that social norms in many communities in the DRC perceive the role of men as breadwinners and financial providers. The results from the International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES 2014) recorded a major increase of men and women in the DRC expressing their challenges of not having enough means to provide for the family needs. Interviews found that men and women lack financial resources to meet the needs of their families. They struggle to provide food, pay tuition and secure other basic needs for their children over the period of the conflict. This sense of failure of not being able to be the provider for the family is a burden for most men that too often falls on the women. The economic challenges also reflect psychologically on men soldier who experience poverty due to irregular salaries, lack of benefit and inconsistent governance structures (Baaz 2009, Baker G et al. 2014).

In correlation with the ideal and social perception stated above, there is also a common expectation that men should have a high sex drive, be able to obtain multiple partners, to bestow gifts in exchange for sex, to be financially capable of purchasing one or multiple wives, and be able to have the physical, economic, and social power to protect their wives from other men (from Mechanic 2004 quoted in Merger 2010). Men are not the only ones that have such perceptions of masculinity. Some women (mother, sisters, and girlfriends) also expect men to fulfill their role as breadwinners and accept this gender role. Some women justify men's violent behaviours by the fact that men need sex and can express their manhood through violence (Baker G et al. 2004). Failure to achieve these social standards even in the mist of a complex socio-economic context result in a sense of lost of identity and value by men toward themselves. As result, feeling stronger by excreting violence and using sexual satisfaction as a coping mechanism contributes to the increased prevalence of SGBV in the country.

2. Economic ambition

2.1. The economic situation

The unprecedented economic hardship created by the conflict exacerbated the level of poverty, and limited employment opportunities, while the conflict itself left many men with serious injuries leading to handicaps. The effect of such hardship resulted in men being unable to provide basic needs for their family either because they are incapacitated and/or lack economic resources. Meanwhile, the social norms of masculinities constructed in communities in the DRC

and division of gender roles are maintained in rhetoric despite of the economic and social realities that pervade everyday life (Lwambo, D. 2013). As highlighted previously such gender roles for men in this context are impossible to maintain for the average citizen who is not a part of the society's elite such as economic actors, politicians, etc. The increased poverty, lack of employment and economic hardship leave men frustrated and desperate to find alternatives to uphold their sense of maleness.

2.2. The Political Economy of Conflict and the Use of SGBV

Using a feminist political economy approach, Meger (2015) argues that gender shapes the identities and functions of actors in the DRC conflict, not only at the individual level, but also at cultural and structural levels. The conflict added to the broader struggle for power and control over productive resources, which is part of the second factor that fuels SGBV.

In the case of the DRC, some acts of sexual violence are driven by economic ambition. Not only is there a political economy aspect to the prevalence of SGBV, but there is also the individual motivation to gain access to alternative sources of income through activities that lead to the use of violence, including SGBV. From a political economic standpoint, the illegal exploitation of mineral resources has been one of the causes for violence and economic ambition. The Global Witness found in a field research in 2008 and 2009 that the two main warring parties of the conflict were the most heavily involved in the illegal exploitation of minerals, notably the "Forces armées de la république démocratique du Congo" and the "Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda" (Meger, 2010). It was found that actors involved in illegal exploitation and abuse are the same involved in several forms of SGBV. Moreover, the area most affected by conflict and SGBV in the DRC witnessed the presence of several armed groups including the two cited by Meger.

Looking at the strategic use of SGBV, Meger (2010) underscores that there is an economic incentive for local groups and their international supporters to maintain chaos and instability for them to easily access mineral resources and exploit mining sites. Sexual violence is often used to gain or maintain control over the land and resources of a community by enforcing displacement. It is perpetrated to create social disorder and fear, which often result in the community confronting forced displacement as a resort to protect their lives and their families (Meger 2010). Furthermore, the exploitation of resources by many national actors, international states and non-

state actors contributed to the emergence and increase of shadow networks of exploitation of mineral resources. These networks are controlled by or are linked to armed groups or actors in armed groups sharing similar economic interests. Inevitably, violence has become an intrinsic part of their strategy to achieve their economic ambition since it provides competing factions with the cover and/or power necessary to access the valuable commodity. The rape of Congo's women in the pursuit of mineral wealth is then not simply about the economic greed of particular groups in the Congo but should be situated within "the global assembly line of capitalist production" (Meger 2015). There is a correlation between individual motives and structural influences driven by economic ambition when it comes to the prevalence of SGBV.

In the DRC army, there is a culture of inequitable resource distribution that encourages its members to seek extralegal income opportunities, to the extent of tolerating and being involved in SGBV. Members of the army are heavily involved in the illegal trade of minerals and often collaborate with other armed and non-armed groups (Baaz and stern 2010). Moreover, Østby and all. (2016) argues that some soldiers in assignments who are exposed to mineral resources mine sites and aware of the underground market rules by elites such as their commanders are likely to seek their own interest in participating in actions that would facilitate their access to economic resources whether it would be legal or not. This fact is reflected in reports that highlight that sexual violence are often accompanied with robbery and property extortion.

In addition to the general interest for mineral resources' exploitation on a larger scale, literature started to focus on the spread of sexual violence in areas where small-scale mining is part of the community's economic sustainability. Feminist scholars argue that women's economic empowerment in the informal economy of small-scale mining contributes to the risk of sexual assault among women. As Østby and all. (2016) mentioned, women working in the small-scale mining sector is an entry point for their financial autonomy and their ability to provide basic needs for their family. "Women may earn a living through small businesses, such as selling food and beverages and other supplies, as well as filling various support functions for miners, such as cooking and cleaning." The backlash is that the lack of employment opportunities for men has shifted the gender roles for some. Many women started to be the provider, which raised tensions in households. As explained by Østby and all. (2016), it challenges ideals of masculinity and traditional power structures in the home. Consequently, some men feel the need to impose their

sense of masculinity using violence and forcing women and girls in their surroundings to have sex with them.

The backlash is that the lack of employment opportunities for men has shifted for some the gender roles. Many women started to be the provider which raises tensions in households. As argued by Østby and all. (2016), it challenges ideals of masculinity and traditional power structures in the home. As consequences, some men feel the need to impose their sense of masculinity using violence and forcing their partner of other women and girls in having sex with them.

Although the level of sexual violence can be explained to some extent by poor living conditions according to some literature, this assumption is not unanimously shared. For example, a Human Rights Watch Report (2009) states that: “Poor living conditions of soldiers cannot justify any of the sexual crimes committed by the Congolese army. But efforts to improve access to necessities and look after soldier’s families ultimately contribute to civilian protection.”

3. General Weakness of the State

The ongoing conflict has further exacerbated instability, governance ineffectiveness, impunity, and gender and power inequalities. Conflicts have weakened the nearly unstable structure. The unreliable justice system, the high level of corruption in almost every public institution, and the abuse of power from political actors, and authorities contribute to exacerbate SGBV in the country. In addition to these institutional failures, the existing gender inequalities and inequities embedded in society and institutions are converging factors for the prevalence of different forms of SGBV against women.

The non effective governance has a big impact on the population, including women and girls. In the following are highlighted some of the repercussion of bad governance in the country for the people. One of the main arguments fuelling the prevalence of SGBV is the dependency on resources exploitation. For decades, the DRC depends on income derived from rents of natural resource deposits. The administration relied entirely on resource exploitation and failed to develop a domestic productive sector (Meger 2012). Over time, selfish ambitions from leaders in the political sphere and institutional levels exacerbated the level of corruption. This culture prevails over good governance aiming at a collective interest for developing the country. Meger noted that the legacy of self-interested state administration in Congo has led to the current

environment in which politics and economics in the country are mainly shaped by the exploitation of the country's vast supply of natural resources. This general weakness of states creates a lack of credibility from the government to care of the well-being or interest of the general population. The average citizen learned not to have any expectations from public institutions. Given the poor social conditions, frustration and tensions against the government are also present. Vlassenroot (2006) mentioned that violence among civilians resorted in response to the exclusion experienced from the government and a way to benefit from modernization and participate in the global order. Many young men have joined armed groups for these motivations.

Thus, the weakness in governance at almost all levels of public institutions, lack of accountability and continuous tensions between civilians and government weakened the relationship between armed forces and armed groups and the civilians. The constant distress and tensions promote resistance as a resilience mechanism against representative of the government who are soldier's usually in one hand. On another hand, members of armed forces feel the need to gain back respect with violence. Keeping in mind that both categories of men react based on their identity constructed in forms of masculinities that tolerate and use violence as dominating power.

In addition, the general culture of impunity has rendered SGBV an effective tool for inflicting violence and a way to avoid legal retribution. In one of her speeches, the US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton addressed how the pervasive and evil culture of impunity was leading to a cycle of violence and had devastating impacts long after the act was perpetrated. As she quoted: "In the arsenal of any armed group, this is the only weapon of mass destruction for which societies blame the victims, rather than the attackers. Although it is a war crime, it more often leads perpetrators to the corridors of power than to the cells of a prison. (Hilde F. Johnson, Co-chair of UN Action Against Sexual Violence in Conflict, 29 September 2009) (From Baaz and Stern 2017)".

Moreover, Meger (2010) mentioned the argument of Briggs (2007, 168) who suggest that the atmosphere of impunity has led to a belief among soldiers and civilian men that they can perpetrate crimes of sexual violence without consequence. The general environment of corruption and economic interest also affects the justice system. The personnel of the justice system to rely on bribery to earn their living. As the Human's rights report quoted, "In court

cases today, whoever has the money wins.” The culture of impunity makes women more vulnerable and contribute to a cycle of violence with no retaliation.

In instances where the perpetrator is charged for committing sexual violence, the level of bribery allows for release on bail and no follow up seems to be done to ensure proper measures of punishment. Courts frequently release alleged rapists on bail, under suspicious circumstances and in violation of applicable rules of penal procedures. The Mission de l’Organisation des Nations unies en République démocratique du Congo estimates that 80 per cent of alleged rapists in South Kivu are released on bail and never reappear in court (Ertürk 2008). “As those who commit crimes of sexual violence went unpunished, other potential abusers observed the tacit acceptance of such crimes and victims learned there was no point in lodging complaints” (Csete, J. & HRW. 2002).

III. The Effects of SGBV Perpetrated by Men on Women

Over the past two decades, increased attention has been brought to the issue of SGBV perpetrated in the DRC against women and girls. Most reports highlighted the pressing concerns of the impact of SGBV in the lives of women and community. SGBV resulted in humanitarian actions to help victims. Three main impacts are addressed to consequences that SGBV have on women and girls face.

A. The Health Impact

Alike many other conflict-affected States, SGBV repercussions on women and girls have long-lasting health impacts. The main documented consequences are HIV transmission, unwanted pregnancy, and Sexual Transmitted Infections (STIs) and negative effects on mental health. Furthermore, the consequences on women have ripple effect on the welfare of her community. According to Wakabi (2008), SGBV in the DRC is characterized by the brutality with which the attacks are carried out. Due to such brutality, women and girls suffer from damage to their reproductive system, resulting in multiple fistulas, as well as broken bones, severed limbs, and burns.

Young girls are also very impacted by SGBV. In fact, research has demonstrated that victims of rape in the DRC are mainly youth. The United Nations Population Fund recorded 15,996 new

cases of sexual violence in the DRC in 2008. From their report, sixty-five per cent of the victims were children and adolescents younger than 18 years, with ten per cent of all victims younger than 10 years old. When it comes to women and girls, the most common form of SGBV is rape. Several reports related to sexual violence in the DRC indicate that sexual violence is widespread and perpetrated among other atrocities in forms of gang rape, abduction for purposes of sexual slavery, forced participation of family members in rape, and mutilation of women's genitalia with knives and guns (Peterman et al. 2011).

The main health consequence is the severe injuries in genital organs with the most important being vaginal fistula. The mutilation and violence resorted to during rape causes the tearing of a hole in the tissue between the vagina and the rectum or the vagina and the bladder. Many women who suffer from vaginal fistulas consequently can no longer hold their urine or faeces. This injury has more impacts than just the visible wounds. It is the cause of social stigma which emphasizes the psychological harm to women and consequently to their relatives. The smell caused by urine and faeces remains and becomes subjects of humiliation for women victims. It causes automatic rejection and stigma (Peterman et al. 2011; Ertürk 2008). Fistula can lead to chronic medical problems, including ulcerations, kidney disease, and nerve damage in the legs if left untreated. The medical treatment is a surgical operation. However, due to barriers to accessing medical care, treatment is difficult to obtain. Local health centres lack the necessary equipment and trained medical staff. For example, the few existing specialized medical hospitals, such as the well-known Panzi Hospital (Bukavu, South Kivu) or the DOCS Clinic (Goma, North Kivu), are overwhelmed and geographically inaccessible for many women (Ertürk, 2008).

Another consequence is the level of sexual transmitted diseases. The most spread STD is the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). Experts from Human Rights Watch (2002) reported that an estimate of 60 per cent of regular troops and militiamen in Congo are infected with HIV/AIDS. The war exacerbates an existing HIV/AIDS crisis. Evidence of that spread has been well documented through reports that highlight the difficulty of providing care and treatment to women affected by HIV due to limited infrastructure, high costs of testing, and the fear of social stigma and desperation in front of impunity, and the fact that health care givers are mostly men. The bigger reluctance for victims to seek care and treatment is the fear of being rejected by loved ones, humiliated and condemned. Some are even rejected from their community because of their

potential to transmit HIV and STDs. The fear of rejection is one of the reasons why family members prevent women from seeking STI testing. For example, a woman who had been raped interviewed by Csete, J (2002) for Human Rights Watch testified that “her husband rejected her, saying he was afraid that she had contracted HIV and would contaminate him” (Csete, J. & HRW. 2002).

In addition to visible impacts on victims, many reports have documented the tremendous psychological consequences of such experience for women and even their closed ones. Among psychological consequences, include loss of the capacity to love and care, mistrust of orders, major mental health issues, such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). As stated by Bihabwa Mahano and Mbenda Kangami (2018), rape is described as the most stressful event an individual can experience in their lifetime and it would generate PTSD in 80 per cent of cases versus only 20 per cent on average for other types of trauma. In addition, women can have suicidal thoughts. Some survivors whose families were killed in the conflict stated that they felt guilty having survived while family members had died. According to Penn and Nardos (2003), “victims have a two times greater risk of qualifying for ten different psychiatric diagnoses, including major depression, alcohol abuse, drug abuse, obsessive-compulsive disorder, generalized anxiety disorder, eating disorders, multiple personality disorder, borderline personality syndrome, and post-traumatic, stress disorder”. Pratt’s report (2004) mentions that other related effects include “shock, a fear of injury or death that can be paralyzing, a sense of profound loss of control over one’s life. Women also experience persistent fears, avoidance of situations that trigger memories of the violation, profound feelings of shame, difficulty remembering events, intrusive thoughts of the abuse, decreased ability to respond to life generally, and difficulty re-establishing intimate relationships” (Swiss et al.1993). These accounts show some of the medical immediate effect that can be diagnosed at a glance. The effect of SGBV is far-reaching than physical health and some women carry lifetime health issues due experience of SGBV.

B. Social Impacts

As previously stated, women have the role of the bearer of life and are the essence of the community fabric in Congolese society. A local authority from South Kivu declared that: “to attack the wife of a Mushi is to break up his family, his community”. The importance of a

married man allows him to speak publicly in community decision-making gatherings, a position that a single man would not be able to have in such gatherings. (Bihabwa Mahano and Mbenda Kangami, 2018). However, war has impacted the way a woman's status is perceived, which in consequent is equivalent to land or loot (Brownmiller, 1975; Turshen, 2001) (Quoted in Meger 2012). For the average Congolese woman, sex holds an important moral value. Given the importance of a woman's chastity in the Congolese society, sexual intercourse becomes a great honour for the married woman in the objective of reproduction. In that sense, it is known that hindering the dignity of the woman by touching her in any sexual manner is assimilated with killing everything that constitutes her very existence as a person (Guinamard 2010 from Bihabwa Mahano and Mbenda Kangami, 2018). Any form of sexual encounter outside the private sphere is shunned. As Bihabwa Mahano and Mbenda Kangami (2018) say: "society's view of rape and its victims is one who judges, pushes away, blames and stigmatizes". They explain how some women victims are accused of being consenting and unfaithful.

Hence, sexual violence is perpetrated often with the intention of destroying social fabric, profaning the community and dishonouring the husband. Women victims suffer from rejection, shame, stigma, guilt and economic hardship, in addition to the ongoing physical and mental health consequences (Freedman 2017, Csete, J. & HRW. 2002). Women and girls become more vulnerable to any effect of the conflict, especially when they do not have support from their family and community.

A survey conducted by IMAGES (2014) reported results from surveyed men to assess their attitude toward family relatives who were victims of SGBV. The main reason for their stigma was described as the identity and role of women as mothers, child bearers and holder of the fabric of the community reproduction. There is a sense of stain and disgrace accompanying the subjects of a sexual act, despite it being forced upon. While the head of the household is on one hand powerless toward the situation of having his wife raped, on another hand feel he will still feel dishonoured. Protecting the women and girls of the household is seen as the responsibility of the man. Failing to do so has an impact on his reputation in the community. For example, a man in military camp in Goma expressed that if his wife were raped, he would reject her, stating that "a raped woman loses her values, and she affects a man's social image. That is why he has to chase her away" (Baker G et al. 2014).

In cases where the survivors are not rejected, they face daily verbal abuse and other forms of offences in the household and the community. Some women survivors of rape reported that when members of their family did not reject them, they do face daily violence because the culture does not tolerate raped women. Despite not being physically rejected from the household, their husband and family-in-law members could still see them as “useless and dirty” (Baker G et al. 2014).

The occasional victim that finds herself pregnant will in most cases experience increased discrimination and social stigma. In that case, the child most of the time will also carry this stigma. As Freedman (2017) requoted: “Children are likely to be rejected by the community and/or bullied. This places a burden on both mothers and children, who are stigmatized and often forced into poverty, with the risk that the children born of rape will end up as street children” (Liebling et al., 2012).

C. Economic Impacts

The conflict has exacerbated the already pre-existing economic instability in most of the communities of the DRC (Economic Commission of Africa, 2015). According to the Economic Commission of Africa (2015), the country was already under precarious welfare and poverty conditions resulting primarily from extreme inadequate funding of social sectors by the government, worsened by the progressive disengagement of the donor community. In the eastern region particularity, the conflict exacerbated the level of economic hardship, unemployment and poverty (Baker G et al. 2004). It is difficult to measure the full extent of the impact of conflicts on individuals and communities, especially on women survivors of SGBV. However, I have tried below to highlight the main elements from literature that demonstrated the relation between economic welfare, social norms and tendencies around SGBV.

The fear of being raped forces women to reduce their movement to go work or run errands, especially those that have witnessed cases of rape on their way to the market or daily activities. According to qualitative surveys conducted in the DRC, many women were raped in the field by armed groups, on the way to the market and to school. Furthermore, the study found that combatants who raped women also forced sex in their own partner relations.

In other scenarios, more women and girls are resorting to trading sex for food, shelter, or money in order to provide for themselves and their families. As the responsibility of providing nutrition

and food for the family lies heavily on the woman, this has been another trend observed because of the economic instability brought by the conflict. Interviews conducted in Goma (Csete, J. & HRW. 2002) pointed out that survival sex creates a context in which abusive sexual relationships become normal, and in which many men, whether civilian or combatant, perceive sex as a “service” easy to get with the use of pressure. The question of consent becomes blurry and that statement clearly demonstrates how gender and power contribute to the prevalence of SGBV. Out of these interviews, Catherine B. for example is a thirty-year-old widow and mother of eight explained that she could not dare to refuse men because she does not want to leave her children hungry. Another instance is the case of girls without money for school fees (Csete, J. & HRW. 2002). Although physical violence like in many instances of rape is not exercised, women do not participate in sexual intercourse willingly. Men suggesting money in exchange for sex are usually aware of their situation and are in position of power over the women. Therefore, use their influence to gain sexual favours.

CHAPTER 4: THE QUESTION OF SGBV AS A WEAPON OF WAR IN THE DRC

Often, SGBV is referred as a weapon of war in the DRC. Framing the issue as a weapon of war has been at the forefront of discussions, talks and research concerning the conflicts in the DRC and its high prevalence of diverse forms of gender-based violence. It is so widespread that the use of SGBV as a weapon of war becomes subject to little critical analyses. It is more considered as an assumption rather than a question. This is due to the pervasiveness and brutality with which rape is perpetrated. Most scholars worked on making analysis and arguments about the different element that makes SGBV an effective weapon of war but gender scholars Maria Eriksson Baaz and Maria Stern (2017) reflected on this dominant framing from a critical standpoint.

Why the discourse?

Framing the issue of SGBV as a weapon of war has been at the forefront of discussions, talks and research concerning the conflicts in the DRC and its high prevalence of diverse forms of gender-based violence. This thought is so widespread that rape as a weapon tends to be an assumption rather than a question. This is due to the pervasiveness and brutality with which rape

is perpetrated. Most scholars worked on making analysis and arguments about the different elements that make SGBV an effective weapon of war, but gender scholars Maria Eriksson Baaz and Maria Stern (2017) reflected on this dominant framing from a critical standpoint.

In order to better, approach SGBV in development and humanitarian policies and take actions, understanding the limits in existing policies will help inform better policies and actions and promote a holistic approach to tackling the issue. Before getting in an in-depth analysis, it is crucial to underscore that outlining the discourses around SGBV as a weapon of war does not undermine in any way the gravity and importance of the research already produced. In alignment to the ongoing battle to have sexual violence legally decreed as a crime against humanity and as a war crime, the conceptualization of SGBV as a weapon of war has been crucial to move away from the general idea of rape as a tragic but inevitable outcome of war. Such views tolerate the rationale of sexual violence as an outcome of men's sexuality in a climate of warring that lacks "normal" societal controls (Baaz and Stern 2010).

I. Understanding the Statement of SGBV as a Weapon of War

It is important to acknowledge that in the case of the DRC, some men have been threatened to use violence, including sexual violence on their wife or daughter. This is not what is referred to in the paper. We are specifically addressing the case of perpetrators having the intention to harm their victim. The main rationale raised in literature for qualifying SGBV is that it is used with the intention to create forced displacement, to humiliate and weaken the community foundation, and break the social fabric. Perpetrators are aware of the long-lasting and underlying harm it creates and seems to find it functional.

SGBV is at its core an obvious act of violence. Moreover, Meger (2011) defines violence as "a coercive mechanism by which to exert or enforce one's power, making power the end for which violence is one of the means". In that line of thought, she explains that sexual violence becomes a form of political violence when it is used as a means of affecting a change in social relations or destabilizing existing structures (Meger, 2011). Thus, its use as a means for political or economic ambition makes of sexual violence an instrument.

As well, the gendered story behind the prevalence of SGBV addressed in previous chapters demonstrates how gender plays a critical role for understanding SGBV in the DRC. The reasons

why women are targeted enlightened our understanding as to why SGBV is often used and represented as a weapon of war. The role of gender and power relation clearly aligns with Baaz and Stern's explanation of the sexed story describing the essentialist concept of men being defined by their natural desires and the gendered story that addresses how gender roles shape individuals and are embedded in social norms and behaviour, which at the macro level results in violence, including SGBV to some degree. Chiefly, "the conceptualizations of sexual violence as a weapon of war make sense because rape is understood as a gendered act, effective precisely because it is gendered" as Baaz and Stern (2017) well summarized. The explanation of SGBV an inevitable outcome of war based on an essentialist concept of men being defined by their natural desires and committing forms of SGBV by lack of sexual satisfaction opportunities has been discussed previously in this paper and reveals the importance of considering sex and gender in the discourse of SGBV.

II. Discourses around the Question of SGBV as a Weapon of War

Rape is described as a "weapon", "strategy" or "tactic" of war considering its strategic, systemic, intentional use.

Drawing from research from sociology of violence and the military and research in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), as well as research material from other conflicts/post-conflict settings, Baaz and Stern (2017) argued that the strategic aspect of sexual violence might vary based on military contexts. Thus, should not be generalized in all conflict settings where SGBV is prevalent. In the case of the DRC, they argue that the consequences on the bodies of women as targets are tangible and real without a doubt. However, the meanings attached to these violent actions and the interpretations of their origins, consequences and their potential tactical aspect may vary depending on discursive contexts. As Wood (2009) explains, depending on the goals of the armed groups, the strategic and non-strategic aspect of SGBV is perceived differently. Armed groups driven the long-term goals of governing civilians are less likely to tolerate or encourage mass rape of their future constituency since that will have a negative impact on gaining support and legitimacy (quoted from Baaz and Stern 2017). Moreover, the rationale for strategic use of SGBV and its functionality to achieve economic ambition poses a problem. Indeed, some commanders and leaders of armed groups can perceive the perpetration

of any form of SGBV by their members as counterproductive. For example, Baaz and Stern (2017) explain that in the case of resource exploitation, effective resource extraction necessitates in many cases to establish good relations with local authorities and communities, something that is difficult to create and maintain with high levels of abuses. The latter implies that from a long-term standpoint, armed groups that aim to exploit resources might use co-operation and some sort of diplomacy to maintain a good influence on local authorities in order to continue their activities of exploitation. Thus, the army may act in an opportunistic manner, but it does not mean that their aim is aided by inflicting systematically violence. Nevertheless, there are some members of the army who do use violence to push forward their economic agendas. Another point that nuances the argument of strategic aim behind SGBV. According to Weinstein (2007), in cases where motives are primarily ideological and units depend on civilian support for survival and sustainability, the incentive structures work toward restraining violence against civilians. On the contrary, armed groups with opportunistic motives, because of the poor availability of resources, are less dependent on civilian support and they are thereby assumed to lack the motivation to maintain cooperative and nonviolent relations with civilians. According to Weinstein (2007), they are less likely to engage in longer-term strategies of social mobilization since “the marginal benefits of moving quickly are much higher in resource-rich environments” (from Baaz and Stern 2017).

I would argue that this argument makes the assumption that armed groups or commanders care for the welfare or the opinion of the local authorities and civilians. In the context of the DRC, most armed groups are already in position of power and authority. Meaning, they are predisposed for using force and violence. Their masculinity has been constructed on the basis of domination. Influenced by gender stereotypes, they perceive peacefulness or calmness as feminine behaviours. They are clearly aware of their position of power and usually misuse of it. This is so common that it has become the image of soldiers and any representative of law or the government instead of being perceived as protectors of civilians. Furthermore, the culture of impunity in war reinforces their unwillingness to promote co-operation. Nonetheless, the argument that soldiers and/or rapist perceive themselves as virile hetero macho individuals when perpetrating SGBV can be too idealistic.

Another contested argument in the discourse of SGBV as a weapon of war is the fact that most literature assumes that military institutions operate in an orderly and efficient way. Several studies in conflict-affected regions argue that the fact that military commanders use SGBV strategically and prompt soldiers to use rape as a tool explain the prevalence and pervasiveness of rape in contexts of conflicts (cf. Seifert 1996; Skjelsbaek 2001) (from Baaz and Stern 2017). There is no doubt that this is the case in some instances. However, Baaz and Stern (2010) argue that this is not always the case in the DRC. Truly, the military has difficulties to embody discipline and control over its own soldiers and structure of command. Soldiers tend to be portrayed as disciplined trainees that willingly abide to the chain of command with no resistance, which is geared toward moulding reliable masculinized killers (and rapists). Moreover, Grossman (2009) argues that there is a tendency in this literature to downplay the agency of soldiers themselves, who are not simply passive recipients of training, but engage in various forms of coping strategies and resistance (quoted in Baaz and stern 2017).

This is partly due to the armed force being situated within the general political and economic context of the DRC, as well as in the global political economy as seen in the previous section of the analysis. Not only the reintegration process of diverse armed groups with their background of combatants in national armies was incomplete and very inefficient, but there is also a competition of resources within the army. There is a tendency in armed forces to seek deployment in regions where natural resources are exploited. The definition of a “good deployment area” is clearly linked to how lucrative the area is in terms of potential control over and access to resources (Baaz and stern 2010).

In addition, Soeters et al. (2006) explain that the military aims to be (in Goffman’s term) a “total institution” and recruits are supposed to go through a process of “degradation or ‘mortification’, i.e. a process of deconstruction of their civilian status”. After that, “having become receptive to new values, the cadet-officers are ‘rebuilt’, i.e. given a new identity” (quoted in Baaz and stern 2017). Hence, great effort is directed to reach that goal. Despite some effort engaged in the DRC to implement the process of demobilization, disarmament and reintegration strategies, the aspired-to ideals are never fully attained. This “incompleteness” is often not sufficiently recognized in the Weapon of War discourse, or in feminist research on militarization more generally (Grossman 2009).

Another central point is that the complexity of war requires an understanding of underlying causes of SGBV in the DRC. Among the many justifications (actual state of tensions, the psychological effect of the protracted conflict on men and women, notably soldiers) that drive the prevalence of SGBV, the increased use of drugs and alcohol, including in combat situations as a coping mechanism is one of them. Baaz and Stern (2010) found that soldiers themselves attribute the act of sexual violence to their state of insobriety, drugged in combination with other frustrations and the warring context. Even though the use of alcohol or other drugs should not be seen as a cause of sexual violence, it increases the likelihood of such abuse if the context is prone to sexual violence. Thus, the perpetration of SGBV even when committed by members of armed groups or soldiers is not always motivated by the use of SGBV as a weapon of war, since combatants often don't follow a chain of command and aren't deemed functional in military that have long-term ambitions.

Moreover, Baaz and Stern (2017) argue that the discourse of SGBV as a weapon of war ought to pay attention to the causes that fuel violence. By looking at the micro dynamics of war, they advance the essential, the concept of forward panic and spirals of violence. Randall Collins (2008) conducted an in-depth analysis of perpetrators' experiences of violence and explains that forward panic is an "emotional flow that can arise in circumstances of intense tension or fear and is an emotional state that feeds a frenzy of excessive and non-utilitarian violence". Moreover, Baaz and Stern (2017) reported that many soldiers talk about the "spirit and craziness of war" and the use of drugs as explanations for the violence committed against civilian populations. For example, one captain quoted that: "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' (Baaz and Stern 2017:83). The use of drugs and alcohol to drawn experience, trauma and predispose themselves to be at the front line disrupted the behaviours of soldiers. That discourse challenges the notion of intentionally in the argument of SGBV as a weapon of war. The notion of forward panic fits perfectly within the context of the conflict in the DRC and can obviously find ground as a root cause for the prevalence of SGBV. Moreover, among the micro dynamics is the sentiment of disrespect from civilians to soldiers. Civilians have a negative image of military personnel because of the long history of abuse perpetrated by them (dating back to the colonial era).

Indeed, from the civilian perspective, soldiers reflect the image of corruption, greediness and an opportunistic government who cares less of its citizens. Soldiers on their part suffer low status and sentiments of being disrespected by civilians and undervalued by their own military (which is connected to low salaries, poor living conditions and the lack of non-material rewards, e.g., medals, as well as nationalist propaganda in support of the armed forces). The backlash of such tension's results in soldiers being prone to violence against civilians because they feel as if civilians should owe them respect. Baaz and Stern (2017) noted that in several testimonies, 'violence against civilians was clearly expressed as a manifestation of a "need to put them in their place", "show them a lesson" and "punish" them. For example, one corporal explained: "The civilians don't respect us. They see us as useless people/losers [batu ya pamba]. Because we don't have anything. We have to beg from them, so they see us as losers"' (Baaz and Stern 2017:81). There is a nesting of diverse and multiple factors like the bad governance issue that is reflected in military as well, and the inequitable distribution of the army's own resources, such as salaries, rations.

It becomes evident that the micro dynamics play an important role in fuelling violence, including SGBV. The aforementioned gender dimension behind the issue combined with the micro-dynamics of war lead us to understand that SGBV is a privileged form of violence. The above arguments can therefore challenge the assumption that SGBV is systematically used as a weapon of war because there are many other factors that indirectly exacerbate violence, especially SGBV.

Another relevant element noted in the literature review is the high prevalence of intimate partner violence (IPV) and non-combatant rape must be considered in this sphere. The interviews conducted by Baker G et al. (2004) demonstrated that intimate partner violence is among the highest forms of SGBV. Twenty-six per cent of the men interviewed reported that they have forced women to have sex and sixty-six per cent of women reported that either partner or non-partner has forced them. Rape and sexual violence are commonly associated with war and conflict in the minds of women and men (from an interview in Goma).

To conclude, there is combination of external factors that creates an environment prone to violence. Among the factors, the social norms, the visible consequences of the protracted conflicts, the unstable and bad governance, impunity, the tensions between civilians and armed

groups, the local tensions, poverty, the economic inequalities, the rise of illegal exploitation of minerals. Beyond that, the inner state of the perpetrators, such as identity struggles (gender, in their role of soldiers and/or combatants), bad feelings, psychological trauma and health, social constraints lead to the prevalence of SGBV.

It is interesting how common rationale of SGBV as a weapon of war reinforces that it is often used to humiliate, destabilize society and the social fabric. Simultaneously, the latter section shows that motives contributing to violence involve sentiments of being undervalued, disrespected, mistreated and misunderstood.

From both parties, the essential welfare is clearly not met. The repercussion of so many socio-economic factors intertwined with rigid social norms and unachievable gender roles, compounded with the environment of conflict and continuous instability and insecurity are at the core of the violence, including SGBV.

Throughout their work, Baaz and Stern make clear that they do not in any way contest the fact that SGBV can be a weapon of war. Evidence has demonstrated that in some cases, SGBV is used effectively with an intentional and functional motive as a weapon of war. However, having a generalized assumption would not benefit an in-depth analysis of the issue of SGBV in the specific context of the DRC. Having a critical view of the discourse allows highlighting limits and gaps in existing studies. Therefore, assessing better how improvement can be made. The understanding here is that Baaz and Stern (2017) counterargument includes many relevant points that would help to address SGBV in a more complete way and help to make sustainable development programming to tackle SGBV. The importance is to understand root cause based on the context and have all parties' perspectives. The interdisciplinary approach used by the scholars Baaz and Stern (2017, 2010) is key in a quest to unpack the issue of SGBV, especially the question of its use as a weapon of war. Considering a complementary approach from different practitioners' views is important in order to consider the plural dimensions of SGBV and consequently, any practical implementation that can be produced from such analysis. The view from authors living and experiencing the context of conflict and all dimensions portrayed in the studies would add value to the argument. The understanding with Baaz and Stern's (2017) counterarguments includes many relevant points that would help address SGBV with all its complexities and help design sustainable development programming to tackle SGBV.

PART III: MEN AND MASCULINITIES IN THE WARRING CONTEXT OF THE DRC

CHAPTER 5: THE ROLE OF MEN AND MASCULINITIES IN THE PREVALENCE OF SGBV

Gendered identities are a key determinant in a person's life and inform his or her actions, decisions, and interactions with others. The previous section demonstrated the link between hegemonic masculinity and the prevalence of SGBV. Butler (2008) presented identities as socially constructed through interaction with one's environment such as people, places, and materials. There is a consensus that identity is the substance of personhood (from Trenholm et al. 2012).

In order to have a better comprehension of masculinities as a construction of gender identity, specifically in the form that enables violence and promotes expression of maleness through violence against women, we aim to explore the main points that shape masculinities of male perpetrators or those who tolerate SGBV in the Congolese warring context. According to Connell (1992), hegemonic masculinity is an idealized image of the aggressive, risk taker, independent, sexually virile, unemotionally rational, and heterosexual man. Violence is a prominent trait in hegemonic masculinity, which the military system has socialized and then exploited (Meger 2012).

I. Militarized Masculinity

Masculinity becomes militarized when characteristically military practices expand into the civilian arena and become associated with popular conceptions of masculinity's (Sjoberg & Via 2010) (from Meger 2012). With the long-lasting series of conflicts and the multiplicity of armed groups, the concept of militarized masculinity has taken root in Congolese society and greatly pervaded the daily lives of people. Although military cultures manifest differently, for the most part they involve hierarchies, male exclusivity and a sense of entitlement, which are embedded in patriarchal ideologies (Yuval-Davis 2004; Farwell 2004).

Militarized masculinities are part of the factors leading to the perverseness of SGBV. However, its influence does not systematically relate to SGBV as a weapon of war. As previously stated, condition and circumstances need to be considered when assessing SGBV as a weapon of war.

Militarized masculinity is a conception of masculinity that legitimizes the use of violence but is not systematically triggered by a strategic and political motivation. The distinction between the constructions of such masculinity as a social construct helps to understand the role of men and masculinities without automatically tying the issue to a weapon of war.

In comparison, “feminine serves as the opposing entity in the binary pair of masculine—feminine, thus working as contradictory to the apparently innate masculinity of the military” (Pin-Fat and Stern 2005). The militarization of masculinity in the Congo has resulted in an exacerbation of gender role distinctions, mainly women’s subordination to men. To mold effectively whoever is considered a soldier, the military employs the idea of “femininity” as the antithesis of what it means to be a man (Hooper, 2001:43) (quoted from Meger 2012). How masculinity is constructed can differ, as masculinities are fluid and evolve over time and context. For example, there are urban and rural versions of manhood, and some directly or indirectly related to army or militarized contexts. Others can be associated with farming or cattle herding (Baker and Ricardo 2005).

The comprehension of the construction of masculinity requires recognizing that women often share the same perception of manhood as men and boys, which is rooted in social norms and culture outside the conflict. Women co-create masculinities through the expectation they put on men. As Gary B. and Ricardo’s (2005) study underscored, whether they are in men’s lives as mothers, aunts, sisters, friends, sexual partners, or teachers, women are in direct contact with boys and convey messages about gender norms directly and indirectly. For example, for some women, they perceive men as breadwinners and expect them to hold their role as such even if the women are working (Lwambo, D. 2013). In Congolese society, most men at the front lines of war zones in the DRC are young (up to 40 years old roughly).

Ultimately, many men chose to participate actively to the conflict through enrollment in armed forces or militias because they seek better living conditions and/or aspire to an ideal of what a combatant represents. The image of combatants as seen in western movies that portrays machismo, strength and power combined with patriarchal norms and images of wealth reflected for combatants are part of what shape perceptions of masculinity. This portrays militarized masculinity in conjunction with existing social norms, and a culture of manhood. They see

themselves as having a set of attributes simply because they are in a male dominant environment that represents authority and power and implies respect.

Going back to the chief social requirement for being a man, masculinity is constructed on ideologies that link violence, sexual performance, and financial independence with power. The feeling of empowerment is central to achieving masculinity and the main reason that men become a soldier.

According to Baker and Ricardo (2005), young men's participation in conflict and use of violence becomes for them a way to feel empowered. It is a means to live up to their perception of masculinity in a context where they do not have other means to achieve it. As we already mentioned, financial independence is a perception of manhood and influences the construction of masculinity in the DRC. Failures to achieve financial independence due to the context has led some men to join militia or armed groups.

Although research demonstrates that the way new recruits expect to be treated when enrolling in armed groups is different from the reality they experience once actively participating in the armed group. Ethnography research conducted by Trenholm et al. (2012) demonstrated that "poverty was reported as influential for enlisting in official and unofficial armies and that the inherent hardships of army life become evident only after entering". A quote shows the importance of the army as a job and an income," . . . in the army (government) they also have things which are very good . . . such as when they have received money . . . when a person is a soldier, you can see that it is a better life than what you are living. (pp., 211)."

Another point is the sense of power men experience through having access to a gun. Being a soldier gives the ability and opportunity to use violence, and to access a weapon. Keeping in mind the discourse depicted in the "SGBV as a weapon of war" section on how armed groups are poorly governed. Thus, soldiers may not abide by institutional requirements and still use their guns in communities. As soldiers refer to the warring context as the "craziness of war", having a weapon combined with a level of frustration and all the other micro dynamics, increases the risk of executing violence. Owning a gun systemically puts soldiers in a position of power. A boy soldier from Trenholm et al. (2012) ethnographic study states, "the soldier likes to walk, to be seen, to intimidate civilians, believing that his gun can solve everything (pg. 214)". Having a gun demonstrates a sense of authority. Moreover, soldiers view themselves as different

from other people. They feel and identify themselves as more powerful than civilians (Trenholm et al. 2012).

The perception of empowerment is strongly related to socialization and learned behaviours. Baumeister (1989) relates behaviour to the subjective perceptions, expectations, occasions, and dispositions of the actor and these are mediated by culture and environment. People organize their cognition and perception of reality in terms of cultural meanings and values ascribed to them, and these influence their responses (behaviour), which can be violent or nonviolent depending on how we perceive the situation (from Iseke 2012).

The warring context promotes the idea that use of violence is part of a demonstration of strength. Men are expected to live up to ideologies that reflect manhood as it aligns with militarized masculinities. They feel the need to be accepted and a part of the community that they live in. Their self-perceived failure to achieve what they think is expected from them has repercussions for their self-worth. The resilience mechanisms and coping for such failures in their identity translate to the need to impose, dominate and satisfy their sexual urges. For example, boys in the most brutal of armed insurgencies are recognized as “big men” when they lose control in a situation and are able to exert violence on those around them. Some observers of young male combatants in West and Central Africa suggest that the violence looks like a performance of young men acting out a violent version of manhood, seeking to inflict fear and to make their presence known before a terrified audience (Baker and Ricardo 2005).

Moreover, the perception of being a good soldier is tied to successfully passing cultural and social initiation rituals. Although these rituals are not based on structural requirements, they are part of cultural and social norms. In some instances, this initiation is mostly traumatic, involving the forced use of violence. Non-compliance to these rituals systematically hinders their acceptance in the group. This form of exclusion aligns with the form of hegemonic masculinities that diminish any masculinity that does not comply with the perception of dominance and use of violence. In that setting, rape and any form of sexual violence has been a way of creating a masculine bonding between men and boys in armed groups, especially when there are many conscripts in these groups who need to be initiated into the group (Amnesty International, 2004) (from Freedman 2017).

Further, men attested through interviews conducted by Trenholm et al. (2012) that sexual violence was a way of bolstering confidence, quelling anxiety and restoring their power in times of fear and uncertainty. This sense of satisfaction and way to reinforce their ego and sense of having power is the result of perceptions and constructions of militarized masculinities, related to external factors that fuel the use of violence and sexual violence in the warring context. Through the act of rape, many key components of both the provider and the fighter are realized: the sexual relief vital for the fighter is achieved, and the dominance and the heterosexuality of the provider is experienced, however, temporarily (Eriksson Baaz & Stern, 2009). Baaz and Stern (2018) confirm through their work on SGBV in the DRC that men's notions of what it means to be a male identity in the DRC is assimilated to the dominant and generalized notion of military masculinity.

Similarly, the association of masculinity with sexual potency is even more present in socialization in the military. For example, gang rape has been used as a bonding mechanism between hyper masculine groups of men—from sporting groups and fraternities through military units—because it cements loyalty and coherence and reinforced norms of hegemonic masculinity (Goldstein, 2001) (from Meger 2012).

II. Idealistic Versus Reality

As Lerone Bennett said, “Men act out of their images, they respond, not to the situation, but to the situation transformed by the images they carry in their minds. In short, they respond . . . to the ideas, they have of themselves in the situation” (Chinweizu, 1987). Men shape their behaviours according to social norms, learned behaviours and expected gender roles. Actions they take and decisions they make are driven by an expectation of gaining acceptance, respect and being valued and recognized in their identity as good men. Through Baaz and Stern (2018) work in the DRC, they highlighted the dissonance there is between the perception of a good soldier in the DRC and the lived reality expressed by soldiers. The ideal militarized masculinity that came from the testimonies was not based on an aspiration of heroism in combat. Rather than representing themselves as (aspiring to be) heroic and brave, men talked about their experience of the horrors of combat, of their fears, and how they needed to drink or take drugs to calm their anxieties (Eriksson Baaz and Stern 2013).

A nuance to make in men's perception of ideal masculinity is the influence of cultural norms. Portraying strength and sexual prowess is also linked to a responsibility to use strength and virility responsibly. As heads of the household or heads to be, Congolese men expect submission from members of the community, specifically from women. The culture, however, suggests that they should behave in non-violent ways toward household and community members, be responsible, good negotiators and problem solvers. Nonetheless, not all were willing or able to put them into practice, as they are related to a number of other conditions, such as physical aptitude, ability to procreate, access to economic resources, knowledge and skills, influence, and decision-making power (Lwambo 2013).

The reality of economic hardship, stressful environments along with trauma and mental health issues caused by the conflict does not permit the ideal context for the idealistic gender ideologies to be manifested by men and women. As we discussed earlier, the changing context of war did not adjust the existing social expectations and rigid gender roles. Men also see success as occupying a more secure position in the army. Instead of being at the front line, they value the administrative positions. Indeed, the soldiers overwhelmingly spoke of administration—working behind a desk—as the ultimately desirable position. Hence, men also relate their sense of failure to meet their responsibility as protectors and providers for their family. When asked about their perception of a good soldier, they explained that discipline not only means to follow orders, but also be a good protector of civilian men and women (Baaz and Stern 2018).

It appears that there is a conflict of identities since men can perceive ideal manhood, as being the protector and provider but at the same time as being entitled to respect and the subordination of others. A man can portray violence but at the same time express powerlessness and vulnerability.

In result, many soldiers struggle with self-worth because of not being able to achieve the requirements for manhood despite their efforts. This sense of failure to be what they perceive as being good and valued is damaging to their identities and leads in turn to violent or abusive behaviour.

They justify the use of violence as a coping mechanism for the challenges they face because of the consequences of war. They have “abdicated responsibility for their actions, and blamed both their superiors and their situation for the violence they committed. Yet, such abdication also coexisted with instances of self-criticism, guilt, and responsibility, as well as

difficult moral self-reflection (Eriksson Baaz and Stern 2009)”. This statement poses a problem of agency and individual responsibility. Is the later justification relevant to understand the action of committing sexual violence? I believe that this rational require to discuss the question of responsibility and who must be held accountable for considering the situation of men and the social construct around their masculinity. Response measures to tackle SGBV could look at the situation of the perpetrator while ensuring that responsibility and agency for their actions are taken in account.

III. Implications in Policy Making and Programming

The paper so far argued of the relation between social construction of masculinities and femininities, and the working of gender roles and its influence on the prevalence of SGBV in the DRC. It also underscored the relation between militarized masculinity and violence against civilians, especially women. I recognize from the latter analysis that gender inequalities are central to the issue of SGBV, and that these inequalities are imbricated in complex and multifaceted socio-economic issues. In addition, the construction of gender roles based on ideal of masculinities and femininities have an impact on gender relations in the society. Men and masculinities are important factors to consider when trying to understand the issue of SGBV against women. Since they play a key role in the prevalence of SGBV, it is obvious that their consideration in tackling it is necessary.

Many scholars are paying attention to masculinities and engaging men and boys for a thorough analysis of SGBV. For example, the work of scholars such as Jane Parpart, Zalewski, and specifically in the DRC, Jane Freedman, Maria Stern, Erickson Baaz, Desiree Lwambo, and Meger has contributed immensely to understand the relation between gender and power, masculinities and SGBV. Included in these studies are recommendations that serve as a guide for implementation. Academic study and research can form the basis for a rationale that informs policymaking and development programming.

In development programs, efforts had already started around the late 1980s to shed light on the limitations in the study of gender inequalities in programming. The focus is turning from women to gender, with its emphasis on the social construction of norms and practices around masculinity and femininity and their impact on gendered opportunities and relations. The gradual shift from

women to gender gave an entry point for bringing men and masculinities into development discourse and practice (Parpart, 2015). More than that, the welfare of men themselves and dichotomy of women being always the victims and men only the perpetrators is changing based on studies. The dominant idea of men as a perpetrator and thus, not paying too much attention to them, is shifting. This shift is allowing a holistic reflection on the issue of SGBV by looking at how the living conditions of men can affect their behaviour.

One of the principal international policies established that outline the issue of SGBV in the context of conflict affected states is the women, peace and security framework. The main resolution from the United national security council resolution (UNSCR) 1325 has been central to the work against SGBV in conflict affect contexts. In the history of engaging men and boys, the Beijing declaration played a role in proposing the resolution 2106, which enlist men and boys in the effort to combat all forms of violence against women. To that resolution was followed the 2242 one in 2015, which reiterated ‘the important engagement by men and boys as partners in promoting women’s participation in the prevention and resolution of armed conflict, peacebuilding and post-conflict situations. The rare reference of men and addressing masculinities as part of implementing the resolutions in the women, peace and security agenda (Washington DC: United States Institute for Peace, 2013).

Although these are noticeable progress towards addressing SGBV and Women, peace and Security, some gaps have been subject to discussion from a gender perspective of the resolution 1325. In the UNSCR 1325, very little attention has been paid to the role of men or masculinities in causing SGBV and all related inequalities. The Resolution focuses on women’s sexual vulnerability, leaving out men; the subjects who were the main source of danger to women. It noted women’s absence from significant positions, not the overwhelming presence of men in places of power (Cynthia Cockburn, 2003). While the women, peace and security agenda ought to remain its focus on women and the disproportional impact of violence and conflict on them and indirectly on the society depending on the context, not paying proper attention to the causes and how to mitigate further risk pauses concerns in making sure that programs are sustainable. As Duriesmith (2017) argues, such absence and imprecision in the language presented in the resolution has consequently repercussion on the expected outcome of the agenda which hopes to

engage men in achieving its goals, without first having established their relationship to violence or oppression.

The approach of engaging men and boys has been taken on by some pro feminism organizations. International and local organizations (governmental and non-governmental) are also starting to acknowledge how crucial it is to understand the diverse and complex dynamics of gender relations, gender ideologies, and masculinities in the DRC. They often advocate for policy and frameworks of implementation that take in account the underlying causes and other related consequences of SGBV. Some of the non-governmental organization and development agencies have started to recognize the role socialization plays in shaping and responding to traditional patriarchal masculine ideals and expectations (Parpart, 2012). For example, MenEngage alliance, the white ribbon campaign, and Promundo work at the grassroots level for research and advocacy toward reducing poverty and engaging men and boys in gender equalities.

We understand that men act how they act and tolerate SGBV based on several factors that sometimes relate to their own struggles. This informs policy and programming and can be a way to address social norms programming. However, the comprehension of challenges that men face and its repercussion for their behaviours does not undermine the gravity of committing SGBV. Responsibility for the perpetration of SGBV remains. A human right approach ought to be taken even for the perpetrator, but legal measures ought to be enforced for both victim and perpetrators.

While working with men and boys and trying to convince them to contribute to gender equality, it is important to reflect on the specific issues that relate to the challenges that men and boys faces, which lead to violent behaviour and need to be seriously explored. A human rights-based approach to improve gender equality (meaning equality and opportunity for women and men) will help shape social norms for the whole society, as we keep in mind that construction of masculinities includes everyone in society. The 1995 Beijing conference reinforced this shift and adopted a plan of action stating that “men and women should share power and responsibility and work in partnership toward gender equality, especially in the areas of education, socialization of children, childcare and housework, sexual health, gender-based violence, and the establishment of more equitable work—life balance for both sexes” (Parpart 2012).

IV. General Recommendation

The complexity of the violence in the DRC exacerbated the existing social and economic issues. Predominantly, the gender and power inequalities and the social issues related to gender norms and rigid gender roles for men and women exacerbated with the conflicts. As we previously noted, increased efforts are being established to fight SGBV in the country. The growing effort to understand the implications of masculinities and all interrelated factors of SGBV and the inclusion of men and boys in the equation would help inform better implementation of initiatives aiming at tackling the issue. At the institutional level, effort ought to be taken at all levels and involve all stakeholders to reinforce accountability. Among possible actions could be supporting and engaging effort to promote better governance to enforce the implementation of punitive measures, fight against corruption, promote a better legal system, advocate for responsible use of violence and SGBV in the military system and completing disarmament demobilization and reintegration, fight against inequitable distributions of resources, and illegal exploitation of minerals.

Moreover, working to implement programs in community engagement at the individual level, with community leaders and local authorities would be useful to assess and contribute to reduce social issues at the grassroots level, while respecting the cultural and local authorities in the community. For example, promoting a general engagement and citizenship (by making sure there is meaningful participation of women and men) toward good governance. Work on proposing policies for local and regional authorities that advocate for the positive gender norms that refrain from using violence. At the community level, prioritizing support on grassroots women's organization, human right organization promoting positive masculinities. For example, listen actors involved (men, women, community leaders, existing activists). Taking an approach to contribute to better social norms with imposing the western approach and culture. Building on good norms and cultural values promoting the idea of men being protectors and promoting engagement of men and boys by explaining impact for their family.

PART IV: CONCLUSION

As this study illustrates, SGBV in the DRC is the result of many interconnected factors. It has devastating impacts for all of society; however, the issue disproportionately affects women and girls. Hegemonic models of masculinities play a key role in the prevalence of SGBV.

Chapter 1 provided an overview of the context and the history of conflict in the DRC. It was essential to have a contextual analysis of the issue and its linkage with the series of protracted conflicts. We understood that the DRC faces complex political challenges despite the natural resources it holds. Chapter 2 provided background on the issue of SGBV, its prevalence and the devastating effect it has on women. The main converging factors for such prevalence and underlying causes that contributed to the increase of SGBV are so embedded in society and complex that each issue cannot be analyzed in silos. Chapter 3 argued that we should question our assumption that SGBV is a weapon of war. Considering SGBV as a weapon of war is not a general conception for any instances of sexual violence that occurs against women by a soldier or member of militia. Although SGBV occurs in the context of conflicts and is often perpetrated by soldiers, the motives behind the act are sometimes not related to a strategic means. On chapter 4, I focused on men and masculinities to outline the perceived gender identities that lead to perpetration of SGBV, which allowed us to understand better the reality of men and the importance of considering the construction of masculinity and the underlying causes of the conflict that contributed to SGBV. Chapter 5 provided a brief reflection on policymaking and programming implications of our analysis in order to translate the academic findings into concrete actions.

This study reinforces the belief that tackling SGBV by focusing solely on women is not sufficient. A better approach that promotes the inclusion of men and masculinities in the equation and as strategies of prevention could have a bigger and lasting effect. Considering the implication of gender relations and the role of both men and women in the society and looking at how these considerations relate to violence could improve the response to fight SGBV. In addition, deviating from assumptions and seeking to understand actors (perpetrators, victims, related caretakers, and other people in the society) and their perception on SGBV and gender relations is important to tackle the issue and conceive good preventive inclusive measures.

My paper did not attempt to provide a solution to SGBV and to all its underlying causes. It would be out of scope and way too ambitious. However, I hope it serves to understand the main factors explaining the issue of SGBV. It could be a starting point for further reflection on how to tackle the issue.

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