Battles on Women’s Bodies
War, rape and traumatisation in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo

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What supports, enables and/or condones rape as a weapon of war?

Gender construction as an overarching theme
Women: symbol and property of the nation

Misogyny magnified
Military culture

Construct of masculinity
Changing nature and Chaos of war

Atmosphere of impunity
Displaced Populations

Culture
Rape as a weapon of war in the global political economy

“...The rape victims of eastern Congo don’t give a damn about debt relief. They want to know who is raping them, who has provided the guns...”

— Dennis McNamara, special U.N. adviser
Impact: Multiple burdens
Aim of this study

To explore local leaders perceptions concerning rape and raped women in the context of war in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo.

Part of a collaborative project with 3 perspectives

1. Local leaders
2. Men who have deviated from the norm and accepted back their raped partners
3. Raped women’s reflexions on men’s actions
Supervisor and hospital chief: Dr. Mukwege

Panzi Hospital

www.panzihospitalbukavu.org
Some of the Findings

• "Caught between a rock and a hard place": The Church doctrine

• The target has no value

• Mass traumatization: a new phenomenon

• Peace, not beans: inappropriate aid

• "The selling of another’s pain is inhumane"
Conceptual framework

Raped Women

- rejection
  - fear
  - AIDS-STD's pregnancy
- traumatization
- military culture
  - chaos of war
  - lack of Infrastructure
  - insecurity-impunity-no resources
- poverty
- inappropriate aid
- global political economy
- international apathy
- women's low status
  - patriarchy-church-culture
Conclusion thus far

Rape as a weapon of war in the Congo is the tip of the iceberg in a web of complexity involving:

• global players
• structural ideologies
• international apathy
• greed and deception
We need to gain a deeper understanding into the complexity of war rape in order to provide humanitarian assistance and public health interventions that are comprehensive and considerate of the actual needs of all the survivors.
Continuing fieldwork DRC

An ethnographic study which investigates the:

1. plight of the raped woman

2. fate of the children born of rape

3. traumatised masculinity of the raped woman’s partner
What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us.

Ralph Waldo Emerson
Thank-you
Particulars of this study

- Design: Qualitative exploratory study using researcher and method triangulation
- Participants: Purposive sampling of 10 local leaders with diverse backgrounds with the assistance of a key community member
- Method: 7 semi-structured interviews of 30 minutes plus
- Data Collection: 4.5 hours of audio recordings collected, translated from French and transcribed in English
- Analysis: Graneheim and Lundman’s content analysis with consensus sought from several readers
- Ethical Concerns
Methodological issues of this first study

• Qualitative semi-structured interviews

• Impact of the researcher as tool

• Trustworthiness: credibility, dependability, transferability