The Wartime Rape Narrative in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

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Abstract

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The international community has constructed a dominant narrative to explain the prevalence of gendered violence in the eastern parts of the Democratic Republic of Congo. This dominant narrative posits regional and national antagonisms over conflict minerals as the cause of the Congolese wars that have resulted in the mass rape of Congolese women and girls. Sexual violence against women and girls is portrayed as the most significant form of violence occurring during the Congolese wars. This narrative has had a substantial impact on how the international community has represented, researched and responded to Congolese women and gendered violence. I argue that this narrative is based on problematic conceptions of gender relations rooted in Western feminism that are incompatible with the local experiences of Congolese women and men. The misconception of gender, gender relations and gender violence has engendered misguided intervention initiatives that have failed to produce meaningful change in the lives of Congolese women. This thesis challenges dominant discourses that inform and impose specific narratives of violence and development agendas. It moves beyond them to propose an alternative analysis of gender and gendered violence. It sheds light on the historical disconnection between international and local perspectives of gender and gender violence in the Congo, arguing that to be effective, international development and humanitarian discourses must be re-examined in light of the local socio-cultural context of eastern Congo.

INTRODUCTION

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has faced systemic violence since the outbreak of war in 1996.[1] The Congo wars, occurring from 1996-1998, 1998-2003, represent some of the most complex conflicts of our time. They involved up to fourteen foreign armies, consisted of horrendous human rights abuses, and resulted in the highest death toll experienced during any conflict since the Second World War.[2] Media and human rights reports have popularized specific narratives of violence in the DRC having a formative effect on public perception and policy makers' understandings of the causes, consequences, and solutions to violence.

These conflicts are said to have an array of causes including local disputes over land and resources, the acquisitive goals of regional and rebel armed groups, and political and ethnic grievances.[3] The international community has constructed a dominant narrative positing regional and national antagonisms over conflict minerals as the cause of the Congolese wars that have resulted in the mass rape of Congolese women and girls. This narrative has had a substantial impact on how the international community has represented, researched and responded to Congolese women and gendered violence. In this dominant and over simplified narrative, sexual violence against women and girls is portrayed as the most significant form of violence occurring during the Congolese wars.

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[1] This thesis uses the name the Congo/DRC throughout to provide consistency. Throughout its history the DRC has changed its names several times. Belgian colonizers originally named it the Congo Free State. It was renamed the Belgian Congo when it was ran by the Belgian parliament from 1908-1960. At independence it retained the name Congo, but was later renamed Zaire by President Mobutu in 1971. In 1997 President Laurent-Désiré Kabila reverted back to the Democratic Republic of Congo. Autesserre, *The Trouble With The Congo: Local Violence And The Failure Of International Peacebuilding* (Cambridge: New York, 2010), 36.
[2] Ibid., 2-3.
[3] Christopher Williams, "Explaining the Great War in Africa: How Conflict in the Congo Became a Continental Crisis," *The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs* 37, no. 2 (2013): 81.

This narrative is based on problematic conceptions of gender relations rooted in theories that are commonly associated with white, western feminists that are, at times incompatible with the local experiences of Congolese women and men. The misconception of gender, gender relations and gender violence has engendered misguided intervention initiatives that have failed to produce meaningful change in the lives of Congolese women. To be effective, international development and humanitarian discourses must be re-examined in light of local socio-cultural context.

This thesis explores the formation and reinforcement of narratives of violence and sheds light on the historical disconnection between international and local perspectives of gender and gender violence in the DRC. Its temporal focus is the period of the two Congolese wars (1996-2006) and their unstable aftermath, and its geographical focus the eastern DRC, specifically the provinces of North and South Kivu as well as the District of Ituri, where the war left the worst human rights violations in its wake. This area represents the focal point of violence due to the Congo's shared boarder with Rwanda, Uganda, and Burundi. Accordingly, most media and nongovernmental organization accounts of the violence focused on this area.[4] These accounts had a formative impact on perceptions of violence and thus wielded a great influence on the international community's understanding of the conflicts, policy decisions on intervention, and scholarship and research priorities.[5]

Historians and international relations scholars have studied the causes and continuation of violence in eastern DRC in depth to provide a deeper understanding of the

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[4] Jan Vansina, "The Politics of History and the Crisis in the Great Lakes," *Africa Today* 45, no. 1 (1998): 37.
[5] There is vast research on how media coverage influences foreign policy decisions either directly, or through public opinion with the media coverage an issue receive having a direct effect on the likelihood of policy action. Allan Thompson, "The Responsibility To Report: A New Journalist Paradigm," in *The Media and the Rwandan Genocide,* edited by Allan Thompson (Kampala, Uganda: Foundation Publishers, 2007): 438-439.

war. At the outbreak of war a number of scholars including Filip Reyntjens, Gérard Prunier, and Jean-Pierre Chrétien presented historical overviews of the violence in the Great Lakes Region.[6] Since then, more in depth analyses have traced the historical paths and turning points of conflict. Scholars such as René Lemarchand and Thomas Turner have argued that current conflicts are rooted in eastern DRC's status as a "borderland" characterized by population movements, territorial claims and shifting identities.[7] The Great Lakes borderland debate encourages a regional analysis of violence and specifically focuses on Rwanda's polarizing and trans-border effect on ethnicity.[8] Historical analyses of Great Lakes Region conflicts have explored the evolution of ethnicity in North and South Kivu, demonstrating the shifting nature of the politics of belonging and the continuing impact of exclusion as a root cause of violence.[9] Other analyses have presented dynamics of conflicts internal to DRC by referencing the legacy of patrimonial networks, economic collapse, and poor national management occurring under President Mobutu as significant contributors to violence.[10] Economic analyses of the violence focus on internal state collapse, arguing that historical factors such as social fractionalization and ethnic antagonisms are less important in predicting the causes of civil war.[11] These economic analyses often use the Collier-

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[6] René Lemarchand, "Reflections on the Recent Historiography of Eastern Congo," *Journal of African* History 54 (2013): 425. Gerard Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis: History of a Genocide* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), Filip Reyntjen, *L'Afriquedes Grands Lacs en crise: Rwanda et Burundi, 1988-1994* (Paris: Karthala, 1994), Jean-Pierre Chretien, *Rwanda: Les Medias du Genocide* (Paris: Karthala, 1995).

[7] René Lemarchand, "Reflections," 420-21. Thomas Turner, *The Congo Wars: Conflict, Myth and Reality* (London: Cambridge, 2007).

[8] Lemarchand, "Reflections," 424.

[9] Emizet François Kisangani, *Civil Wars in the Democratic Republic of Congo*, 1960-2010 (Boulder: Lynne Rienner 2012. Stephen Jackson, "Boarderlands And The Transformation Of War Economies: Lessons From The DR Congo," *Conflict, Security And Development,* 6, no. 3 (2006): 425-447.

[10] Koen Vlassenroot, "Reading the Congolese crisis" and "Land and Conflict: The Case of Masisi," in *Conflict and Social Transformation in Eastern DR Congo,* edited by Koen Vlassenroot and Timothy Raeymaekers, (Gent, Acedemia Press, 2004): 39-60 and 81-102.

[11] Léonce Ndikumana and Kisangani Emizet, "The Economics of Civil War: The Case of the Democratic Republic of Congo," *Political Economy Research Institute* 63 (2003): 26.

Hoeffler model[12] of civil wars to argue that natural resource dependence is the largest determinant of violence in the DRC where wealth in natural resources combined with economic collapse to create a volatile environment.[13] However, historians have found this economic explanation ineffective when applied to the DRC because it ignores basic historical facts that are critical to understanding the civil wars.[14]

Most analyses of violence are largely descriptive using a historical analysis of violence to explain the present, while others are concerned largely with policy analysis and prescription. Severine Autesserre's history "from below" presents a convincing analysis of the local roots of conflict. As one of the few academic researchers on the ground in the unstable eastern DRC during the transition period of 2003-2006, Auteserre's *The Trouble With The Congo* provides important primary data regarding international interventions, offering a thorough analysis of why they have been unsuccessful in the DRC. She concludes that local issues are essential to understanding the roots of conflict at higher levels; however, they remain largely left out of dominant discourses that focus solely on the national and regional dimensions of violence.[15] Autesserre's book helps to bridge the divide between international perspectives of violence and intervention and local realities that are often only alluded to in descriptive works.

Sally Engles Merry, an anthropologist and legal gender scholar, formulates a similar nexus in her book *Human Rights and Gender Violence: Translating International Law into*

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[12] The Collier-Hoeffler model argues that three economic factors are predictors of civil war: the initial level of income, grown rate of income, and primary commodity exports in total exports. Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, "On the Incidence of Civil War in Africa," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 46, no. 1 (2002): 15.
[13] Ndikumana and Emizet, 27-29.
[14] Lemarchand, "Reflections," 429.
[15] Autesserre, *The Trouble with the Congo,* 38.

Local Justice.[16] She explores the gap between human rights legislation on gendered violence that translational elites develop, and its application in local communities. Merry examines how the international community produces ideas about gendered violence as human rights violations in order to fit a dominant narrative of violence requiring intervention. Whether these interventions are successful depends on whether local communities participate in their conception and application. Using Merry's thesis of local appropriation as a starting point of investigation, I present a historical gender analysis of eastern DRC in order to demonstrate that interventionist initiatives have failed to combat gendered violence in the DRC because they are rooted in misconceptions of gender and gendered violence at the local level.

Although there have been a number of different scholarly explanations for the historical causes and consequences of violence in the Great Lakes Region, an appropriate in-depth historical gendered analysis remains absent in the historiography. This does not mean that gendered analyses of the violence in the DRC do not exist. On the contrary, a number of reports outline the ways men and women experience violence differently as a result of gender.[17] However, most gendered analyses of violence only explore violence against women, focusing on the extent and use of sexual violence that armed factions perpetrate against women as a result of their inferior social position. These analyses often fail to define what gender means to a woman in the cultural context of the DRC and how this impacts local interpretations of violence.

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[16] Sally Engles Merry, *Human Rights & Gender Violence: Translating International Law Into Local Justice* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Free Press, 2006).
[17] See, Jane Freedman, "Explaining Sexual Violence and Gender Inequalities in the DRC," *Peace Review: A Journal of Social Justice* 23 (2011): 170-173. Amie Alden, "A Continuum of Violence: A Gendered Analysis of Post- Conflict Transformation," *POLIS Journal* 3 (2010): 1-37.

The continued insecurity and inaccessibility in parts of the Great Lakes Region has caused a relative dearth of scholarly literature on gender in eastern DRC.[18] Several important autobiographical works by Rwandan refugees exiled to the eastern DRC in 1996-97 are helpful at filling this void.[19] The autobiography of Beatrice Umutesi, a Hutu Rwandan refugee living in eastern DRC, provides a useful examination of the intersecting nature of ethnicity and gender dynamics involved in violence and displacement.[20] Also, although not specific to eastern DRC, scholars such as Jeannie Burnet and Bonnie Hewlett offer important ethnographical studies on the life processes of women in Rwanda and the Congo Basin increasing an understanding of the nature of women's lives in the region.[21]

The insights offered in these works demonstrate the limitations of gender analysis conducted in the tradition of white Western second-wave feminism.[22] The third wave feminist term "white feminism," is used throughout this thesis. The term was constructed to address the white centricity and domination of white western feminists. When the needs of African women are acknowledged, their struggles are defined from a white feminist perspective that views all women as a homogenous entity subject to a universal patriarchy, without accommodating the cultural and individual heterogeneity of experiences.[23] As a

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[18] Nancy Rose Hunt is one notable exception. Most of her work focuses on Congolese women in Belgian Congo during colonization; however, her recent work is useful in exploring historical rhetoric of gender and gender violence in the region and how it relates to current discourses of gender violence in the DRC. Nancy Rose Hunt, "An Acoustic Register, Tenacious Images, And Congolese Scenes Of Rape And Repetition," *Cultural Anthropology* 23.2 (2008).

[19] Jerome Karimumuryango, Les réfugiés rwandais dans la région de Bukavu, Congo RDC: la survie du réfugié dans les camps de secours d'urgence (Paris: Karthala, 2000).

[20] Marie Béatrice Umutesi, *Surviving The Slaughter: The Ordeal of a Rwandan Refugee in Zaire,* (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2000).

[21] Jennie Burnet, *Genocide Lives In Us: Women, Memory, And Silence In Rwanda,* (Madison: The University Of Wisconsin Press, 2012). Bonnie Hewlett, *Listen, Here Is A Story: Ethnographic Life Narrative From Aka and Ngandu Women Of The Congo Basis,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[22] Rose Lindsey, From Atrocity to Data: Historiographies of Rape in Former Yugoslavia and the Gendering of Genocide, *Patterns of Prejudice* 36, no., 4 (2002): 670-71.

[23] Sherri Liska, "Talking Back to White Feminism: An Intersectional Review," *Liberated Arts: A Journal for Undergraduated Research* 1, no 1 (2015):2.

result, white feminism assumes that what is best for white, western women is best for all other women.

Although this discourse has been highly successful at liberating white western women of the white middle class through a focus on liberal initiatives encouraging economic and political emancipation, applying these principles universally through gender and development initiatives has been ineffective at achieving meaningful change at the local level in the DRC. Although the efforts of white western feminists to assist Congolese women are significant, as demonstrated by white feminists activists who have pushed forward legislation to criminalize wartime rape, white western feminists' domination of development discourse continues to be problematic in the DRC. Addressing these limitations, I offer an analysis of eastern DRC informed by African womanist and African feminist theories of gender.[24] Using these theories, I adopt an intersectional approach that accommodates Congolese women's experiences of gender, race and ethnicity, acknowledging that these identifiers are not static but changed throughout history as a result of geographical, political, and economic upsets.

The use of African womanist and African feminist theories encourages a more critical reading of human rights and development reports that make up the majority of primary source material on the Congolese wars. The ideological influence of these international agencies has informed their representation of the situation in eastern DRC

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[24] Africana womanism offers a new form of feminist consciousness grounded in African culture. This ideology recognizes both ethnicity and gender, focusing on the unique experiences, of Africana women living both on the continent of Africa and its diaspora. Clenora Hudson-Weems, "Africana Womanism: Cultural And Agenda Conflicts In Academia: Critical Issues For Africana Women's Studies," in *The Womanist Reader,* edited by Layli Phillips (New York: Routledge, 2006), 39-40. African feminism attempts to create a more inclusive form of feminism that acknowledges dimensions of race, sex, class and culture as intersects of oppression. Filomena Steady, African Feminism: A World Wide Perspective," in *Women in Africa And The Diaspora,* edited by Rosalyn Teborg-Pen, Sharon Harley and Andrea Benton Rushing, (Washington: Howard Up, 1987): 4-5.

causing most documentation to occur according to western norms of gender.[25] As a result, these documents are largely useful for their empirical evidence, but not always for their qualitative investigation.

Most human rights reports derive from investigative techniques emphasising the dominant narrative of violence. Although they are sometimes supported by testimony, they typically conclude with an analysis driven by their specific mission brief: to end gendered violence and improve the status of women in the DRC.[26] Unfortunately, the voices of Congolese are largely silent in many of these reports. When testimonies are included, women's experiences of violence are repackaged into patterned narratives of wartime rape and thus minimize other forms of abuse ranging from forced displacement to looting.[27] By prioritizing certain experiences and identities above others, the voices of Congolese women are never entirely heard within the dominant narrative international aid workers, humanitarians and development workers have constructed.

The dominant discourse of gendered violence has led to an overarching emphasis on evidence meant to fit these narratives leading to the marginalization of other voices, theories, and intervention initiatives that are more appropriate in the context of eastern DRC. This thesis challenges and fleshes out dominant discourses that inform and impose specific narratives of violence and development agendas, and moves beyond them to propose an alternative analysis of gender and gendered violence. This alternative analysis considers Congolese women as the definers their own history and experiences and, in so

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[25] The ideological identity of an organization greatly affects the reading of a situation and can determine the dialect developed to explain and historicize the event. See, Rose Lindsey, From Atrocity to Data: Historiographies of Rape in Former Yugoslavia and the Gendering of Genocide, *Patterns of Prejudice* 36, no., 4 (2002): 68.
[26] Ibid., 68.
[27] Ibid.

doing, aims to develop a nexus between international perspectives and local realities that is

will be of greater relevance to the actual needs and desires of Congolese women.

In this thesis the international community refers to a complex array of layers

represented by a myriad of foreign interveners including international institutions such as

the United Nations and World Bank, non-governmental organizations like Women for

Women International and Oxfam, government officials, and individuals acting in a non-

state capacity.[28] The participation and influence of these constituents is not static, but

changes depending on the nature of the issue. However, dominant actors such as the United

Nations Security Counsel have significantly more influence in dictating discourse and

determining policy than international non-government organizations. Therefore, the

perspective represented as dominant in the international community does not necessarily

represent the opinion or priority of all its constituent parts.[29] Although action is often taken

in the name of international community, it is not a linear act of global governance that

represents a consensus and results in direct action. It is one that has emerged from a

complex process of decision-making influenced by international norms. The details of this

process are not the focus of this thesis; however, the complexity of how international norms

emerge and influence policies is acknowledged as an important element associated with the

representation of the international community's perspective in this thesis.[30]

This thesis is divided into four complementary chapters with each offering an

alternative analysis to a dominant narrative used to explain violence in the DRC. The first

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[28] Autesserre, *The Trouble with the Congo,* 10.
[29] In some cases sufficient agreement amongst international actors occurs appropriately attributing a policy to the international community. This occurs regarding cases of genocide or mass wartime rape considered to be wrong by all of humanity. While the international community may reach consensus on a problem, they rarely agree on its solution.
[30] For further information see, Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, "Transnational Advocacy Networks in International and Regional Politics," *International Social Sciences Journal* 51, no. 159 (1999):89-101, and Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists beyond Boarders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics (*Ithaca: Cornell University, 1998).

chapter presents a background of the history of the region and the two Congolese wars. The second chapter argues that the focus on high levels of rape has clouded a historical analysis of gender dynamics in the region. I assert that gender and development frameworks that draw upon the theories of white feminists have been ineffective because they ignore the nuances of local Congolese identity. [31] The third chapter explores experiences of gender violence during the Congolese wars, arguing that the specific focus on sexual violence against women has created narrow definitions of victim and perpetrator, hindering a holistic understanding of gender violence affecting men, women and children. The fourth chapter cumulates into a summative analysis of the divergence between international perspectives based on the dominant narratives and local realities presented in the three previous chapters. I argue that these initiatives have been ineffective because the international community has grafted external designs onto eastern DRC through universal assistance initiatives without attempting to understand what peace or gender equality look like from a local perspective.[32]

These chapters offer a starting point for further analysis into some of the under represented alternative storylines of gender, gender violence and intervention in eastern DRC with the aim of encouraging a deeper analysis of the socio-cultural reality of local contexts affected by international development initiatives. This research offers a corrective to an incomplete understanding of the nature and causes of gendered violence resulting in inappropriate policy responses. A better understanding of the origins of these narratives and

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[31] Signe Arnfred, "Re-Thinking Sexualities In Africa," in *Re-Thinking Sexualities In Africa,* edited by Signe Arnfred (Sweden: Almqvidt & Wiksell Tryckeri AB, 2004), 12, 15.
[32] Sara Hellmüller, "Bridging The Disconnect: Integrating Local Perspectives In Peace Processes, European Conference on African Studies," *Swiss Peace* (2011): 2.

how they become entrenched in policy initiatives will enable more appropriate methods of

analysis and intervention in eastern DRC to develop.

CHAPTER ONE

DOMINANT DISCOURSES ON VIOLENCE

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) lies at the heart of the African Continent. Home to some of the world's most impenetrable rainforests, its immense size and history of colonial violence, causes the DRC to hold a special fascination for outsiders who wish to understand how it came to be in its current state of instability. The history of violence in Africa's Great Lakes region is immensely complex. Rather than leading to more intrigue, this complexity has resulted in the DRC's historical and political marginalization, leaving it to be studied by small enclaves of scholars, politicians, and activists

The rest of the world continues to engage a dominant discourse to explain the history and persistence of violence in the DRC. Made up of several main narratives, this discourse has affected the intervention programs applied in eastern DRC, largely to the detriment of the Congolese people. This chapter focuses on the negative consequences of the main narratives used to explain the central cause and consequence of the conflicts. It will demonstrate that the international community has focused on regional and national power struggles over conflict resources as the primary cause of violence in the Great Lakes region largely to the exclusion of all alternatives. Furthermore, the dominant international narrative centers on rape during wartime as the most important consequence of regional violence. The focus on wartime rape in the eastern DRC has resulted in a problematic conceptualization of Congolese women as victims of sexual violence. This has negatively impacted women in the region, overlooking most other forms of gender based violence that exist during both times of war and peace.

This chapter will briefly explore the history of the DRC from colonialism to the end of the two Congolese wars. It will explain how and why certain dominant discourses and simple narratives become popular and are adopted by international policy makers while others are not. It will demonstrate that the dominant discourse of violence in the DRC encouraged an international focus on regional and national power struggles over conflict resources, ignoring other causes of violence such as those rooted in the region's history, social and political tensions, and grass roots antagonisms over land and power. This narrow focus has had negative implications for peace building efforts in the region.

It then explores how the wartime rape narrative came to be perceived as the most pressing consequence of the conflict. It will explain how the narrow focus of this narrative, which excludes all other forms of gendered violence and life force atrocities caused by the conflicts, has negatively affected local Congolese women. This will be demonstrated through an exploration of how the wartime rape narrative has shaped the narrow mandate of aid interventions and international legislation causing a focus on curative measures without understanding the larger socio-cultural gender process that contribute to gender based violence. This chapter concludes by contending that in order to adequately address gender based violence, the social, cultural, and political determinants of violence must be addressed outside of the wartime rape narrative and grounded in an analysis of gender relations at the local level.

This thesis is focused on the years 1996-2006, the period of he Congo wars; however, the nature of the violence in the Great Lakes is so dynamic that it cannot be understood without an analysis of the region's longer history. In order to move beyond the main narratives used to explain the violence in the eastern DRC, a basic understanding of

the history of the region is necessary. At the Conference of Berlin in 1885 European heads segregating the African continent amongst the colonial powers. King Leopold II of Belgium ruled the Congo as his personal fiefdom. Although he had successfully convinced the other powers that his interests were purely altruistic, with Christian civilization as the main goal, in practice King Leopold II ran "The Congo Free State," as a private enterprise extracting every morsel of wealth from the country.[1] This practice became exceptionally brutal once the immense resources of the country became known.

The *force publique* officers under Leopold's reign implemented a harsh system of forced labour where killing, mutilation, and kidnapping of Congolese were employed to promote the gathering of ivory and latex rubber. Historians estimate that the brutal practice of forced labour under King Leopold cost between five and eight million Congolese lives.[2] This number does not include countless other Congolese who were maimed, beaten, and tortured in order to compel populations to achieve higher resource quotas.

The horrors committed in King Leopold's Congo led to what was arguably the first great international human rights movement.[3] Coming at a period before the creation of human rights conventions, this movement to stop coerced labour in the Congo involved numerous influential characters including President Theodore Roosevelt, the Archbishop of Canterbury, and Mark Twain. Mass meetings of protest were held across the United States, England, and as far away as Australia.[4] Under immense international pressure, King Leopold handed over the Congo to the Belgian government in 1908.

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[1] Adam Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998), 87, 166.
[2] Ibid., 3.
[3] Ibid., 2.
[4] Ibid., 3.

Although several administrative improvements were made under Belgian rule,

including the implementation of a nationwide primary education program and a

rudimentary healthcare system, the Belgians continued to focus mainly on resource

extraction. Even in the face of impending independence the Belgians did little to encourage

Congolese development.[5] Laws prevented most Congolese from accessing many of the

structural elements of development. They were prohibited from living in higher-class

neighbourhoods and all upper elements of military and civil services were European. While

government sponsored education and social welfare programs were available, they were

kept to a bare minimum and usually only accessible to Congolese *évolués*.[6] Upon

independence a population of nearly twenty million comprised only seventeen university

graduates and approximately five warrant officers.[7] After seventy-five years of colonialism

on June 30, 1960, these few privileged yet underprepared men were expected to run the

country.[8]

The Cold War ushered in an era of what can be referred to as neo-colonialism.[9] In

1965, Joseph Mobutu took power in a CIA sponsored coup. The next thirty-two years

Mobutu ran the nation as his own personal country. Mobutu embodied a neo-patrimonial

polity where loyalty and patrimonial ties outweighed merit and were rewarded through

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[5] Jason Stearns, *Dancing in the Glory of Monsters: The Collapse of the Congo and the Great War of Africa (*Public Affairs: New York: USA, 2011), 7.

[6] The Congolese évolués were a small group of beurocratic intelligentsia who were considered an elite group distinct from the Congolese masses. As the elite they were granted certain privileges and positions by white colonizers to reinforce their loyalty and status. Jean-Claude Willame, *Patrimonialism and Political Change in the* Congo (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1972), 24-25.

[7] Gerard Prunier, *Africa's World War: Congo, The Rwandan Genocide and the Making of a Continental Catastrophe (*New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 76.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Neo-colonialism is a new form of imperialism used to control post colonial states. It defines states that are independent in theory, yet their economic system and political policy is directed by outside forces. This often occurs through economic or monetary means with imperial powers controlling the neo-colonial government policy through secured payments towards the cost of running the state or by posting civil servants in politically powerful positions. Both of these mechanisms were used in the DRC post independence. Tatah Mentan, *The State in Africa: An Analysis of Impacts of Historical Trajectories of Global Capitalist Expansion and Domination in the Continent,* (Cameroon: Langaa Research & Pub. CIG, 2010): 201.

clientelism. This thwarted the development of a responsive and effective bureaucracy resulting in the crumbling of national institutions and infrastructure.[10] Although many Congolese inhabitants considered Mobutu's government illegitimate, this lack of legitimacy was balanced by the international aid Mobutu used to keep himself in power. However, with the end of the Cold War came the end of the Congo's strategic significance to the West, and an end to the aid keeping Mobutu at the helm of government.[11]

By the early 1990s Mobutu's international isolation had led to the near complete state failure of the Congo. The Mobutu state had lost all capacity to provide public services, security, or mediate internal crises effectively. The Rwandan Patriotic Army's (RPA) invasion of eastern Congo in 1996 made the failure of the Mobutuist state conclusive. It took only six months for the anti-Mobutist coalition to reach Kinshasa, demonstrating the weakness of the Zairian Armed Forces and their leader, Mobutu.[12]

A significant cause of the Congolese conflict was the Rwandan genocide of 1994. Perpetrated by the ethnic Hutu government, the Rwandan Armed Forces (FAR) and several militia bands, the most notorious being the Interahamwe, the genocide resulted in the deaths of approximately 800,000 Rwandans, mostly ethnic Tutsi and moderate Hutu. The dynamics of the genocide are complex. However, what is clear is that the violence and scale of the Rwandan genocide was unprecedented in modern Africa and had extreme reverberating effects throughout the Great Lakes region.

The genocide resulted in one of the largest humanitarian crises the world had ever seen. Ironically, it was the Hutu, not the Tutsis` who were the main recipients of

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[10] René Lemarchand, *The Dynamics Of Violence In Central Africa* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 224.
[11] Ibid., 226. Kevin Dunn, *Imagining The Congo: The International Relations Of Identity* (NewYork: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), 160.
[12] Lemarchand, *The Dynamics Of Violence,* 220.

international humanitarian aid following the genocide. Once the Tutsi-led Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) seized control of Rwanda in July 1994, over one million Hutu civilian refugees fled to eastern Congo settling in camps along the boarder in North and South Kivu. With these civilians came an estimated forty thousand ex-FAR and more militiamen who had come prepared with money, equipment, and administrative training.[13] Almost all those political and militaristically responsible for the genocide came to the Congo because Mobutu was a known FAR sympathizer allowing increased freedom of movement compared to other camps in Tanzania and Burundi. [14] The survivors of the former Rwandan government quickly became leaders of the camps, setting up administrative structures and forcing aid workers to operate through them. Within months they gained control of all humanitarian aid, including food supplies.[15] In practice, half the camps' populations were genuine refugees and half were militia grouped in quasi-military training camps. The Congolese boarder provided protection from the Rwandan Patriotic Army allowing these militias to regroup, rearm, and prepare to retake Kigali.[16] Thus, the FAR`s exodus from Rwanda did not end the civil war but introduced what Jason Stearn describes as a "hiatus in the hostilities" with the second act staged on Congolese soil.[17]

The refugee camps in eastern Congo were set up in July 1994 and stayed in place for over two years, jointly housing over a million refugees. Some contained more than 400, 000 inhabitants, making them the largest refugee camps in the world and larger than any

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[13] Stearns, 15. Estimates on these numbers vary with other accounts arguing as many as two million Hutu's fled across the boarder along with more than 50,000 armed Rwandan Hutu responsible for the genocide. Séverine Autesserre, *The Trouble With The Congo,* 43.
[14] Stearns, 15. Prunier, 25.
[15] Stearn, 14-15.
[16] Ibid., 15.
[17] Ibid.

city in eastern Congo.[18] For two years the international community treated the situation as a

humanitarian crisis, spending over two billion US dollars on aid for refugees.[19]

Unfortunately, the situation required a political analysis and solution to deal with the

presence of Rwandan war criminals within the camps; however, one was never

implemented. The international community failed to separate FAR soldiers and Hutu Power

militia from the refugees despite the Kigali government's demands that the *génocidaires* be

repatriated back to Rwanda. Instead, the international community continued blindly to help

the refugees, even after multiple humanitarian reports published evidence that the aid they

supplied was also aiding perpetrators of the genocide.[20] The international community's

failure to respond resulted in Rwanda engaging in military action against the camps in an

effort to separate *génocidaires* from the refugees.[21]

The political scientist René Lemarchand describes the Rwandan invasions of the

DRC in 1996 as "a surgical pre-emptive strike" against partially militarized refugee camps,

with the goal of eliminating Hutu *génocidaires* through search and destroy operations.[22]

However, in practice their methods were less than surgical, resulting in widespread

massacres of both Hutu and Tutsi civilians, with devastating consequences for local

Congolese.**[23]** What some have called "Africa's World War" began in September 1996.[24]

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[18] Ibid., 34.

[19] Prunier, 30.

[20] Although many humanitarian organizations were made aware that they were supporting perpetrators of the genocide only Medecins Sans Frontieres stopped providing aid. Medecins Sans Frontiers, *"Breaking the Cycle: Calls for Action in the Rwandese Refugee Camps in Tanzania and Zaire,"* Medecins Sans Frontiers, November 10, 1994, hhtp://www.doctorswithoutboarders.org/publications/article.cfm?id=1465.

[21] Stearns, 38-39. John Eriksson's study estimates that a total of 4000 refugees died as a result of violence within these camps often at the hands of the former Rwandan government various militias. John Eriksson, "International Response to Conflict and Genocide: Lessons from the Rwandan Experience, Danish International Development Assistance," *Synthesis Report* (1996): 28. Also see, Fiona Terry, *Condemned to Repeat? The Paradox of Humanitarian Action* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002).

[22] Lemarchand, *The Dynamics Of Violence,* 223.

[23] Ibid.*,* 225.

[24] See, Prunier, *Africa's World War.* The conflict involved fourteen foreign armies as well as a number of local militia's. The violence turned into a continental war with the violence so widespread it led United States Assistant Secretary of State Susan Rice to call it the first African World War. Autesserre, *The Trouble With The Congo,* 2.

Paul Kagame's regime led the RPA invasion in the DRC on the basis of apparently

legitimate security concerns but soon formed a strategic alliance with a local rebel force,

the *Alliance des Forces Démocratiques pour la libération* (AFDL), led by Laurent Kabila.

Backed by the African coalition,[25] and with the goal of overthrowing Mobutu, the RPA and

AFDL succeeded in toppling the Congolese government forces in under a year. By May of

1997 Mobutu had fled and Kabila became president of the DRC.[26]

Although the 1996 war is often described in the media as a war of greed based on

conflict resources, the invaders and new leaders of the DRC argued it began as a

continental revolution steeped in pan-African ideology.[27] This rhetoric was soon retired and

within less than two years, the foreign actors who had liberated the Congo from Mobutu

capitalized on more lucrative interests in the nation.[28] After fifteen months of relative

peace, the Congo was again involved in a regional conflict. This time the war was largely

an effort by external powers to protect their investments and acquire a piece of Congo's

wealth. Instead of a coalition with a mutual goal, the region became split. Uganda, Burundi,

and Rwanda stood united against Kabila's government, who was backed militarily by

Angola, Zambia, Chad, and Zimbabwe.[29] This war also involved dozens of rebel groups.

Usually aligned on the basis of ethnic and linguistic affiliations, nearly every rebel group in

the Congo was affiliated with an outside patron. These alliances and loyalties constantly

shifted with the main goal for all being survival and the accumulation of resources.[30]

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[25] 1994 Ugandan President Museveni called a meeting in Kampala to discuss the idea of overthrowing Mobutu. In 1995 Tanzanian President Nyerere re-launched the idea holding a meeting with other African leaders he identified as "enemies of Mobutu" (leaders from Eritrea, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Uganda, Zimbabwe and Angola.) Nyerere wanted to usher in a new generation of African leaders who were concerned with the economic and social welfare of their populations. Prunier, 67.
[26] Stearns, 164.
[27] Stearn, 52-54. See note, 25.
[28] Ibid., 55-56. Refer to footnote 25.
[29] Ibid., 192.
[30] Ibid., 251.

In 1999, the first attempt at peace was undertaken with the signing of the Lusaka Ceasefire Agreement between the Congo, Angola, Namibia, Rwanda, Uganda and Zimbabwe. The agreement called for a national dialogue, a new political system, and national elections.[31] Also as part of the agreement, the UN Security Council established the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC).[32] The mandate of MONUC was to observe the conditions of the ceasefire, disarm and demobilize forces, and provide protection to humanitarian programs. The results were short lasting with nearly every side breaching the agreement within a matter of months. In 2002, the Inter-Congolese Dialogue agreed to in the Lusaka agreement took place in Sun City, South Africa. This led to the final Pretoria II agreement resulting in a tentative peace between Rwanda and the DRC.[33] It stated that Rwandan troops would withdraw from DRC territory with the condition that the Congo, in cooperation with MONUC, would continue to work to track down ex-FAR agents and Interahamwe.[34] It also restated a commitment to unifying Congo and installing a transitional power-sharing interim government between Joseph Kabila and several internal rebel groups.[35] Both attempts at peace have been tentative at best in large part because they did not take local considerations into account. These negotiations were largely conducted between regional and national leaders and largely excluded local actors and local militias who were responsible for much of the violence in eastern DRC. Most militia fighting occurred as a

[31] Sara Hellmüller, "Bridging The Disconnect," 7.
[32] UN Security Council, *Resolution 1279 (1999) Adopted by the Security Council at its 4076th meeting, on 30 November 1999*, 30 November 1999, S/RES/1279 (1999), http://www.refworld.org/docid/3b00f1e168.html.
[33] Hellmüller, "Bridging The Disconnect," 8.
[34] See, Paule Bouvier and Francesca Bomboko, Le Dialogue Intercongolais. Anatomie d'une Négociation à la Lisière du Chaos. Contributions à la Théorie de la Négociation (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2004).
[35] Hellmüller, "Bridging The Disconnect," 7.

result of grassroots antagonism over ethnicity, political power, and resources.[36] Because

these grassroots issues were left unaddressed, despite the presence of the largest

peacekeeping mission in the world (MONUC), periods of conflict continue throughout

much of the Congo with the majority of the violence occurring in eastern DRC.[37]

The number of nations and armed groups involved in this African conflict was

unprecedented, as was the scope and nature of the violence.[38] Between 1996 and 2003

nearly 5.4 million people died with millions more being wounded, tortured, and

displaced.[39] Two decades after the genocide that ignited the conflict began, large portions

of the DRC remain engaged in perpetual violence beyond the control of the Kinshasa

government. At the local level, civilian casualties have been overwhelming. These

casualties result from both the armed conflict, and the harsh living conditions civilians are

forced to endure as a result of the conflict. The violence makes steady cultivation

impossible, much of the infrastructure has been destroyed and displacement is a constant

factor of life for many.[40] In the wake of the wars, a new form of violence has begun to

emerge; that of the social marginalization of Congolese youth who see no future for

themselves or their country. With millions still living in displacement camps, sky-high

poverty levels, and a genuine lack of social, political, and economic opportunities, many

youth have taken up arms because they see it as the best tool of social empowerment.[41] It is

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[36] Ibid.
[37] After the signing of the Lusaka Ceasefire Agreement in July 1999 the United Nations Security Council passed resolution 1279 creating the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUC). In July 2010 MONUC was renamed the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO). This was meant to reflect the new phase of peace building the country had reached. United Nations, "MONUSCO: United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission In The Democratic Republic Of The Congo," *United Nations*, March 2015, http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/monusco/background.shtml.
[38] Prunier, 338.
[39] Benjamin Coghlan et al. "Mortality In The Democratic Republic Of Congo: An Ongoing Crisis," *International Rescue Committee*, (2007): 3.
[40] Prunier, 338.
[41] Lemarchand, *The Dynamics Of Violence*, 257.

the lack of alternatives, coupled with inadequate state control that allows rebel groups to flourish and the violence to continue. In the face of this tragic knowledge, the international community has failed to intervene successfully to prevent or end this conflict.

In 1998, the humanitarian medical organization Doctors Without Borders (MSF) began to publish a list of the top ten most underreported humanitarian stories of the year. The lack of attention paid to the crisis in the Congo, despite the ongoing civil war and continued internal displacement, caused it to appear on this list a total of nine times between 1998 and 2007.[42] The case of the Congo is but one example of Africa's international marginalization. The geographic, economic, and political peripheral nature of Africa to the western world means the international community does not concern itself with African affairs unless necessary. This necessity occurs in cases of genocide, war crimes, or massive human rights violations when there is a legal obligation for the United Nations to intervene. However, even these occurrences warrant an intervention only if they present a global threat and receive intense media coverage.

Following the attacks on New York's World Trade Center in 2001, terrorism has become the number one issue of importance in global affairs. Despite arguments made by some politicians, most Western policy analysts believe that Central Africa does not possess the terrorist breeding capacity that other areas of the world do.[43] The major threats present in Central Africa, such as HIV or Ebola epidemics, are largely viewed only a threat to Africans. Thus, they are allowed to go unnoticed and untreated for longer periods of time.

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[42] Medecins Sans Frontieres, "MSF Releases Tenth Annual 'Top Ten' Most Underreported Humanitarian Stories Of 2007," *International website of Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF),* December 20 2007, http://www.msf.org/article/msf-releases-tenth-annual-top-ten-most-underreported-humanitarian-stories-2007.
[43] Chris Abbot, Paul Rogers and John Sloboda, *Global Responses To Global Threats: Sustainable Security For The 21st Century, (*United Kingdom: Oxford Research Group, 2006), 5.

When they are noticed, it is rare that they are understood by the international community, which tends to employ stereotypical categorizations such as "humanitarian crisis" or "failed state" to situations that are often at variance with their reality. This variance between the reality of the situation in eastern Congo and the international community's perception of the crisis and their resulting policies, rely on historic representations of Africa that have constructed the dominant discourse on the Congo wars.

DISCOURSE ON THE CONGO

A dominant discourse is a particular way of representing a specific concept. This refers to the production of a certain type of knowledge through the construct of particular language used to represent a given topic. The discourse a topic is presented within makes it possible to construct the issue in a certain way to others who are not as familiar with the concept. The power of a discourse is such that it not only constructs the topic in a certain way, but can also limit all other ways the topic can be understood.[44]

To understand discourse it is essential to note that power produces knowledge. The West has historically been portrayed as a superior civilization tasked with producing knowledge about the world. However, when exploring new worlds, Europeans continued to use their own cultural categories, language, and ideas to represent their discoveries. They attempted to fit this new world into their own pre-existing conceptual frameworks. Thus, all aspects of Africa's colonial history were fitted into European preconceptions about

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[44] Stuart Hall, "West And The Rest: Discourse And Power," in *The Indigenous Experience: Global Perspectives*, edited by Roger Maaka and Chris Andersen (Toronto: Canadian Scholars Press, 2006), 165.

Africans, created by previous experiences and modes of understanding. In any form of knowledge production it is those who produce the discourse that hold the power to enforce its validity and make it true.[45]

In the same way that discourses shape knowledge, narratives are created within specific discourses to shape the way we perceive specific issues or events.[46] In the case of the discourse used to explain the conflicts in the Congo, specific narratives have been created to represent what the international community views as the causes, consequences, and solutions of the wars. These narratives have been employed globally, largely to the exclusion of all alternatives. Over time, the repetition of these narratives reinforced dominant meanings and practices that were eventually taken for granted as true and natural.[47]

In the discourse on violence in the DRC these narratives suggest the conflict was caused by regional and national struggles over economic resources, with the main consequence of the violence being the mass rape of Congolese women and girls by armed factions.[48] These narratives became prominent because they simplify an excessively complex situation into understandable and relatable storylines. Although each narrative represents an important part of the story, cumulatively they fail to accurately represent the situation in the Congo, leading to inadequate intervention strategies.

The dominant narrative suggests that the main cause of violence in the Great Lakes region was the quest for political power and economic wealth through control of the

[45] Hall, 169.

[46] Séverine Autesserre, "Dangerous Tales: Dominant Narratives On The Congo And Their Unintended Consequences," *African Affairs* 111, no., 443 (2012): 206.

[47] Autesserre, "Dangerous Tales," 207.

[48] Ibid., 202.

Congo's natural resources. The violence was the result of national and regional power struggles between leaders of foreign armies, the Congo state, and rebel leaders. These regional antagonisms, consisting of the physical presence of Rwanda, Uganda and to a lesser extent Burundi in the eastern Congo, were primarily motivated by the desire to gain control of natural resources such as gold, diamonds, cobalt and copper which were present in the area.[49]

This narrative was used to interpret the violence in the Congo in 2000, when the UN Security Council appointed a special panel of experts to explore the link between the war and the Congo's natural resources. They concluded that illegal mineral exploitation carried out by foreign and local factions had been funding the war for years, while simultaneously allowing elite parties from both the Congo and their foreign invaders to become rich.[50] Their findings suggested that the intense and violent competition over mining sites between national and foreign actors, often utilizing local proxy militias, was the key source of violence. Furthermore, the extreme violence directed at civilians was mostly committed in order to gain control over these resource rich areas.[51] While the exploitation of these conflict minerals is an important dimension to the violence, it has never been the whole story.

Alternative causes have been outlined in a number of competing narratives emphasised by academics, think tanks, and Congolese intellectuals.[52] However, all have continued to remain overshadowed by the notion that regional and national power struggles

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[49] Ibid., 210.
[50] UN Panel of Inquiry, 'Report of the panel of experts on the illegal exploitation of natural resources and other forms of wealth of the Democratic Republic of the Congo' (United Nations, New York, 2001 to 2003).
[51] Autesserre, *The Trouble With The Congo,* 65.
[52] See, Laura Seay, "Do We Have The Congo Rape Crisis All Wrong?" *The Atlantic* (2011), available at http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2011/05/do-we-have-the-congo-rape-crisis-all-wrong/239328/.

over economic resources were the main cause of the violence. This narrative took hold in the international community because it presented a relatively uncomplicated storyline that built on familiar concepts and oriented familiar forms of action. Many in the international community already familiar with the conflict mineral narrative recognized the economic dimensions of violence, and the history of the Congo's "resource curse."[53] This narrative also presented identifiable perpetrators, and suggested simple solutions to very complicated problems.[54] Firstly, the clear regional and national tensions responsible for causing the violence could be assuaged through peace processes that would result in the removal of foreign-armed factions from Congolese land.[55] Second, the illegal exploitation of natural resources could be dealt with by ending the illegal trafficking of resources.[56] It was believed that global legislation forcing companies to identify whether they were using conflict minerals would serve to reduce the use of these resources, cutting off the source of war funding for armed groups.[57] Lastly, any remnants of violence that continued could be dealt with through the implementation of state authority in the eastern Congo.[58] Unfortunately, these solutions were not enough to end the violence in eastern Congo that continues to this very day. This is in large part because this dominant narrative ignores the important contribution of other causes of violence such as the pervasive poverty of the region, other economic sources of tension, the hostile relationship between local populations and the state, and the role of grassroots antagonisms.

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[53] Autesserre, "Dangerous Tales," 211-212.
[54] Ibid., 212.
[55] Ibid., *The Trouble With The Congo,* 78.
[56] Ibid., "Dangerous Tales," 209.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Ibid., 218.

The most significant flaw in the dominant narrative is that it completely discounted the role of local agendas in grassroots violence. In contrast to the dominant narrative, reports show micro-level tensions were not the result of macro-level manipulations but of distinct decentralized antagonisms between different groups over scarce resources.[59] For example, in Masisi of North Kivu, land conflicts between Banyarwanda[60] and indigenous groups known as the Nandes have continued since colonial times. Although mostly Tutsi Banyarwandans officially owned the land, indigenous groups claim that the land belongs to them because the government had no right to sell their customary land.[61] Forced displacement has further antagonized these disagreements. When a group is forced to flee, many returned later to find their land occupied. An example is the case in Masisi where in the 1990s many Tutsi Banyarwandans fled their land to escape local massacres.[62] Upon their return, the Tutsi Banyarwandans formed armed groups to take back their land, initiating periodic bouts of local violence between these two groups over the land.[63]

Similarly, in the District of Ituri most of the fighting was not a result of regional violence but occurred between two ethnic groups; the herding Hema and farming Lendu, over the scare resource of land.[64] Disputes over land caused most of these interethnic fights; however, micro tensions were also intertwined with national tensions.[65] When the transitional government attempted to impose state authority in the area, local militias

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[59] Autesserre, *The Trouble With The Congo,* 126-127.

[60] The term Banyarwanda refers to Hutu and Tutsi who speak Kinyarwanda, and trace their origins to Rwanda. However, this term does not accommodate for the date and circumstances of migration into eastern DRC. See Lars-Christopher Huening, "Making Use of The Past: the Rwandophone Question and the "Balkanisation of the Congo,"' *ROAPE* 40, no. 135 (2013): 13-31.

[61] Autesserre, *The Trouble With The Congo*, 163.

[62] In May of 1993 tensions between Banyarwandans and indigenous Congolese groups (Hunde, Nande, Nyanda assisted by Mai-Mai groups) erupted into severe violence causing the death of 10,000 Banyarwandans and the displacement of 250,000 people. Lemarchande, *Dynamics of Violence*, 229.

[63] Autesserre, *The Trouble With The Congo,* 162-163.

[64] Hellmüller, "Bridging The Disconnect, 16.

[65] Autesserre, *The Trouble With The Congo,* 175.

violently rejected these advances because they jeopardized their control over local economic and political positions of local authority.[66]

Thus, during the conflict, local agendas interacted with national and regional tensions, contributing to the violence. As the dominant narrative posits, macro level activity did influence micro-level actions to an extent during the conflict; however, the opposite was also true. Bottom up tensions between ethnic groups, most notably the Banyarwandans and indigenous Congolese, caused by historical rivalries over land, resources and political power, had been causing violence in eastern Congo long before regional actors were involved. These grassroots rivalries fuelled macro level tensions resulting in numerous regional, national, and local armed groups cooperating in a complex system of alliances and counter alliances throughout the war. However, once national and regional peace settlements were signed, local conflicts over land, power, and resources persisted, usually becoming autonomous.[67]

The causes of these micro-level tensions were the result of the complex history of the region. Successive waves of immigration, forced migration and displacement caused a lack of association between ethnic and geographic grouping in the Great Lakes Region. Although considered native to Rwanda, Hutu and Tutsi migration patterns have resulted in an estimated fifteen million people dispersed throughout the Great Lakes region who speak Kinyarwanda or Kirundi.[68] Although not always included in the dominant narrative, when the international community explores ethnicity it has tended to follow the familiar narrative of Hutu/ Tutsi antagonisms. Usually explained in the case of eastern Congo by Samuel

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[66] Ibid., 177.
[67] Ibid., 165.
[68] Lemarchand, *The Dynamics Of Violence*, 227.

Huntington's concept of "Kin Country Syndrome," ethnic tensions in the region are considered to be the projection of ethnic hatreds from one national arena to another. Thus, all ethnic violence is seen as a continuation of the Rwandan genocide.[69]

While there are tensions between Hutu and Tutsi in the eastern Congo, the violence during the Congolese wars was also the result of antagonisms between Banyarwanda groups and local indigenous Congolese groups. These distinctions are not clear cut but challenged by other factors that cause identities to constantly shift. For example, prior to the genocide in Rwanda, Hutu-Tutsi relations in the DRC had improved, with the two groups developing closer ties in opposition to indigenous groups who wanted the removal of all Banyarwandan communities.[70] The Rwandan genocide and subsequent incursion of Hutu refugees in the North and South Kivu severed these relations and caused a distinct Hutu and Tutsi split.[71] In 1996, with the invasion of the RPA, these distinctions changed with all Banyarwandans being collectively categorized as Tutsi Rwandan foreigners, regardless of their period of migration or ethnicity. During this period, all Banyarwandans, including groups like the Banyamulenge communities of South Kivu who had settled before colonization and considered themselves true *Congolite*,[72] were considered foreign by local indigenous populations and threatened with violence, insecurity, and expulsion.[73]

Thus, much of the violence did not result solely from regional armed forces but from local militia groups formed to protect their kinfolk from oppression and expropriation

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[69] Ibid.
[70] Ibid., 230
[71] Ibid.
[72] *Congolite* refers to a sense of "Congoleseness," Stephen Jackson, "Borderlands And The Transformation Of War Economies," 429. Also see Jason Stearns, *Dancing in the Glory of Monsters, 62* for further discussion on Banyamulenge and regional politics that developed during the Congolese wars.
[73] Ibid.

from their local enemies.[74] Militia groups such as the Mai Mai formed originally as local

protection militias meant to protect their ethnic groups from both regional and national

armed groups as well as their local enemies.[75] However, as tensions progressed they began

to form and re-form around ethnic bases, becoming less committed to protecting their local

groups, and more committed to ridding the nation of Rwandan troops and all

Banyarwandans.[76]

    As demonstrated by examples in Masisi and the district of Ituri, these localized

conflicts have been largely the result of quests for access to land rights in the highly

populated region. While there are intense ethnic tensions in the area, they are not the mere

result of ethnicity. The precarious nature of social and economic life in the Congo coupled

with failed institutions and deteriorated social fabric has resulted in a lack of strong civil or

political unions for people to rally around. As a default, ethnicity has become the strongest

form of social mobilization because it presented the most coherent ideology in the

country.[77]

    Poverty coupled with a high population density led to intense conflicts between

local groups over economic resources. Contrary to the dominant narrative, these conflicts

were not caused by natural resources but instead were the result of land hunger, cattle

disputes, resources such as timber or charcoal, and local taxation. The significance of this

assertion has been demonstrated by a UN report that suggests that only eight percent of all

conflicts were fought over natural resources.[78] Thus, although regional and national power

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[74] Autesserre, *The Trouble With The Congo,* 7, 175.
[75] Helleüm, "Bridging The Disconnect, 16.
[76] Autesserre, *The Trouble With The Congo,* 175. Helleüm, "Bridging The Disconnect," 16.
[77] Stearns, 216.
[78] UN Integrated Bureau, 'Termes de Référence: Analyse des Conflits' (Internal document, Kinshasa, 2011), 3.

struggles over natural resources played a role in the conflict, grassroots antagonisms between local groups over land and resources are the essential contributor to the continuation of violence.

However, in accordance with the dominant narrative, local antagonisms and decentralized conflicts over resources have been dismissed as residual effects of broader national and regional tensions. The unfortunate consequence of this causative narrative is that it resulted in the implementation of solely top down solutions that ignore the reality of localized bottom up tensions. The focus on strengthening state authority diverted attention from alternative policy actions including, but not limited to, the reform of state administration, the elimination of corruption, and the resolution of these grassroots antagonisms.[79]

The implementation of state authority to deal with local violence was rooted in historical colonial rhetoric regarding state building and the nature of the DRC. The belief that the Congo was an inherently turbulent environment, as proven through the historical Congolese atrocity narrative depicting the Congo as "a land of… inherent savagery, and barbarism,"[80] enabled international actors to believe that violence not motivated by national and regional tensions was a normal feature of life in eastern DRC.[81] The view of local conflict as part of the culture of the country cast it as a criminal and private matter, not important enough to warrant a place in the dominant discourse, or to engender a change to political policies of intervention.[82] Instead of addressing these issues, the international community has continued to link localized violence as a result of criminalized agendas with

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[79] Autesserre, "Dangerous Tales," 212, 220.
[80] Ibid., *The Trouble With The Congo,* 74.
[81] Dunn, 173.
[82] Autesserre, *The Trouble With The Congo,* 75.

a presumption that local actors desire to control mining sites. International analysts and humanitarians assumed both of these causes of violence could be solved through greater state authority in the region that would be implemented once the conflicts were over. Therefore, in this narrative only violence considered a direct result of the conflict was significant enough to warrant international attention.

THE WARTIME RAPE DISCOURSE IN THE DRC

International narrators of the violence in the Great Lakes Region perceive wartime rape as the most pressing consequence of the Congolese conflicts. The narrow focus of the wartime rape narrative, which excludes all other forms of gendered violence and life force atrocities caused by the conflicts, has had negative effects on local Congolese women. This focus has shaped a narrow mandate of aid interventions that fails to address socio-cultural gender dynamics and how they are linked to other types of gendered violence.

The mass rape of Congolese women and girls has become the dominant atrocity narrative used to frame the consequences of the violence in the DRC. The original atrocity narrative developed in the 1890s was used to reveal how the extreme capitalist production of Leopold's Congo led to the brutal treatment of Congolese men and women.[83] Nancy Rose Hunt has suggested that the standard atrocity narrative has presented a gender blind analysis of Congolese history. Depicted through the use of the "mute row of male atrocity victims with mere stumps for arms," women's experiences of pain and suffering were often

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[83] Holmes, 231.

left absent, despite documented evidence of their existence.[84] The general dismissal of the

impact of violence on women was a global phenomenon with gendered violence in all

forms largely left out of international human rights law.[85]

The criminalization of war rape by the international community is an important

contributor to the development of the wartime rape narrative. The stigma and shame

historically associated with sexual assault was challenged in the 1960s and 1970s when

extensive second wave feminist scholarship in the west emerged around themes of gender

and violence. Classic works such as Susan Brownmiller's *Against Our Will: Men, Women*

and Rape (1976)[86] were crucial starting points for understanding violence against women

as a global phenomenon, and specifically sexual violence against women during wartime.

Brownmiller suggested that rape was not a sexual act per se; rather, it was a powerful way

to express men's dominance over women during both times of peace and war.

The Bosnian War was viewed as an intensely gendered and radicalized conflict with

a heavy focus on the sexual atrocities committed by Serbian men against non-Serbian

women.[87] Although rape has occurred in armed conflicts throughout history, it was not until

the 1990s when international media reports of mass rape occurring in the context of the

Bosnian war that rape was acknowledged as a deliberate military strategy and required

legal redress.[88]

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[84] Nancy Rose Hunt, "An Acoustic Register," 222.

[85] Neither the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, nor the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) mention gender or sexual violence. Rhonda Copelan, "Toward Accountability for Violence Against Women in War: Progress and Challenges," in *Sexual Violence In Conflict Zones: From The Ancient World To The Era Of Human Rights,* edited by Elizabeth Heineman (Philadelphia : University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 236.

[86] Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (New York: Bantam Books, 1976).

[87] Adam Jones, "Gender and Genocide," in *The Historiography of Genocide*, edited by Dan Stone (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 231.

[88] Sherrie Russell Brown, "Rape as an Act of Genocide," *Berkley Journal of International Law* 21 (2003): 351.

Wartime rape had been prohibited with the fourth Geneva Convention drafted in 1949, but it was viewed only as an attack against a woman's "honour."[89] This treatment of rape as an injury to a woman's honour reduced the motivation to prosecute attacks for this crime compared to other physical injuries incurred in wartime.[90] Since then, women and human rights' advocates have worked to raise awareness of gendered violence occurring in all forms. The pinnacle of these efforts was achieved in 1993 at the World Conference on Human Rights where gendered and sexual violence were defined for the first time as human rights issues in international law. The UN Convention on the Elimination of Violence against Women (CEDAW) defined gender-based violence as any act that "results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, psychological harm or suffering of women… whether occurring in public or private life."[91] It concluded that any violence perpetuated against a person's will as a result of power inequalities or perceived gender roles was a violation of women's human rights.[92] This understanding was front and centre in women's suffering the Congo conflicts.

In the last two decades, there have been further resistance movements in the international realm to combat historical understanding that viewed sexual violence as a by-product of war, with women being the regrettable, but unavoidable collateral damage. Substantial strides were made when the United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 827 (1993) leading to the establishment of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia. This represented the first ever condemnation of war rape by the

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[89] Article 27, paragraph 2 of the Geneva Convention equates a woman's dignity with her sexual purity noting that chastity and modesty are inherent qualities of a women's honour.

[90] Alona Hagay-Frey, *Sex and Gender Crimes in the New International Law,* (Boston: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2011): 3.

[91] UN General Assembly, *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women*, United Nations, Treaty Series1249, (18 December 1979), http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/text/econvention.htm.

[92] Copelan, "Toward Accountability," 241.

Security Council.[93] Subsequent precedents were set at the International Criminal Tribunal

for the former Yugoslavia and the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda successfully

declaring rape as a crime against humanity, a crime of war, and a crime of genocide.[94] In

1998, the ICTR convicted Jean-Paul Akayesu, a Rwandan Hutu Mayor and perpetrator of

the genocide of rape, marking the first time ever that rape was defined in international law.

It is defined as "a physical invasion of a sexual nature, committed on a person under

circumstances which are coercive."[95] Sexual violence is considered to be "any act of a

sexual nature" committed on a person under coercive circumstances. As defined by the

United Nations, sexual violence includes "rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced

pregnancy, enforced sterilization, or any other form of sexual violence of comparable

gravity against women, men or children."[96] The new conceptualization of rape in law

successfully challenged the historical perception of rape as an inevitable outcome of war.

This created a new framework of analysis to view sexual violence in the Congo. While it is

clear that this wartime rape narrative is important because it allows sexual violence to be

recognized as a war crime globally, the way it has shaped the understanding of gendered

violence in the Congo has had problematic effects.

Even before Margot Wallstrom publicly labeled the eastern Congo the "rape capital

of the world," sexual violence had become the main frame used when thinking of the

consequences of violence in the Congo. Published in the aftermath of the Rwandan

genocide, human rights documents such as Binaifer Nowrojee's *Shattered Lives: Sexual*

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[93] Statues at the ICTY, ICTR, and the Rome Statute have since followed this precedent.

[94] Alona. Hagay-Frey, *Sex and Gender Crimes in the New International Law (*Boston: Martinus Nijhoff, 2011), 99.

[95] *The Prosecutor v. Jean-Paul Akayesu Chamber Judgement*, ICTR-96-4-T, International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, 2 September 1998, para 688, https://www.icrc.org/casebook/doc/case-study/ictr-akayesu-case-study.htm.

[96] United Nation's Security Council, *Conflict-related sexual violence –Report of the Secretary-General, (*New York: UN Security Council, 2012), 2.

Violence During the Rwandan Genocide and Its Aftermath (1996) broke the silence surrounding the devastating effects of war on women.[97] Working within the context of genocidal rape, her work broke traditional taboos surrounding the use of sexual violence against women in conflict, leading the way for further analysis of gender and war. A number of feminist, journalists, politicians, scholars and activists followed in Nowrojee's footsteps, raising the alarm against the heinous nature of wartime rape throughout the world.

In 2002 Human Rights Watch published *War Within A War*, the first comprehensive report mapping the extent of sexual gender based violence in eastern Congo.[98] Many reports have followed serving to raise the profile of sexual violence in the DRC. These publications, coupled with mass media campaigns reporting large numbers of girls and women being raped by armed factions, were integral in fashioning the international community's perception of gendered violence in the eastern Congo. As a result, the international community interpreted gendered violence to refer exclusively to sexual violence, specifically wartime rape and sexual torture, performed against civilian women and girls by armed soldiers and militias.[99]

The legal evolution of wartime rape in international legislation partially explains the international community's adoption of the wartime rape narrative; however, there are several other interrelated factors, which explain why this narrative has gained the most public traction. Humanitarian emergencies tend to focus on a specific story with a clearly discernable victim. Examples include amputees in Sierra Leone, starving children in

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[97] Binaifer Nowrojee, *Shattered Lives: Sexual Violence During The Rwandan Genocide And Its Aftermath* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1996).
[98] Human Rights Watch, *The War Within The War: Sexual Violence In Eastern Congo* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2002).
[99] Human Rights Watch, "The War Within The War," 14-16.

Ethiopia, or victims of chemical weapons in Syria. The media tend to focus all attention

towards these victims, resulting in the development of a specific narrative. These thematic

trends also dominate aid discourse with most funding initiatives being proposed to help the

most visible victims.[100]

International media coverage of the DRC has been dominated by reports on mass

numbers of rape victims and incidents of mass rape.[101] Although there is no denying that

significant numbers of women have been raped, with estimates saying as many as forty

percent of all women have experienced sexual violence, the way these numbers are reported

by the media has significantly fuelled the dominant wartime rape narrative, determining

who is a victim and a perpetrator. An example is demonstrated by *The Guardian*

misrepresenting the statistical findings of a report by HEAL Africa.[102] This organization's

report discusses the high levels of rape perpetrated by men against women, stating that

more than half the patients treated at their medical facility were violated by civilians, not

soldiers. In response to this report, *The Guardian* released an article stating:

> The number of women and children raped in the Democratic Republic of the Congo
> has risen dramatically because of a surge in rebel militia activity, according to a
> local health organisation report. Heal Africa, which runs a hospital for rape victims
> in the eastern city of Goma, said it had registered 2,517 cases in the first half of this
> year."[103]

The presentation of these statistics perpetuates a predetermined narrative of wartime

rape in the DRC that is intentionally misleading.

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[100] Laura Heaton, "The Risks of Instrumentalizing the Narrative on Sexual Violence in the DRC: Neglected Needs and Unintended Consequences," *International Review of the Red Cross* 96 no. 894 (2014): 625.

[101] Some examples of these reports include: "UN Official Calls DR Congo 'Rape Capital of the World'", BBC, 28 April 2010, available at: http://news. bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/8650112.stm. "Rape in DR Congo: A 'Weapon of War,' Aljazeera, March 16, 2013, available at: http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/insidestory/2013/03/20133168949374179.html. Michelle Faul, "Some 200 Women Gang-Raped Near Congo UN Base", Associated Press, 24 August 2010.

[102] "North Kivu, Sexual Violence Targets Children", HEAL Africa Press Dossier, 2012, available at: www. healafrica.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/sexual-violence-targets-children-2012.pdf.

[103] "Congo Rape Numbers Rise Dramatically", The Guardian, 19 October 2012, available at: www.theguardian.com/world/2012/oct/19/congo -rape-number-rise-rebels.

International media coverage, specifically by western agencies, tends to highlight stories that align with their audiences' preconceived ideas of a place and people.[104] The wartime rape narrative became immensely prominent in the context of the DRC because it resonated with western audiences and it represented a story of women victims threatened by male killers and rapists.[105] This narrative reinforced what people already knew, or thought they knew, about the Congo and about Congolese men. Gender and race stereotypes were refashioned to fit this narrative employing colonial perceptions of all Congolese men as hypersexual, primitive, and savage while women were grouped homogeneously together as victims.[106] The reality of sexual violence as a global phenomenon made instances of assault more tangible to western audiences. This homogenization of all women as universal victims promoted an urgent need to stop the violence in order to protect these women. Unfortunately, essentializing Congolese women as victims of mass wartime rape by male soldiers has resulted in a global blind spot concerning all other forms of violence against women, causing a general neglect of other consequences of violence, including other forms of gender-based violence that exist during both times of war and peace.[107]

The dominance of the wartime rape narrative has led to the refashioning of gender based violence into a narrative about rape as the weapon used in the "war on Congolese women."[108] This focus on wartime rape has led to the elision of all other forms of gendered violence that are assumed to be entrenched in the "normality" of restricted gender norms

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[104] Heaton, 631.
[105] Georgina Holmes, *Women And War In Rwanda: Gender, Media And The Representation Of Genocide* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 242.
[106] Autesserre, "Dangerous Tales," 215, Holmes, 240.
[107] This will be explored in depth in chapter three of this thesis.
[108] Holmes, 239.

within the social, cultural, or political domain; or the result of other life atrocities that have emerged due to violent conflict.[109] This has resulted in a myriad of negative consequences that have resulted from well-meaning interventions imposed by the international community.

MISGUIDED INTERVENTIONS

Militarized conflicts have detrimental consequences for entire societies, not just the armed combatants involved. There are important indirect negative consequences of prolonged armed conflicts occurring in areas of infrastructure, health, and agriculture, often resulting in reduced access to basic necessities of life such as clean water, food, hygiene, and health services.[110] The indirect effects of war often result in greater levels of suffering, morbidity, and mortality. However, in the eyes of the international community, the prevailing wartime rape narrative's focus on female victims of sexual violence trivialized the desperate situation many Congolese communities found themselves in due to the conflict.

The focus on victims of sexual violence led to the unintentional discrimination against other vulnerable populations who were also affected by the conflict. This occurred in two ways. First, the concentration on sexual violence served to divert attention away from other forms of conflict violence that were not sexual in nature. The recruitment of child soldiers, incidences of homicide and mass murder, as well as different forms of non-

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[109] This idea is explored in depth in chapter three.
[110] Thomas Plümper and Eric Neumayer, "The Unequal Burden of War: The Effect of Armed Conflict on the Gender Gap in Life," *International Organization* 60. 3 (2006): 723-4.

sexual torture are all examples of horrendous violence that occurred against men and women, but did not become popular causes because they do not fit into the wartime rape narrative.[111] Even gendered forms of violence that occurred as a direct result of the conflict were undercut by the continual focus on sexual violence. Women and children are known to be the most vulnerable in conflict and post conflict societies, making up the majority of IDP and refugee camp populations worldwide.[112] However, despite the prevalence of this in the DRC, victims of mass displacement, malnutrition, and inadequate healthcare continued to be seen as secondary in importance compared to victims of sexual violence. Evidence shows that during and post conflict, healthcare provision was so entrenched in the wartime rape narrative that Congolese women knew the best way they would receive medical care was to claim rape.[113]

The focus on sexual violence, specifically on wartime rape, created a prerequisite for victimhood where women's suffering that could not be directly traced to wartime rape was seen as inconsequential and ignored. In the eastern Congo almost everyone has a story of suffering. However, the dominant narrative only allows certain women, who have survived certain experiences, to qualify as victims while the suffering faced by others has been rendered invisible. This distinction between victims of wartime rape and all "other" victims has led to a hierarchy of atrocity, wherein the distinctive characteristics of wartime rape has served to deter recognition from other forms of violence.[114] The result of this

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[111] Autesserre, "Dangerous Tales," 217. Holmes, 243.

[112] Judy Benjamin, "The Gendered Dimensions of Internal Displacement: Concept Paper and Annotated Bibliography," *UNICEF Gender Issues Paper* (1998): 7.

[113] Nynke Douma and Dorothea Hilhorst, "Fond de Commerce? Sexual Violence Assistance In The Democratic Republic Of Congo," *Disaster Studies* 2 (2012): 49.

[114] Rhonda Copelon, "Gendered War Crimes: Reconceptualising Rape In Times Of War," in *Women's Rights, Human Rights: International Feminist Perspectives,* edited by Julie Peters and Andrea Wolper (New York: Routledge, 1995), 204.

hierarchy is demonstrated through an analysis of specific intervention methods imposed by the international community.

The international community controls the majority of agenda setting and coordination for aid interventions because they usually provide the funds for these initiatives. As a result, the dominant discourse used to explain the violence, and victims of violence, are large determinants of which programs are considered the most important. From 1996-2006 the Congo attracted a lot of aid organizations and funding to the eastern Congo. Unfortunately, this aid was narrowly focused on assisting victims of wartime sexual violence largely at the expense of other development projects.[115]

The prioritization of sexual violence within aid interventions had negative effects for many women who did not fit the mandate of these specific organizations. For example, many medical organizations in eastern Congo focused only on health problems which were deemed to be directly associated with sexual assault such as STI/HIV testing and treatment or psychological counselling services. This was problematic because it only allowed the treatment of certain ailments while numerous other problems such as malnutrition, other diseases including malaria and cholera, or psychological problems that were not the result of sexual violence, were excluded.[116] In a conflict or post-conflict society where basic health infrastructure is lacking, medical aid organizations' refusal to treat these common ailments because they did not coincide with their internationally funded mandate was detrimental for many Congolese communities.

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[115] Douma and Hilhorst, 33.

[116] The extent of this problem is shown when it is considered that the majority of deaths occurring in 1996-2003 were not directly related to violence but instead the result of malnutrition, preventable disease, and displacement. Benjamin Coghlan et al. "Mortality In The Democratic Republic Of Congo: An Ongoing Crisis," *International Rescue Committee*, (2007): 3.

Aid groups, government officials, and local communities have become aware that sexual violence, specifically wartime rape elicits the strongest response from journalists and donors.[117] Many aid organizations recognize that they are more likely to receive resources if their beneficiaries are wartime rape victims. Similarly, local Congolese in need of assistance are more inclined to adapt their stories to adhere to a specific script in line with the wartime rape narrative in order to access the privileges of international interventions.[118] Tying medical services to sexual violence when the former are largely unavailable or inaccessible to the general population, serves to exclude all other women who are not categorized as rape victims, even if they suffer from similar health problems. Since the general health infrastructure in the Congo is very poor, many women are forced either to represent themselves as victims of wartime rape in order to gain access to resources, or left to face the painful and often dangerous consequences of remaining untreated for their various health conditions.

One common example occurs with the case of vaginal fistulas. Congolese women know that the most effective way to receive help for a fistula is by claiming rape because there are available funds earmarked for rape survivors. However, women reporting childbirth related fistulas fall outside of the assistance framework of many medical aid organizations.[119] As a result, in the context of the DRC both local Congolese and medical facilities almost exclusively portray fistulas as the result of rape, despite the fact that in 2011 only 1/350 fistula operations performed by Panzi hospital in South Kivu had a

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[117] Heaton, 629.
[118] Ibid., 626.
[119] Ibid., 634. Douma and Hilhorst, 10.

reported link to rape.[120] This example demonstrates that the focus on providing curative

programming to deal with the consequences of sexual violence has resulted in the failure to

address deeper underlying problems with reproductive healthcare in the DRC.[121]

Similar issues affect many intervention programs. Most assistance is focused on

short-term relief aimed at addressing the consequences of violence, rather than the

implantation of long-term development approaches that could address the root causes.

Continuing to operate within the wartime rape narrative, most intervention methods focus

on providing medical, judicial and social assistance to victims in the aftermath of an attack.

There were few organizations that use a long term development approach to address the

actual causes of violence by dealing with poverty, land conflicts, physical and economic

insecurity, or oppressive gender norms.

The failure to consider the role gender relations play in sexual violence and other

forms of gendered violence is reflected by the lack of research on gender dynamics of the

region. To remedy this, programs need to include a focus on the causes of the violence

found in the larger socio-cultural gender realities that exist in the Congo.[122] This requires an

in-depth analysis of how gender relations between men and women contribute to gendered

violence at the local level and how they have changed with the war.

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[120] Heaton 634.
[121] Ibid.
[122] Ibid., 45.

CHAPTER TWO

GENDER DYNAMICS AND A HISTORY OF INEQUALITY

High levels of rape and other forms of sexual gendered violence recognized during the Congolese wars have clouded a historical analysis of gender dynamics in eastern DRC. Because the dominant discourse of gender and development theory assert that the best way to remedy violence against women is to increase gender equality, it is taken for granted that in eastern DRC, where rape and sexual violence are rampant, gender inequality is rife. However, this understanding of gender relations is inconsistent with other research suggesting the equality gap between men and women in parts of eastern DRC has significantly diminished during the last century.[1] Asserting that the current situation of gender based violence in eastern DRC cannot be understood effectively without a contextual analysis of the historical development of ethnic and gender identities and their relationship with gender based violence, this chapter outlines the cultural and historical foundations of gender identities and their evolution in eastern DRC.

Gender norms, identities and relations are fluid and constantly changing. In some cases, as they occur these changes come about incrementally and are hardly noticeable. Other times, these changes occur abruptly, significantly altering gender relations. A number of scholars have explained sudden changes in gender dynamics as revolutions resulting from conflict or extreme situations where women are forced to adapt to new gender roles in order to survive. The case of Rwanda in the aftermath of genocide is one example. Men were the main mortality victims of the genocide, whereas women were subjected to sexual

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[1] Theo Hollander, "Oral Histories Of Gender In Flux: Challenging Popular Perceptions About The State Of Gender In South Kivu, Eastern Democratic Republic Of The Congo," in *Gender and Conflict: Embodiments, Discourses and Symbolic Practices,* edited by Georg Frerks, Annelou Ypeij, and Reinhilde Sotiria König (United Kingdom: Ashgate, 2014), 20.

violence but not necessarily death. Consequently, the population of Rwanda after the

genocide was made up of seventy percent women, many of whom were left as widows

solely responsible for the survival of their household.[2] In order to survive, women took on

jobs and roles that were traditionally outside of their sphere of responsibility, forcing a

sudden renegotiation of gender relations in Rwandan communities.[3] Eastern DRC has

experienced similar changes as gender relations have been suddenly and significantly

renegotiated since colonization. Thus, to uncover the roots of gendered violence in the

Congo wars, the historical social, economic, and political changes that impacted current

gender dynamics in the region must be examined.[4]

Much of the literature on gender in the DRC continues to reify perceptions of a

traditional patriarchy,[5] where static gender relations cast men as violent oppressors and

women as suppressed victims, usually of sexual violence.[6] The excessive increase in

gender-based violence since the Congolese wars began suggests that gender inequality,

resulting from harmful gender norms and traditions embedded in Congolese culture, is

worse now than ever before. Recent international campaigns for worldwide gender equality

as the optimal approach to protection of women from violence reinforce this narrative.[7] In

cooperation with programs for victims of wartime sexual violence, well-intentioned

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[2] Laura Sjoberg, "Reconstructing Women In Post Conflict Rwanda," in *Women, War and Violence: Personal Perspectives and Global Activism,* edited by Robin Chandler, Lihua Wang, and Linda Fuller (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 174.
[3] Ibid., Also see, Catherine Newbury and Hannah Baldwin, "Aftermath: Women In Post-Genocide Rwanda," *Center For Development Information And Evaluation,* Working Paper 303 (2000): 6.
[4] Hollander, "Oral Histories," 20.
[5] Traditional patriarchy implies a fixed and unchanging past of male dominance over women; however, traditional customs and practices result from ongoing processes of reinterpretation and reformulation brought about by socio-political changes. Thomas Spears argues that traditions are malleable and were used by colonial officials and Africans to strengthen and legitimize their rules. He bases his analysis on Terence Ranger's "The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa" where he argued that rather than being timeless, traditions were created by colonial authorities in conjuncture with African elites to establish customs that supported patriarchal colonial authority. This concept if further explored below. Thomas Spear, "Neo-traditionalism and the Limits of Invention in British Colonial Africa," *Journal of African History* no. 44 (2003): 3–27. Terence Ranger, "The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa," in *The Invention of Tradition, e*dited by Eric Hobsbawn and Terence Ranger, 211-262. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1983.
[6] Hollander, "Oral Histories," 19.
[7] Merry, 103.

policies endorsed by the international community aim to improve the status of women and promote gender equality to remedy gender based violence in the DRC. Unfortunately, these programs and policies operate under the dominant discourse of gender and development theory utilizing universal and static models that do not correspond to the changing reality of the DRC.[8] In particular, this model endorses the assumption of some white feminists that all women are universal victims of patriarchy.[9] However, a theory of universal female subordination to men does not fit the realities of many African contexts, including the socio-economic context of many communities in eastern DRC.

In order for policies and programs to be effective, they must respond to the lived realities of the populace. In eastern DRC, assumptions of gender relations based on western experiences of patriarchy and colonialism have informed top down gender and development policies aimed at combatting gender inequality and hence, wartime rape. Driven by international donors who often set program agendas, the continuation of these programs has perpetuated a misconception of Congolese gender relations, crowding out alternative approaches which may be more successful.

This chapter analyses the international community's understanding of the causes and solutions to gender based violence in eastern DRC. Arguing that gender relations in eastern DRC have been understood according to the dominant discourse of gender and development theory, it posits that assumptions about Congolese women in society have

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[8] Caroline Moser, "Gender Planning In The Third World: Meeting Practical And Strategic Gender Needs," *World Development* 17, no. 11 (1989): 1799-1825.
[9] See, Robin Morgan, *Sisterhood Is Global,* New York: Anchor Press, 1984. Amie Alden, "A Continuum of Violence: A Gendered Analysis of Post- Conflict Transformation," *POLIS Journal* 3 (2010): 1-37. Joan Spade and Catherine Valentine, *The Kaleidoscope of Gender: Prisms, Patterns, and Possibilities,* SAGE Publishing LTD, London: England, 2011, xvii. Chritina Morus, "War Rape And The Global Condition of Womanhood: Learning From The Bosnian War." In *Rape: Weapon of War and Genocide,* edited by Carol Rittner and John Roth (Paragon House, 2012), 55. Jelke Boesten, *"*Analysing Rape Regimes at the Interface of War and Peace in Peru." *The International Journal of Transitional Justice* 4 (2010): 110-129.

resulted in policies and programs that are not compatible with many women's lived realities. These assumptions are the result of colonial rhetoric that focuses on dominant perceptions of African women as voiceless, helpless, and oppressed victims without agency. A historical analysis of traditional social structures and gendered understandings of reproduction and production norms in eastern DRC reveal the flaws in this dominant perception. Congolese women have historically wielded significant power through their roles as mothers and cultivators. Tracing history to understand the current social context of eastern Congo, this chapter deconstructs the colonial understandings of African women's history producing a more relevant analysis of Congolese gender relations recognizing how gender identities and realities have changed during and after colonization. This analysis concludes that the dominant discourse casting gender-based violence as a result of women's subordinate status relies on out dated gender norms that no longer reflect gender performances in many communities.

The chapter concludes that traditional gender norms and societal expectations in eastern DRC are no longer compatible with socio-economic realities causing a change in gender performances and thus, in gender relations between men and women. Although patriarchy still exists in most Congolese communities, as men's continued control of most positions of power demonstrates, these positions of power only belong to a small minority of elite men. Within the rest of society, including at the community and family levels, women have experienced a relative empowerment resulting from the disempowerment of men who can no longer fulfill societal expectations of manhood.[10] Despite this societal change, the international community continues to employ polices and initiatives created in

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[10] Hollander, "Oral Histories," 40.

a western capitalist context, rather than the lived experiences and histories of women in the Great Lakes Region.

GENDER BASED VIOLENCE IN THE DRC- THE CONSTRUCTION OF A VICTIM

A number of recent works by gender and war theorists have challenged the assumption that rape is inevitably a by-product of war. Instead, wartime rape is presented on a continuum of violence extending well beyond its use as a weapon of war to an endemic form of gender based violence occurring within households and communities worldwide. This continuum presumes a correlation between gender based violence and gender oppression where extreme forms of violence, such as wartime rape, are overt enactments of gender ideologies and gender inequality usually perpetuated through less obvious forms of violence.[11] This correlation suggests that, while gender inequality and oppression are demonstrated in different ways and degrees depending on culture and contextual circumstances, they are omnipresent, entrenched and reinforced worldwide through a system of global patriarchy.[12] Therefore, violence against women is not a result of conflict, but an indication of pre-existing cultural norms that perpetuate women's secondary status globally.[13]

For proponents of these theories, the best way to protect women from violence is to focus on improving gender equality in their local communities. Scholars and international

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[11] Alberto Godenzi, "Determinants Of Culture: Men And Economic Power," In *Male Roles, Masculinities, and Violence: A Culture of Peace Perspectives,* edited by Ingeborg Breines, Robert Connell, and Ingrid Eide (New York: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2000), 39.
[12] Morus, 55.
[13] Catherine A. McKinnon, "Rape, Genocide, and Women's Human Rights*," Harvard Women's Law Journal* no. 17 (1994): 8.

intervention initiatives view the DRC as a key case study for this typology suggesting that pre-existing cultural norms and power structures that enforce women's secondary status underpin the widespread use of wartime sexual violence. This suggests that an analysis of gender inequalities present in the eastern Congolese societies will uncover the root cause of gender-based violence. Unfortunately, the western Christian missionaries, international organizations and NGOs responsible for conducting such analyses have been unable to understand the dynamics of violence in the DRC. This is because white feminism frames its understanding of gender dynamics in the region on scripted notions of Congolese women and African backwardness. Thus, many Congolese gendered norms and practices are misrepresented as misogynistic because they are not understood in their cultural and social contexts, but from a perspective tinged with colonial biases.[14]

Any historical investigation of gender in a contemporary African society must take the dominance of the western production of knowledge into account. As has been noted in chapter one, the west has controlled epistemological construction of Africa since the sixteenth century perpetuating erroneous conceptions of Africa and Africans.[15] Conventional Africanist scholarship enforces stereotypical images representing Africans as "savage, subhuman, primitive, and hyper-sexed" in need of western protection and civilizing.[16] Under the guise of compassion and duty, these images have served to justify western domination in Africa for centuries.

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[14] Signe Arnfred, "Re-Thinking Sexualities In Africa," 12, 15.

[15] Jan Nederveen Pieterse, *White on Black, Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture (*New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 30.

[16] Oyérónké Oyĕwùmí, "The White Woman's Burden: African Women in Western Feminist Discourse," in *African Women and Feminism: Reflecting on the Politics of Sisterhood,* edited by Oyérónké Oyĕwùmí, 25-44 (Trenton: African World Press Inc.,2006), 25-26.

White feminism has upheld this epistemological pattern, perpetuating certain representations of African women as the "Other."[17] Recycling colonial myths related to Africans' "hyper-sexuality" and "barbaric violence," it portrays African women as voiceless, helpless victims in need of protection from the "Bestial Savage," meaning the African man.[18] These cultural representations have important consequences because they create a specific kind of visibility for African women as victims of a third world, male dominated culture.[19] Much of this white feminist approach conflates the "sexual difference" of African women with their "third world difference," depicting a homogenized version of the "oppressed third world woman."[20] By representing African woman as "other," white western women are by contrast viewed as developed, equal, and liberated by modernity.[21]

The modernity paradigm equates women's subordination with culture and tradition; and gender equality with modernity, assuming that in regards to gender relations, white western women have reached the apex of development. This perception enforces historical dichotomies that view white women as not only different than African women, but above or better than their "other" counterpart.[22] In part this is due to a historical system that categorizes the position of women in any society as symbiotic with the position of their

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[17] The construction of African women as "Other" is this regard is multi-fold and significant as it applies to Congolese women. As Signe Arnfred points out, "'Others' are not there as produced by nature; 'others' are constructed. This is true of 'woman as other', as well as of 'third world as other' and of 'third world woman as other.'" Arnfred, *Sexuality And Gender Politics,* 111. The idea of "woman as other" formed with the second wave of feminism when women became defined as the second sex. Simone De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex,(* London: Vintage Classics 1949/1997). The assumption of a universal subordination on the basis of their sex advocated a solidarity between all woman grounded in this "otherness." This assumption of unity on the basis of biology results in a binary division of power; where all women are presumed to be equally powerless and exploited by men. Problematically, this universal categorization assumes an ahistorical unity between all women based on this generalized subordination without anticipating different conditions as a result of social class, ethnic identity or local. As Chandra Mohanty asserts, this analysis is overly simplistic and has proven ineffective at producing strategies to combat oppression in developing settings such as Africa. Chandra Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship And Colonial Discourses," *Boundary* 12/13 no. 3 (1984): 333-358.

[18] Oyēwùmí, "The White Woman's Burden: African Women in Western Feminist Discourse," 31. Alta Jablow and Dorothy Hammond explain the positing of the two contradictory images of Africans in dominant colonial rhetoric: noble savage and bestial savage. Dorothy Hammond and Alta Jablow, *The Africa that Never Was: Four Centuries of British Writing About Africa, (*New York: Twayne Publishers Inc., 1970), 20.

[19] Signe Arnfred, "Re-Thinking Sexualities,"12.

[20] Arnfred, *Sexuality and Gender Politics in Mozambique,* 111. Mohanty, 352.

[21] Arnfred, *Sexuality and Gender Politics in Mozambique,* 112.

[22] Arnfred, "Re-Thinking Sexualities," 8.

society in the evolutionary hierarchy.[23] Accordingly, African woman are at the bottom of

this hierarchy, deemed the least "liberated" and inhabiting the most uncivilized society.[24]

Gendered development practices remains rooted in the assumption that as the most

liberated by virtue of their highly civilized society, some white western feminists have a

duty to "liberate" third world women. What Oyérónké Oyēwùmí has called "the west

woman's burden of the twentieth century" is the global social mission white feminism has

taken on: to battle a patriarchy assumed to be universal, and bring African woman into

modernity. From this feminist vantage point, the burden means "rescuing the exploited,

helpless, brutalized, and downtrodden African woman from the savagery of the African

male and from a primitive culture symbolized by barbaric customs."[25] Thus, the Western

world is set up as the model of achievement and African woman, as oppressed

subordinates, should be grateful receivers of the blessing of modernity white western

feminists bring.[26]

In the name of gender and development, NGOs and international aid organizations

staffed by western women dispense funds and implement programs telling African women

what they must do economically, socially, and politically in order to reach a desirable level

of modernity.[27] Consequently, white feminist discourses on Africa are privileged above

other discourses that are more appropriate in the context of the DRC.[28]

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[23] The concept of an evolutionary hierarchy first resulted from evolutionary race theory where societies were ranked based on ethnic and racial differences. Modern social sciences have disproven this idea of a hierarchy of races and cultures showing that concepts of biological evolution cannot be applied to cultural development. Nevertheless, it has remained entrenched in colonial rhetoric. See, Charles Darwin, *On The Origin Of The Species By Means Of Natural Selection Or The Preservation Of Favored Races In The Struggle For Life,* (United Kingdom: Murray, 1859). Steven Rose, "Darwin, Race and Gender," *EMBO* Reports 10, no. 4 (2009): 297-298. Peter Bowler, *Evolution: The History of an Idea (*California: University of California Press, 1983), 305-306. Carol Adams, *Animals And Women: Feminist Theoretical Explorations*, (USA: Duke University Press, 1995).
[24] Oyēwùmí, 29.
[25] Ibid., 28.
[26] Arnfred, *Sexuality and Gender Politics in Mozambique,* 106-107.
[27] Ifi Amadiume, *Reinventing Africa: Matriarchy, Religion and Culture* (New York: Zed Books, 1997), 194.
[28] Holmes, 70.

Whereas white feminism prioritizes a homogenized global experience of women based on a shared gender, other theories in line with Africana womanism and African feminism are more attune to gender relations recognizing the diversity of women's experiences by virtue of location, ethnicity, class and social context.[29] There are important differences between these theories.[30] Many African scholars resist using the term feminism, assuming that western ideology grafted indiscriminately onto an African context is highly problematic.[31] Africana womanism offers a new form of feminist consciousness recognizing both the ethnicity and gender of women. Grounded in African culture, it is an ideology focused on the unique experiences, struggles, needs and desires of all Africana women living both on the continent of Africa and its diaspora.[32] Similarly, African feminism combines dimensions of race, sex, class and culture as intersecting oppressions aimed at creating an inclusive form of feminism that recognizes women foremost as human rather than sexual beings. It is meant to emphasis the totality of women's experiences without solely focusing on gender.[33] White feminism continues to dominate the discourse determining what African women consider their intersectional oppressions to be. African womanism and African feminist theories, and the women who are proponents of them, are more attune with the unique diversity of African women's experiences because they are grounded in African culture and authored by African women. Although these theories are more appropriate to understand the diversity of women's experiences in eastern DRC, they

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[29] Hudson-Weems, 39-40.

[30] See, Patricia Hills Collins, "What's In A Name? Womanism, Black Feminism, and Beyond," in *The Womanist Reader,* edited by Layli Phillips (New York: Routledge, 2006), 57-68. Nikol-Alexander- Floyd and Evelyn Simiem, "Revisiting 'What's In A Name?" Exploring The Contours Of Africana Womanist Thought," in *Still Brave: The Evolution Of Black Women's Studies,* edited by Stanlie James, Frances Smith Foster, Beverly Guy-Sheftall (NYC: Feminist Press, 2009): 92-114.

[31] Mary Kolawole, "Re-Conceptualizing African Gender Theory," 261.

[32] Hudson-Weems, *Reclaiming Ourselves,* 54-55.

[33] Steady, "African Feminism: A World Wide Perspective," 4-5. Also see, Filomena Steady, *The Black Woman Cross Culturally, (*Cambirdge: Schenkmen Publishing Co., 1981).

remain largely unrecognized within dominant discourses on gender and development developed under the auspice of white feminism. Undermining the relevance of these theories in development initiatives reinforces the marginalization of Africans in the global political order and reproduces ineffective gender policies that do not resonate with gender realities in eastern DRC.

Dominant understandings of gender relations in the DRC have read history backwards, understanding gender relations through the conceptual lens of present day and gender and development thinking which see gender oppression as rooted in patriarchal African tradition and harmful cultural practices. However, a reinterpretation of "tradition" and "culture" makes it apparent that gender relations and identities in the DRC do not fit the dominant development narrative. Gender and development discourse perpetuates the image of "African Culture" and tradition as excessively patriarchal, ignoring the fact that "patriarchy" may appear differently and take on different meanings depending on the historical and regional context that shapes it. African feminist and African womanist theories challenge the way mainstream white feminism perceives Congolese women and the best approach to gender equality. Through critiques of gender dichotomies and portrayals of female subordination in white feminist scholarship, they have shown that "gender" is more dependent on social contexts and specific relations than biological bodies.[34] The multiple identities of Congolese women as mothers, wives, and workers interact to determine their own constructs of womanhood, which do not always correspond with the dominant definition of "woman." Just as there are multiple versions of history, there are multiple versions of womanhood. A gendered analysis of history is not about

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[34] Arnfred, "Rethinking Sexuality," 11-12.

finding the correct version of history or womanhood, but about accounting for plurality and explaining multiple experiences.[35]

The concept of universal subordination inherent in white western feminism is constructed around one version and experience of womanhood and fails to acknowledge the numerous social, political and economic realities women find themselves in globally. Gendered organizations focused on improving the relevancy of women in developmental policy such as "Women in Development" and "Gender and Development" represent a global approach to women and gender development issues that is assumed to be relevant worldwide.[36] Unfortunately, the planners of these programs have been trained in the western traditions of development policies and gender studies. The result has been the appropriation of African women's experiences by westerners, particularly by white feminism, with the goal of creating beneficial development policies for these women. Thus, despite two waves of development programming, women in the DRC continue to be the recipients of misguided and inappropriate gender development programs that often do more harm than good.

Most development policies on gender fail to take into account local understandings of gender, power relations, and individual needs. Instead they implement programs based on universal tendencies that do not correlate with the local realities. The emphasis of gender and development programming includes:

> The abolition of the sexual division of labour; the alleviation of the burden of
> domestic labour and childcare; the removal of institutionalized forms of
> discrimination such as rights to own land or property, or access to credit; the

[35] David Newbury and Catharine Newbury, "Bringing The Peasants Back In: Agrarian Themes In The Construction And Corrosion Of Statist Historiography In Rwanda," *The American Historical Review* 105, no. 3 (2000), 856.
[36] Arnfred, *Sexuality and Gender Politics in Mozambique,* 131.

establishment of political equality; freedom of choice over childbearing; and the adoption of adequate measures against male violence and control over women.[37]

White feminism sees these issues as women's "real" issues, considered universal and especially prevalent in third world societies. These policies ignore that Congolese women threatened with immediate practical needs, may not recognize nor prioritize their strategic gender needs. Depending on a woman's position, gender interests may not be prioritized over women's other interests that cut across class, race, or ethnic identity. Thus, women's solidarity in these forms cannot be assumed.[38] The resistance of third world feminists to this global agenda reveals the inappropriateness of applying identical development standards based on western norms to all women in all parts of the world.[39] However, the international community continues to employ uniform programs without acknowledging that sometimes these interventions are more dangerous than doing nothing.

There are major ethical issues associated with the west's domination of development programs which ignores how specific dynamics and histories have created the conditions for certain voices to be heard over others. As Oyēwùmí explains, "white sisters" who dominate the development agenda have a tendency to adopt a way of hearing without listening, where they hear what they want to hear, and tend to fit preconceived judgments into traditional colonial understandings. Thus, international programs meant to uncover the reality of women in the DRC are usually directed by white feminist organizations conducting fact-finding missions. Unfortunately, this enables white feminism to define African women's realities rather than allowing African women to determine and share their

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[37] Moser, 1803.
[38] Hazel Reeves and Sally Baden, "Gender And Development: Concepts And Definitions," Bridge Institute of Development Studies 55 (2000), 1-38.
[39] Fiona Flew et. Al, "Introduction: Local Feminisms, Global Futures," *Women Studies International Forum* 22, no. 4 (1999): 393-403. Helen Safa, "Beijing, Diversity And Globalization: Challenges To Women's Movement In Latin America And The Caribbean, *Organization* 3 (1996): 566.

own experiences.[40] As Nkiru Nzegu and Oyēwùmí argue, concepts and categories derived solely from western historical experiences do not appropriately investigate indigenous societies.[41] This gives rise to two modes of knowing; the "abstract" view put forth by white feminism and international organizations, and the "concrete" view of Congolese women living in eastern DRC.

This practice can be seen in the way international organizations have incorporated gender-training programs into their mandates. Especially prevalent in eastern Congo, both staff and local participants are trained to use and interpret their lives through the standardized language of gender and development discourse emphasising female subordination. Despite situations in which women may exercise significant power and agency, women who participate in these donor-sponsored activities learn to "see themselves as oppressed under patriarchal power."[42] This undermines the socio-cultural context of the situation, as women do not learn to appreciate and develop the specific gender dynamics of their community. Women who are interviewed or participate in these programs are subjected to power inequalities where western outsiders constrain access to resources. This can encourage "victims" to present evidence in a certain way to safeguard their own interests and receive training or benefits. This makes data collection difficult and presents an inaccurate construction of the reality women face and their real versus perceived priorities.[43] Congolese women are often forced to live a "double

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[40] See, Mary Kolawole, "Re-Conceptualizing African Gender Theory: Feminism, Womanism And The *Arere* Metaphor," 260 for a discussion on the politics of self naming and defining the reality of your own struggle.

[41] See, Nkiru Nzegwu, "Gender Equality In A Dual System: The Case Of Onitsha," *Canadian Journal Of Law And Jurisprudence* 7, no. 1 (1994): 73-95. Oyeronke Oyewumi, *The Invention Of Women: Making An African Sense Of Western Gender Discourse,* Minnesota: University Of Minnesota Press, 1998.

[42] Arnfred, "Rethinking Sexualities," 12.

[43] Ingrid Samset "Sexual Violence: The Case of Eastern Congo," in *The Peace In between: Post War Violence and Peace building,* edited by Astri Suhrke and Mats Berdal, 230- 247. New York: Routledge Publishing, 2012.

consciousness,"[44] adapting to the rules of the dominant discourse in order to survive and

receive the benefits of development aid, even though it may conflict with or undermine

their traditional sources of power.[45] For example, by attempting to bring women into the

formal market economy, development programs often initiate training sessions to teach

women marketable skills. However, despite the good intentions of these programs it

represents a reversion to colonial periods where women were taken from their traditional

agricultural work and taught the skills of a good housewife.[46] Instead of initiatives meant to

bring women into the formalized economy, programs should capitalize on women's

historical and continual role in agriculture and the informal economy tailoring programs to

accentuate the power and agency women acquire through these traditional roles in their

local communities.

Women's agricultural work has always played a significant role in their cultural

identity by providing for the survival of their families and communities. For many women,

agricultural work and market trading are more sustainable and practical forms of livelihood

than jobs in the formal economy. Thus, although many may perceive women's subsistence

agriculture as a form of gender oppression victimizing Congolese women by keeping them

out of the male dominated formal economy, it is actually a source of pride and power

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[44] The term "double consciousness" coined by W.E.B Du Bois was used to describe the psycho-social experience of African Americans. In the book *The Souls of Black Folk* he describes "double consciousness" as "a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness, an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife- this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He does not wish to Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He wouldn't bleach his Negro blood in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of opportunity closed roughly in his face." William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk,* (New York: Dover Publications, 1903), 2-3.
[45] Arnfred, "Re-thinking Sexualities," 12. Also see, Mary Kolawole, "Re-Conceptualizing African Gender Theory: Feminism, Womanism And The *Arere* Metaphor," in *Rethinking Sexualities,* edited by Signe Arnfred (Sweden: Almqvidt & Wiksell Tryckeri AB, 2004): 251-269.
[46] Nancy Rose Hunt, "An Acoustic Registry," 241-242.

central to their identity as women.[47] The authority women acquire through these traditional

roles is often misunderstood by international agencies yet it may be largely responsible for

Congolese women's resistance to western models of development that aim to disrupt these

gender structures.[48]

It is necessary to study why Congolese women do what they do in order to

understand possibilities for change. Policy makers must take into account the actual

positions of power that women command in their families and communities and develop

policies that compliment and accentuate the historic and continued agency and engagement

of Congolese women. This requires new interpretations of gender relations and gender

policies that deviate from white feminism and account for Congolese women's lived

realities and needs, allowing them to define their own problems and ways of struggling

against oppression.[49]

Whether equality with men in the same way white feminism understands it is a

desirable goal for women, and whether this will impact experiences of gender violence,

depends on understandings of how different men and women currently are, and want to be.

Instead of assuming that white feminism is the best approach to gender equality, the power

that a woman can gain from being treated as a wife, mother, or dependent needs to be

understood in relation to what she gains from being an autonomous individual. This

requires asking Congolese women what they need, instead of allowing others to continue to

dictate the dominant narrative. By allowing Congolese women to define their reality instead

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[47] Lee Ann De Reus, "My Name Is Mwamaroyi: Stories Of Suffering, Survival, and Hope In The Democratic Republic Of Congo," in *Rape: Weapon Of War And Genocide,* edited by Carol Rittner and John Roth, (USA: Paragon House, 2012), 149.
[48] See Susan Rogers, "Female Forms Of Power And The Myth Of Male Dominance: A Model Of Female/Male Interaction In Peasant Society," *American Ethnologist* 2, no. 4 (1975), 727-756.
[49] Mojúbàolú Olúfunké Okome, "What Women, Whose Development? A Critical Analysis of Reformist Evangelism on African Women," in *African Women and Feminism: Reflecting on the Politics of Sisterhood,* edited by Oyérónké Oyēwùmí, (Trenton: African World Press Inc.,2006), 79.

of considering them objects of investigation, a more thorough analysis of gender relations and women's experiences of gender are possible.[50] This calls for a gendered perspective rooted in African culture that explores outside of gender, to consider the interplay of class, culture, ethnicity and politics to determine how they affect gender consciousness and relations of belonging within and amongst different communities at the local level.

COMPONENTS OF COMMUNITY BELONGING

Congolese women do not constitute a homogenous social category. These women have singular identities and realities that determine their experiences and opportunities. In eastern DRC, how gender inequality is experienced and perceived differs for women according to a variety of factors such as age, ethnic identity, and location. These life processes impact a woman's status and gender relations within her local community; therefore, the static nature of gender inequality across the DRC should not be assumed. Understanding how gender differences affect community belonging is critical to address gender relations and inequality. Who can belong to a specific community, and the types of interactions that occur between community members are determined by a number of factors including one's ethnicity, gender, class, and geographical location. These factors not only impact one's belonging to a community but also their place within a given social hierarchy.[51]

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[50] See, Mary Kolawole, "Re-Conceptualizing African Gender Theory: Feminism, Womanism And The *Arere* Metaphor," 251.
[51] Bryant Keith Alexander, *Performing Black Masculinity: Race Culture, and Queer Identity, (*United Kingdom: AltaMira Press, 2006), 72-73.

This is especially prevalent in the DRC where shifting and often conflicting ethnic identities has been tied to numerous conflicts over citizenship and land rights, challenging previous conceptions of nationality and group belonging.[52] Whereas in Rwanda ethnic constructions are commonly viewed through the Hutu-Tutsi dyad, it is more complex in eastern DRC due to cyclical patterns of migration and forced displacement. Ethnic divisions here are complicated with nationality claims and land rights effecting divisions between Hutu-Tutsi identities, as well as between autochthonous Congolese and Banyarwandans, over group belonging and access to resources.[53]

These divisions of ethnic and national identity were compounded during the Congolese wars with many eastern Congolese assuming all Banyarwandans were Rwandan foreigners. The dismissal of all Banyarwandans as mere "Rwandans" extended to all groups regardless of their history and period of settlement, changing previous notions of nationality and belonging. The Banyamulenge are an example of a group whose notion of belonging was severely challenged by these changing identifiers. Although originally Rwandan Tutsi, the Banyamulenge settled in the high plains of eastern DRC in the 1930s and consider themselves Congolese citizens. Until the outbreak of war, their Congolese nationality was largely uncontested; however, since the Rwandan invasion, a focus on their Rwandan Tutsi heritage has become the dominant measure of their identity. Many Congolese doubt that any Banyarwandans in eastern DRC could even be considered truly

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[52] For example, although Tutsi and Hutu communities are present throughout southern Uganda, western Tanzania and eastern Congo with continuous migration patterns dating back to pre-colonial periods, they are considered native to Rwanda. This resulted from widespread migration of Rwandan workers to eastern DRC, followed by further waves of Rwandan displacement brought about by political violence throughout the post colonial era. An estimated fifteen million people in the Great Lakes region speak Kinyarwanda and Kirundi (a language closely related to Kinyarwanda). In 1993 approximately half the population of North Kivu, 3.5 million, were identified as Kinyarwanda speaking with eighty percent Hutu, twenty percent Tutsi. Lemarchand, *The Dynamics of Violence,* 223.

[53] Stephen Jackson, "Boarderlands And The Transformation Of War Economies," 429. Also see Jason Stearns, *Dancing in the Glory of Monsters,* 62 for further discussion on Banyamulenge and regional politics that developed during the Congolese wars.

Congolese; yet, many Banyarwandans proclaim their *Congolite* above other forms of identity.[54]

Although changing notions of belonging contribute to local tensions in eastern DRC, these tensions are not the mere result of ethnicity. Ethnicity has been used to reinforce claims to land rights and other scarce resources, fuelling tensions between groups; however, these conflicts are not rooted in ethnicity but in the evasive poverty and lack of resources, specifically land, characteristic of the region. For example, in Masisi North Kivu, the indigenous Nande group has referenced their Congolese ethnicity in their land claim, arguing that the government had no right to sell their customary land to Banyarwanda immigrants. Ethnic claims to customary land have become more significant since the war due to the overall deterioration of social and economic conditions.[55]

In the DRC, ethnic consciousness is often a "fluctuating, situational expression of group identity aimed at achieving a specific political end."[56] Ethnic identity is often selectively represented depending on circumstances in order to receive higher status or access to resources. Despite the processes of inclusion and exclusions used to redefine ethnicity, nationality and belonging in the context of changing circumstances, both insiders and outsiders of the group often view these identities as timeless and legitimate.[57]

This is common throughout the DRC as demonstrated with political ethnic affiliations used to gain and secure power during the Congolese wars and subsequent 2006 political elections. The Congolese discourse of authenticity led to resentment of foreign influences solidifying exclusionary national identities based on ethnic affiliations and

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[54] Ibid., 429.
[55] Autesserre, *The Trouble With The Congo,* 126-127, 163.
[56] Spears, 18.
[57] Ibid., 18-19.

heightening identity anxieties between groups.[58] This exclusionist ideology played out in the 2006 elections where Kabila's alliance with the RPF during the first Congolese war was conflated to an ethnic affiliation with Rwandan Tutsis. The political opposition accused Kabila of being a Tutsi foreigner because of his "collusion with forces of aggression."[59] They simultaneously proclaimed their candidate Roger Lumbala, "a son of the country" or "autochthon."[60] The use of "autochthon" and "foreigner" in this example demonstrates the arbitrary and changing nature of ethnic identities of belonging used for political gain. As Stephen Jackson demonstrates, the degree of inclusiveness under the banner of autochthon or Congolese slips, allowing certain populations who were previously "in" to be "out," jeopardizing their belonging and threatening their access to resources.[61]

These dynamics are further complicated by the close geographical proximity of different groups in eastern DRC forcing interethnic and multifaceted relationships within which complex alliances of belonging, exchange and dependency are intertwined. Despite the emergence of some intra- and inter community cohabitation forced by the paucity of land, group belonging remains important in the DRC because access to land and other benefits are primarily determined by lineage or membership in a specific clan, family or ethnic community.[62] Thus, the central role of ethnicity as an organisational principle of communities must be considered within socio-cultural gender histories.[63]

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[58] Stephen Jackson, *"Congolité:* Elections And The Politics Of Autochthony In The Democratic Republic Of The Congo," in *Rhetorics Of Insecurity: Belonging And Violence In The Neoliberal Era,* edited by Zeynep Gambetti and Marcial Godoy-Anativia (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 71.

[59] Ibid., 75.

[60] Ibid.

[61] Ibid., 78.

[62] For example, in the Kalehe territory of rural South Kivu there are six principle ethnic groups that have formed numerous intra and inter- community cohabitations because of a paucity of land (Bahavu, Batembo, Barongeronge, Bahutu, Batutsi, and Batwa). Women for Women International, "Women Inherit Wrappers, Men Inherit Fields: The Problem of Women's Access to Land in South Kivu, Democratic Republic of Congo," *Research Report* (2014): 14.

[63] Ibid., 13.

Despite their geographical proximity, by virtue of their cultures and experiences, different groups in eastern DRC evolved differently causing various expressions of gender to develop. Whether a community is matriarchal or patriarchal, rural or urban, or formed from voluntary migration or forced displacements are factors determining how gender roles and identities are established and are maintained. Communities in eastern DRC are usually made of several kin groups or lineages, although the constant shift in migration patterns and urbanization has resulted in larger communities forming largely according to ethnic ties instead of just consanguine or filial relations.[64]

In the context of eastern DRC, research that follows white feminist theorizing suggests that perceptions of masculinity and femininity are not ethnically specific.[65] Numerous studies on gender inequality argue that although ethnicity is an important factor in community belonging, the "experiences of women across ethnic lines are more similar than different."[66] Although it is true that gender inequality is not restricted to one group or another but cuts across ethnic divisions affecting all women to different degrees, these assertions fail to acknowledge that ethnic customs regarding gender differ from one community to another; therefore, dominant trends cannot be assumed.[67]

Issues of ethnicity, nationality, and location create diverse contexts that change how masculinities and femininities are formed and enacted within a given community's social structure. Lineage patterns within various groups are also an important factor in

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[64] Stearn 216.

[65] Desiree Lwambo, "Before the War, I was a Man: Men and Masculinities in Eastern DR Congo," *Heal Africa (*2011): 13.

[66] Christina Morus has suggested that focusing on "individual women's experiences may help to establish inter-ethnic solidarity by empowering women to find a public voice that can both create greater gender consciousness and transcend divisive ethnic frameworks." Morus, 57.

[67] Furthermore, changing notions of belonging can accentuate certain gender practices and customs. For example rituals of manhood practiced by one community may suddenly become a marker of difference when previously had little significance. An example, in eastern DRC many communities mark the graduation of manhood by performing elaborate circumcision rituals. This has become a marked difference used to separate certain groups of men from other groups such as the Banyamulenge who do not practice circumcision rituals. See Stearn, *Dancing In The Glory Of Monsters,* 63.

determining how kinships and bonds of belonging are formed. Although not a universal fixture, patrilineal descent systems are common in many areas of eastern DRC and can be recognized through customary authority systems. For example, in Kamanyola, a small territorial entity of South Kivu Province, the territory is under the supervision of a customary chief whose power is inherited through patrilineal norms. Patrilineality is a common mode of social organization in many territories of eastern DRC codified in state legislation.[68]

Institutional structures such as patrilineality have led to the DRC being presented as a traditionally patriarchal society substantiated by discriminatory gender norms and attitudes about the secondary status of women's roles in society. Claiming that the DRC is traditionally patriarchal assumes that women have always had a distinctly subordinate status in their homes, families, and communities that has not changed despite significant political, social and economic upsets. This reinforces the idea of a static past and suggests that despite imperialism, colonization and several wars, Africans still have an intact cultural heritage.[69]

Importantly, the concept of tradition as it is understood in most histories of the DRC must be outlined to avoid ahistorical assumptions of the static nature of cultural practices. As historian Thomas Spear explains, "tradition" is an interactive process where changes are adopted incrementally over time often through a projection of the present into the past, making traditions seem like a timeless embodiment of past experiences, despite what

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[68] Alice Mushagalusa Karhikalembu, "The Symbolic Dimensions Of Wartime Rape: A Case Study Of Kamanyola Community, Bukavu/ South Kivu Province (Democratic Republic Of Congo)," *Masters Thesis* (Johannesburg: University Of The Witwatersrand, 2014): 48. For further discussion see: International Crisis Group (ICG), "Comprendre Les Conflicts Dans L'Est Du Congo (I): La Plaine De La Ruzizi," *Rapport Afrique,* no. 206 (2013).
[69] Oyěwùmí, 31.

subjective knowledge may suggest.[70] In the DRC like most parts of Africa, tradition as understood today is the result of an interactive process between local communities and colonizers. With colonization, "tradition" became a source of continuous struggle over power, meaning, and access to resources where ideas of the past were recast in present circumstances to legitimize status or restrict access.[71]

Often understood within the paradigm of gender, tradition is mistakenly assumed to be static and all encompassing. However, gender roles and gender relations in eastern DRC are dynamic and have experienced significant restructuring resulting from political and economic changes. Gender is a social construct that informs a gendered order based on the configuration of practices resulting from specific historical circumstances.[72] The meanings attributed to roles and norms are the result of contextual group struggles over socially valued resources whereby the dominant group assigns and directs the social expectations of a society.[73] Gender hierarchies have been renegotiated throughout history in an interactive process between dominant and subordinate groups.[74] These changes are often understood by analyzing the change in gender roles and responsibilities men and women embody at any given time in order to assess their status in a society. However, as a category of analysis, gender needs to be studied by looking not only at gender roles and how they have changed, but the gender meanings ascribed to men and women's experiences. As several

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[70] Spears, 4, 7.
[71] Ibid., 9, 14.
[72] R.W Connell and James Messerschmidt, "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking The Concept," *Gender and Society* 19, no. 6 (2005): 846.
[73] James Waller, "Rape as a Tool of "Othering" in Genocide," in *Rape: Weapon of War and Genocide,* edited by Carol Rittner and John Roth (USA: Paragon House, 2012), 92-93. Lynn Weber, "A Conceptual Framework For Understanding Race, Class, Gender, And Sexuality," *Psychology of Women Quarterly,* 22 (1998), 16.
[74] Iris Berger, "Feminism, Patriarchy and African Women's History," *Journal of Women's History* 20, no. 2 (2008), 131.

historical analyses have showed,[75] when there is a disjunction between the meanings of

masculinity and femininity and the social roles performed by male and females, conflicts,

tensions and new meanings can arise.[76] The DRC has experienced several significant

periods of gender renegotiations resulting from economic and political upheavals caused by

colonization, economic destabilization and war. These periods of instability reconstructed

traditional perceptions of masculinity and femininity and impacted the performance of

gendered social roles.

The following section determines how socio-economic changes during the

Congolese war affected men and women's lives, concepts of masculinity and femininity

and gender relations. Because expectations and performances of gender change over time,

an exploration of historical changes that have created contemporary manifestations of

gender is necessary. This will challenge contemporary gender stereotypes of Congolese

women labeled as voiceless victims of traditional patriarchy by demonstrating that western

conceptions of gender relations in eastern DRC do not correspond with the historical lived

experience of womanhood there.

GENDER RELATIONS FROM THE COLONIAL TO THE POST COLONIAL

In most societies, gender norms develop around concepts of masculinity and

femininity that dictate capabilities and expectations. How femininity and masculinity are

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[75] See Randal Packard, "Social Change And The History Of Mis Forturtune Among The Bashu Of Eastern Zaire," in *Exploration in African System's of Through*, edited by Ivan Karp and Charles Birds (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, (1980): 237-67. Caroline Ifeka-Moller "Sitting On A Man: Colonialism And The Lost Political Institutions Of Ibo Women: A Reply To Judith Van Allen," *CJAS* 7 (1973), 317-18.
[76] Nancy Rose Hunt, "Placing African Women's History And Locating Gender," *Social History* 14, no. 3 (1989): 371.

valued and expressed in a given society determines the identities and roles individuals take on in their family and community. Gender constructs differ according to social structures present in Congolese communities. For many women, the structural elements of life are embedded not only in gender but kin group, age, marital and reproductive status determining the roles and work taken on at any life stage. For example, throughout Congo, domestic chores begin at a young age and are divided along gender lines. Girls are often kept close to home taking care of younger children, learning food preparation, cleaning, food crop cultivation and fetching water and firewood for the family. These responsibilities change as a woman ages and takes on other roles in society.[77]

The dominant discourse prevalent in gender development theory asserts that gender inequality in the DRC is the result of harmful traditional gender norms rooted in a highly patriarchal culture that has continued to suppress women since pre-colonial times. This perception is countered by a number of works by influential African scholars who show how pre-colonial gender relations allowed women to derive power from their reproductive and productive abilities, playing prominent social, spiritual, and even political roles in their communities and families.[78] In this narrative, colonization seriously undermined African women's power by replacing existing socio-political practices and systems of knowledge with western –scripted notions.[79] In eastern DRC oral tradition and available documentations suggest that although social structures did change affecting women's social and economic roles, not all changes were negative.

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[77] Burnet, 42.
[78] Amadiume, 102.
[79] Dunn, 170. Many African scholars who work on pre-colonial Africa assert that colonial patriarchal practices undermined the matriarchal nature of many societies throughout Africa. In matriarchal societies, female-male relations are often understood as non-hierarchal and men and women work together in all areas of social organization.

Patriarchy has always been a central feature of most matrilineal and patrilineal societies in eastern DRC.[80] However, expressions of patriarchy and gender norms associated with masculine and feminine roles changed during colonization due to the economic and political restructuring. In some ways this accorded men more privileges than women in political, economic and social domains.[81] In pre-colonial subsistent economies there was a clear sexual division of labour. Men were usually in charge of livestock herding and cash crops, while women were responsible for subsistence agriculture and market trade. Women's important role in food production afforded them agency and power within their families and communities.[82] With the move from subsistence to a monetary economy, women's roles changed as paid labour was almost exclusively a male domain.[83] However, women's status did not universally decline with these economic changes. Rather, women tended to take on more responsibility for subsistence agriculture and domestic activities to accommodate men's productive roles outside the home. Women's contributions remained significant and helped preserve nutritional adequacy for their families and communities when economic declines occurred.[84]

The change to a formal cash economy privileging men changed familial roles and representations of work.[85] Men's paid labour caused them to become the main providers of the household, a position that had previously been shared by men and women. Because women were largely restricted from participation in the formal economy, many households

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[80] Hollander, "Oral Histories," 20.

[81] Miranda Gertrude, "Colonialism, Education, and Gender Relations in the Belgian Congo: The Évolué Case," in *Women in African Colonial Histories, edited by Susan Geiger, Musisi Nakanyike and Jean Allman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 144.*

[82] Amadieume, 21, 35.

[83] Janet MacGaffey, *Entrepreneurs and Parasites: The Struggle for Indigenous Capitalism in Zaire,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 165-8.

[84] Nancy Rose Hunt, "Placing African Women's History And Locating Gender," 361.

[85] Géraldine André and Marie Godin, "Child Labour, Agency And Family Dynamics: The Case Of Mining In Katanga (DRC), *Sage* 21, no.2 (2014):167.

became dependent on men's financial contributions causing the significance of men as fathers and husbands increased. This emphasised a nuclear family structure that placed men as household heads, reinforcing the nature of patriarchy.[86]

These family structures and gender relations changed in the post-colonial period, affecting constructions and performances of gender. A key moment of gender balance disruption was the first war in post-independent Congo: The Muelele rebellion in 1964.[87] With most men engaged in the war, women took on the majority of responsibilities associated with food production and the running of the household. When men returned, women continued to be involved in food production responsibilities more so than men, changing gender norms.[88]

The war also devastated the economy and impoverished much of eastern DRC. Many expatriates left due to the violence and their absence severely damaged the industrialized cash economy. During this and the post war period, men found it difficult to find paid labour, which undermined their social role as provider. This significantly impacted social norms.[89] A significant example is demonstrated by the inability of men to afford the payment of bride prices necessary to legitimately marry and start a family.

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[86] Ibid.

[87] After the murder of Patrick Lumumba efforts made to avenge his death started in eastern DRC 1964. The rebellion meant to overthrow Mobutu's government and was led by Pierre Mulele in Kwilu and Gaston Soumialot in South Kivu. The war was massive in size requiring mercenaries to be flown in to end it. See, David Van Reybrouck, *Congo: The Epic History Of A People,* trans. Sam Garrett (New York: Harper Collins, 2014). Renee Fox, Willy de Craemer and Jean-Marie Ribeaucourt, "The Second Independence: A Case Study Of The Kwilu Rebellion In The Congo," *Comparative Studies In Society And History* 8, no. 1 (1965): 78-109.

[88] The Babembe od South Kivu are a notable example. Hollander, "Oral Histories," 34.

[89] Hollander, "Oral Histories," 32.

GENDER, MARRIAGE AND SOCIAL NORMS IN POST COLONIAL DRC

In most Congolese communities, marriage has never been an individual affair but one involving the larger extended family. The interests of the family, clan or community are important considerations due to intergenerational transmission of property and social status, which are often conferred through marriage.[90] Kinship ties, communal differences and historical events that have caused division between certain ethnic or geographical groups determine potential marriage partners.[91]

Who can marry, whom they can marry and when, are important considerations that are dependent on meeting both physical and social criteria. Customs present throughout most of eastern DRC, such as the payment of the bride price, are meant to ensure that men and women had achieved the social maturity necessary to marry. The determinants of social maturity are different for different groups but tend to be related to one's ability to assume gender roles and responsibilities associated with the status of husband, wife or parent. For example, among the Ngbanka of Ubangi, when a young woman can carry out the chores of an adult woman such as cooking and farming, she is considered fit for marriage. Young Ngbanka men have to show their suitability for marriage by demonstrating they are able to provide for a family and afford the payment of a bride price.[92] The bride price is usually a transfer from the groom's entire family to the bride's family. The purpose of this system was originally a form of compensation to the woman's family for the loss of labour they would suffer when she married and moved away from home. However, it is also a way for

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[90] Hewlett, 64.

[91] Theo Hollander's exploration of oral traditions in South Kivu uncovers tensions between the Manyamuenge and Babembe tribes resulting from the Mulele rebellion in 1964. Hollander, "Oral Histories," 32.

[92] Hewlett, 64. For further information on kinship, marriage and social organization of the Ngbandi see, H. Burssens, "Les Peuplades de l'Entre Congo-Ubangi (Ngbandi, Ngbaka, Mbandja, Ngombe et Gens d'Eau)," *Annales du Musée Royal du Congo Bèlge, Serie Sciences de l'Homme. Monographies Ethnographiques* 4, Series IN-80 (1958): 94-109. Marcel Henrix, Le Mariage Et La Naissance Chez Les Ngbaka Minagendre (RDC), *Annales Aequatoria 30 (2009): 653-699.*

the husband to show that he is financially able to provide for a wife and family. This is one of the reasons why young Congolese men tend to remain unmarried for much longer than women.[93]

The social custom of paying a bride price has undergone substantial change since pre-colonial periods resulting from economic and social restructuring of society. Significant social and economic changes brought about by war and market crashes disrupting gender dynamics, challenging the ability of young men to pay a bride price.[94] These economic challenges impacted traditional social processes and women's place in the family and community. In pre-colonial South Kivu, a bride price was necessary in order to legitimize a marriage. It was usually the father who paid the bride price for his son's first bride. He was also responsible for the selection of the bride.[95] With the changing economic conditions, the character of marriage changed. Men were increasingly responsible for securing their own bride price. Although young men's autonomy increased as they were able to choose their bride independently of their father, the deteriorating economic situations meant young men were not able to easily afford the payment. This led to an increase in sexual relations before marriage, or secret marriages conducted without parental consent.[96] Because a bride price was not paid, a woman could obtain a divorce much more easily and she also maintained custody over the children. These rights significantly strengthened her position in the family

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[93] This is a common occurrence in many countries throughout Africa where the payment of a bride price or bridewealth is still common. A study by Bankole, et al. (2004) found that in many countries in Africa twenty-six percent of adolescent girls were married whereas only six percent of adolescent men were married in many countries. This data has been used to highlight the vulnerability of young women to older spouses; however, it also demonstrates the relevance of the brideprice system where only men who can show financial stability are able to marry. Akinrinola Bankole et. al, *Risk and Protection: Youth and HIV/AIDS in Sub-Saharan Africa (New York: The Alan Guttmacher Institute), 2004.* Gary Barker and Christine Ricardo, "Young Men and the Construction of Masculinities," 12.
[94] Hollander, "Oral Histories," 31-32.
[95] Ibid., 25.
[96] Ibid.,31.

while simultaneously decreasing the authority of husbands over their wives.[97] Once paid, divorce became much more difficult and women risked losing their children in the settlement. Thus, although women's engagement in the labour force and the change in marriage structure lessened gender inequality in a number of ways since the Congo wars, it remained significant in the first half of the post colonial period.

       The second half of the post colonial period saw significant gender reconstructions resulting from an increase in women's social opportunities due to government policies promoting gender equality, and the declining economic conditions of eastern DRC. Economic instability continued throughout the Mobutu era. The fall in copper prices in 1974 coupled with extreme government mismanagement caused widespread economic instability leaving many men unemployed and unable to provide for a household.[98] This economic degradation had a significant impact on women's position in society. The deconstruction of the formal economy previously dominated by men gave way to a more informal market economy where women had always played an important role. Because men were unable to find employment, many women became the breadwinners. Women's financial contributions gave women more influence over how the family money would be spent, enabling her to challenge her husband when she did not agree with his financial decisions.[99] Thus, women's financial leverage empowered women within their families and in larger society, creating new structures of dependency and authority.[100]

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[97] Hollander, "Oral Histories," 32-33. Within these unofficial marriages men generally remained the head of the household and any surplus income women brought in work belonged to men. Jacques Depelchin suggests that this surplus was often used to pay the brideprice, thus in a way women were pay for their own brideprice. Jacques Depelchin, "From Pre-Capitalism To Imperialism: A History Of Social And Economic Formations In Eastern Zaire (Uvira Zone C. 1800-1965)," *UMI Dissertations Publishing* (1974): 140.
[98] See chapter one. Thomas Turner, *The Congo Wars: Conflict, Myth, and Reality* (New York: Zed Books, 2007): 35.
[99] Ibid.
[100] Hollander, "Oral Histories," 34.

Government policies promoting gender equality implemented under Mobutu were instrumental in empowering women. Mobutu promoting many women to high positions of power and created employment options specifically for Congolese women.[101] Women's increased economic and political participation in the public sphere challenged traditional gender balances and norms. This empowerment of women was paralleled by the relative disempowerment of men who had lost their economic footing in society challenging their ability to provide and protect for their family; two basic attributes of manhood.[102] Therefore, at the outbreak of war in 1996, traditional understandings of gender inequality emphasising women's subordination and men's dominance were inappropriate to define gender relations in eastern DRC.

GENDER RELATIONS DURING THE CONGOLESE WAR AND ITS AFTERMATH

The dominant discourse suggests that extreme gender inequality present in prewar DRC caused high levels of wartime rape and gender violence to occur during the war. Although gender relations were problematic in this period, it was not because of gender inequality; but rather because notions and norms of gender had stopped reflecting the lived experiences and performances of gender.[103] Despite this change in the gender balance, most international perspectives continue to assert traditional notions of gender oppression and

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[101] During Mobutu's reign he created hundreds of dancing groups of women who earned a salary travelling the country singing in his honour. Hollander, "Oral Histories," 39.
[102] Hollander, "Oral Histories," 40-41. The ideal of the hegemonic man who embodies wealth, strength and dominance was incompatible with the lived experiences of men who were unable to find meaningful employment. Furthermore, women's empowerment had diminished their expected obedience and submissiveness both within the family and society See, Conan Dolan, *War Is Not Yet Over: Community Perceptions Of Sexual Violence And Its Underpinnings In Eastern DRC* (London: International Alert), 2010.
[103] Hollander, "Oral Histories," 43.

women's subordinate status. The Congolese wars only further disrupted gender balances, continuing the trend of women's empowerment that began in the post-colonial era.

The most significant cause of this gender restructuring resulted from the economic collapse that occurred during the Congolese wars. Although the economy had been in significant economic decline during the post-colonial era, the influx of refugees in eastern DRC after the Rwandan genocide caused further upset to the local economies.[104] Even areas that had previously remained relatively economically stable during the Mobutu era suffered economic collapse during the wars.[105] Many men found themselves unable to find paid labour resulting in an inability to fulfill their traditional role as provider. The economic position of women in eastern DRC did not deteriorate in the same way. Many continued to work in subsistence agriculture as well as in other sectors of the economy.

A study conducted by the organization "Promundo" showed that nearly forty percent of men in eastern DRC reported not working in income generating activities.[106] However, another study conducted in eastern DRC by Women For Women International found that that ninety-three percent of the women engaged in work, either in the formal or informal economic sector.[107] This divergence may be explained by the contradictory definitions used to define work. Congolese men tend to have a stricter definition of work that is more in line with international perspectives, taking it to mean permanent occupation

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[104] Koen Vlassenroot and Timothy Raeymaekers, *Conflict And Social Transformation In Eastern DRC Congo, (*Gent Belgium : Academia Press Scientific Publishers, 2004), 48.
[105] See Theo Hollander, "Men, Masculinities, and the Demise of the State," 417-439, for a case study.
[106] Promundo, " Gender Relations, Sexual and Gender Based Violence and The effects of Conflict on Women and Men in North Kivu, Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo," *International Men And Gender Equality* Survey (2014): 21.
[107] Women For Women International, "Stronger Women, Stronger Nations," *Report Series* (2010): 6.

in the formal sector.[108] Conversely, Congolese women have a more flexible definition of work, viewing it as everything that helps them and their children survive.[109]

Women make up a huge component of the workforce in eastern DRC. In rural Congolese societies, female labour is essential to agriculture with women making up fifty percent of agricultural sector contributions and ensuring seventy five percent of food production in rural areas.[110] Although both men and women recognize these contributions as essential to the survival of their families and communities, both Congolese men and the international community have historically considered the contributions of women's labour less significant than men's.[111]

This may be because Congolese women's productive labour is often conflated with their reproductive role as mothers caring for a family. This overlooks that in subsistence economies, reproductive and productive work is combined.[112] Although previously men's role as breadwinner allowed women's contributions to be considered supplementary, in the aftermath of the Congolese wars, women's financial contributions often superseded their husbands' forcing the value of women's productive labour to be recognized.

The increase of women breadwinners changed traditional structures of masculinity and femininity in eastern DRC. Research across Sub-Saharan Africa on manhood and

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[108] Ibid., 146. See Gary Barker and Christine Ricardo, "Young Men and the Construction of Masculinities," 8, for a discussion on the relationship between manhood and different forms of employment. It is suggested that many African men confirm the importance of stable employment in the formal economy as men's work, and a requisite for manhood.

[109] Donny Meertens, "The Nostalgic Future: Terror, Displacement, and Gender in Columbia," in *Victims, Perpetrators and Actors: Gender, Armed Conflict and Political Violence,* (New York: Zed Books, 2001), 142.

[110] Women for Women International, "Women Inherit Wrappers," 18.

[111] In part this misperception is due to different definitions of work and a viable economy. Although women have an active role in the productive economy, they tend to continue to engage in gendered divisions of labour with women maintaining responsibility for the majority of lower paid work such as subsistence agriculture, informal trade, and household maintenance, while men tended to cash crops and higher income generating activities. There are feminists who argue that by its very nature this sexual division of labour indicates the differential value of men and women's work and can be seen as proof of women's oppression. Chandra Mohanty argues that the sexual division of labour in and of itself does not necessarily indicate a devaluation of women's work. Instead, this must be proven through an analysis of a particular local context. Mohanty, 348.

[112] Women for Women International, "Women Inherit Wrappers," 18.

masculinity has found that "the chief mandate or social requirement for achieving manhood in Africa- for being a man- is some level of financial independence, employment or income, and subsequently starting a family."[113] Although these norms are maintained in rhetoric and social expectations, the economic and social realities that pervade everyday life make it difficult for men to fulfill these roles because most have little access to land for commercial activities and few opportunities of paid labour.[114] The inability to find work and support a family has challenged men's social recognition and sense of manhood.[115]

The impact of men's decreased authority has been acutely felt in the family. As women's financial obligations intensified their changed responsibilities and roles within the household affected men and women's identities and relations. Women's active economic role in the family empowered them, causing an increase in their agency and authority.[116] They were able to demand more rights within the household and challenge their husbands in some decisions, especially those that concerned the family's well being and how to spend family money.[117] Although this is not a feature of all marriages, for some women, their financial leverage allowed them to assert more power in their familial and community relationships diminishing the expected obedience, submissiveness and dependency traditionally associated with femininity.[118]

The harsh economic circumstances renegotiated relationships of dependency forcing gender reconstructions. While women's dependency on men decreased as a result

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[113] Gary Barker and Christine Ricardo, "Young Men and the Construction of Masculinities," 6.
[114] Lwambo, 55.
[115] Hollander, "Men, Masculinities," 427.
[116] Women For Women International, "Stronger Women Stronger Nations," 34.
[117] Lwambo, 62.
[118] Baaz and stern show that this is not a reality for all women as demonstrated by female soldiers in the Congolese army. Although they exercise considerable power at work they remain submissive wives in their home lives. Maria Eriksson Baaz and Maria Stern, "Fearless Fighters And Submissive Wives: Negotiating Identity Among Women Soldiers In The Congo (DRC), *Armed Forces & Society* 39, no. 4 (2012): 727-728.

of their economic independence, men's dependency on women increased.[119] Most

Congolese are acutely aware of this transformation and even children have recognized the

decreased status of men in society. A case study of the gender disruptions that occurred in

2010 in Kilbo, South Kivu, demonstrates this change in the following exchange described

by a Congolese man mobilizing men for an interview;

> I asked the lady if the father would be willing to come for an interview. […] one of the children of the man that I wanted to invite said the following; 'why do you ask for my father to be interviewed, they should interview mammy, since daddy is useless and there is nothing he can do.' …. I said; ''how can you be so disrespectful to your own father?'' And the boy pointed to the fact that there is nothing that the father is useful for. He cannot provide and he cannot do anything, so what is the use of having him as the representative of the family.[120]
> This example showcases the way economic situations and new social roles

renegotiated gender status at both the community and household level.

Although some men migrate outside of their community to find work, and others

leave their family rather than face the humiliation of not being able to provide for their

wives and children, many men stay because they have nowhere else to go.[121] As a result,

men have established different ways of coping with the new gender balance. One response

to these changing social norms has been an attempt to reassert their dominance through

violent assertions of male authority.[122] This method had been outlined by a number of

scholars working on gender-based violence in the DRC including Eriksson Baaz and Stern,

Lwambo and Dolan. They suggest that in situations of instability, men will often become

increasingly aggressive as a way to enforce their masculinity. These theories are rooted in

notions of hegemonic masculinity and emphasised femininity that see gender power as a

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[119] Hollander, "Oral Histories," 43.
[120] Hollander, "Men and Masculinities," 426-427.
[121] Lwambo, 62., Hollander, "Men and Masculinities," 426.
[122] Lwambo, 51.

"zero-sum game."[123] Men who attempt to reinforce traditional hierarchies by asserting their dominance rely on the one thing they have not lost, their physical strength. These men often engage in physical violence against both women and other men. They also usually refuse to engage in work that is traditionally considered women's work such as childcare and housework.[124]

Other men in eastern DRC have coped with changing gender roles in a more cooperative manner. Instead of attempting to reassert their dominance and regain their traditional masculine roles, they have readjusted gender expectations of themselves. Recognizing that they no longer have as much authority as they previously did, they have accepted the sharing of responsibilities amongst members of the household. In some cases men try to blend into the background by staying out of the way. Other men actively engage in forms of labour traditionally deemed woman's work. For example, in Kiliba, South Kivu some men began to engage in farming activities and "accompanying ladies with many of their tasks."[125] Thus, although a gendered division of labour still exists in the DRC economic difficulties have caused increased fluidity when defining gender-appropriate work.[126]

Despite these substantial changes in gender performances, traditional expectations and norms, rather than the actual experiences of gender, dominate the narrative on gender

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[123] Hollander, "Men and Masculinities," 428. Many scholars who study men and masculinity in distressed environments have corroborated this theory; see Barker and Ricardo, Lwambo, Eriksson Baaz and Stern "Why Do Soldiers Rape? Masculinity, violence And Sexuality In the Armed Forces In The Congo (DRC)," *International Studies Quarterly* 53, (2009): 495-518.
[124] Lwambo, 62.
[125] Hollander, "Men and Masculinities," 433.
[126] Barker and Ricardo, 37. See Victor Agadjanian, "Men Doing Women's Work: Masculinity And Gender Relations Among Street Vendors In Maputo, Mozambique," *The Journal Of Men's Studies* 10, no. 3 (2002) for a case study of reshaping definitions of manhood and family reshaping in the face of economic challenges in Mozambique.

relations in eastern DRC.[127] Gender and development theory continues to reify patriarchal

gender relations as the cause of excessive gender based violence in the DRC. However,

historical analysis demonstrates that although the DRC remains a patriarchal society,

women have experienced empowerment despite the increase of male violence against

women. The variance between the gendered reality of experiences and the dominant

narrative of gendered violence calls for a re-examination of the gender perceptions of

Congolese women and gender relations, enabling a more holistic understanding of gender

relations and their connection to the causes and experiences of gendered violence in eastern

DRC.

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[127] Although social realities have created a change in gender relations and norms, traditional ideologies remain significant. Despite the fact that women make up the main provider in most households, a study by Women for Women International reported that only thirty percent of women considered themselves the head of the household. This is because cultural understandings of "head of household" remain rooted in traditional ideologies of men as provider, thus for a woman to be the head of a household she must be widowed, divorced or unmarried. Women For Women International, "Stronger Women Stronger Nation," 18.

CHAPTER THREE

THE GENDERED DYNAMICS OF VIOLENCE

The eastern DRC has remained a place of violence and perpetual insecurity since the beginning of The Congolese Wars causing significant hardships for local communities bearing the consequences of violence.[1] The most important consequence of war in the context of the DRC is usually understood within the dominant narrative of wartime rape perpetuated by armed men against women. This narrative has encouraged an increase in research focusing on gender-based violence in order to understand how women are uniquely victimized in violent conflicts due to their subordinate status. The DRC has become a key case study of this research, perpetuating an image of Congolese women as the defining victims of violence.

The dominant narrative of gender based violence prevalent in the DRC places an overwhelming focus on sexual violence against women as the worst form of violence occurring in the armed conflicts. This understanding of gender violence does not explore how violence is gendered it its many other forms. Different forms of violence affect men, women and children differently as a result of social structures, norms, and circumstances of any given context. By limiting Congolese experiences of violence to those that fit under this dominant narrative, a large part of the story is left unanalyzed.

This chapter outlines how violence is gendered in the DRC. It explores how individual acts of violence often have a gendered motive based on socially constructed and

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[1] In a survey conducted for the World Development Report in 2011, the DRC had the highest frequency on every parameter regarding the fear of violence, fear of sexual harassment and abuse, prevalence of sexual violence, fear of political violence and looting and damage to their property Ingunn Bjørkhaug and Morten Bøås, "Men, Women and Gender Based Violence in North Kivu, DRC," *FAFO* 39 (2014): 15.

culturally defined attributes associated with masculinity and femininity. By focusing on these gender constructions, narrow definitions of victim and perpetrator develop which hinder holistic understandings of gender violence and ignore how violence victimizes men, women and children differently. It then addresses the dominant narrative of sexual violence against women outlining violence against women in its many other forms, and concluding with an analysis of Congolese women's perceptions of this violence.

PERCEPTIONS OF GENDER BASED VIOLENCE IN THE DRC

The international community's representation of violence during the Congolese wars[2] has always been particularly gruesome. Recent media representations and policy reports repeat colonial discourses describing African conflicts as distinctly "other" and especially violent.[3] In a throwback to Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899) soldiers and combatants are reported to be brutal killers and rapists who mutilate and eat their victims.[4] Although represented as distinctly brutal and damaging, the conflicts in the DRC were not more violent than other wars in other parts of the world.[5] However, these wars did have a different character of violence. The decentralized nature of the Congo wars meant that the majority of fighting did not occur on the front line but at the home front, taking place in local villages and towns throughout eastern DRC with excessive violence acted out

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[2] Refer to chapter one for a thorough analysis of the causes, consequences and nature of the conflicts.
[3] Maria Eriksson Baaz and Maria Stern, "Making Sense of Violence: Voices of Soldiers In The Congo (DRC)," *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 46. 1 (2008): 58.
[4] Ibid., 59.
[5] Prunier, 336.

on the bodies, homes, and livelihoods of the Congolese people. [67]

The result was a new depiction of armed men's violent attacks on peaceful civilians. Among the looting, pillaging, and physical violence, many of these attacks included the sexual violation of women and girls that becomes increasingly common in wartime. As a result, the narrative of violence in the DRC portrays wartime rape as the main weapon of war during the Congolese conflicts, perpetrated en masse against women and girls. Many reports have reinforced this narrative, reiterating the logic of rape as a weapon of war in the DRC as a cheap and effective weapon used to feminize the enemy, or other men, by insinuating that they cannot protect "their" women.[8]

This narrative emphasises the negative role of gender inequalities and norms embedded in the DRC stressing their relation to gender based violence in war. However, as demonstrated in the previous chapter, these portrayals are not representative of experienced gender realities, making this analysis more convincing in theory than in practice. Nevertheless, these representations dominate reporting of violence in the DRC, reinforcing gender inequalities as the root of violence against women.[9]

Women are the overwhelming majority of victims of gender based violence causing it to be used interchangeably with violence against women."[10] In the context of the DRC where wartime rape is considered the largest issue facing women, gender based violence has become a synonym for sexual violence against women. This perspective, dominant in

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[6] Ibid., 337-338. Although the violence was varied throughout the eastern provinces, most of the references in this chapter refer to violence in the provinces of North and South Kivu, which faced extreme hardship due to their geographic location along the Rwandan boarder.

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[8] Baaz and Stern, "Why Do Soldiers Rape?," 499.

[9] Baaz and Stern, "The Complexities of Violence," 42.

[10] Natalia Linos, "Rethinking Gender Based Violence During War: Is Violence Against Civilian Men A Problem Worth Addressing?" *Social Science and Medicine,* 68 (2009): 1550.

human rights discourse, is problematic. It fails to explain the nuances of gendered violence in the DRC. The conceptualization of gendered violence as violence against women minimizes other forms of violence that are necessarily gendered, but conceptualized as normal in the context of war. This includes the gendered nature of battle casualties, the use of child soldiers, or different ways structural violence and displacement affect women and men. By continuing to present wartime rape as the most severe form of gender based violence, the understanding of who the victims of violence are is distorted. The overwhelming focus on female rape victims has caused violence that specifically victimizes men, children and women physically, economically, or politically to be underreported. This ignores the gendered nature of violence in its many forms, sexual, physical and structural, rendering the gendered aspects of a number of other types of violence committed against both men and women as insignificant and invisible in the discourse.[11]

In the narrative of violence in the DRC, simplistic gender distinctions between victims and perpetrators have cast men in uniform in the role of perpetrator, while victims are played by women and girls, specifically raped women and girls. [12] This narrative relies on militarised gender ideologies and historical depictions of military roles in war. Militaristic masculinity is associated with protecting, warring, and killing, while women as feminine, are stereotypically associated with peacefulness, life giving and in need of protection.[13]

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[11] Baaz and Stern, "The Complexities of Violence," 42.
[12] Although the significant rise in rape perpetrated by civilian men against women has recent garnered attention by international organizations and scholars, the dominant narrative of wartime rape continues to suggest that rape is the result of armed conflict and armed men are the main perpetrators. See Human Rights Watch, "The War Within The War," 14-16. Also see, Kirsten Johnson et al., "Association of Sexual Violence and Human Rights Violations With Physical Mental Health in Territories Of The Eastern Democratic Republic Of The Congo," *Journal Of The American Medical Association* 305, no., 5 (2010): 559.
[13] Baaz and Stern, "Why Do Soldiers Rape," 499. Douma and Hilhorst, 21. Also see Cynthia Enloe *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics.* Berkeley (University of California Press, 1990).

Historically in the literature on armed conflict, women's participation was largely left out of the repertoire with armed violence assumed to be the domain of men. Ideally, this meant that violence would be limited to man-to-man combat taking place on a battlefield with women remaining on the home front, far from the realities of war. Women and children were thus relegated to the status of civilians. The status of civilians has been protected under international law since the 1950 Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Times of War. This legislation portrayed women and children as the most vulnerable members of societies, emphasising their status as victims of undue violence. It required that civilians "be at all times humanely treated, and shall be protected especially against acts of violence," furthermore, women "shall be especially protected against any attack on their honour, in particular against rape, enforced prostitution, or any form of indecent assault."[14] This legislation reified a narrative of violence that categorized women and children as vulnerable victims, and battle aged men as perpetrators of war.

The long history of violence between men on a battlefield created a narrative of war that normalized male on male violence.[15] While male casualties have been accepted as logical, female causalities are socially and culturally problematized as gendered violence.[16] However, this perspective on gender only considers the situation of women and girls while overlooking men's roles and experiences of violence. The very fact that men are more

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[14] International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), *Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War (Fourth Geneva Convention)*, 12 August 1949, Article 27, available at: https://www.icrc.org/ihl/385ec082b509e76c41256739003e636d/6756482d86146898c125641e004aa3c5.

[15] Constructed around militarised masculinity with men were meant to fulfill roles as fearless protectors, history shows that even when men were killed on the battlefield they were not represented as victims of violence, but rather as a masculine hero who scarified his life for his children, wives and nation. Moser and Clark, 3.

[16] Georg Frerks, Annelou Ypeij, Reinhilde Sotiria König, "Rethinking Gender and Conflict: Discourses, Embodiments and Symbolic Practices," in *Gender and Conflict: Embodiments, Discourses and Symbolic Practices,* edited by Georg Frerks, Annelou Ypeij, Reinhilde Sotiria König (England: Ashgate, 2014), 2.

likely to take up arms by virtue of militarized masculinities is an example of how violence is gendered.[17] Yet, the presumed normality of this violence has caused issues of male-on-male violence to be neglected in the current discourse on gendered violence in the DRC.[18]

The main method of analysis used to study how violence is gendered is a gender analysis created from white feminism's politicised experience of marginalization and subordination as a sex.[19] However, this perspective again operates from the perspective of universal patriarchy that assumes all women to be victims. The use of this analysis is problematic in the context of eastern DRC and occludes a clear analysis of gender relations and how gender affects experiences of violence. A holistic gender approach that understands men and women's roles outside of the dichotomy of victim and perpetrator, as well as the way violence affects men and women differently, is a more effective way to understand the conflict in eastern DRC. This approach requires a less biased analysis of the nexus between gender and conflict that acknowledges the diversified roles men and women play in conflicts beyond the stereotypical portrayals based on gender ideologies.[20]

MEN AS VICTIMS OF GENDERED VIOLENCE

Gendered violence continues to be presented as a "war against women" further enforcing the paradigm of female victims and male perpetrators. However, gendered

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[17] For a discussion on militarized masculinity see, Miranda Alison, "Wartime Sexual Violence: Women's Human Rights And Questions Of Masculinity," *Review of International Studies,* 33 (2007): 75-90.
Chi-Chi Undie, "Towards A Research Agenda On Gendered Violence In Sub-Saharan Africa," *Ethnicity & Health,* 18. 5 (2013): 450.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Moser and Clark, 15.
[20] Frerks, Ypeij and König, 2.

violence affects both men and women in different ways. As Cynthia Cockburn states, "men and women often die different deaths and are tortured in different ways… because of the different means culturally ascribed to the male and female bodies."[21] This makes men and women more susceptible to different types of violence as a result of their gender and gender roles. For instances, while women are more likely to be singled out for rape because of their gendered reproductive and productive powers, men are more likely to be singled out for direct execution as they are assumed to be potential combatants.

Gender-selective mass killings are a frequent and often defining feature of human conflict extending back to antiquity.[22] However, as a regular and ubiquitous aspect of contemporary conflicts it is often left out of public policy discourse focused on gendered violence because women and children are considered the most vulnerable population. This is problematic because as Adam Jones argues, "the most vulnerable and consistently targeted population groups, throughout time and around the world today, are non-combatant men of 'battle age,' roughly fifteen to fifty-five years old."[23] In part this is because battle-aged men are the most dangerous for a conquering force as they present the greatest threat to authority. However, unlike soldiers, they usually do not have the appropriate means to defend themselves resulting in much higher levels of homicide. The mass murder of men in the Congo Free State is an example of this male selective violence. Daniel Vangrowenweghe, a Belgian anthropologist working in a former rubber area in 1970, found persuasive demographic evidence suggesting that large numbers of men had been worked to death as rubber slaves or killed in punitive raids. He asserts;

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[21] Alden 9.

[22] Adam Jones, "Gender and Genocide," 1-30 in *Gendercide and Genocide* edited by Adam Jones (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2004), 3.

[23] Ibid., 10.

No other explanation accounts for the curious pattern that threads through the village-by-village headcounts taken in the colony long before the first territorial census. These local headcounts consistently show far more women than men. At Inongo in 1907, for example, there were 309 children, 402 adult women, but only 275 adult men. Statistics from numerous other villages show the same pattern…"[24]

The targeting of battle-aged men has remained a constant pattern of violence throughout the history of the Great Lakes Region.

This was seen during the Burundi genocide of April- November 1972 where battle aged men and educated elites were specifically targeted for elimination.[25] Between 150,000 and 300,000 Hutu civilians, mostly educated Hutu men, were killed by Burundi Tutsi. Another 300,000 more Hutu elites, again mostly men, sought refugee in Rwanda during these attacks.[26] Similarly, during the Rwandan genocides of 1994 Tutsi men were specifically targeted for homicide, while women bore the brunt of other forms of violence, specifically sexual violence.[27] This also occurred in the aftermath of the genocide when the RPF systematically eliminated tens of thousands of refugees in eastern Congo. The RPF specifically targeted civilian men assumed to be *génocidaires*; however, women and children were also killed during these raids.[28] Thus, men have suffered from higher levels of mass killings than women throughout the history of the Great Lakes Region, continuing

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[24] This is not to undermine the other types of gendered violence women faced, historically and contemporary in periods of violent conflict. While men were often worked to death or killed en mass by the colonial authorities, women faced different forms of violence that were distinctly gendered most often in the form of sexual violence. Colonial forces were known to hold women and children as hostages until local chiefs would supply food. Torture for these hostages was also routine, as an officer with the Force Publique wrote on November 22, 1895, "All the solders want one. The sentries who are supposed to watch them unchain the prettiest ones and rape them." Hoschild, 99, 162.

[25]Rene Lemarchand, "The Burundi Killings of 1972," *The Online Encyclopedia Of Mass Violence,* 138 (2008), 2, 5, 7, http://migs.concordia.ca/documents/The-Burundi-Killings-of-1972 Lemarchand.pdf. Rene Lemarchand, "Genocide In The Great Lakes: Which Genocide? Whose Genocide?," *African Studies Review* 41, no. 1 (1998): 6. Also see, Rene Lemarchand, *Burundi: Ethnic Conflict And Genocide* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; New York: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1996).

[26] Rene Lemarchand, *The Dynamics of Violence*, 67. Boniface Kiraranganiya, *La Verité sur le Burundi,* (Canada: Naaman, 1985), 76.

[27] Sjoberg, 174.

[28] Lemarchand, "Genocide In The Great Lakes," 8. James Gasana, "Factors Of Ethnic Conflict In Rwanda and Instruments For A Durable Peace," in *Federalism Against Ethnicity,* edited by Gunther Bachler (Zurich: Verlag Ruegger), 105.

to make up a large percentage of deaths caused by direct violence during the Congolese wars.

Many other forms of violence also target men and boys specifically because they are male. Men are more susceptible to forced recruitment into armed groups, arbitrary arrests and torture. Despite the gendered nature of this violence, discussions of violence in the DRC continue to overlook the victimization of non-combatant men. In gender sensitive policy discourse only women tend to be considered when discussing vulnerable victims of violence.[29] Male victimization has remained a taboo subject in discussions of gender, leading to their exclusion in most gender sensitive policies in the DRC.[30] This is seen by men's invisibility in supposedly gender sensitive policies regarding sexual violence in eastern DRC.

In addition to gender-selective killings, men as victims of conflict sexual violence in eastern DRC have remained largely invisible in policies meant to address wartime rape.[31] Sexual violence is not only a "systematic pattern of destruction towards the female species" as international narratives often asserts.[32] It is a form of gendered violence that affects both men and women to different degrees and in different ways. Men and boys are raped in the DRC, as in other conflicts, with a survey conducted in eastern DRC showing that 23.6 percent of men reported being exposed to sexual violence during their life time while 64.5

[29] Linos, 9. Also see, Charli Carpenter, "Recognizing Gender-Based Violence Against Civilian Men And Boys In Conflict Situations," *Security Dialogue* 37, no. 1 (2006): 83-103.

[30] Jones, 17.

[31] Christian Mervyn et. Al, "Sexual And Gender Based Violence Against Men In The Democratic Republic Of Congo: Effects On Survivors, Their Families And The Community, *Medicine, Conflict and Survival* 27, no. 4 (2011): *227.*

[32] Yakin Ertürk, "Promotion and Protection of all Human Rights, Civil, Political, Economic, Social and Cultural, Including the Right to Development," Report of the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, its cause and consequences. Advanced Edited Version. Human Rights Council, Seventh session, Agenda Item 3, (2003), www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/docs/7session/A-HRC-7-6.doc. Accessed August 5, 2015.

percent of those men stating it was conflict associated sexual violence.[33] However, these attacks against men often go unreported and have received far less international and domestic attention.[34]

Therefore, a more inclusive gender perspective of the nature of violence in the DRC acknowledging the different forms of victimization women and men experience. The lack of acknowledgement of male victims further entrenches simplistic divisions of victims and perpetrators based on gender distinctions. Problematically, when intervention initiatives are implemented they often fail to recognize the rights and needs of men and boys who have been victimized by gendered violence, continuing to make them susceptible to other forms of violence in the future. Once it is established that groups beyond women are vulnerable to targeting on gender grounds, restrictive intervention policies focused on women *qua* victims can be refocused to become more effective in their local setting. This requires exploring how violence specifically affects men, women and children differently because of their unique vulnerabilities and place in society.

VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

Children represent more than half of the population in DRC and experience particular vulnerability to conflict violence and structural violence. Younger children are uniquely vulnerable in conflicts because they are so dependent on others for survival. Their dependency keeps them at a higher risk especially in periods of instability. With the

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[33] Johnston et al., 558.

[34] This is likely because the stigma attached to male rape is much higher than female rape due to the strong disjuncture between victimhood and masculinity where being a victim, especially of sexual violence, represents "failed masculinity." Baaz and Stern, "Complexities of Violence," 43.

majority of the country living in poverty, food insecurity has become a major issue in the DRC. Since the wars began, food production levels have decreased by thirty-forty percent with about one third of the population subsisting on one meal a day. The effects of food insecurity are most severe in the eastern provinces resulting from failed infrastructure and increased levels of conflict. The impact of food insecurity places growing children at an increased risk of malnourishment.[35] A side effect of malnourishment is a higher rate of disease, morbidity and death with children under the age of five having the highest rate of mortality in the country, accounting for forty-six percent of deaths in eastern DRC.[36]

During violent conflict when the situation deteriorates children are almost always left to the responsibility of the mother while husbands and fathers take up arms or flee to avoid persecution.[37] Having only one parent as a protector and provider makes children more vulnerable to both direct and indirect forms of violence.[38] When violent attacks or displacement occur, children are at an increased risk of being separated from their families or losing a parent to violence or disease.

Children become dependent on extended family, strangers and aid agencies for survival. Instability and increased poverty make these relations unreliable as aid agencies can move on at any time, and the extended family is often unable to feed more mouths.[39] Many children become responsible for their own survival, taking on the roles and burdens of adults by becoming the household head caring for their younger siblings. The result is

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[35] Sarah Bailey et. al, "Child-sensitive Social Protection In DRC" A Diagnostic Study," *Oversees Development Institute* (2011): 13.

[36] Coghlan et al., 14.

[37] Hollander, "Oral Histories," 33.

[38] World Vision International report on vulnerable children in eastern DRC, undertaken in Sake, Bulengo Camp, Mugunga Camp, Minova, Goma, showed that fifty five percent of children orphaned or separated from their parents and twenty five percent of them living without any adult support. World Vision International, "No One To Turn To: Life For Children In Eastern DRC," *World Vision International* (2014): 11.

[39] Ibid., 11.

children taking on economic initiatives at increasingly young ages in order to provide for the needs of the household.[40]

Although children are still assumed to have the least amount of agency in a society forced to depend on others to survive, their increased engagement in social and economic developments has increased their independence. Overall an estimated forty-two percent of children between the ages of five and fourteen years are engaged in child labour, usually in mines and agriculture.[41] Although children have always been expected to engage in labour such as cultivating family fields, the necessity and demand for child labourers has increased substantially during the conflicts resulting in increased exposure to armed violence while working in isolated mines or fields. Many children and adults have reported that the highest risk situations for violence occur when children are carrying out the chores of daily living such as cultivating fields, transporting goods, or attending school or work.[42] During these attacks children of both sexes are physically abused, robbed, and in a number of cases, forcibly recruited into an armed group.

Although the official age of military recruitment is 18 in the DRC, with forty seven percent of the population under the age of fifteen, child recruits are abundant in armed groups.[43] During the Congolese wars, children were recruited and used in all armed groups taking on both combat and support roles. Since 2005 a total of 30,000 child soldiers were demobilised in the DRC with an estimated 7,000 remaining active.[44] Another estimated 11,000 children escaped after being forcibly recruited, without being officially

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[40] André and Godin, 162.
[41] Ibid., 2.
[42] Jill Trenholm, Pia Olsson, Martha Blomqvist and Beth Maina Ahlberg, "Constructing Soldiers From Boys In Eastern Democratic Republic," *Men and Masculinities* 16. 2 (2012): 211.
[43] Ibid., 205.
[44] Ibid.

demobilised.[45] Forced recruitment or abduction into an armed group occurs against all segments of society; however, children are particularly vulnerable to abduction because they are usually easier to apprehend and their age makes them more malleable and vulnerable to manipulation. This makes them an effective commodity of war supporting the economy of violence.[46]

Child soldiers exist as both victims and perpetrators of violence, including sexual violence. They are often put in combative roles and are commonly reported to be perpetrators of human rights violations. However, many children became part of an armed group by forced recruitment or as an act of survival. Not all children were abducted into the armed forces. Some chose to join to escape the desperation of poverty; however, these decisions are often made under coercive circumstances of necessity.[47]

Both boys and girls can be coerced to join armed groups. Once part of the group, they tend to take on gendered roles. Boys usually engage in armed combat on the ground level. Although girls are also active combatants in many cases, they are also likely to perform other tasks such as portering, domestic labour, and sexual slavery, becoming the "wives" of their captors.[48] The Congolese government and international community continue to overlook the recruitment and use of thousands of girls by armed forces. Estimates suggest that girls may have made up forty percent of the total number of child soldiers during armed conflict; however, only twelve percent of child soldiers formally demobilised were girls.[49] Many girls who are abducted by armed groups are not seen in

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[45] Child Soldiers International, "*Child Soldiers Global Report 2008, Democratic Republic of the Congo*" (2008): 7.
[46] Trenholm, 205.
[47] Ibid., 220.
[48] Johnston et al., 559.
[49] Child Soldiers International, 4.

their capacity as child soldiers but rather as sexual slaves used to satisfy the soldiers and perform domestic duties. Nevertheless, most girl combatants reported having to perform domestic and sexual duties in addition to combative ones, making their experiences of violence different from boys.

Therefore, the forms of violence children as soldiers and civilians encounter are multifaceted and significant. However, the significance of age as a determinant of how violence is gendered, and in who is a victim or perpetrator of violence, continues to be overlooked in discourses of gendered violence. When children are included they are often associated with women's experiences of violence. This is seen with the move in international agencies to respond to women and children as one entity instead of previous practices of protection through separation. Even organizations that are focused on children such as The United Nations' Children's Fund (UNICEF), Save The Children, and Defense for Children International, focus on ensuring children's welfare by helping mothers and potential mothers, thus addressing children's needs through their concerns for the status of women. [50] This undermines the unique experiences of children in war and the necessity of policies that focus on children's vulnerabilities instead of making them a subset analysis of violence against women.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Violence against women in its many forms, sexual, economic, structural, social are often interconnected, existing on what Cynthia Cockburn calls a continuum of violence that

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[50] Mark Evans, *Ethical Theory In The Study Of International Politics,* (New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2004), 95.

exists in peacetimes and extends to war times.[51] Effective initiatives aimed at remedying

violence against women must take this interconnectedness into account through an analysis

of the gendered significance of each form within its cultural context of eastern DRC.

Therefore, although sexual violence is a significant form of violence experienced by

Congolese women, it represents only one form of violence along this continuum and must

be analyzed as such.

SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Women and girls suffer extraordinary rates of sexual violence as a result of armed

conflict. Although statistics are difficult to confirm given the sensitive nature of sexual

violence and continued insecurity in much of eastern DRC, a prominent study published in

The American Journal Of Public Health reported twelve percent of women in eastern DRC

had been raped at least once in their lifetime. Extrapolating this data throughout the

country, the authors concluded that approximately 1.8 million Congolese women had been

raped, or 1,152 women every day, forty-eight women every hour, and four women every

five minutes.[52] Although it is clear that women are not the only victims of sexual violence

they are overwhelmingly targeted for this type of violence for a number of reasons directly

related to their gender.[53] While some generalizations can be drawn about wartime rape, it

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[51] Alden, 1.

[52] Amber Peterman, Tia Palermo, and Caryn Bredenkamp, "Estimates and Determinants of Sexual Violence Against Women in the Democratic Republic of Congo," *American Journal of Public Health*, 101, no. 6 (2011): 1060-1067. Another study conducted in Ituri district and North and South Kivu published in *the Journal of the American Medical Association* found 39.7 percent of women (23.7 men) reported exposure to sexual violence in their life time with seventy four percent of those women (64.5 men) exposed to conflict related sexual violence, the most common type being rape (51.1 percent women, 20.8 percent men), Johnston et al., 558. Another study by Slegh et al., conducted in eastern DRC reported 9 percent of men and 22 percent of women have experiences sexual violence during conflict. Slegh et., al., 1.

[53] Baaz and Stern, Complexities of Violence, 43.

should always be analyzed within the context of culture and symbols of gender structures that occur within a particular nation-state since its use varies among different actors and in different contexts.[54]

In violent conflicts the reproductive and caring roles of women as mothers are sometimes targeted for specific forms of violence. Women are symbolic representations of their community or nation making them more vulnerable to targeted attacks aimed at destroying a particular community.[55] Attacks against women are not always based on women *qua* women, but often play on the dominant roles of men as protectors of women making these attacks an effective method of humiliation for men who are unable to protect "their women/nation/homeland."[56] Claudia Card has argued that wartime rape conducted by soldiers is a "cross cultural language of male dominance," used to displace and produce male dominance over both women and the enemy group during violent conflict.[57]

Local Congolese perspectives on sexual violence as a weapon of war suggest that wartime rape in the DRC is a new phenomenon brought on by the influx of foreign Rwandan soldiers and used to dominate local populations.[58] However, sexual violence has been a tactic of war used throughout the world since antiquity, prevalent in the DRC since colonization and often accompanied by other acts of brutality. *[59]* The excessive cruelty associated with sexual violence during the Congo's colonial period demonstrates this prevalence. Depicted in memories of "sentries who made mothers have sex with their sons, fathers with daughters, kin with kin," or reports of other sentries "amusing themselves

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[54] Meger,119.
[55] Ruth Seifert, "The Second Front – The Logic of Sexual Violence in Wars," *Women's Studies International Forum,* 19 (1996): 39-40.
[56] Baaz and Stern, "Making Sense of the Violence," 67.
[57] Claudia Card, "Rape As A Weapon Of War," *Hypatia* 11 (1996): 8.
[58] Michael VanRooyen and Jocelyn Kelly, "Sexual Violence In The DRC: Understanding The Epidemic," *Harvard Humanitarian Initiative* (2006): 20, https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/Harvard%20Humanitarian %20Presentation.pdf.
[59] Kruger, 29.

while pounding the insides of women's vagina's with sticks,"[60] this demonstrates the historical presence of excessive sexual violence in the DRC which should not be overlooked in present day analysis. It also outlines the severe and interconnected damage this type of violence does to a woman's reproductive, physical and psychological health.

Sexual violence in the recent Congolese wars, including rape, continues to have a number of associated consequences that are gender related and their disproportionately affect women. Women's reproductive capabilities make pregnancy an important potential consequence of rape. Despite the high number of unwanted pregnancies that have resulted from rape, abortion remains illegal in the DRC with a 5-10 year prison sentence for anyone who has an abortion.[61] This results in mothers birthing children that may not be wanted, or resorting to clandestine abortions that are often unsafe.

Women are also at a higher risk of contracting STIs and HIV. This has become a serious problem as it is estimated that sixty percent of regular troops and militiamen in the DRC are infected with HIV/AIDS.[62] All of these consequences can have severe effects on a woman's physical and psychological health. Untreated STI's, botched abortions, or forceful sexual assault can all severely damage a woman's reproductive organs. Because rape is often an act of violence against a woman's reproductive labor, the damage sexual violence can cause to a woman's femininity is a distinctly gendered form of violence. Congolese

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[60] Rose Hunt, "An Acoustic Register," 238.
[61] There is also five to fifteen year sentence for anyone involved in an abortion Congolease Penal Code (book ii), article 165 and 166. Synergie Des Femmes Pour Le Victims Des Violence Sexuelles, "Report On Violence Against Women In North And South Kivu, In The Democratic Republic Of Congo," *Alternative Report For The Committee On The Elimination Of All Forms Of Discrimination Against Women,* 55th session*,* (2013): 8, http://www2.ohchr.org/English/ bodies/cedaw/docs/ngos/OMCT_SFVS_ForThe Session_E_DRC_CEDAW55.pdf .
[62] Human Rights Watch, *The War Within The War*, 77.

women reported that being able to have children and provide for their family embodied

what it meant to be a woman. Childless women reported feelings of failed femininity.[63]

Many women pride themselves on their reproductive and productive labor, both of

which grant them status in their families and community.[64] When women are raped, their

reproductive labor can be harmed in several ways that compromise community belonging.

For example, a woman can become impregnated as a result of rape making her bear a child

for an outside community. Furthermore, by preventing her from becoming a mother in her

own community, either by making her appear unacceptable to a partner, or by becoming

physically unable to have children, a woman may be ostracized and face feelings of failed

femininity. The consequences of rape can represent what Allison Ruby Reid-Cunningham

has called a "social death" used to describe the fate of women whose identity and self-

worth had been essentially destroyed through sexual violence.[65] Although rape does carry

important social consequences and, in some cases, it results in a woman being stigmatized

by family and community or deserted by her husband, the stigma associated with rape has

declined significantly in the DRC.[66]

Nevertheless, sexual violence can challenge a woman's ability to carry on a normal

life afterwards. Physically damaging a woman's reproductive ability has become a common

factor of sexual attacks in the DRC. Many gendered atrocities revolve around women's

sexual and reproductive attributes, demonstrated by the cutting off of breasts, tearing open

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[63] Baaz and Stern, "Fearless Fighters And Submissive Wives," 719-722.

[64] Women for Women International, Land Rights, 22.

[65] Robin May Schott, "War Rape, Natality and Genocide," *Journal of Genocide Research* 13 (2011): 8.

[66] Many reports suggest that women who are stigmatized after rape are ostracized because of the shame they have brought on their family. See Human Rights, *War Within A War*, 64. In the DRC there are more reports of husbands abandoning wives because they assumed their wives had been infected with HIV. Many wives who were left by their husbands stated that their husband was worried they were "contaminated" with a disease and they did not want to get it. Women who were able to present a clean STI test were usually accepted. This suggests that disease more than the act of rape is the cause of women's stigma. Jocelyn Kelly et al. "If Your Husband Doesn't Humiliate You, Other People Won't; Gendered Attitudes Towards Sexual Violence In Eastern DRC" *Global Public Health: An International Journal For Research, Policy, And Practice,* 7.3 (2012): 285-298. Trenholm, 139-152.

vaginas or eviscerating a woman's uterus, common occurrences in the Rwandan genocide and Congolese wars.[67] This violence seems to portray a distinct hatred or animosity towards femininity, specifically towards women's ability to reproduce.[68] For Congolese women, the ability to become a mother is an important part of womanhood and indeed femininity. Being denied their reproductive ability is a distinctly gendered violence against women that affects Congolese women on many cultural and social levels. Because motherhood is linked with one's social status, not being able to become pregnant can hinder a woman's social mobility and damage her social identity as a woman.[69]

While women's reproductive labor plays an important role in gendered violence, women are also targeted for sexual violence and physical attacks because of their productive labor. The economic self-sufficiency of Congolese women is linked not only to their community standing but also to their sense of womanhood and femininity.[70] Thus, the consequences of rape for women are intimately intertwined with economic violence.[71] Looting and pillaging often accompany sexual violence directing an effective blow to women's reproductive and productive capacities. Robbing a woman of her assets or livelihood destroys her productive labor and thus some of her power in a given community.[72] It is also a way to break down the fabric of a community by damaging the livelihood of its members. Most women who have access to land tend fields and are

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[67] Human Rights Watch, War Within A War, 54.

[68] Seifert, 37-38.

[69] Baaz and Stern, "Fearless Fighters," 722. Jennie Burnet's ethnographical analysis of women's experience after the Rwandan genocide provides demonstrates how rape and especially forced impregnation can also hinder a woman's social mobility by limiting her participation in traditional means of social reproduction which allow a woman to become a legitimate wife and mother. Burnet, 136.

[70] Baaz and Stern, "Fearless Fighters," 722.

[71] Meredeth Turshen, "The Political Economy Of Rape: An Analysis Of Systematic Rape And Sexual Abuse Of Women During Armed Conflict In Africa," in *Victims, Perpetrators of Actors?* Edited by Caroline Moser and Fiona Clark (London: Zed Books, 2001), 67.

[72] Ibid., 56.

responsible for seventy five percent of food production in rural areas.[73] When a woman's

crops are destroyed or she is robbed of her property and assets, she cannot provide for her

family. The inability to produce food and care for the family is a direct assault on a

woman's femininity and her gender role in her community.[74] Thus, sexual violence does

not only damage the life of the individual woman but it breaks down the social fabric and

economies of her community seen in failed harvests, lost productivity, and reduced

economic participation.[75] Without structural recourse in the form of a welfare state, women

are more likely to face economic hardship adding further desperation to their situation of

poverty and insecurity.

During the Mobutu era, the welfare state disintegrated, with spending on social

services overtaken by military spending.[76] Since 1994 there has been a general lack of state

authority, including the running of government funded public services in eastern DRC. In

the government's absence, non-state actors, specifically religious civil society organizations

in cooperation with NGOs, have provided these much needed services.[77] These groups have

a great deal of authority and legitimacy in eastern DRC because civilians often look to them

to solve their problems rather than a government unable to provide necessary public

goods.[78] These groups have been successful at assisting struggling people in eastern DRC,

demonstrating the tenacity and viability of local solutions and organizations in the absence

of a functioning welfare state. Although these organizations successfully fulfill a desperate

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[73] Women For Women International, "Land Rights," 18. Refer to chapter two.
[74] Baaz and Stern, "Fearless Fighters And Submissive Wives," 719-722.
[75] United Nations, "UN Officials Urge Eradication Of Sexual Violence In Africa's Great Lakes Region," December 15, 2011, http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp? NewsID=40748&Cr=&Crl=.
[76] Laura Seay, "Effective Responses: Protestants, Catholics and the Provision Of Health Care In The Post-War Kivu's," *Review of African Political Economy* 40, 135 (2013), 84. Also see, Laura Seay, "Whiter Civil Society? Local Peacebuilding And The International Community," *African Security Review* 20, no. 2 (2011): 73-79.
[77] Seay, "Effective Responses," 83-85.
[78] Ibid., 93.

need in these areas. By providing certain services such as health care and education, they are largely dependent on external funding and are thus contingent upon donor preferences.[79] Furthermore, although they are successful at answering the public need for services, they do address the circumstances of widespread individual poverty and state instability that have necessitated their presence in the first place.

ECONOMIC AND STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE

The majority of families in eastern DRC live in poverty. When a family loses a provider, whether a primary or secondary earner, increased economic vulnerability occurs. Women tend to be more affected than men because women make up the majority of single parent households with 61.5 percent of female-headed households living below the poverty line.[80] Excessive individual poverty coupled with degrading infrastructure and a bankrupt economy had caused intense forms of economic violence affecting women in different ways. Structural violence can be defined as a systemic form of violence where social institutions kill people by preventing them from meeting their basic needs. In eastern DRC structural forms of violence account for the largest portion of civilians deaths affecting women and children at much higher rates than men. A gendered analysis of mortality in eastern DRC demonstrates this disparity.

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[79] Ibid., 86.
[80] Compared to fifty four percent of male-headed households. Freedman, 170-173.

Between 1998-April 2007, an estimated 5.4 million people died in the DRC.[81] These fatalities are distinctly gendered. It is widely acknowledged that most combatants in armed conflicts are men, making men the majority of victims in military operations.[82] However, because of the nature of conflict in the DRC with violence often enacted at the local level, civilians bore the brunt of conflict related injuries.[83]

Despite media depictions of brutal physical violence occurring during the Congolese wars, of the 2.5 million who died between 1998-2001, only fourteen percent of all fatalities were the result of direct violence in the form of physical assault, sexual violence, or homicide.[84] The remainder died from war related causes that prevented civilians from accessing the resources required to meet their basic needs.[85]

While war increases the conditions for morbidity and death it also weakens the capacity for dealing with the adverse health and social conditions of survivors.[86] Although it is acknowledged that armed conflicts have a negative impact on agriculture, structural infrastructure, public health and the social order of societies, it is often overlooked in favour of more direct forms of violence, such as sexual violence. However, the negative impact is substantial and gendered, affecting women and children more than men for a variety of reasons.

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[81] 2.1 million of those deaths have occurred since the formal end of the war in 2003. Benjamin Coghlan et al. "Mortality In The Democratic Republic Of Congo: An Ongoing Crisis," *International Rescue Committee*, (2007): 3.

[82] Of this fourteen percent only six percent were battle deaths resulting during military operations. Ibid.

[83] Prunier, 338-339.

[84] Bethany Lacina and Nils Petter Gleditsch, "Monitoring Trends in Global Combat: A New Dataset of Battle Deaths," *European Journal of Population* 21 (2005): 159.

[85] Mortality rates are significantly higher in the eastern provinces with the crude mortality rate standing at 2.6/1000 deaths per. This rate is eighty five percent higher than the sub-Saharan average and significantly higher than the national crude mortality rate Even though armed conflict is more common in eastern DRC, less than ten percent of these deaths were due to direct violence. Like the national average, most were attributed to preventable and treatable conditions such as preventable disease and malnutrition made untreatable due structural violence and economic disparity. Coghlan et al., 3-6.

[86] Plümper and Neumayer, 728.

Women face different types of vulnerabilities as a result of the gendered roles they assume in Congolese societies. They are more vulnerable to armed attack and structural violence because of their diminished access to resources during periods of conflict. Familial gender divisions also dictate that women are responsible for daily household chores such as gathering firewood, collecting water and cultivating fields. These tasks often require women to travel alone in insecure areas increasing the risk of exposure to attacks by armed groups especially during periods of insecurity.

When conflict emerges, men tend to take up arms or flee their homes for safety while women who are encumbered with dependents tend to remain at home longer. Women assume multiple roles as head of household, provider and community leaders in order to meet the needs of their family and society.[87] Although women are capable of carrying the community, remaining in an insecure situation alone makes them more vulnerable to forms of violence such as extortion and illegal taxation by local armed forces. Impromptu roadblocks where armed men would extort money from civilians were ubiquitous throughout eastern DRC and became a means of survival for many soldiers who went long periods without pay.[88]

These gendered behaviours usually remain common when families are displaced, increasing the vulnerability of displaced women and children. Marie Béatrice Umutesi explained the behaviour of many heterosexual couples she observed in the DRC, when living as a refugee from Rwanda. She explained that while women were attached to their husbands and loyally accompanied them, many husbands were irritated by the presence of

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[87] Hollander, 33-34.
[88] During Mobutu's period the armed forces rarely received their salaries. Many learned to extort their livelihood illegally from civilians, encouraged by Mobutu's speech to the army where he declared, "You have gun's; you don't need a salary," Stearns 116-117. Trefon, 62.

their families who encumbered their ability to move quickly. She noted that when situations deteriorated, many men would abandon their families leaving their wife to care for themselves and their children.[89] Many men justified this behaviour by the fact that men risked more if rebels caught them. Indeed, they were more likely to be forced to join the fighting, or be tortured and killed if caught. However, women were also subjected to severe forms of torture. The threat of death remained real for all displaced people given that in armed attacks on groups, machine guns and mortars do not distinguish the sex or age of their victims. Since women and children make up the majority of displaced people in groups they actually have a higher likelihood of being injured or captured when these attacks occur.[90] In the aftermath of an attack women often require medical or legal recourse; however, eastern DRC's broken infrastructure often makes this impossible, demonstrating a subsequent form of structural violence.

Women tend to suffer more severely from damaged health and other infrastructure than men do and they suffer in distinctly gendered ways.[91] Damage to basic infrastructure including electricity, sanitation and water facilities is an inevitable part of warfare. This can lead to an increase in preventable disease and injury, which are hard to treat given the lack of local medical clinics in many communities. The great distance between cities, towns and villages makes fixing these structures or travelling a daunting task, especially given the inadequate roads and transport systems in the DRC[92]. Not being about to travel quickly and efficiently due to poor roads makes receiving access to emergency medical care and other social services a challenge.

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[89] Umutesi, 175.
[90] Ibid., 174-175.
[91] Plümper, 724.
[92] Trefon, 52.

This does not occur in all areas of eastern DRC. Especially in larger cities such as Bukavu and Goma, healthcare infrastructure have been better maintained by civil society organizations. In eastern DRC today, religious institutions are the primary health care providers.[93] Although these organizations provide a number of services efficiently, often in cooperation with humanitarian organizations and NGOs, there is considerable variance in their ability to deliver social services.[94] Although better funded and more efficient than government-run organizations, they still face difficulties in providing adequate care especially outside of the urban centers as a result of conflict, insecurity, and the challenge of finding enough external aid to adequately provide equipment for all different medical maladies.

Women tend to have more health complications throughout their lives as a result of their physiology. They are more susceptible to vitamin and iron deficiencies and a poor diet is a reality lived by many in the DRC given the increasingly high rates of malnourishment and food insecurity.[95] They also face unique challenges due to their reproductive role, making damage to health care facilities an important form of violence against women. During conflicts and periods of insecurity, access to obstetric care is dramatically reduced and miscarriages as well as maternal and neonatal mortality rates increase.

The need for obstetric specialists is especially prevalent in the DRC where despite the instability women continue to have one of the highest fertility rates in the world with an average of 6.3 births per woman.[96] Depending on the area and access to resources available,

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[93] Seay, "Effective Responses," 86. Trefon, 127-128.
[94] Ibid.," 84.
[95] Plümper, 730.
[96] Samuel Mills, "Reproductive Health At A Glance: Democratic Republic Of Congo," The World Bank (2011): 2, http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTPRH/Resources/376374-1303736328719/DRC41411web.pdf.

many of these births are not attended by a trained medical professional increasing the risk of maternal and neonatal mortality. In 2007 as the country was rebuilding, maternal mortality caused 9.1 percent of women's deaths in eastern DRC making it the most common known cause of death for women at this period.[97] Given the scare resources of health specialists and women's reproductive health, in many parts of eastern DRC, access to life saving interventions is usually difficult.

Negative health impacts are especially pronounced for displaced people. Mortality rates in refugee and internally displaced people camps are up to a hundred times higher than the normal mortality rates of a war afflicted country.[98] For women who are displaced, finding access to maternal health can be even more difficult. The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (RCOG) stated: "approximately 15 percent of displaced pregnant women will encounter a potentially life-threatening complication, such as hemorrhage, sepsis, obstructed labour or eclampsia."[99] Because women and children make up the majority of displaced people in the DRC, they face distinct forms of violence in internally displaced people camps and ad hoc displacement settlements.[100] The mobile nature of internally displaced people makes determining populations difficult. Estimates suggest the number of displaced people in the Congo has hovered around the two million mark for over a decade, with the highest level being 3.4 million at the end of 2003.[101] In conditions of over population, close quarters and unsanitary living, infectious disease is

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[97] Coghlan et al., 15.

[98] Plümper, 10.

[99] Royal Collage of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists. "Effects of Conflict on Women's Reproductive Health Needs to be Recognized and Managed Sensitively. 4 July 2014, https://www.rcog. uk/en/news/tog-release-effects-of-conflict-on-womens-reproductive-health-need-to-be-recognised-and-managed-sensitively/.

[100] Estimates suggest that women and children make up about eighty percent of displaced people world wide, Benjamin, 7.

[101] Stacey White, "Now What? The International Response To Internal Displacement In The Democratic Republic Of The Congo," *Brookings Institute* (2011): 4., http://www.brookings.edu/~/media/research/files/papers/2014/12/29-idp-humanitarian-reform-reports/the-international-response-to-internal-displacement-in-the-drc-december-2014.pdf

more likely to become epidemics. In eastern DRC four of the top five causes of death were

infectious disease accounting for fifty five percent of deaths in the DRC, and fifty six

percent in eastern DRC.[102] Despite the undesirable conditions of the camps, many stay

because the only thing worse than being in a camp is being back in an insecure village.[103]

When insecurity or violence hits a community, many are forced to leave their

livelihood and homes behind. However, displacement means much more than just a loss of

goods and property, it destroys the social fabric of a community and challenges previous

gender roles. Both men and women suffer from displacement; however, men tend to be

worse at adapting to the changed situation. Women are better able to adjust to economic

disruptions because they were more willing to take on all kinds of survival activities such

as street vending and domestic services in order to provide for their family. This allowed

them some means of survival, no matter how precarious, and often placed them in the role

of family provider.[104] While women were better able to adapt to some forms of economic

violence than men, they suffer significantly more from the loss of social bonds and support

systems they had embedded in their home communities. Widespread displacement

eliminates social support networks that many women rely on for their survival and

identity.[105] Thus, women have been forced to develop new strategies of support and

survival in every day life, causing new social structures to be created.[106]

During displacement, domestic arrangements and social groupings tend to take on

new structures. In internal displacement and refugee camps, shattered families form new

[102] The top five causes of death are: neo-natal conditions, fever/malaria, diarrhoea, respiratory infections, and tuberculosis. Coghlan et al., 12, 15.
[103] Cohen, 15. Benjamin, 12.
[104] Meertens, 142-143. Benjamin, 14.
[105] Meertens, 141. Benjamin, 16.
[106] See, Andrew Apter, "Matrilineal Motives: Kinship, Witchcraft, And Repatriation Among Congolese Refugees," *Journal Of the Royal Anthropological Institution,* 18 (2012): 22-44.

domestic partnerships and unions between survivors. This is demonstrated by the rise in

young marriages and multiple marriages in displacement camps. Trends of intimate partner

violence in the form of marital rape, wife beating and psychological manipulation have

increased since the conflicts. Some men act out their frustration over their inability to fulfill

their expected gender roles through violence.[107] Although intimate partner violence against

women is high in eastern DRC, the severity and significance that Congolese women attach

to it varies significantly depending on the type of violence and how others perceive it.[108]

Although everyone suffers in periods of war, women's cultural place in society

makes specific types of violence more meaningful and especially difficult. However, many

of these forms of violence are unrecognized by the international community who continues

to focus on gendered violence within its dominant narrative of wartime rape. Although

women and girls are the main victims of sexual violence and it is indisputably an important

form of violence that requires significant resources to combat, prioritizing sexual violence

limits understandings and resources for other forms of violence that are distinctly gendered,

but receive far less attention. To aid women who are victims of violence effectively, the

complex experiences of violence women have as a result of their gender must be

acknowledged in all their forms.

Different forms of violence against women are often intimately intertwined. Sexual

violence does not occur in a vacuum. It results from the roles women play in society

resulting in unique gendered consequences. These consequences are often aggravated by

economic and structural violence that hinders a woman's access to resources and structural

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[107] This is not representative of all families or men. As chapter two demonstrates, some men found non-violent ways to renegotiate their masculinity rather than resort to violent aggression. Hollander, "Men, Masculinities, 431-432"

[108] Deepan, 33.

recourse. A woman's loss of livelihood due to violence does not only result in hardship for one woman. It usually means her family will go hungry, and her community will suffer from her inability to produce food. Therefore, the entire community suffers from war rape and other forms of violence against women. The international community's singular focus on raped women misreads local realities.[109] When the international community only focuses on the effects of sexual violence against women, it can miss the effects of suffering of trauma on partners and children, the fracturing of families, and other forms of loss.

SECONDARY VICTIMS, PRIMARY LOSS

As a mother, daughter, sister, or wife of a loved one who was injured or died as a result of war, women who are not directly injured are not seen as the primary victims of violence. These experiences center on the violations of others, not a woman's own experiences of violence. Since the Congolese wars began most Congolese have lost a loved one, yet in the dominant narrative, this form of violence is still considered a secondary form of violence. This does not acknowledge that for a mother, the loss of a husband or a child may be the worst form of violence she can imagine.[110]

In eastern DRC, mothers often face conditions that make losing a child to death, abduction, or other forms of trauma a likely occurrence. A survey conducted by Slegh et al.

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[109] Trenholm, 7.

[110] The IMAGES survey reported that 52.5 percent men and 61.8 percent women had experiences the injury of a family member, 49.1 percent men and 64.7 percent women had a family member killed, 21.7 percent men and 22.1 percent women had lost a child, 8.1 percent men and 13.4 percent women had lost a partner. Slegh et al., 5.

in eastern DRC showed that 22.1 percent of women surveyed had lost a child.[111] In the face of knowing that they cannot provide for or protect another child, more women living in precarious conditions have begun to attempt to decrease their likelihood of becoming pregnant. This is an age-old tactic of defense women have employed during periods of conflict when it becomes apparent that they cannot provide for or survive with another child.[112] However, for Congolese women who place such a high value on fertility and children, being coerced into not fulfilling their vision of femininity and motherhood is a unique and highly significant form of violence and loss.[113]

The significance of these forms of secondary losses as well as other forms of violence cannot continue to be overlooked if effective policies are to be implemented in the DRC. Assumptions that sexual violence is "the defining crime" that happens to women needs to be challenged through the recognition that it is but one form of violence women experience during conflict.[114] By homogenizing women as victims, or potential victims, of sexual violence, the diversity of other experiences of violence are rendered invisible. It needs to be recognized that some women do not see rape or sexual assault as the worst form of violence they encountered during the Congolese wars. By perpetuating monolithic understandings of rape instead of considering cultural factors that make women's reactions to other forms of violence vary, an inaccurate picture of how violence is gendered and understood in eastern DRC develops.

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[111] Ibid.
[112] Hunt, "An Acoustic Registry," 14.
[113] Ibid., 9. Also see, Nancy Rose Hunt, "Colonial Medical Anthropology and the Making of the Central African Infertility Belt," in *Ordering Africa: Anthropology, European Imperialism, and the Politics of Knowledge,* edited by Helen Tilley with Robert J. Gordon, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007): 252–281.
[114] Sara Sharratt, *Gender, Shame, and Sexual Violence: The Voices of Witnesses and Court Members at War Crimes* Tribunals (England: Ashgate Publishing Int., 2011), 1.

To be more effective, international interventions must include the many forms of violence women encounter in conflict with supplementary attention paid to the vulnerabilities of men and children in conflict settings. This is not to suggest that these needs are similar or require the same levels of outreach, it is merely to suggest that violence in the DRC is necessarily gendered and by focusing only on one type of survivor, part of the picture is obscured, resulting in a disconnect between policies developed by the international community and the reality of needs on the ground.

CHAPTER FOUR

INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE AND LOCAL REALITY

The overwhelming violence that occurred during the Congolese wars led to an outpouring of international assistance in the DRC. The aim of humanitarian workers was to stop the conflict and to end the suffering of the Congolese people. Although the war officially ended in 2003, and several peace agreements have since been implemented, the fighting continues in eastern DRC. Rampant insecurity, regular displacement and violence continue to affect local citizens with international reforms resulting in change, without improvement. Although there is no denying the substantial reforms that have occurred in the social, legal and political realm of the DRC, the majority of these reforms have resulted in little localized change and even less improvement in the lives of ordinary Congolese citizens. When it comes to gendered violence, some progress has been made through constitutional reforms; however, the implementation of interventions has not produced the desired results on the ground for Congolese women.[1] The lack of improvement results from an incompatibility between the international community's perception of the problems and solutions to violence in eastern DRC, and the local reality. Instead of attempting to understand what peace or gender equality look like from a local perspective, the international community has grafted external designs onto eastern DRC through universal assistance initiatives. However, because these perspectives were informed by a global culture of development instead of local realities, they have been widely ineffective in eastern DRC.

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[1] Heidi Hudson, "Double-edged Sword of Peace? Reflections on the Tensions Between Representation and Protection in Gendered Liberal Peacebuilding," *International Peacekeeping* 19, no. 4 (2012): 443.

This chapter asserts that many initiatives in eastern DRC have failed because they prioritized international norms of development rooted in western liberal principles, while ignoring the local context and actors. When local ownership of intervention initiatives was encouraged it usually occurred in the form of cooperation between international authorities and national elites without including local stakeholders who are most affected by peace-building and aid initiatives.[2] Demonstrated through the example of the peace building initiatives undertaken by the international community in an effort to end the second Congolese war, I argue that these initiatives were largely ineffective because they failed to take local considerations into account. I use this example to show the policy gap between the reality of local Congolese communities in eastern DRC and the international perception of the problems. Drawing on this example I will then demonstrate that initiatives undertaken by the international community to end gendered violence have had little effect because they are rooted in gender and development logic rather than in local conceptions of gender, gender relations and equality. Recently there have been a number of government reforms to promote gender equality including a revision of the Congolese constitution and a push to improve women's political and economic participation, as well as to provide greater government accountability for human rights violations. However, the promises made by the government have little significance in eastern DRC where the state lacks legitimacy and authority. I conclude this chapter by arguing that local initiatives have had better success because they built upon pre-existing capabilities, knowledge and legitimacy rooted in local communities. Because grassroots organizations privilege an understanding

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[2] Hellmüller, "Bridging The Disconnect," 2.

of the reality of gender relations in the community over perceptions of white feminism,

they are better equipped to create substantial and sustainable change in eastern DRC.

INTERNATIONAL SOLUTIONS TO VIOLENCE

The Congolese wars are considered some of the most complex conflicts of the

century. Conflicts involving multiple regional and national armed forces as well as local

militias destabilised a large part of the African continent.[3] In an effort to make sense of the

violence, the narrative has been simplified to portray the main cause of violence as regional

and national struggles over economic resources and the main consequence as the mass rape

of Congolese women and girls.[4] This simplified explanatory narrative led to international

interventions to stop the violence and ease the suffering of the Congolese people. However,

these interventions have been largely unsuccessful because the interventions applied in the

DRC were constructed around principles of liberal peace-building that privileged organized

peace talks and general elections over other approaches that may have been more relevant

for the local context of eastern DRC.[5]

The international community posits a commitment to local ownership in all of their

interventions; however, the term "local" is not clearly defined in international humanitarian

policy.[6] In regards to eastern DRC, local has become a buzzword framing international

interventions, yet in practice it has meant the involvement of national elite and high-level

government officials, not civil society. Problematically, the perspectives of national elites

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[3] Autesserre, *The Trouble With The Congo,* 2.
[4] Refer to chapter one, Autesserre, "Dangerous Takes, 202.
[5] See, Hellmüller, "Bridging The Disconnect," 11.
[6] Autesserre, *The Trouble With The Congo,* 42. Hellmüller, "Bridging The Disconnect," 5.

usually do not reflect the views of the general population.[7] This dissonance is especially

problematic in the DRC where most national elites and government officials are based in

the capital of Kinshasa. In a country of 2.3 million square kilometers, Kinshasa lies on the

periphery, representing a distant and abstract entity for many Congolese, especially those in

the east.[8] Far removed from the reality on the ground, to the international community,

Kinshasa represents the Congo state, and all those residing in it.[9]

The assumption that national elites are the embodiment of the state is characteristic

of the international community's tendency to regard the local population as a uniform

group, despite the reality that the DRC is a highly heterogeneous society.[10] When there has

been differentiation made about the identity of individuals in eastern DRC, they tend to

revert back to dyadic labels such as Hutu vs. Tutsi or Government vs. Rebels.[11] These

binaries ignore the highly heterogeneous nature of identity and belonging that make up

local communities in eastern DRC. Ignoring complex subnational dynamics is a common

shortcoming in international cultures of intervention, hence the focus on national

governments in peace negotiations, rather than the general population.[12]

Foreign actors pursue interventions based on their understanding of who the key

players are. In the case of the DRC's peace negotiations, the dominant narrative asserts that

national and regional armed forces were causing the violence; hence they were the main

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[7] Hellmüller, "Bridging The Disconnect," 6.
[8] Trefon, 50-51.
[9] Ibid., 51. There are exceptions to this rule as demonstrated by the dominant narrative of wartime rape where sexual violence victims represent a homogenization of Congolese women. However, as a norm in international relations government organizations tend to embody the state and all those who reside in it.
[10] Tobias Pietz and Leopold von Carlowitz, "International and Local Policing in Peace Operations", *8th International Berlin Workshop*, Zentrum für Internationale Frie- denseinsätze (2007): 13. Hellmüller, "Bridging The Disconnect," 6.
[11] Autesserre, *The Trouble With The Congo,* 42. Refer to chapter one.
[12] Autesserre, *The Trouble With The Congo,* 42. Hellmüller, "Bridging The Disconnect," 5.

targets of the negotiations.[13] The first attempt at settlement in 1999 concluded with the

Lusaka Agreement. Although the fighting continued, the agreement led to a national

dialogue between conflict parties held in Sun City, South Africa in 2002. This dialogue

eventually concluded with the final Pretoria II Agreement, signed in December of 2002.[14]

In the aftermath of this peace negotiation, observers argued that the terms of the

Pretoria Agreement had been largely imposed by the international community, and failed to

include many important stakeholders, specifically civil society representatives.[15] At

Lusaka, participants included the main rebel armed groups, the Rassemblement Congolais

pour la Démocratie (RCD), the Mouvement de Libération du Congo (MLC),[16] as well the

governments of Congo, Angola, Namibia, Rwanda, Uganda and Zimbabwe. Although civil

society representatives were invited to participate at the negotiations in Sun City, they

played a fringe role with armed conflict parties dominating the discussions. It was largely

the international community and armed men who determined the reconstruction of the

country, not the civil society who would actually be responsible for rebuilding it.[17]

The international community's consideration of the unitary nature of "local"

Congolese assumed that the demands of national elites represented the entire civil society.

Given the heterogeneity of the eastern DRC, that assumption led to dangerous results. The

exclusion of local civil actors also implied the exclusion of locally formed militia groups

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[13] Refer to chapter one.

[14] Hellmüller, "Bridging The Disconnect," 7. Refer to chapter one for details.

[15] This is demonstrated by the decision to hold democratic elections strongly promoted by the international community. Elections are considered a cornerstone of the principles of liberal peace-building; however, in a fragile and decentralized state like the DRC they are less effective and rendered largely meaningless. Hellmüller, "Bridging The Disconnect," 8, Emeric Rogier, "The Inter-Congolese Dialogue: A Critical Overview" in, *Challenges of Peace Implementation: The UN Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo*, edited by Mark Malan and Joao Gomes (Porto, Pretoria: Institute for Security Studies, 2004): 39.

[16] The Rassemblement Congolais pour la Démocratie (RCD) was the initial rebel movement during the 1998 war and was allied with Rwanda for most of the war. The Rassemblement Congolais pour la Démocratie- Goma (RCDG), was the main rebel group during the war and controlled most of eastern DRC. The Mouvement de Libération du Congo (MLC) was the second main rebel movement and allied with Uganda. Both were later transformed into a political party during the transition. Autesserre, *The Trouble With The Congo,* xiv, xv.

[17] Hellmüller, "Bridging The Disconnect," 8-9.

responsible for much of the fighting in eastern DRC.[18] The exclusion of the Banyamulenge

of South Kivu in these negotiations is an example of this disconnection between

international assumptions and the local reality.

The international community considers the Banyamulenge to be Congolese, thus

their concerns should have been reflected in those of the national elites. However, despite

settling in the DRC two centuries ago and considering themselves to be Congolese citizens,

other groups in eastern DRC view the Banyamulenge as Rwandan foreigners and have

threatened their security by violently trying to expel them back to Rwanda.[19] The

international community did not consider many of these nuances of belonging in peace

initiatives. Because the Banyamulenge were unable to express their opinion at the peace

negotiations, they continued to feel threatened, leading their local militias to continue to

engage in violence. Given that fragmented, micro-level militias fighting over grassroots

antagonisms caused the majority of violence, the impact of their exclusion in these peace

processes is apparent.[20] Thus, because the opinion of local actors, especially female local

actors, was not considered, insecurity continued.

Furthermore, these international interventions prioritized external models of "liberal

peace building" focused on promoting democracy, market based economic reforms and a

range of other institutions associated with "modern" states as the best way to build peace.[21]

However, local actors did not perceive these ideas to be the most sustainable way to build

peace in the DRC because they did not address the main causes of violence, including first

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[18] Refer to chapter one. Hellmüller, "Bridging The Disconnect," 15.
[19] Tatiana Carayannis, "The Complex Wars of the Congo: Towards a New Analytic Approach," *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 38 (2003): 247. 232-255.
[20] Ibid., 16.
[21] Edward Newman, Roland Paris and Oliver P. Richmond, eds., *New Perspectives on Liberal Peacebuilding,* (New York: United Nations University Press, 2009), 3.

and foremost, grassroots antagonisms over land and resources. Unfortunately the local communities, although presumed to be the main beneficiaries of the peace talks, were not allowed to contribute their definition of what peace is or should be. Instead the international community transplanted western norms into societies telling local actors what peace should look like.[22] These peacebuilding processes attempted to impose an externally created state without considering indigenous institutions. As such they failed to take into consideration the self-determined needs, culture and identity of local Congolese.[23] Thus, liberal peace building initiatives actually disempowered local eastern Congolese people through a complex process of security governance, which was dominated by the state and intergovernmental actors focused on issues of security sector reform, extending the rule of law and enforcing Kinshasa's state authority.[24]

Similarly, as demonstrated in chapter two, definitions of gender equality are based on white feminist perspectives that are not relevant to or appropriate in eastern DRC. The gender and development theory imposed specific gender discourses based on patriarchal perspectives to enforce their norms of development. The way the international community frames gender reinforces these "truths," determining the path taken by international interventions. These interventions serve to reproduce and re-institutionalize gender relations of domination and subordination in Africa because they ignore the reality of women and women's place in eastern DRC. Even when women have represented themselves, colonial logic continues to dominate their perspectives, dictating what and who

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[22] Hellmüller, "Bridging The Disconnect," 13.
[23] Marta Iñiguez de Heredia, "The space for Congolese self-determination between absences and presences of the African Union and the United Nations", *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations*, 3 no.1 (2009): 13.
[24] Hudson, 445. Heiner Hänggi, "Approaching Peacebuilding From a Security Governance Perspective," in *Shaping A Security Governance Agenda in Post-Conflict Peacebuilding* (Geneva: DCAF Publishing, 2005), 8.

counts in women's human rights discourse.[25]

The peace negotiations held in Sun City demonstrate how mainstream policies practiced by the international community results in exclusionary politics that fail to provide a holistic picture of the reality of the situation, and the specific needs and wants of local actors. Similarly, the international community determines Congolese women's needs according to global discourses on gender.[26] However, they fail to acknowledge how local perceptions of gender and gender relations in eastern DRC differ from western theories. Although most international organizations possess the same narrative explaining gender violence in eastern DRC, positing women and girls as the victims of violence in the Congolese wars due to their vulnerability and subordination in society, local narratives regarding gender subordination vary considerably. As shown in the previous chapter, gender relations have changed since colonization, affording Congolese women greater status and authority in their families and communities. Women are now the main providers in most families, granting them the role of head of household. While local women may not see themselves as victims of subordination, but as active agents who provided and protected their families, the international community continued to push for reforms to minimize gender inequality which is assumed to be the main cause of violence against women.[27] In the DRC, reforms targeted specific areas and specific agents for redress in an attempt to criminalize sexual violence and increase women's status through legal rights aimed at enhancing their economic and political participation in society. Although the Congolese constitution saw significant reform in the aftermath of the Congolese wars,

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[25] Ibid., 444. Refer to chapter two.
[26] Ibid., 445.
[27] Merry, 101.

specifically in the area of sexual violence and gender equality, these reforms mean little in the local context of eastern DRC where the state has little authority, violence remains widespread, and women do not always recognize the significance of these formal rights.

GENDER EQUALITY THROUGH LEGISLATION

Since the Congolese wars, pressure by international institutions has focused on the DRC's obligation to implement international procedures into national legislation. They assumed that by incorporating gender equality and criminalizing gender violence, change would occur. The Congo is party to numerous international human rights instruments and conventions regarding international humanitarian law created to protect women and girls from gender based violence in both times or war and times of peace. These include, but are not limited to the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), CEDAW, and "The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights."[28] International documents, resolutions and laws articulate a set of global rules regarding the treatment of human beings. These protocols are necessarily broad enough to gain global consensus; however, this often prevents them from having the teeth necessary to implement meaningful change by themselves. To be effective it is important to localize these global procedures in the national constitution. Furthermore, effective procedures of implementation and enforcement are necessary to ensure real success.[29]

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[28] See Chapter one.
[29] Merry, 5.

The majority of constitutional reform in the DRC has focused on gendered violence, specifically sexual violence against women and girls. This is demonstrated by the marked change in legislation that occurred with the new criminal code adopted in 2006. It prohibited sixteen different types of sexual violence, including rape. However, marital rapes, and other forms of domestic violence, remain absent under the law.[30] Despite high instances of domestic violence, there are currently no state measures in place to protect or assist victims of domestic violence, including in instances of marital rape. This example is but one that demonstrated how the laws put in place to protect and promote women's human rights remain at variance with the reality of women's lives.[31]

There is often a huge distance between where the laws are created and where they are to be deployed, resulting in varying levels of significance and success. Human rights discourse and gender equality embedded in international legislation are based on white feminism representative of the western world. These universal concepts often overshadow the meaning of gender and gender violence at the local level. This is apparent in the DRC where a number of human rights campaigns dealing with violence against women focus on the promotion of gender equality as the best way to protect women from violence.[32] A number of these campaigns argued that archaic laws such as those in the Congolese Family Code promoted women's second-class status in society and needed to be abolished for women's rights to be realized.[33]

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[30] CEDAW, "Report On Violence Against Women In North and South Kivu, In The Democratic Republic of Congo," *55th session* (2013): 7.

[31] Holmes, 222. Refer to chapter three.

[32] Merry, 101.

[33] EASSI, "Women's Political Participation And Economic Empowerment In Post Conflict Countries," *International* Alert (2012): 35, http://www.international-alert.org/sites/default/files /publications/2012 09 WomenEmpowermentEN_0.pdf.

In response to pressure by the United Nations, World Bank and NGO's, the DRC adopted a new constitution in 2006. The new constitution promised to promote equality between Congolese men and women by ensuring the protection and promotion of women's rights by eliminating all forms of discrimination in civil, political, economic, and social areas.[34] It offered protection against all forms of violence against women that occurred in both their public and private lives with the law determining the conditions for the application of these rights.[35] However, while amendments were made to the Congolese Family Code, it continues to define the husband as the head of a household and requires his wife to obey him in all things.[36] Amongst other constraints, wives require husbands' permission to work outside the home, to perform legal actions, and to open a bank account.[37] Advocates argue that these laws are just some of the ways gender based violence was perpetuated in the DRC despite being in blatant violation of international standards of equality between men and women.

While gender and development theory argue that these issues are the cornerstone of women's rights and insist on women's economic and political emancipation as a necessary step for their liberation, it fails to acknowledge that these laws do not have the same significance in eastern DRC as they do in western countries. While women may not legally be able to open a bank account according to the Congolese Family Code, this may not be a matter of concern for Congolese women given that there are only sixty banking branches across the entire country, and only 60,000-100,000 out of a population of approximately 67

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[34] Third Republic Constitution, Article 15 (adopted February 2006).
[35] CEDAW, 2.
[36] Article 444 of the Congolese Family Code declares, "The husband is the head of the household. His duty is the protection of his wife; his wife owes her obedience to her husband."
[37] Ibid.

million inhabitants, have a bank account. [38] Similarly, although a woman is assumed to require her husband's permission to work outside the home, economic realities show this is far from the norm with most women acting as the main income provider in their households.[39] Thus, although international perceptions informed by white feminism see the reform of these laws as essential for gender equality, in eastern DRC Congolese women may see these priorities as divorced from the reality of how things really are.

The promotion of free market economy assumed to address economic inequalities is another example of how the international perspective is at odds with local interests that support local economic wellbeing.[40] Gender and development theory assumes that conflict has exasperated women's disadvantaged position in the formal economy, and in turn, has increased the burden of female-headed households. These assumptions are at the root of international intervention programs aimed at bringing women into the formal economy and removing barriers to their financial autonomy. However, this ignores that women already make up the majority of providers largely through their work in the informal sector. While the international community assumes that the informal sector characterizes precarious work and insecurity, in eastern DRC the economy is largely informal with only four percent of the population having stable positions in the formal economy.[41] Therefore, pushing women into a collapsed formal economy has few benefits.

The international community posits the importance of the inclusion of women in all realms of society, with specific emphasis on the economy and political decision making

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[38] Alfie Ulloa, Felipe Katz and Nicole Kekeh, *Democratic Republic of the Congo: A Study Of Binding Constraints,* (Havard: Massachusetts, 2009), 33.
[39] Refer to Chapter two.
[40] Hudson, 446.
[41] Hudson, 446.

positions because these are assumed to improve women's social status and thus, enhance gender equality. However, the international community offers a simplistic understanding of why this inclusion is important, and does not always contextualize the significance of inclusion in specific local realities.[42] Laura Sjoberg demonstrates in her article "Reconstructing Women In Post Conflict Rwanda" that while women may have experienced considerable advances in the political realm, they have experienced setbacks in other areas of gender equality.[43] In the 2008 election, Rwandan women had over fifty six percent of elected seats in their national parliament.[44] Although Rwandan women had the highest political representation of women in the world, they remain ranked 135 out of 146 on the Gender Development Index and experience higher than average rates of gender based violence including domestic violence and rape, which has only increased since the genocide.[45] Thus, improved representation does not necessarily mean gender equality has improved, nor does it translate to a decrease in gender-based violence in the country.[46]

These changes in legislation and interventions meant to empower women show that while women advance in some areas, they may experience setbacks in others.[47] Although white feminist approaches have simplified women's status to that of global subordinate under patriarchy, in reality it is much more complicated and insists on a thorough local

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[42] Ibid., 452.
[43] Sjoberg, 184.
[44] Ibid.,171.
[45] Ibid., 180.
[46] Furthermore, the way women are included is a significant factor in gender equality. Although a thirty percent quota system was implemented in Uganda these seats were only add-on seats reinforcing women's secondary status. Therefore, higher rates of female representation do not necessarily represent a change in perception about women. Hudson, 452. The DRC has not implemented quota systems, however the government has made a commitment increasing women's representation in the local, provincial and national institutes. Doris Mpoumou, "Women's Participation In Peace Negotiations: Discourse In The Democratic Republic Of The Congo," *International IDEA* (2004), 122, http://www.idea.int/africa/upload/women_drc.pdf. This has occurred more in theory than in practice. Although women were involved in the 2006 general election, making up the majority of voters, only eight percent were elected to the National assembly, and only 8.6 percent to the Senate. EASSI, 32.
[47] Sjoberg, 184.

analysis.[48] While formal equality is an important issue that should be included in international and national legislation, international interventions have failed to ask if these issues are important for local Congolese women. To a woman fighting for survival in a war, or a woman who is already the main provider in her family, or a woman who already helps make decisions in her community, formal economic and political equality may not be considered significant.[49] Thus, the application of laws created in the context of white feminism cannot be universally applied as the sole answer to important challenges facing women in the DRC.

DISCONNECTION BETWEEN THE NATIONAL AND LOCAL

Most of the changes pursued in international law and in the DRC's national constitution have had little effect because they have not reached the local level or addressed issues of real concern to Congolese citizens. Human rights advocacy and legislation development are the activities of the national elite and international community, thus they usually do not resonate at the grassroots level where these laws are not understood or enforced. The number of women in eastern DRC who do not know about legislation meant to promote women's human rights is very high. Although most women were aware of the clauses regarding gender equality in the new constitution, only 32.4 percent knew about other international statues such as CEDAW, and only four percent of Congolese women knew about resolution 1820, which declares wartime sexual violence a war crime and a

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[48] Ibid., 184.
[49] Merry, 92.

violation of women's human rights.[50] Thus, women who are unaware of their formal rights

are unlikely to claim recourse when those rights are violated.

Furthermore, within human rights rhetoric women are encouraged to recognize their

rights and violations of those rights; however, the obligation of protecting those rights falls

on the state.[51] In eastern DRC there is a divergence between international assumptions of

state authority and local norms of protection. Whereas historically, Congolese women

relied on norms of kinship and care for protection, human rights rhetoric asks them to

abandon these social bonds and rely on the state for protection.[52]

This is highly problematic in eastern DRC due to the hostile relationship between

the state and its citizens. Throughout history, the state has represented more of a threat to

local eastern Congolese people than a beneficial structure, resulting from decades of

pervasive corruption and abuse of citizens by their government. Tracing back from Leopold

to Kabila, government officials used public office as a means to accumulate personal

wealth largely at the expense of the public good.[53] Agents of the state ranging from

administration to the security sector have been largely responsible for the majority of

human rights violations throughout history. Whether through the dismantling of health care

infrastructure or armed forces looting civilians, Congolese citizens have been exploited,

threatened, and oppressed by the state causing them to see it as a hostile threat to their

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[50] EASSI, 32. Resolution 1820 was passed by the UN security counsel in 2008 as a follow up to Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) which was meant to address the disproportionate and unique impact armed conflict had on women. Resolution 1820, specifically recognizes conflict related sexual violence as war crime and encourages the training of troops to prevent and respond to sexual violence when it occurs. UN Security Council, *Security Council resolution 1820 (2008) [on acts of sexual violence against civilians in armed conflicts]*, 19 June 2008, S/RES/1820 (2008), http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/CAC%20S%20RES%201820.pdf.
[51] Merry, 180.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Autesserre, "Dangerous Tales," 219. Also see, Trefton, *Congo Masquerade.*

survival rather than as a protector to vulnerable citizens.[54]

In eastern DRC, state authority has not existed since the early 1990s.[55] By the mid 1980s the national and local government had lost most of their capacity to maintain public order.[56] When the state became incapable of providing social services or of protecting its citizens, other civil society organizations stepped in. Although most organizations operate in de jure partnership with the state, they remain in control of most decisions and serve as the only social service providers in the region. In eastern DRC these organizations have effectively substituted state management, thus usurping authority from the government.[57]

Although the legitimacy and authority of the Congolese government remain important to the international community, civil society organizations and local NGOs hold far more significance to local populations. In eastern DRC, non-state actors maintain social order, operating schools, hospitals and providing basic security in some areas.[58] These civil society organizations in many ways function as the state, maintaining a basic level of public order, managing disputes, operating institutions, and providing security.[59]

Therefore, although the international community encourages state capacity building, in actuality, civil organizations tend to remain the main providers of social order, security, and services.[60] For example, unlike the state whose authority has continued to weaken since the post colonial era, the Catholic church has maintained its position as the strongest institution in Congolese society, and the only functioning institution in the insecure areas of

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[54] Autesserre, "Dangerous Tales," 219.
[55] Seay, Effective Responses, 83.
[56] Ibid., 88.
[57] Ibid., 85.
[58] Ibid., 84.
[59] Ibid., 84, 86.
[60] Trefon, 127-128.

eastern DRC.[61] The church's continuous presence has earned it a high degree of trust and

authority amongst the population.[62] Although the state has attempted to reassert authority

with the assistance of international initiatives, the trust necessary for the government to re-

attain legitimacy among the population does not exist in eastern DRC where many feel the

state has abandoned them.[63] The relatively few Congolese women who understand their

juridical rights are unlikely to assert them if the state cannot deliver on its claims of

protection.[64] Thus, this international human rights discourse has not achieved grassroots

appropriation.

Some local organizations are finding a way to bridge the divide between universal

human rights concepts and local realities.[65] Nevertheless, international initiatives continue

to base their interventions on thematic knowledge of peace building and white feminism,

according to non-negotiable principles rooted in international development initiatives that

overshadow local history and politics.[66] These organizations tend to ignore local knowledge

in favour of their habitual way of operating. For example, in the District of Ituri where local

violence has remained fairly constant since the outbreak of conflict in 1996, the

international community implemented a number of peace building initiatives, one of which

aimed to teach local organizations how to mediate conflict. This program ignored the fact

that these local actors conducted mediation on a daily basis, and had done so long before

the international community had arrived. Despite experiencing relative success prior to

these international interventions, the international community was quick to point out that

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[61] Seay, Effective Responses, 87.
[62] Ibid., 90.
[63] Ibid., 94.
[64] Merry, 271.
[65] Ibid., 217.
[66] Sara Hellemüller, "International and Local Actors In Peacebuilding: Why Don't They Cooperate," *Swiss Peace,* Working Paper (2014): 15.

"this was not the right kind of mediation," and reorganized the local organizations

according to international standards rooted western notions of liberal peacebuilding.[67] This

is problematic as it can disempower local civil society organizations whose initiatives and

energy is undermined by the international community's assumed expertise.[68]

Instead of prioritizing international models of intervention, the benefits of local

grassroots initiatives run by civil society should be explored because the local knowledge

and understanding these organizations possess can be invaluable for building sustainable

interventions. Although they do not always have the money or capabilities of

internationally funded organizations, they usually possess substantial legitimacy within the

community and understand the cultural heterogeneity and history of the region.[69] Whereas

international organizations base their efforts of intervention on what they have heard the

biggest problem is, whom they rely on for this information can change their initiatives.[70] As

Laura Seay asserts,

> Western diplomats who visit on a two-day trip to discuss sexual violence are taken
> to meet the same informants that the World Bank consultants, on a mission to
> develop small businesses, met just the week before… Journalists seem to follow the
> same route, with everyone writing a story about rape using quotes from Dr Denis
> Mukwege at Panzi Hospital.[71]

Although this represents an effort by international community to obtain local actors'

opinions, the use of a small number of informants is problematic as these informants have a

tendency to repeat the same narrative of problems and solutions that reinforce the dominant

international perspective.[72] This perspective tends to differ from the thinking of general

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[67] Ibid., 16-17.
[68] Ibid., 17.
[69] Ibid., 23.
[70] Seay, "Whither Civil Society?" 5.
[71] Ibid.
[72] Ibid.

populations they aim to help, yet whose voices remain largely unheard in the planning of international interventions.

Local organizations base their mandates on what they know the problems are, from having lived with them.[73] This gives local organizations more legitimacy because local populations recognize that these organizations understand their problems and are more likely to stay in the community even when the international funds run out. Whereas local organizations work to achieve local legitimacy in their community to make their programs successful, international interventions achieve legitimacy from the international community such as the UN Security Council.[74] In order to do this they have to tailor their programs to popular causes written in human rights vernacular. Unfortunately, this vernacular does not always translate down to the local level on its own. It often has to be reworked to fit the particularities of the local community thus; partnerships between international and local organizations are beneficial.

Similarly, when local groups adequately present their problems in human rights discourse, local problems can find a global audience allowing a forum for resistance. In the DRC, prior to the negotiations at Sun City some local women's groups formed transnational bonds with global women's organizations to promote their participation in the upcoming peace process. Amongst these groups, hundreds of new gender networks were developed to help promote women's participation through global conferences, education seminars and protests. Although only ten women participating in a limited capacity at the final discussion, it represents the power of international human rights rhetoric when it is

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[73] Hellemüller, 17.
[74] Ibid., 24.

localized in grassroots organizations.[75]

This initiative, like so many others, show that although there is substantial differentiation between local realities and the international community's perception of the problem and solution to violence in eastern DRC, there are ways to bridge this divergence through the cooperation of local initiatives with international organizations. Although steps have been made in the direction of understanding the local context, further success is dependent on rethinking the superiority of gender and development theory as it is applied in the complex context of the DRC. Understanding that women in the DRC do not prioritize the same issues or experience violence in the same way as western women is a crucial starting point. Only when the divergence between the proposed problem and solution meet with the reality on the ground can sustainable peace begin to build in the DRC.

[75] Julie Ballington ed., "The Implementation Of Quotas: African Experiences," *EISA* (2004): 121, http://www.idea.int/publications/quotas_africa/upload/IDEA_no3.qxd.pdf

CONCLUSION

This thesis presents a further understanding of where dominant narratives come from in order to encourage policy makers and academics to explore outside the dominant narratives used to explain the dynamics of gender violence in eastern DRC. It uses a case study of the wartime rape narrative in the DRC to illustrate the inaccuracy of dominant explanations of gendered violence in the region. It questions dominant narratives that inform and impose specific development agendas, arguing that they have had little tangible effect in the lives of ordinary Congolese women because they do not accommodate the realities of gender and gender violence experienced in local communities. This thesis offers a starting point for further analysis into some of the many under represented alternative storylines of gender, gender violence and intervention in eastern DRC in the hopes of encouraging a deeper analysis of the socio-cultural reality of local contexts affected by international development initiatives.

There is no one true historical interpretation of Congolese history or gender relations. However, the international community's over reliance on dominant narratives has resulted in the persistence of inadequate intervention initiatives that fail to accommodate for the complex local reality in eastern DRC. From the onset of the Congolese wars in 1996, the complexity of the dynamics of violence led to an inadequate analysis of the causes, consequences and most appropriate solutions to violence dominating international discourse on violence in the DRC. Arguing that national and regional violence over conflict minerals was the main cause of the conflict; this narrative ignored local causes of violence rooted in historical antagonisms over land rights, scarce resources, and shifting ethnic

alliances.[1] Peace building interventions have been unsuccessful because they failed to acknowledge these local dynamics. Instead, they initiate top town programs that have proven ineffective at addressing or ending the local causes of violence.[2]

Within the dominant narrative, the main consequence of violence is the massive wartime rape of many Congolese women and girls. This became the main atrocity narrative of violence, framing all other forms of violence and encouraging specific intervention initiatives. Most of these initiatives have proven ineffective because they are created from gender and development frameworks encouraged by white feminism rather than local Congolese. This externally imposed framework meant to improve gender equality is based on western conceptions of women's place and gender relations in eastern DRC, rather than gender realities on the ground.[3] While women in the DRC may be considered subordinate according to western standards of modernity, within their local context many women exert substantial authority and power in their families and communities. International narratives on gender and gender violence ignore the nuances of local Congolese agency assuming that all Congolese women are in need of saving from their subordinate status. However, local Congolese women have been navigating their social lives efficiently and sustainably through numerous social transitions and gender renegotiations for centuries. Intervention initiatives must acknowledge that these women are not helpless victims of gender subordination but active agents of change in their own lives.

Furthermore, women are not the only victims of gender violence. Exceptionally high levels of wartime rape and other forms of sexual violence against women did occur

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[1] Autesserre, "Dangerous Tales," 202, 210.
[2] Ibid., *The Trouble With The Congo,* 126-127.
[3] Arnfred, "Re-Thinking Sexualities In Africa," 12, 15.

during the wars; however, these were by no means the only form of gendered violence that occurred. Men, women and children all suffered from distinctly gendered forms of violence. The prioritization of women, specifically raped women, as the most prevalent victims of violence obscures a holistic understanding of gender violence and discourages aid interventions that accommodate for violence outside of the wartime rape narrative.

Understanding the many different dynamics of gender, gender relations and gender violence in the DRC demonstrates the many factors that have been left out of the dominant narratives used to explain the causes and experiences of gendered violence. Because these factors were misinterpreted or dismissed by international analysis of the Congolese wars, international initiatives meant to end gender violence have been ineffective at producing meaningful change on the ground for Congolese women. Instead of using domestic understandings of peace and gender equality, most initiatives are informed by a global culture of development rooted in western liberal principles.[4] To be successful, initiatives have to resonate with local communities and accommodate the structural conditions of the places they are deployed.[5] This relies on an understanding of the real circumstances of the local community, not one translated down through dominant narratives based on inaccurate historical analysis.

Analysis of the situation in the DRC often overlooks positive change occurring in eastern DRC since the wars ended. Most changes have resulted from the Congolese people and their social dynamism rather than from external interventions.[6] Demonstrated through the emergence of a thriving informal economy, grassroots associations and local

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[4] Hellmüller, "Bridging The Disconnect," 8.
[5] Merry, 221.
[6] Trefon, 125.

community solidarity networks, new social and economic survival strategies have offset the failure of the Congolese state and the international community. Rather than being victims of circumstance, Congolese women are active agents of change, acting independently to make choices for themselves and their families to ensure their survival.[7] The agency of local Congolese needs to be recognized and encouraged by the international community, as does the capacity, legitimacy and power of local grass roots organizations. These local organizations have the most appropriate understanding of what Congolese women want and need to thrive in their community thus their insight should be valued.

However, local organizations remain under utilized and underrepresented in international agenda setting processes. Their voices are often dominated by national and global elites informed by dominant narratives.[8] Given the slow changing nature of international culture of development, enabling grassroots organizations to dictate the narrative of local needs and realities to the international community will take time. This thesis attempts to encourage this process by questioning traditional western frameworks of analysis and encouraging the development of alternative perspectives more attuned to local Congolese realities. In doing so, a broader understanding of different storylines that exist outside of dominant narratives such as the wartime rape narrative will develop, enabling more appropriate intervention initiatives that accommodate the complex reality on the ground of eastern DRC.

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[7] Ibid.
[8] Merry, 69-71.

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