

Mapping the Invisible Rape: Men and Boys as Victims of Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict

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Abstract

An armed conflict is always a scenario of extreme violence. From all forms of violence, the rape is one with tremendous power of destruction of the individual and collective, disaggregating family and community bonds. This kind of violence is portrayed as targeting particularly women and children, putting the men in the place of perpetrator of the rape. This works aims to approach the sexual violence as a weapon of war targeting men and boys as victims of such violence. We focus this issue in armed conflicts in the African continent as geographical space of analysis. Based on records from the international press, it seeks to understand the relations of power, dominance, and submission, established between man as perpetrator of sexual violence and man victim of rape, as well as the reasons for the invisibility of this kind of sexual violence.

Keywords: sexual violence, men and boys, invisibility, armed conflict.

Resumo

Mapeamento da Violação Sexual Invisível: Homens e Rapazes como Vítimas de Violência Sexual em Conflito Armado

Um conflito armado é sempre um cenário de extrema violência. De todas as formas de violência, o estupro tem um grande poder de destruição individual e coletiva, desagregando os laços familiares e da comunidade. Esta violência tem sido tratada como dirigida especialmente às mulheres e crianças, conferindo aos homens um caráter exclusivo de agressor. O presente artigo aborda o tema da violência sexual enquanto arma de guerra, prestando especial atenção aos homens enquanto vítimas dessa violência e focando o continente africano como espaço geográfico de análise. Tendo por base artigos de imprensa internacional, procura perceber as relações de poder, de dominância e de submissão, que se estabelecem entre o homem perpetrador de violência e o homem vítima dessa violência, assim como as razões para a invisibilidade desta violência sexual.

Palavras-chave: violência sexual; homens e rapazes; invisibilidade; conflito armado.

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Introduction

The sexual violence during armed conflicts is a phenomenon which has been taken a growing awareness by scholars and policy makers. The dynamics of non-international armed conflicts are volatile and characterized by lack of respect for the international law, resulting in mass human rights violations, atrocities, and the most heinous crimes. There's little, or none, respect for the International Humanitarian Law (IHL). IHL is a branch of international law that seeks to humanize war and limit its methods to those absolutely necessary to achieve the objectives of the parts involved (Salmón, 2012). It is characterized by a core of norms, from treaty law to customary law, with the aim to limit the means and methods during armed conflict, having in mind the needs of those who are no longer taking part of the hostilities or those who are not taking part at all (Pereira, 2014).

The use of sexual violence as a weapon of war is increasing in recent years or being reported often than it was in the past. The rape of civilian population by armed forces, in particular the rape on women, is a phenomenon which characterizes the inner essence of widespread violence during wartime. Raping civilian population of a conquered territory was the consummation of the conquistador's victory and the ultimate defeat of the conquered. As Susan Bronmiller states, quoted by Danise Aydelott (1993):

Men of a conquered nation traditionally view the rape of "their women" as the ultimate humiliation, a sexual coup de grace.... Rape by a conquering soldier destroys all remaining illusions of power and property for men of the defeated side. The body of a raped woman becomes a ceremonial battlefield, a parade ground for the victor's [trooping]. The act that is played out upon her is a message passed between men – vivid proof of victory for one and loss and defeat for the other.

The First World War (WWI) brings a new significance to the sexual violence in armed conflict. This conflict was characterized by extravasating the borders of the battlefield, resulting in a more generalized violence. The battlefield changed for the villages and the cities, representing a much deadly threat for civilian population, in particular, women and children (Pereira, 2014). This situation was even worse during the Second World War, where, besides the millions of deaths, there was a prevalence of sexual violence and sexual slavery¹,

1 As the known case of "comfort women", when the Empire of Japan invaded the Korea peninsula and the Japanese army abducted thousand of women and forced then to prostitution and sexual satisfaction of Japanese army. The relative unknown Massacre of Nanking, a massacre that occurred during the conquer of Nanjing, former Chinese Capital, which was followed by the massive rape of chinese women. Even today, this massacre is not fully recognized by Japanese government.

forced pregnancy and other cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatments (Pereira, 2014).

In ancient times, in the aftermath of the armed conflict, the rape of women had – and in certain way, still have –, the symbolic power of total destruction of the enemy. Diana Marder, quoted by Danise Aydelott (1993), states that: “When I rape your woman, ... I destroy your property. I insult you. I humiliate you. If I rape all your women, I defile an entire generation. And if I force your women to bear my children, I pollute your race”.

The destructive power of rape goes much further than sexual satisfaction of the perpetrator. It represents the full dominance of the winner over the defeated. The relation portrayed between perpetrator and victim it is a power relation of dominance of powerful male and masculinity to the weak female. But this may not correspond entirely to the reality, despite power relations still acting during wartime. According to Valorie Vojdik (2013) the post-colonial feminist theories empowered the invisibility of men as victims, as men being portrayed always as perpetrators of violence and never as victims. Vojdik supports that the rape of a woman in armed conflict scenario represents a relation of power, but also, a negotiation between different groups, despite its ethnic, religious or national nature.

Being defined as a power relation between men *v.* women, it's not a surprise that rape, in the main legal instruments and resolutions adopted by the United Nations and regional organisations, had a unique focus on women as vulnerable victims and object of great concern during an armed conflict. In fact, the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa dedicates an article to the protection of women in armed conflict, in particular the need for protection against sexual violence to women who seeks refugee. The article 11, n.º 3 of the Protocol states that:

States Parties undertake to protect asylum seeking women, refugees, returnees, and internally displaced persons, against all forms of violence, rape and other forms of sexual exploitation, and to ensure that such acts are considered war crimes, genocide and/or crimes against humanity and that their perpetrators are brought to justice before a competent criminal jurisdiction.

This reflects also in the programmes for development and post-conflict scenario. And a broader term had emerged on political agendas for development, which is gender-based violence. According to the UN:

‘gender-based violence’ (GBV) is used to distinguish violence that targets individuals or groups of individuals based on their gender from other forms of violence.

GBV includes violent acts such as rape, torture, mutilation, sexual slavery, forced impregnation and murder (IRIN, 2004, p. 3).

The European Institute for Gender Equality highlights that the gender-based violence is particularly destructive for the victims, as it constitutes a grave violation of the person's physical and psychological integrity, as well as a grave violation of his/her fundamental human rights (European Institute for Gender Equality). In the case of men, the more recent human rights reports started to pay attention to victims of sexual violence during armed conflict. The data available suggests a violence like the one found against women. Despite of this, many organisations keep seeing men only as perpetrator, replicating stereotypes of masculinity and power dynamics. As we will see, the question of masculinity(ies) is crucial to understand the invisibility men as victims of rape during armed conflicts.

This article aims to highlight sexual violence during armed conflicts and the changing stereotypes of men as perpetrators and women as victims. It looks for growing visible reality of men and boys being subject of sexual violence. The methodology adopted is based, primarily on reports and media records, as well as a review of the most relevant literature on the topic. In the first part, this article briefly explores masculinity(ies) in the Africa continent to understand patterns of violence and silence. In the second part, sexual violence as a weapon of war is explored. Finally, the third part looks at men and boys as victims of sexual violence and the growing attention that this issue gathering.

Masculinity(ies) and its role in armed conflict

To understand the question of sexual violence against men it is necessary to look for the question of masculinity (or masculinities), as the perceptions of masculinities in peace and wartime are of great importance because the sexual rape of a man by other man, had the clear objective to destroy the victim's sense of being man. Masculinity is directly linked with the behaviour expected by the society in which the individuals are, this is "[masculinity] is what any given society accepts as features associated with the male gender and expressions of maleness" (Uchendu, 2008, p. 3).

Stevlana Koudolo (2008) states that the formation of masculinity is conditioned by several factors, as family, friends, education, social communication, religion, and others. For Gary Barker and Christine Ricardo, masculinity, as a social construction, needs to be framed in the context that people are inserted. For the authors, for example, formal education is central in the formation of masculinity. In their words, "[f]ormal schooling clearly also has an impact on the social construction

of masculinities, and is a space for constructing, creating, or reinforcing specific versions of manhood” (Barker & Ricardo, 2005, p. 14).

Egodi Echendu conducted a research on the perception of a Nigerian youth group about the conception of masculinity. What he found reveals the masculinity as a social construction. The young linked to masculinity, peculiar physical, biological, and psychological characteristics.

These [characteristics] include superior physical strength, firmness, fearlessness, decisiveness, an ability to protect the weak, to be principled, to control, to conquer, to take risks, provide leadership, to be assertive, to enjoy a high social status, and to display versatility in martial arts. (Echendu, 2007, p. 283)

The results found by Echendu must be read in conjunction with the social context in which this young people are inserted. For example, for many of these young boys, the transition for adulthood is made through rituals of initiation, and as concludes Júlio Langa, “[i]n many African communities, the initiation rite constitutes a very crucial stage in an individual’s life. The initiation rites symbolize the transition from boyhood to manhood” (Langa, 2014, p. 21). This author studied Mozambican youth and found that the concretization of masculinity occurs through male sexualization (Langa, 2014). In other word and having as frame the Mozambican boys, their masculinity — or masculine identity — is related with sexual competence, or the perception of that sexual competence. It’s negative for a man to be perceived as sexually incompetent because “there is nothing more frightening than to be seen as sexually weak” (Langa, 2014, p. 21).

Sexual violence in armed conflict: searching for a definition

In an armed conflict, thinking about sexual violence equals to think about rape, and rape as a strategy of war. As observes Sophocles Kitharidis, in an armed conflict rape “is used as a military strategy by rebel forces in order to humiliate and intimidate” (Kitharidis, 2015, p. 455). Maria Baaz and Maria Stern call for a holistic understanding of sexual violence during armed conflict. In the view of the authors, it was useful to conceptualise sexual violence as a weapon of war, but they call for an understanding beyond that. In their words:

The conceptualisation of sexual violence as a ‘weapon of war’ has been indispensable in placing war-time rape on the security agenda. From being a tragic but inevitable outcome of war, war-time sexual violence is now legally decreed to be a crime against humanity and a war crime. Many recent conflicts, such as in Rwanda and Bosnia,

have indeed demonstrated the ways in which systematic mass rape has been used as a weapon of war, as a tool of violent identity politics and oppression. (Baaz & Stern, 2010b)

The understanding of the sexual patterns of violence during armed conflict has evolved in recent years. The kind of acts that of sexual nature are beyond the sexual act itself, encompassing a wide range of acts that may fall within this concept. Interestingly, Aisling Swaine, in a brief policy paper on conflict related violence against women refers to rape as “strategic rape”, stressing the intentionality of the act as a method of war (Swaine, 2018, p. 4).

There is no consensus about a definition of sexual violence during armed conflict. Nordås and Cohen (2021, p. 193) states that most of the proposed definitions generally “include rape and consider sexual violence to include a wide range of violations”. This seems a narrow definition for highly complex reality. An essentialist definition of rape in wartime, as Elvan Isikozlu and Ananda Millard observe is generally defined as the “forced penetration of an individual’s body by the perpetrator’s sexual organ, or the penetration of an individual’s sexual organs with the perpetrator’s body parts or with an object”, a definition based on the developments in International Criminal Law (Isikozlu & Millard, 2010, p. 23). In the view of the said authors, this definition essentialises rape to a non-consensual sexual act performed during war, which misses the power dynamics of rape and equals all acts of rape. In the words of Isikozlu and Millard:

Such a limited understanding appears to have precluded a consideration of how the dynamics of war, which surround the perpetration of rape, influence the experience and consequences of rape, as well as the most effective means of responding to these consequences. (Isikozlu & Millard, 2010, p. 23)

Following the point mentioned, some scholars stress other misconceptions that may help to better understand the phenomenon. Sexual violence during conflict is not just about forced and no consented sexual relations. Dara Cohen, Amelia Green and Elisabeth Wood (2013) stress that sexual violence is not a ubiquity of war, it’s not just a problem in ethnic conflicts, perpetrators aren’t always men nor combatants, and victims aren’t always female. This helps us to escape to the stereotype of sexual violence as a power relation between male combatants and powerless civilian women.

An important aspect to take into consideration in defining sexual violence during armed conflict is the developments in international jurisprudence. As Olivera Simi and Jean Collings observe, the former International Criminal Court for Rwanda, in the case *Akaesu* densified the definition for more than a performative act:

The Chamber specifically rejected a mechanical description of rape and instead defined it as 'a physical invasion of a sexual nature, committed on a person under circumstances which are coercive'. Despite the reference to the 'sexual nature' of the offence, the Chamber noted that rape is ultimately a crime of aggression that is unable to be captured through a mechanical description of possible objects and body parts. (Simi & Collings, 2018, p. 189)

International jurisprudence has dealt with the issue of rape in other parts of the words, but the Akayesu case in Rwanda is a landmark case in defining elements of rape during armed conflict. The importance of this case is such that scholars have pointed notions of 'genocidal rape' or rape as genocide (Eboe-Osuji, 2007; Vito, Gill, & Short, D. (2009).

The legal framework in International Law

The International Humanitarian Law (IHL) is body of laws, from customary law to treaty law, that regulates the armed conflicts. It aims to protect people from the hostilities, reducing unnecessary suffering and driven by the principle of humanity. Rape and other forms of sexual violence are prohibited in several IHL treaties and other codes of war.

Before the born of IHL, the Lieber Code (1863) included rape as a prohibited act against the civilians of occupied territories. Article 44 stated that:

All wanton violence committed against persons in the invaded country, all destruction of property not commanded by the authorized officer, all robbery, all pillage, or sacking, even after taking a place by main force, all rape, wounding, maiming, or killing of such inhabitants, are prohibited under the penalty of death, or such other severe punishment as may seem adequate for the gravity of the offense.²

It also states, in its article 47, that American soldiers may be tried for crimes committed, including rape, in occupied territories. This is an important recognition of rape as a heinous crime committed against civilians.

The most important development took place in two branches of International Law: International Humanitarian Law and International Criminal Law, the later as we already had the opportunity to mention. For International Humanitarian Law, in case of International Armed Conflict (IAC) the four Geneva Conventions of 1949 gave special attention to civilian women as a vulnerable group during armed

⁶ Article 44 of the Lieber Code (1863).

conflict. Geneva Convention I states, in its article 12 regarding to the protection of the wounded and sick, that all must be treated equally without discrimination, but highlights that 'Women shall be treated with all consideration due to their sex'. Similarly, Geneva Convention III, in its article 14 states the same. Only in Geneva Convention IV, rape is mentioned regarding to the protection and special needs of women. In the wording of the article 27 of the IV CG:

Women shall be especially protected against any attack on their honour, particularly against rape, enforced prostitution, or any form of indecent assault.

The I Additional Protocol (1977), expanding the protection of civilians in an IAC, grants several protections to women and children. Article 75 (Fundamental Guarantees) states that:

Women whose liberty has been restricted for reasons related to the armed conflict shall be held in quarters separated from men's quarters. They shall be under the immediate supervision of women. Nevertheless, in cases where families are detained or interned, they shall, whenever possible, be held in the same place and accommodated as family units.³

Furthermore, under chapter II of the Protocol (measures in favour of women and children), and entire article is dedicated to the Protection of Women. Article 76, number one states:

Women shall be the object of special respect and shall be protected particularly against rape, forced prostitution and any other form of indecent assault.⁴

For Non-International Armed Conflict (NIAC), common article 3 of the four Conventions prohibits "mutilation, cruel treatments and torture" as well as "outrages upon personal dignity, in particular humiliating and degrading treatment".⁵ No specific reference is made to rape or women. The Additional Protocol II (1977) only mentions that, while under custody and "Except when men and women of a family are accommodated together, women shall be held in quarters separated from those of men and shall be under the immediate supervision of women".⁶

3 Article 75, 5), I Additional Protocol.

4 Article 76, 1), I Additional Protocol.

5 Common article 3, a) and c).

6 Article 5 (2) a), II Additional Protocol.

The growing awareness of United Nations to sexual violence against men and boys

Under the United Nations, some important developments must be referred. In the beginning of the new millennium, the United Nations Security Council adopted a resolution that put women and girls in the centre of the peace and security concerns. The Resolution 1325 (2000) – *Women, Peace and Security* (WPS) – calls on states to address attention to the vulnerabilities of women and girls during armed conflict, but also to include women as promoters of peace, and active agents in conflict resolution and post conflict transformation. Regarding to sexual violence, the UNSCR 1325:

Calls on all parties to armed conflict to take special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence, particularly rape and other forms of sexual abuse, and all other forms of violence in situations of armed conflict.⁷

In 2009, part of the Women, Peace and Security agenda, it was adopted the resolution 1888, that calls on States to fight the growing sexual violence in conflict. In this resolution, the UN Security Council states that:

Reiterating deep concern that, despite its repeated condemnation of violence against women and children including all forms of sexual violence in situations of armed conflict, and despite its calls addressed to all parties to armed conflict for the cessation of such acts with immediate effect, such acts continue to occur, and in some situations have become systematic or widespread.⁸

The WPS agenda at the UN offers an opportunity to rethink the relationships of gender and power in armed conflict and other scenarios of turmoil. And it's also important to mention the cultural impact globally (Romão, 2021). Notwithstanding this great window of opportunity, several scholars point out that WPS fails to recognise men and boys as victims of sexual violence, as well as LGBTI communities (Davis & Stern, 2018; Hagen, 2016).

In 2019, the UN Security Council adopted the resolution 2467, which clearly recognise men and boys as victims of sexual violence during situations of armed conflict. In the said resolution, the UN Security Council:

7 S/Res/1325 (2000).

8 S/RES/1888 (2009), paragraph 3.

Notes that sexual violence in armed conflict and post-conflict situations disproportionately affects women and girls, recognizes also that men and boys are also targets of sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict settings, including in the context of detention settings and those associated with armed groups; urges Member States to protect victims who are men and boys through the strengthening of policies that offer appropriate responses to male survivors and challenge cultural assumptions about male invulnerability to such violence; requests further that the monitoring, analysis and reporting arrangements on conflict-related sexual violence focus more consistently on the gender specific nature of sexual violence in conflict and post conflict situations against all affected populations in all situations of concern, including men and boys.⁹

Resolution 2467 was the first of its kind, mapping women, men, and children as vulnerable to rape and wartime sexual violence. It's an important recognition, but the resolution fails to intersect gender, sexual orientation, and gender identity, as scholars point out (Davis & Stern, 2018; Hagen, 2016).

Sexual violence against men and boys: a sociological approach

The sexual violence against men in wartime has been subject of growing attention by scholars in recent years (Carpenter, 2006; Sivakumaran, 2007; Russell, 2007; Solangon & Patel, 2012). On the other hand, NOG and research institutes are contributing for policy making and law drafting, as illustrates the report of the Refugee Law Project on comments to the ICC draft gender Policy (Refugee Law project, 2014).

The sexual violence in armed conflict, with particular focus on rape, is majority perceived as a relation *perpetrator v. victim*, which represents *man v. women* (Baaz & Stern, 2010a). Legal and political efforts concerning to rape in armed conflict are focus on the protection of women and children. They are perceived as vulnerable group inside the civilian population and protected as such. As we had opportunity to explore, the rape of the female body represents the destruction of family and community bonds. This kind of “weapon” is very destructive, pulverizing that way the social cohesion of the community and nullifying resistance (Sivakumaran, 2007).

On the opposite side, despite rape of men by other men in context of armed conflict follow the same patterns of violence against women, and in theory should receive

⁹ S/RES/2467, paragraph 32, p. 9.

the same protection by legal and political spheres, but that's not the case. As Sivakumaran (2007, p. 260) states:

There is a strong link between male sexual violence and sexual violence against women. Male sexual violence should be considered under the same rubric and using similar analyses as sexual violence against women for, [the] dynamics, the constructions of masculinity and femininity and the stereotypes involved are similar.

The report *Human Security Report 2012* affirms that the narrative of rape in armed conflict, portrayed by the media, fails in considering men as victims. The report says that media always “[represents] men – invariably combatants – as the perpetrators of sexual violence and women and girls as the victims. Little is said about sexual violence against males, while female perpetration is ignored almost completely despite recent evidence indicating that it may be far more prevalent in wartime than is generally understood” (Human Security Report, 2012, p. 29).

In situations of armed conflict, the sexual violence against women or men, goes far beyond from sexual satisfaction. The former International Criminal Court (ICC) Prosecutor, Louis Moreno-Ocampo, stated in November of 2010 that women “were raped systematically to assert dominance and to shatter resistance” and, in the other side, men were also subject of sexual violence, in particular rape in public, with the objective to “destroy their authority, their capacity to lead” (Durr, 2014). The declarations of Moreno-Ocampo are indicative of the awareness of the ICC to the full dimensions of gender-based violence during armed conflict.

For men, sexual violence is much more than a mechanical act. They are subjected to “[s]odomy, being forced to have sexual intercourse either with a woman or another man, being forced to gang rape women, having their genitalia touched, being forced to strip in public and any indecent sexual act without consent” (Chitsike, 2013). The ultimate objective of the perpetrators is the humiliation of the male victim and elimination of resistance. To achieve this goal, some men are subjected to torture and other cruel and inhumane treatments, such as being “forced to penetrate holes in banana trees that run with acidic sap, to sit with their genitals over a fire, to drag rocks tied to their penis, to give oral sex to queues of soldiers, to be penetrated with screwdrivers and sticks” (Storr, 2011). The physical consequences of those acts for the victims are, among others, “bruises, lacerations, stabbings and fractures, genital pain during urination, anal and testicular pain and sexual dysfunction including impotence, [genital] mutilation, anal tearing and bleeding and sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV” (Solangon & Patel, 2012, 421).

The sociological process that explains the rape of men in armed conflict it's not different from the one that explain the rape of women in the same scenario. According to Vojdik “wartime sexual violence against men is about masculine domination and

power just as it is for women – both forms of violence involve similar constructions of masculinity and heterosexualized masculine domination” (Vojdik, 2013, p. 926). Vojdik highlights three important aspects of this kind of violence.

The first point is related to the temporal nature of the phenomenon. By this, the author means that sexual violence against men is not an isolated nor recent phenomenon, but something that happened in several armed conflicts from ages. She realized that legal protection granted by law is, in practice, different depending on the victim’s gender. A problem arose from the data collected in the field shows that men subjected to rape and other forms of sexual violence are treated as cases of torture, cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatments (Russell, 2007). This happens because of stereotyped perceptions that men cannot be raped and by such they only may suffer from degrading treatments, as defends Sivakumaran. In the author’s words, “[if] the abuse is recognized, it may not be seen as sexual violence, for the issue is often buried under the rubric of ‘abuse’ or ‘torture’, [castration] is seen as ‘mutilation’ and rape as ‘torture’ [this] may be due to, and reinforces, the view that men cannot be subject of sexual assault.” (Sivakumaran, 2007, p. 256). This misconception jeopardizes the whole dimension of the raped men during wartime. The second point highlighted by Vojdik, is the sociological basis of sexual violence, which is similar for men and for women. The author states that “the rape and sexual violation of men constructs and enforces actual and symbolic gendered power on several levels” (Vojdik, 2013, p. 926). Concluding, she supports that rape is a process which masculinizes the perpetrator and feminizes the victim.

The third point is that sexual rape of men “is not an aberrant result of the chaos of war” (Vojdik, 2013, p. 927). The phenomenon is part of a social system that builds men as masculine, heterosexual, and dominant. This results that this particular kind of violence is not exclusive of armed conflict scenario, but during the conflict, without Law and order, the traditional dynamics of power between men and women are destroyed and hierarchies are reshaped. (Sivakumaran, 2007).

Rape of men in media outlets

Men subject to sexual violence feel themselves ashamed, humiliated, diminished in their masculinity and helpless. The following testimony of a man raped by soldiers is illustrative of that: “I was raped by different soldiers. I have so many thoughts. I cannot sleep. I became impotent. Concentration is my main problem. My future is ruined. I have no future” (Time Live, 2011). For those men who were raped in front of the community, the consequences may be particularly severe. They are abandoned by family and for the community. For those who were raped out of sign, these men live in fear that the community finds out that they were raped. They fear

to be called homosexuals for being sodomized. The homosexuality is illegal in most African countries, and homophobia is on rampage in the continent (Garrido, 2016). Perpetrator and victim are, by this, bound to a pact of silence. The victims do not talk about the trauma because they are afraid of being identified as homosexuals (Durr, 2014). This silence conspiracy in which the victims are trapped is fed by this fear of violence and homophobia.

It is for this reason that both perpetrator and victim enter a conspiracy of silence and why male survivors often find, once their story is discovered, that they lose the support and comfort of those around them. In the patriarchal societies found in many developing countries, gender roles are strictly defined (Storr, 2011).

This necessity, in societies, to be masculine, or at least to look masculine, keeps these men in silence. The community and family expect that its men are strong and protective. Being raped destroys their masculinity, and that sense of protection and strength expected to those men. On the opposite side, rape another man reinforces the masculinity of the perpetrator.

The fear of rejection drives the lives of raped men. As another man told to the German *Deutsche Welle*:

How do I tell my wife I was raped? What is she going to think about me? She won't see me as a man again. She will start looking at me like any other woman (Ndinda, 2013).

For those who speak about the violence suffered, rejection and abandonment are the hard reality, because family perceive that he was not able to defend himself, and by that, it is not able to defend them (Ndinda, 2013). These men are perceived as weak, as being no longer men: "The people in my village say: 'You're no longer a man. Those men in the bush made you their wife'" (Gettleman, 2009).

There is also the fact that episodes of such men are often reported to be coerced into rape or witnessing rape. Clearly, the intent is not the sexual satisfaction of the perpetrators of violence. This is the destruction of family ties, which are particularly strong in African societies. Valorie Vojdik (2013) asserts that the sexual rape of men publicly as well as the forced incest of family members is intended to humiliate and foster feelings of shame and impotence as these acts destroy fundamental values and norms in those societies.

The abduction of these men is a pattern that has been consistent in several accounts of victims of sexual violence who told of their experience. Armed groups assault communities and separate women and children from men, subtracting the latter from the community. The abducted men are obliged to do various household

tasks, for example, to fetch water, but also to serve as sexual slaves – a role always attributed to women and girls – or, in the case of boys, as child soldiers. The performance of tasks normally attributed to women is part of a wider strategy to emasculate these men. Often the victims state that the first sexual contact occurs with the commander of the armed group, or another who is hierarchically superior to the others:

The leader of the group asked to have sex with me. I did not understand what I meant. I have ordered that I have tied up and then raped me. The other nine came after him (Seruwagi, 2011).

The mentioned testimony gives us another pattern of this kind of violence. Gang rape is a behaviour frequently reported by the victims. It is a phenomenon that assumes an important role of fostering group cohesion, because “can create bonds between people in social groups and may provide psychological benefits to the perpetrators by improving group morale through inducing feelings of power and victory” (Cohen, 2013, p. 463). In other words, the individuals belonging to the armed groups perceive that a gang rape as a process of belonging to the group, as an act of camaraderie. Scholars stress that it is a recurrent behaviour in armed groups with low degree of cohesion (Cohen, 2013). Sexual violence is a process of affirming perpetrators as male, dominant and heterosexual, as it still is a means of cohesion among individuals in armed groups.

As we already had to opportunity to demonstrate, for the victims of sexual violence, the scenario is the opposite. Men who are victims of sexual violence experience feelings of individual destruction, shame, impotence, failure to protect their families and communities, fear of family rejection, abandonment, and social stigma, among others (Solangon & Patel, 2012). The sources on international media are illustrative of this reality. In this sense, it is clear the allusion to shame for the fact and loss of dignity in the following excerpt:

After what they did to me, I felt ashamed. It was a bad experience of my life. I left Congo when I was broken and confused. I felt like I had lost my dignity, with too much pain on my body (Durr, 2014).

Raped men may suffer from confusion of gender, and doubts over their own sexuality. In these cases, it is often found that these men do not feel themselves to be such, or that they have been somehow transformed into women by their abusers:

In the past, I thought that it was only females who were raped but not men. I cannot understand myself today. I feel pain all the time in my anus and bladder. I feel like my bladder is full of water. I do not feel like a man (Seruwagi, 2011)

Conclusion

The wartime sexual violence is a hard reality of wars from ages. But men and boys were always not taken into consideration as victims of such violence. The present article aimed to drawn on this hidden reality and bring invisible victims of sexual violence in wartime to the centre of the debate. The patterns of sexual violence perpetrated against women and girls may also be found against men and boys. The objective is the dehumanisation of the victims and the destruction of social cohesion. But to rape a man, as we may conclude, reinforces masculinity of the perpetrator, and destroys masculinity of the victim. It's a powerful mean to eliminate resistance from civilian populations.

Policy and decision makers need to have a gender sensitive approach to the issue of sexual violence in conflict. The fact highlighted by several scholars of sexual violence against men and boy is catalogued as torture, inhuman and degrading treatments jeopardize the frame of wartime sexual violence. Despite women and girls are, in matter of fact, most vulnerable to violence, security policies must consider the complex dimension of victims, their gender, their ethnic group, age, religion, sexual orientation and gender identity among other. There is no more tolerable rape depending on those factors. Finally, there are some visibilities of this issue in international media and ONG reports, which helps to raise awareness from politician and public opinion.

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