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SPECIAL REPORT

1200 17th Street NW • Washington, DC 20036 • 202.457.1700 • fax 202.429.6063

Jocelyn Kelly

Rape in War: Motives of Militia in DRC

Summary

- United Nations Security Council Resolution 1820 signals a new movement in the international community to recognize widespread sexual violence against women in conflict as a threat to international peace and security.
- Research on sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) has predominantly focused on victims and survivors of rape. A better understanding of the roots of SGBV in conflict, however, can only be gained by examining the experiences and motivations of perpetrators.
- SGBV has been a pervasive and highly destructive feature of the conflict in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Soldiers from the Mai Mai militia group, one of many armed groups operating in this conflict, describe a number of factors that promote sexual violence in the ranks of this group.
- Soldiers have a complex and sometimes contradictory relationship with civilians. Interviewees express a desire to reintegrate into civilian life and return to pre-war norms, and they see themselves as protectors of civilians. However, civilians are also seen as a resource that can be exploited for money, food, and other needs.
- For the Mai Mai, sexual violence against women by other armed groups, particularly foreign groups, is seen as a motivation to fight. Nevertheless, at least some soldiers justify sexual violence perpetrated by members of their own group.
- Some commanders explicitly support rape by treating women as a spoil of war. Men also describe rape as a result of individual motives, such as the desire of a particular woman.
- The most effective interventions to address SGBV are tailored to the motivations and decision-making structures of each armed group. An understanding of militia group attitudes is especially important as these groups are currently being integrated into the national army.
- Mai Mai commanders should be held responsible for the violence perpetrated by themselves and the men under their command. High levels of concern about contracting HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections pose an opportunity to discourage combatants from engaging in sexual violence.

About the Report

This report reflects a key goal of USIP's Gender and Peace Initiative, which seeks to inform policy through analytical and practitioner work. The report presents the results of qualitative research conducted with combatants from the Mai Mai militia in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), as part of a project by the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative (HHI). Interviews conducted at three field sites provide insight into soldiers' motivations and their attitudes toward sexual violence in their group. However, soldiers' responses also reveal potential areas for intervention.

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Jocelyn Kelly is the sexual and gender-based violence research coordinator for the HHI, where she designs and implements research projects to examine how different groups experience and perceive conflict in the DRC. She received her master's in public health from the Harvard School of Public Health.

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- The DRC government should use the integration of Mai Mai troops into the national army as an opportunity to retrain troops, with a focus on sensitizing soldiers about human rights and the need to protect civilians. Trust between civilians and the military could be built through regular meetings among leaders as well as effective prosecution of rape crimes.
- The international and humanitarian communities can provide mental health counseling to demobilized soldiers as well as employment opportunities to assist in reintegration.

To address the issues that arise in conflict and move toward effective reconstruction, policymakers and practitioners must understand the needs, experiences, and motivations of the different populations involved. At the heart of most conflicts are the armed combatants themselves—often among the most difficult groups to access, but some of the most essential to understanding the factors driving violence. Hit by two successive wars in 1996 and 1998, the eastern region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) hangs in limbo between a conflict and postconflict state. In a theater of impunity, over twenty armed groups operate in a shifting landscape of motivations and alliances, leaving the country, after decades of unrest, with some of the worst health and development indicators in the world.

Extremely brutal forms of sexual violence have been one of the most salient and destructive characteristics of the conflict. Despite international recognition of the problem, levels of rape in eastern DRC increased in 2009 and remain extremely high.[1] The United Nations estimates that 200,000 women and girls have been assaulted over the past twelve years.[2] In the first three months of 2010, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees reported that 1,244 women were sexually assaulted throughout the country. More than a third of these rapes occurred in North and South Kivu provinces, in the conflict-affected eastern region. These regional figures are comparable to the same period in 2009, revealing little progress in decreasing sexual violence.[3] Rapes in DRC are so common and vicious that the United Nations undersecretary-general for humanitarian affairs, John Holmes, called rape in DRC "the worst in the world."[4]

To address these crimes against humanity, the United Nations Security Council recognized sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) as a threat to world peace and security by adopting Security Council Resolution (SRC) 1820 in June 2008. SCR 1820 condemns sexual violence as a tactic of war and requires that states carry out the appropriate judicial reform and transitional justice procedures necessary to prevent sexual violence during conflict. In his one-year followup report on Resolution 1820, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon noted the importance of analyzing the trends of sexual violence in armed conflict, calling for more and better data to understand the profiles and manifestations of sexual violence in individual settings, including the motivations of perpetrators.[5] Academic and humanitarian communities echo Ban Ki-Moon's call and recognize that to effectively intervene, it is necessary to understand the conditions, motivations, and risk factors involved in these acts of violence.[6] The extant research on SGBV has, predominantly and appropriately, focused on victims and survivors of rape. To better understand this complex phenomenon, however, it is necessary to look not only at the consequences, but also at the roots of SGBV in conflict, and this analysis can only be done by better understanding the experiences and motivations of perpetrators.

Previous research from the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative (HHI) has highlighted the connection between armed groups and sexual violence in DRC. In a survey conducted in eastern DRC in 2007, over 80 percent of women interviewed reported that their attacker was wearing some kind of uniform. Over two-thirds said they were gang-raped, and almost half reported being abducted. These findings speak to the highly militarized forms of rape in DRC, suggesting that understandings of why SGBV occurs there are incomplete without fuller insight into the experiences and attitudes of combatants themselves.[7]

This research project is among the first to document directly the role of a militia group in perpetrating sexual violence in DRC and to examine motives and rationalizations for engaging in sexual violence. This report focuses on the attitudes toward violence in one DRC militia group, the Mai Mai. The first part of the report describes the general characteristics of the Mai Mai militia: the motivations of soldiers to join the group, challenges they face as active combatants, some of the ways socialization occurs in the group through looking at initiation rights and magical belief systems, and the role the command structure plays in soldiers' lives. The second section examines soldiers' attitudes toward women in general and female combatants in particular, then turns to the ways soldiers talk about sexual violence, both in society and within the Mai Mai. Finally, the report explores soldiers' thoughts on demobilization and aspirations for the future. The concluding recommendations have been made to inform policymakers and practitioners on the types of interventions that may be most effective to mitigate violence and effectively demobilize soldiers. As Mai Mai forces continue to integrate into the national army—the Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo (FARDC)—harmful behaviors and attitudes that manifest in the Mai Mai have a high probability of appearing in the FARDC if they are not properly understood and addressed.

Rape in War: Attempts at Understanding

Wartime rape is probably as old as war itself. However, real attention to and study of this phenomenon has been undertaken seriously only in the past two decades, as international attention became focused on the atrocities committed in the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda.[8] Wartime rape can differ from other forms of sexual violence, such as intimate partner rape, in that it is typically used as "a weapon wielded by male soldiers of one country (or national, political, or cultural group) against typically unarmed female civilians of another."[9] SGBV during conflict can serve larger strategic purposes, functioning as a means of warfare with diverse yet predictable consequences. The strategic rape theory states that SGBV is a tool to subjugate populations, instill fear, curtail movement and economic activity, stigmatize women, undermine community and family structures, contribute to bonding of perpetrators through the common act of rape, and in some cases, deliberately pollute the bloodline of the victimized population.[10]

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History has shown, however, that the reality of wartime rape is unexpectedly complicated, and that the pervasiveness of sexual violence varies across and within conflicts. Various parties may use SGBV differently in the same dispute, and the types and prevalence of SGBV may change both temporally and geographically. Rape has been highly violent and widespread in some conflicts, such as in Sierra Leone, Rwanda, and DRC, and rare in other conflicts, such as in Israel-Palestine and El Salvador.[11]

Armed groups in DRC conflict often exhibit a unique profile or "repertoire of violence." Interahamwe troops during and after the war of 1998 were infamous for raping with instruments such as guns and forcing people to watch as other members of their family were killed. Currently, the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), which has established itself in northeastern DRC, practices both killing and mutilation of civilians to deter communities from disclosing LRA whereabouts.[12] A group's repertoire of violence may change over time; it may serve the strategic aims of the groups or be a pattern of individual exploitation that has reached large proportions. Widespread rape, however, can also be detrimental to the perpetrating groups. Instead of intimidating populations, rape can spur them toward anger and revenge. When armed groups depend on civilians for support, rape can quickly undermine their reputations and endanger the groups' access to vital resources, such as food and shelter. A single-theory approach may be too blunt a tool to adequately predict profiles of violence and motivations

for the perpetration of SGBV within conflict. It may be more valuable to look at a multiplicity of causes and dynamics that interact to influence soldiers' behaviors. These can change over time and space, just as they can vary from unit to unit within the same larger structure. This project attempts to take a more differentiated view of the motivations and causes of violence by looking at a particular group within the DRC conflict.

Project Background

The Mai Mai (Swahili for "water water") originally formed in the 1960s as part of the Mulelist Rebellion, when then–education minister Pierre Mulele organized youth into militias to revolt against Mobutu's government.[13] Mulele used local medicine men to convince the young men that bullets would turn to water if shot at Mai Mai fighters.[14] Beginning in 1993, many of these local militias reorganized to protect their communities from Mobutu's army and the influx of foreign armed militias after the 1994 Rwandan genocide.[15] Mai Mai militias soon became a powerful force in the eastern region of DRC, with an estimated 10,000 to 25,000 soldiers fighting with Kabila in the 1996–97 conflict. As the Mai Mai have proliferated throughout eastern DRC, fighting each other, foreign militias, and the government over natural resources and land, they have increasingly been implicated in the looting, rape, abduction, and mass displacement of civilians.[16]

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For this report, thirty-three Mai Mai combatants were interviewed in three rural towns in eastern DRC—seventeen in Kamituga, eight in Katogota, and eight in Chambucha—from January 2009 to February 2010. Soldiers from the first two field sites were associated with the subgroup Mai Mai Shikito; soldiers from the third field site were associated with Mai Mai Kifuafua. The interviews were conducted in a private location by a team of male Congolese social workers and psychologists. Access was negotiated through the militia's officers and permission given to travel to field sites and speak with soldiers. Logistics in each field site were then discussed with the highest-ranking commander. The interviewees ranged in age from eighteen to forty-five years old; ranks ranged from private to major. All interviews were recorded with permission of the participants. Swahili transcriptions of the recordings were written and these transcripts translated into English. The translated narratives were analyzed to identify the salient themes emerging from the interviews. All text pertaining to these themes was then compiled and analyzed, and areas of convergence and disagreement across interviews identified.

As in all qualitative research, the interviewers can influence the type of information that emerges. The Congolese interviewers used their role as outsiders to the group to encourage interviewees to feel comfortable speaking about things they might not be able to talk about with their fellow soldiers. The interviewers' experience working with war-affected populations was also intended to facilitate dialogue. However, soldiers might not have wanted to discuss sensitive or difficult topics with outsiders for fear of being judged or disclosing sensitive group information. The presence of a female American researcher, who traveled to the field site and introduced the project, also influenced responses. On one hand, soldiers seemed to view the presence of a foreigner as an opportunity to gain access to an international audience and to explain themselves to the rest of the world. On the other hand, soldiers may have said things they thought an outsider might want to hear or things that would portray their actions in a positive light.

Methodological Challenges

This study does not seek to make generalizable claims about the state of mind or experiences of Mai Mai soldiers in eastern DRC. The small sample size and qualitative nature of this

study mean that these results cannot be taken as representative of soldiers, or even Mai Mai soldiers', experiences in the war.

Speaking to active parties to a conflict, who have their own motivations and objectives, means the information gathered may be biased or amended versions of what soldiers truly believe. Sometimes, however, this bias itself is informative, revealing what soldiers perceive as important to convey to an interviewer. Working with armed actors who are currently within a command structure also means that they may tell more about the group's goals and ideals than the reality of the situation. Despite these drawbacks, the results of this research offer some insight into the experiences and attitudes of certain Mai Mai soldiers and reveal a number of common themes that emerge across interviews.

Results

Reasons for Joining the Mai Mai: "There Was Nothing Else for Me to Do"

Conversations with Mai Mai combatants largely revolved around the devastating consequences that years of war have had on communities throughout eastern DRC. Nearly all the soldiers described having a family member killed in the conflict and losing the ability to study or find a job. As one soldier said, "There was nothing else for me to do. I knew I had no other support, so I had to join the military."

The frequent looting and destruction of villages during the conflict resulted in a pervasive fear that foreign combatants would overrun the country. This realization, linked with a deeply ingrained distrust of the government and perception that the national army was ineffectual, pushed many men to join the Mai Mai. As one interviewee said,

> We came to realize that our country had been invaded by foreign troops, and that we needed, ourselves, to fight for our country. We have waited for government support for so long, it did not come.

The fear of foreign invasion and the anger at the looting of DRC was so strong that some interviewees viewed the invading forces as an existential threat to the country itself:

> They [Interahamwe][17] were killing the population, they were beating them without any reason, and they were looting their goods and raping the population. Because of that, we felt that we might be exterminated and so we decided to create this group to be able to protect the population.

Another stated Mai Mai goal was to protect the country's national resources. One interviewee highlighted the central role of natural resources in Mai Mai objectives: "The goal of this group is to protect natural resources that are in this part of the country. We know already that natural resources are what motivate the enemy to come here." Despite their dedication to these stated aims, however, soldiers emphasized how difficult their lives were. Lack of pay was most often cited as a problem, though soldiers also spoke about the lack of uniforms, supplies, and health care:

> It is sometimes revolting to see the conditions under which we live, but other times, we say that we devoted ourselves to join the army in order to protect our population. Nevertheless, these conditions are still unbearable.

Another soldier said simply, "If I were paid I would not be starving." Soldiers emphasized that the social isolation resulting from living in the bush was extremely difficult. Many expressed a desire to go back to life as it existed before the war and not to be seen as soldiers but as members of the community once again. At the same time, civilians were seen as a source of income and an exploitable resource. Some interviewees described in the same sentence that they were there to protect people but had to steal from them to

survive. As one respondent said, "No soldier is allowed to go to farm; his fields are the population."

Initiation Rites, Magical Belief Systems, and Drugs: "So It Is Like This"

The Mai Mai group is known for its strong rituals and adherence to magical beliefs. All soldiers interviewed spoke of widespread use of magical-religious practices that protect combatants during battle and help them fight. As one soldier stated with a mix of faith and practicality, "We use the traditional medicine for protection and [to] help us to win the war—sort of." Interviewees overwhelmingly expressed belief in magical practices, which included drinking a special porridge, allowing female elders to shower them with sacred water, using local herbs, and scarifications.[18] As one combatant explained,

> [Magical beliefs] are the rule, and it is our foundation. Our biggest support is that witchcraft. Because when we started fighting we didn't have any money for firearms, so, after you got the scarifications, they would provide you with a machete or a knife, and you'd go to war. When you killed an enemy fighter, his firearm would become your weapon. We really believe in the witchcraft, so if you don't go through the rituals, you don't go anywhere.

Soldiers explained how they combined traditional beliefs with Christianity.[19] When one was asked if he felt any difficulty practicing two separate belief systems, he responded, "It is not a problem, I will follow both. I can't do one and not do the other." Another soldier described how he reconciled seemingly contradictory belief systems: "I say to God, 'You are in Heaven, but witchcraft is down here on earth.'" Yet the responses of some soldiers suggested there is not uniform buy-in to the belief system. As one soldier stated, "I do it just because it is a requirement."

Interviewees described initiation rites that involve receiving sacred rituals. However, some soldiers described a much more brutal induction that literally beat the civilian out of new recruits:

> Q: If someone wishes to join you, what can he do?
>
> R: That civilian must be spilt in the dust, be beaten black and blue so that he might leave his civilian thoughts.
>
> Q: Beat him first? How is this helpful?
>
> R: The civilian will come out of him. You must spill him in the mud, to beat him black and blue before he is taken care of and given his uniform as well as a gun.
>
> Q: Will he not be trained?
>
> R: He will be trained after receiving a uniform and a gun. You will be shown the field and explained things as they are. Since you have already dropped civilian thoughts because of the flogging, you will start saying, "Ahhhh! So it is like this!" Then you will be practicing what you have learned.

Another soldier described his first beating, saying new recruits were taken to the river, stripped naked, and flogged. After the beating they were "anointed" with the river mud. The soldier described himself as being "molded in the mud" and went on to say, "All those sticks that you were beaten with put into you another ideology."

Soldiers also described widespread use of marijuana among the troops, both during active fighting and periods of relative peace. Smoking marijuana was cited as one way to overcome fear on the battlefield, especially for new soldiers. A subset of interviewees noted that marijuana could also be widespread in times of little fighting and even after demobilization.

Command Structure and Following Orders

The soldiers interviewed described a well-defined command structure, with higher-ranking commanders working from strategic towns, such as Goma and Bukavu, and running operations from there to rural areas. Many of the soldiers considered the command structure to be paternalistic. Commanders were like fathers and as such had to be obeyed implicitly. Speaking about his superiors, one respondent said, "I am like his son. . . . [The higher ranking officer] has become like my father and my mother at the same time. If I make a mistake, it is normal that he punishes me and I cannot complain. I have to tell myself if I am punished, I deserve it."

However, attitudes of unquestioning obedience and implicit trust of commanders seemed to coexist with feelings of resentment and anger toward unfairness in the distribution of resources. One soldier, describing himself as "an obedient child" and his commander as the "father," said:

> If [my commander] sends me somewhere, I accept. He has become my father.... And if I am looking for a written document that will allow me to go to Bunyakiri or to Bukavu,[20] after he has given me this document I will say that "Really, this father loves me."

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However, the same interviewee went on to say that he received only one-tenth of his promised pay: "It is as if they eat our money. They are oppressing us."

Although all participants described the same general command structure, they disagreed on whether or not orders considered morally wrong should be followed. Roughly half the interviewees seemed to take every order as law, while the other half were more flexible in their interpretations, noting that there was some leeway in obedience. One respondent described how trumped-up charges were often made against rich civilians to extort money from them. In these cases, when a soldier was ordered to do something he did not feel comfortable doing, he could pretend he did not find the person or try to warn the target ahead of time to leave the area. Punishment for disobedience is harsh and includes imprisonment, flogging, and possibly death. As one soldier noted, "I must obey, because they are orders. There is no way to refuse it. . . . Even if you do not want to, you are not given a chance to choose. . . . You go—the body—but [hesitation] the soul is not there."

Attitudes toward Women

When asked about the respective roles of men and women in society, soldiers described extremely rigid and formalized gender roles in times of both war and peace. Men were the protectors of the family and the decision makers, while women cooked, cleaned, raised the children, and undertook small commercial activities or farming to help support the family.

Soldiers did say, however, that there was a small minority of women in the military, called PMF, the French acronym for female military personnel. These women seldom took part in active combat but did have guns and uniforms. Often, they manned checkpoints and roadblocks, or gathered intelligence, since they were able to travel more freely than their male counterparts:

> In general a woman [combatant] brings us some information about what is going on, because she is the person who is moving around. During the war, they may let her pass, which helps us to get information on where our enemies are.

The rigid mind-set toward women in general seemed to translate into dismissive attitudes toward female combatants. Interviewees insisted that even if women were wearing uniforms, their primary role was simply to cook for the men. One interviewee, speculating on what could push women to join the Mai Mai, explained, "If [a woman] joins, it is due

to the fact of not being married" and went on to note that not being married could affect a woman's sanity. These trivializing attitudes toward women, and the assumption that women's main purpose in life was to care for men, underpinned the way many soldiers viewed sexual relations.

Sexual Violence: "Satan Walks behind You"

Soldiers defined sexual violence as forcing a woman to have sex against her will, noting that they had learned this definition mainly from listening to the radio. Rape for the Mai Mai seemed to have military origins (women as a spoil of war) as well as individual motivations (taking a woman because you desire her). In the first case, women were given as a reward; soldiers were ordered to abduct women, and these women were then "given" to soldiers, with higher ranking officers given precedence. As one man said, "[The commander] will have his [girl] brought first before he can ask me to bring mine. In that case, if you refuse, it becomes an open conflict." The interviewer pressed the soldier saying:

> Q: Do you really bring her?
>
> R: That is exactly what I must do. You say: "Great chief, here is the girl you asked me to bring to you."

Another interviewee described how rape can be motivated individually instead of by military command: "Maybe I have a bandit's thought. . . . I see a woman passing by, and I begin to desire her, then I come and I jump into her *phoof*."

When soldiers discussed rape or the ability to resist rape, they often invoked biblical imagery and depicted this type of violence as a manifestation of evil. Forces of good (God) and evil (Satan or the devil) were described as inhabiting the soldier and guiding decisions around sexual violence. When speaking about whether soldiers from his group assaulted women sexually, one respondent said, "To rape? Well, rape for a Mai Mai, it is Satan's work, because as people walk, Satan follows behind them.... This means it [raping] may happen to you when you are not prepared, but all of a sudden, the Devil fools you."

Soldiers noted that being far from their villages made them anonymous. One respondent described eloquently how being in his father's village meant he was respected as an individual. However, the transient life of a combatant took away this identity, and people would only look at him as "a passing soldier."

Interviewees across research sites used "being ordered to rape" as a spontaneous example of an order from a commander, suggesting this type of command may have been given to troops in different areas. Some interviewees noted that even if their hearts were not in it, they felt compelled to follow these orders:

> We are always sent by our chiefs who tell us: "Do this!" Despite your refusal, they oblige you to do it; otherwise you will be beaten seriously. As a result, you will do it unwillingly. And you can even rape because of that.

When prompted about orders to rape women, even women who were much older, the same soldier responded:

> R: Eh [yes], because we say in our career that there is order, and no discussion.
>
> Q: So, when you are in the act of raping that woman who is like your mother, can you not feel ashamed?
>
> R: Well, one must be ashamed. A person like your mother! You should be ashamed. But in that particular case, it will be because of the military service that one can do it. But in my view, I do not find it moral to do such acts.

Even as some interviewees described raping women, abducting them for themselves or their commanders, or raping for individual reasons, many interviewees denied that rape ever

occurred in the Mai Mai and described how it was strictly forbidden by their principles. The reasons given for this were partly ideologically driven, since, as a homegrown militia, the group was ostensibly created to protect the population. When speaking about soldiers that do not rape, one interviewee said:

> It is only thanks to the spirit of God that is within them [that they don't rape], also thanks to the love they have for the whole Congo and for the whole world because we are able to realize that rape is the destruction for the whole population. Rape is forbidden, since we know that we are here to protect the population.

There were also many practical reasons for soldiers not to rape. Interviewees noted that raping risked losing community support, upon which soldiers relied heavily. As one interviewee said, "There are women there who grow food in their fields in the surrounding villages, they assist us with food." Another described, "We have an excellent collaboration with the population who help us." An interviewee discussing the risk of losing support conceptualized rape itself as a form of infection:

> Q: In a group like Shikito or in other similar groups, what could be the consequences for a person who rapes?
>
> R: If you commit rape and you are caught, you must be punished.
>
> Q: What else besides being punished?
>
> R: And if you were not caught, you can get infected.
>
> Q: Can the whole group get infected?
>
> R: No.... Yes—in the sense it can get infected because if one member rapes, everyone will be saying that the whole group of Shikito is raping.

A number of interviewees emphasized that being perceived as rapists would poison relationships with the population, could be detrimental to the soldiers' livelihoods, and could "ruin the reputation of the group." As one man said, "For instance, if one person from the group decides to rape, or a fellow soldier rapes a woman, people will say that the group of Mai Mai is raping women. It becomes an illness for the whole group."

In general, soldiers from the Mai Mai Shikito group were much more likely to state that they did not rape and that rape "never" occurred in the group. They were also more likely to emphasize the positive relationship they tried to cultivate with civilians. Sometimes they claimed that rape "never happened any more" at all and was only a problem of the past. Soldiers from the Mai Mai Kifuafua group were much more likely to admit to raping and to talk about treating women as a spoil of war. It is extremely difficult to know whether Shikito simply had a better public-relations message or whether the group did in fact inflict less violence on civilians. Whatever the reality, the differing abilities of each group to portray themselves in a certain light illustrates the large role of intragroup dynamics in affecting responses.

In both groups, interviewees cited the risk of getting diseases as a consequence of rape. Sexually transmitted infections (STIs), especially HIV/AIDS, were described as an unavoidable punishment, even if one were not formally caught raping. They noted that much of the information about HIV and other consequences of rape were gleaned fromm radio broadcasts. One man noted, "Yes, there is a risk of getting infected, also of being punished. And even when you are not caught, you can get sick."

One soldier even described how the fear of AIDS might stop a soldier who is about to rape a women, saying, "HIV/AIDS is something [Mai Mai soldiers] are so much afraid of. First, you ask yourself, 'Say I have sexual intercourse with this person who may have been infected with HIV/AIDS, what may be the result?' Therefore, you decide not to do it, and you let the person go." When asked about the impact of mass rape, men again focused on the risk of disease, noting that mass rape could destroy entire communities.

> Q: You said that there are consequences for a woman who has been raped. If six or seven women from the same community are raped, what might be the consequences to that entire community?
>
> R: The entire community might be extinguished because disease can spread to everyone, even to the newborns. This will make the community perish.

Some forms of sexual violence, including the use of foreign objects to penetrate women during rape, were seen as unacceptable, while other forms of violence were considered relatively common, including abduction of women and girls as well as opportunistic rape. In some interviews, after soldiers had spoken about the sexual violence they had witnessed in the military, the interviewer asked them specifically about cases of rape where foreign objects were used to penetrate women—a particularly horrific and brutal form of sexual violence that has been described by a number of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and service providers in DRC.[21] The soldiers who had described perpetrating other forms of sexual violence were horrified at this. As one exclaimed, "That is a crime!"

When asked to reflect on why such violence might happen, another interviewee reflected, "I can say that such a person [who rapes women with foreign objects] is a killer, or he is less sane, because he has already raped the woman and has satisfied his needs. He should free her. They have already had their blood mixed from the [rape]. How can someone find it again interesting to kill or ill-treat such a partner?" Calling one's victim a "partner" and normalizing some types of violence (rape) but not others (rape with instruments) illustrates some of the ways soldiers justify their behavior.

One interviewee was outraged at a report that another armed group, the name of which he did not specify, had raped a number of girls all under the age of ten in their area of control. He went on to say this was an awful thing to do and expressed sympathy for the girls. When asked by the interviewer if he thought the attacks were meant to provoke the Mai Mai, he replied:

> It is exactly to provoke us!… We were very annoyed that they took the young girls with them.… They are really provoking us. I am shocked because I am looking after somebody, but another person comes and does such dirty things to them. We are really unhappy about that.

Demobilization

Soldiers were extremely positive about the possibility of integrating into the national army, seeing it as one of the goals of the Mai Mai.

Soldiers were extremely positive about the possibility of integrating into the national army, seeing it as one of the goals of the Mai Mai. It was often described not as a matter of if, but when. Even as many soldiers viewed their service in the Mai Mai as a precursor to integrating into the national army, they noted that at the moment, it did not matter which military they were associated with, as neither the Mai Mai nor the FARDC paid reliable salaries.

Soldiers often expressed concern that the DRC government would not recognize their achievements upon integration. One interviewee noted, "We want the government to officially acknowledge our existence as fighters who defended this country." Combatants also talked about how isolated they felt from communities and envisioned difficulty reintegrating into civilian life. Some desired to leave the military life altogether, but stated that the lack of jobs made this impossible. Many interviewees had tried to leave the militia at some point but kept coming back because they did not find viable alternatives.

Fractured Perceptions and Reconciled Realities

Previous research on rebel groups suggests that highly ideologically driven groups that depend heavily on civilian support often restrain their use of violence.[22] Conversely, groups that attract recruits who join for opportunistic instead of ideological reasons and have

access to lootable resources are more likely to engage in unrestrained violence. The Mai Mai appear to be an interesting mix of these two profiles. Partly ideologically driven, partly driven by necessity, the group idealizes civilian life while exploiting civilians.

Soldiers seemed able to shift among diverse attitudes about rape. They sometimes described it as a great evil and a tool that enemy combatants use to destroy DRC; other times, they frankly described how rape is committed within the Mai Mai. The widespread and violent rape of civilians by other armed groups was cited as one of the reasons soldiers said they were motivated to take up arms and, at its extreme, it was considered an existential threat to Congolese culture. Interviewees were enthusiastic about describing themselves as protectors of the population, discussing how rape of civilians was a liability for the group on a practical level, weakening their vital support from the community. But soldiers also described situations in which they stole, beat, extorted money from, and abducted the same civilians they were charged to protect. Rape might be personally motivated (the result of a soldier acting on personal desire) as well as militarily motivated (rape as a result of following an order or abducting a woman as a form of reward).

Elisabeth Wood makes a compelling case for analyzing sexual violence at three levels: the armed group, the small unit in which combatants function on a day-to-day basis, and the individual.[23] She notes that rape can occur for a variety of reasons at each level. Commanding officers can actively promote SGBV, tacitly accept it, or not punish it at all. In the case of the Mai Mai, top command seems to promote the ideals of protecting the population but seems unable or unwilling to translate these principles into restraint in the field. The present research supports the idea that sexual violence is tolerated, if not promoted, at the individual and unit-command level. Differences between the Shikito and the Kifuafua groups support the notion that attitudes toward rape, and possibly the practice of rape itself, can differ significantly among units operating within the same larger structure.

In interviews with military personnel from the Congolese national army, Maria Eriksson Baaz and Maria Stern note that interviewees distinguish between "lust rapes" and "evil rapes."[24] The Mai Mai seem to make a similar distinction, as they engage in certain types of sexual violence but look upon others as unacceptable. Rape for personal sexual gratification and abducting women for commanding officers was described as relatively commonplace. However, other forms of sexual violence, such as rape with foreign objects and rape of the very young was described as "wrong," even "evil." Thus, soldiers may be able to convince themselves that they are not exploiting civilians as long as they commit only certain acts of violence.

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A number of factors keep this group from achieving the low levels of rape exhibited by ideologically driven civilian-based groups in other conflicts.[25] Mai Mai soldiers describe a process of being de-identified when they join the militia, as they leave behind traditional notions of right and wrong: "They beat the civilian out of you." The command structure is viewed as a paternal force that must be obeyed. Rape is not depicted as a bonding mechanism among members of the group, as has occurred in other conflicts, such as Sierra Leone,[26] but as a part of a soldier's due and a man's right.

The findings outlined above suggest a number of intervention points. Many soldiers noted that they had received messages about the risks and consequences of sexual violence from the radio. High levels of concern about contracting HIV/AIDS and other STIs provide an opportunity to discourage combatants from engaging in sexual violence. Integration into the national army, which most interviewees viewed positively, offers an opening to train soldiers on human rights and the appropriate protection of civilians. However, soldiers were skeptical about the long-term feasibility of integration until FARDC can pay a steady salary. Even those who did not want to integrate into the national army were still extremely positive about leaving the Mai Mai. These soldiers expressed a desire to take up a trade, such as

being a carpenter or auto mechanic, and return to civilian life. Nevertheless, this was not seen as a viable option until more jobs become available in the civilian sector.

At the time of writing this report, the groups interviewed for this project were already integrating into the national army. Without other training, the same behaviors and attitudes that men hold as militia members will likely guide their behavior as national soldiers. The shocking human rights abuses that the FARDC carried out during the Kimia II operations in 2009 illustrate what happens when armed soldiers with no training and full impunity are unleashed on civilian populations. To understand how to best integrate soldiers from a mosaic of armed groups into a national army, it is important to understand the context from which they come. Approaches to addressing SGBV will be most effective if they address the motivations, beliefs, and decision-making structures of each group. This paper offers insight into how one of these groups perceives and perpetrates sexual violence, providing specific intervention points based on this information.

There are a number of areas for future research. The role of women in armed groups deserves more investigation; it would be particularly interesting to examine whether the presence of female soldiers inhibits sexual violence, or the degree to which female combatants are also perpetrators. Interviews with other armed groups, particularly the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), could illuminate each group's unique motivations and attitudes toward sexual violence. Quantitative studies that sample larger numbers of combatants would elucidate the links between soldiers' perpetration of, command-structure attitudes toward, and motivations for sexual violence. Finally, studies that compare current soldiers' responses with those of demobilized soldiers would be illuminating. Demobilized soldiers might be more open about their experiences with violence, since they are no longer part of a command structure.

Recommendations

To the Mai Mai and FARDC

At the high command level:

- Use a multimessage approach to inhibit rape. Reinforce that a soldier's role is to protect civilians and not exploit them. Underpin this message with practical measures to enforce a no-rape policy.
- Hold commanders responsible for the violence perpetrated by themselves and the men under their command, creating a chain of accountability that links high-level command to the actions of individual soldiers.
- Punish high-level commanders who perpetrate or support SGBV to send a clear message throughout the ranks that this type of violence will no longer be tolerated.

At the small-unit level:

- Stop treating civilians in general, and women in particular, as bounties of war and exploitable resources.
- Stop committing, condoning, and promoting sexual violence as part of combat operations.
- Engender an atmosphere of personal responsibility through strong accountability mechanisms for individual actions.
- Carry out appropriate punishments to enforce restraint of violence policies.

At the individual level:

- Stop distinguishing between rapes that are acceptable and those that are not; acknowledge all forms of SGBV are unacceptable.
- Recognize the humanity of civilians and the devastating consequences of rape and other forms of SGBV on women individually and communities as a whole.
- Refuse commands that promote SGBV and violence against civilians.

To the DRC Government

- Continue the integration of Mai Mai troops into the FARDC and use this as an intervention point to retrain troops, with a focus on sensitizing soldiers about human rights and the need to protect civilians.
- Improve civil-military cooperation to help both civilians and soldiers rebuild mutual trust. Regular meetings between civil and military leaders can serve as a first step in this direction.
- Undertake special trainings to ensure female combatants are treated with respect and are not at risk of sexual violence within the ranks.
- Provide soldiers with steady pay and effective training to give them the means to stop exploiting civilians and to change the mentality of soldiers as exploiters.
- Embed a human rights specialist into regimental structures to monitor and reinforce civilian protection policies and to refer abuse cases to appropriate justice mechanisms.
- Prosecute rape crimes, from the highest level of command to the lowest, to send a clear message this type of violence will not be tolerated. Ensure convicted rapists serve their entire prison sentences.

To the Humanitarian and International Community

- Improve messaging about the risks of sexual violence that are geared toward both state and nonstate armed actors. Frame rape as a security issue that jeopardizes the health, effectiveness, and public support of armed groups. Messages can be conveyed by radio, which has shown good diffusion into armed groups.
- Improve messaging around consequences of sexual violence for women and communities to help soldiers better understand the results of their actions.
- Create employment opportunities for demobilized soldiers to provide sustainable alternate means of making a living.
- Undertake community-building exercises to help civilians and demobilized soldiers integrate into the same community and provide mental health counseling and mediation services to both demobilized soldiers and community members.

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17. Interahamwe was an extremist Hutu paramilitary organization credited with carrying out many of the killings during the Rwandan genocide. Members of this group then fled to Congo, where they perpetrated extreme human rights abuses, including highly violent rapes of women.
18. The process of scarification involves cutting or etching patterns into the skin as a form of permanent body modification.
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1200 17th Street NW
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