

---

**Cassandra's Notes** are the reflections of a 21 year old university student. Cassandra wants to promote deep critical thinking of issues related to global conflict so that we may arrive at practical solutions for peace. [Cassandra's Notes do not necessarily reflect the views of Pragmora.]

---

### 1. To what extent is a need to conform a motivation for rape? To what image are soldiers conforming?

I posit that, perhaps, one motivation for rape is the securing of hyper masculinity which is predicated on assumptions such as aggressiveness, strength, and potent sexuality. Though there are several versions of Masculinity, the universal feature of Masculinities is the importance of achievement.

For those men involved in conflict, failure to conform to hyper masculine expectations may not only result in material deprivation and devaluation of self, but also in violence, suffering and death. For instance, a soldier who will not rape might be ostracized from his unit as a result of being, viewed as unmanly, incapable and a liability during combat. In extreme cases, nonconformity might result in instant ultimate condemnation – being put to death.

Sexual violence may be acted out because of a discord between a soldier's embodied experience, who he actually is, and the impossible expectations of militarized hyper-masculinity which propels him to "perform Masculinity" in an effort to conceal this disparity. Thus, aside from excessive physical training to match the aesthetic profile of a fighter, soldiers perform individual expressions of Masculinity through sexual violence indicating dominance over women and dominance over femininity - a 'true' man.

### 2. Is there any indication of a 'normalization of rape'? If so, what are the implications of the normalization of rape and sexual violence?

*"We know it's not a good thing but what do you expect? We spend a long time in the bush and when we meet a woman and she will not accept us then we must take her by force"*

In the videoclip, the soldiers repeatedly assert that living for long periods in the bush, where they were isolated from communities and from women, provoked rape. Soldiers express that when they saw a woman, they were unable to resist taking her by force if she refused to have consensual sex. It seems to me that this rational is predicated on and promotes assumptions that: a) men are biologically predisposed to sexual violence, and are only held back because society controls this 'natural' behaviour b) in a climate of war, where social controls are disintegrated, these acts are unfortunate but inevitable. That is: in the eyes of the soldiers, warfare, which forces some degree of social isolation, makes them lonely and lusty and, while some soldiers may still acknowledge that it is morally reprehensible, rape is justified on the basis that it is inevitable. Inevitability is one step closer to acceptability and normality. Thus, from this perspective, I do see a normalization of rape within the culture of soldiers.

I imagine that the implications of 'normalization' can be extremely adverse. In a country wherein women may have legitimate reason to fear retribution from the perpetrators (especially when these perpetrators are employed by the government); wherein rural women may lack affordable and accessible transportation to courts; wherein many cannot afford legal counsel; wherein many may lack the basic knowledge of how the court system works or even knowledge that rape is illegal – the normalization of rape is another hinderance to justice as activities that are viewed as inevitable, acceptable, and normal could hardly be simultaneously understood to be criminal, deviant and abnormal. I suspect that this atmosphere of normalization of rape and sexual violence is partially responsible for the widespread impunity - that is rapsit are exempt from punishment.

---

Barker, Gary, and Christine Ricardo . "Young Men and the Construction of Masculinity in Sub-Saharan Africa: Implications for HIV/AIDS, Conflict, and Violence." *Social Development Papers Conflict Prevention & Reconstruction* 26 (2005): iii-36. Print.

Bazz, Maria Eriksson, and Maria Stern . "Why Do Soldiers Rape? Masculinity, Violence, and Sexuality in the Armed Forces in the Congo (DRC)." *International Studies Quarterly* 53 (2009): 495-518. Print.

Megar , Sara. "Rape of the Congo: Understanding sexual violence in the conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo." *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 28.2 (2010): 119-135. Print