

The congo war rape as a weapon history essay

[History](#)



Nothing in the world is more heart-wrenching than the frequency of sexual violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. (DRC) The prevalence of this atrocity did not transpire overnight it was an uninterrupted result of Congolese warfare. The increase of sexual violence against women in the eastern Congo began in 1996.[1]These acts of violence were a local demonstration of an intricate rural conflict, which involved many groups of armed combatants and at least seven nations. The warfare in the DRC also caused the unending rapes of thousands of women as well as the deaths of more than 5. 4 million people.[2]Yet, in several cases the troops and militias raped women and girls as part of an overall attack, in which they wounded and murdered citizens, while stealing and demolishing their property. They did this to penalize them for accepting actual or imaginary aid from opposing forces, and to intimidate the communities into enduring their control. Currently this war continues to rage among complete immunity and silenced international reactions for war crimes and rape in which all sides are involved. Even though, it has been over 10 years, many Congolese people are still falling prey to the most appalling acts of violence known to humankind- from the raping of women, and children, to the mutilations and slaughters, of a number of casualties that remain in the Congo while this violence continues.[3]This paper reveals that within the larger war the eastern DRC warring parties carried out another war: a war of sexual violence against women, men, and girls. This dispute will be uncovered by exposing the status of women and girls prior to conflict, the consequences of the usage of sexual violence/rape as a weapon of war throughout the conflict, as well as the misconceptions of wartime rape. Historical BackgroundIn 1994, members of the Interahamwe militia and the Rwandan <https://assignbuster.com/the-congo-war-rape-as-a-weapon-history-essay/>

government's, main army (Forces Armées Rwandaises), (FAR) directed an ethnic cleansing against the Tutsi of Rwanda which took over 500, 000 lives.

[4]However, after the Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA) overpowered the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), the RPF's military forces were massacred and over a million Hutu were exiled in the Congo, then Zaire, where the military and the civilian refugees were forced to establish themselves in camps beside the border.[5]Militia and solders then began to rearm and reorganize themselves within the refugee population, and under the direction of the subjugated military and political leaders, they were prepared to launch new attacks on Rwanda. Although, neither the larger international community, nor the U. N. agencies interfered to end the trainings, such military action was forbidden by intercontinental conventions. In 1996, the Rwandan government led its troops into the Congo, emphasizing the necessity for provision attacks on Rwanda as well as any commitment to safeguard the Banyamulenge, Congolese of the Tutsi's.[6]Together with the warriors of the Allied Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo, the Rwandan armed forces attacked the camps and slaughtered tens of thousands of defenseless Rwandan civilian refugees.[7]After that, hundreds of thousands of involuntary and voluntarily refugees reverted to Rwanda.[8]Nevertheless, various Rwandans escaped westward through the forest. Several thousand militia and ex-(Forces Armées Rwandaises), (FAR) participants reorganized to continue fighting the Rwandan government armies in Rwanda and later in the Congo.[9]Nonetheless many of the citizens were decimated in the following months by Allied Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo (AFDL) or Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA) troops. The troops were also sent from Uganda to assist the AFDL. And in May of 1997, underneath the <https://assignbuster.com/the-congo-war-rape-as-a-weapon-history-essay/>

governance of Laurent Kabila, the supportive and rebellious force of Uganda and Rwanda removed President Mobutu from power, and marched on the Congolese capital of Kinshasa.[10]After that, Laurent Kabila and his government sought to overthrow Rwandan and Ugandan, foreign supporters by offering their support towards rioting against the Congolese government commanded by the Rally for Congolese Democracy (RCD) fourteen months later. President Kabila then recruited aid from troops and military aircrafts from Angola, Namibia, and Zimbabwe, to contest this alliance. However, in July of 1999, the chief foreign candidates signed a cease fire treaty at Lusaka.[11]In 2001, after Joseph Kabila the son of Laurent Kabila was installed as president, the Rwandan and Ugandan troops as well as the other foreign forces decided to slightly separate along the battlefield.[12]The U. N. Observation Mission in the Congo (MONUC), a United Nations diplomacy force, was then put in place to oversee the discharge of soldiers and the treaty. Nevertheless, Uganda decided to transport some of its troop's home and Namibia chose to remove its soldiers, even though Uganda had to eventually send some of their fighters back into the Congo. Rwanda, Zimbabwe, and Burundi, also assumed their soldiers would be removed, however, there was no projected period for this deportation. During this time there was little military action on the front lines; but the fighting that continued in the Kivus was categorized by meticulous violations of the international humanitarian laws. Several of the fighters were also transferred to new posts within the eastern Congo by Rwandan commanders, throughout October and November of 2001.[13]Moreover, after various delays, the Lusaka agreement discussions that were initiated in the middle of October 2001 quickly buckled, but in early 2002 the discussions finally took place in <https://assignbuster.com/the-congo-war-rape-as-a-weapon-history-essay/>

Sun City, South Africa.[14]As a result, the restricted power sharing agreement between the rebels, and most of the civil society, failed to secure peace with Rwanda and omitted the Rally for Congolese Democracy (RCD). [15]This political chaos also dragged dozens of countries into a conflict that became known as " Africa's World War". The Status of Women and Girls Prior to the WarWomen and girls were treated as second class citizens, even before the war in the Congo. The common customs as well as the law defined the role of girls and women as inferiors to men. Though women were usually seen as the main source of family support, the Congolese Family Code states that husbands are recognized as the head of the family and by law all women are required to obey their spouses.[16]Congolese women and girls were also submissive by training and practice. Many Congolese girls had a tendency to marry at a young age because within the Democratic Republic of the Congo a woman's rank is governed by her marital status. In the Congo it is usually more imperative to educate and send boys to school rather than sending the girls. However, as indicated in literacy statics for the Congo gender discrimination did exist before the war and continued to be a problem until 2002.[17]The male leader of the household was also regularly led to resolve offenses against women and girls separate from the courts. However, a number of male household heads have " settled" rape cases by ordering the culprit to marry the victim, or by accepting a cash payment from the perpetrator or his family. Because of the hesitancy of women to endure the shame of being known as a rape victim and because of the corruptions that were resolved outside of the courts, the cases that were formally reported are definitely below the number of crimes that were essentially committed. The Congolese girls and women that were raped in <https://assignbuster.com/the-congo-war-rape-as-a-weapon-history-essay/>

the Democratic Republic of the Congo suffered a substantial loss of societal rank. Once given this subordinate rank, women found it hard to shield themselves from contracting sexually spread diseases, such as HIV/AIDS. Women did not have the right to make their husbands use condoms, and as in numerous countries, adulterous sex by the husband (but not by the wives) is tolerated.[18]The customary large Congolese family also tends to limit the options for a woman's independence from her husband. The women also had restricted power outside of the family. It is still very rare for a Congolese woman to hold a leadership position in politics or within the DRC's civil society. Even though effort was made to embrace women into the Inter-Congolese Discussions, male delegates still make up the vast majority. [19]Rape as a Weapon Congolese woman crying [20]http://cache.boston.com/universal/site_graphics/blogs/bigpicture/congo_02_27/c01_18029319.jpg [21]male-rape-victim-uganda [22]The above images are the representation of Congolese men, women, and girls affected by conflict. Since 1996 the DRC war began to devastate the region and extinguish its local economy. Consequently, the women who provided the means to keep their families alive were greatly motivated by poverty to repeatedly go to the forest to make charcoal, to cultivate in the fields, or to go trade goods at the market, although doing so put them at risk of being sexually assaulted. In several cases women and girls were abducted by the soldiers that took them to military bases within the forest, where they were forced to provide them with domestic labor and sexual services. As the fighting activities began to increase in one area, so did the sexual assaults and other crimes committed against women and girls. Women and girls as well as the other civilians that often fled conflict to live in temporary structures within the forest, were <https://assignbuster.com/the-congo-war-rape-as-a-weapon-history-essay/>

frequently preyed upon by the soldiers and enemies. During this war, thousands of women were assaulted by soldiers, tribal fighters and rebels seeking to abolish communities that supported their adversaries.

[23]Nevertheless, hundreds of thousands of women were displaced by the war while searching for safety for themselves and their families in neighboring towns.[24]However, instead of discovering security, the women were sexually assaulted and tortured for days, months, or years by the soldiers and government officers from the nearby military camps. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo it was also a regular occurrence for armed groups of men to divide into bands of three to five, and overrun a village, forcing themselves into houses where they would snatch and serially rape young girls and women. During the rape the attacker would typically mutilate the female's genitals with pieces of glass, wood, or heated plastic. Several rapists intensified their offenses by shooting victims in the vagina or maiming them with knives or razor blades. However, some rapist chose to leave their sufferers to perish from their wounds, while others outright killed their victims. These armed groups normally used this method of violence to assert power over not only the female victims but their men as well. Sexual violence in the DRC was also used to degrade, shame, and undermine the enemy. The sexual brutality of Democratic Republic of the Congo women had escalated to new altitudes in 2007, after the outbreak of war between rebels and the Congolese army.[25]But in 2009 it was reported, that tens of thousands of women were raped and attacked in their homes, in their fields, and in front of their families.[26]Sexual violence was also used as an extremely effective wartime weapon of genocide. This rise of violence was so severe in the Congo that an international aid agency had to close some of its

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bases in the DRC, because it was too dangerous for its staff to work. The levels of rape in eastern DRC amplified in 2009 and remained tremendously high, in spite of the international recognition.[27]The Human Rights watch estimated that 400, 000 women and girls had been raped in a six year period.[28]It was also reported by human rights groups that hundreds of thousands of women that had been raped in the DRC were also rejected by their husbands and communities. However, the number of male victims is much harder to estimate partly because they were too ashamed to come forward. Reports have also shown that known male rape victims had sentiments of anger and often wondered how something like a sexual assault could happen to them. Those male victims expressed that they were ashamed and wondered why they were raped. Moreover, rape as a wartime weapon in the Democratic Republic of the Congo affected women, men, and children from ages one to ninety years old. Consequences of Wartime Rape: Traumatic FistulasVitonsi Preparing for Surgery[29]This is an image of a four year old female waiting to receive traumatic fistula surgery. Vitonsi was sexually assaulted by militias while trying to cross the river with her mother and pregnant sister. Thousands of raped women and girls in the Democratic Republic of the Congo are now left to suffer from health impediments, while hoping that they will be treated for traumatic fistulas, an injury female's experience as a result of rape or being forcefully sodomized by an object. [30]The physical trauma from such violent assaults can ultimately cause severe injuries to a girl's or a woman's reproductive organs. For example it can cause a disorder called vaginal fistula, which occurs when the wall between a female's rectum and vagina tears. However, it has been assessed that out of six DRC provinces that around 14 percent out of 432 cases were

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because of trauma and thousands of Congolese women and girls had been impacted by traumatic fistulas.[31]A number of soldiers in the Democratic Republic of the Congo had once adopted a deliberate strategy of terror through mass sexual assaults. Nonetheless, sexual violence, even violent sexual assaults, did not automatically cause traumatic fistulas. In its place the militias, having already sexually assaulted the women would intentionally cause severe injuries to her reproductive organs before sending her back to her village. Many of the women and girls that were severely injured during the course of rape were often treated at Panzi Hospital.[32]As described by a victim within Gypsy Girl Chronicles (GGC). One of the victims within the GGC stated that she was sexual assaulted and tormented at the age of 17 during the height of the war. The victim has been at the Panzi hospital, without her family, for over 6 year's undergoing one operation after another.[33]The victim told the GGC's author that she no longer feels human or had no future. Hospitals in Goma have also worked continuously to treat women of the Democratic Republic of the Congo who have suffered and that continue to suffer from traumatic fistula. In a video titled In Transit a young woman with a traumatic fistula is seen en route to the DOCS Hospital, where other women are recuperating from the treatment they have received.[34]It was noted that a number of women travel long distance for a cure and that the Doctors at the DOCS Hospital, specialize in traumatic fistula operations. [35]Nonetheless, medical impediments for women with traumatic fistula can include being permanently infertile, incontinent. Traumatic fistulas may also cause a series of miscarriages, and other health problems.[36]Additionally, women with this condition are often faced with shame and humiliation because of their continuing incontinence as well as their status as a rape

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victim. Several of the injured women and girls were unable to obtain treatment, however there were some hospitals within the DRC that treats sexual assault related injuries, and traumatic fistulas. One center in particular is the Panzi Medical Center in Bukavu and it was created in 1999.

[37]And on 2005, Specialists at the Panzi hospital did approximately 540 traumatic fistula repairs, which 80 percent of those repairs were due to sexual assaults.[38]Justice for Congolese Rape VictimsIt was reported in a Congo planet article featuring members of the U. N. Observation Mission in the Congo (MONUC), that the progress of bringing sexual violent perpetrators to justice had been very disappointing for the Congolese people.[39]However, because of the constant tense circumstances that generated the endless sexual assaults against Congolese women one of the reporters from Congo Planet scheduled a series of interviews to speak with the (MONUC) Deputy Special Representative of the UN as well as Secretary General, Ross Mountain, about this issue and the efforts that the international community and the Democratic Republic of the Congo's government were doing to solve this problem. The first question asked during this interview was: Is sexual violence a long term communal problem in the Democratic Republic of the Congo or it is just a result of war?

[40]Reply: While the war is basically at a standstill, the practice of further catastrophic dimension continues. For instance, the customs have always been to protect and look after women within different societies. So, it is essentially a consequence of a prolonged war in this country.[41]The second question asked was: Did you get any statistics on the number of victims of sexual violence? Reply: It is somewhat hard to obtain exact figures.

However, I am remorseful that we have been dealing with hundreds of

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thousands of casualties over the last couple of years.[42]The next question asked was: Who are the culprits? Reply: Over all it has been indicated that the perpetrators were uniformed males. But today, the culprits undoubtedly include armed forces, and militias of this country, as well as the police. Those named remain the main collection of culprits, however the amount of sexual violence committed by civilians, who are not uniform personnel or military has increased. And that is a very disturbing sign.[43]The fourth question examined by the writer was: Is the government doing something extraordinary to change this situation? Reply: The government has involved itself with the international community which brings together a number of UN agencies as well as international and national civil society and various ministers. They essentially deal with the psycho-social treatment and medical treatment of victims first, and then they reinsert them back into their community or another because of the shame and dishonor a problem that regrettably lingers on. They are also concerned with the issue of bringing offenders to justice. The fifth question inquired was: What exactly is the MONUC doing?[44]Reply: MONUC is very involved with the security of citizens in the humanitarian community. Our MONUC military forces are organized around internally displaced camps and an accumulation of provided security used to discourage violence against citizens. However, with the present state of the jails in this country, nobody remained in custody more than a one or two month period.[45]We are however doing all that we can to certify that those who are identified can be brought to justice. The last question requested by the correspondent was: What are the humanitarian agencies doing for sexual violence victims?[46]Reply: I currently have aid available and as the humanitarian director, I do have <https://assignbuster.com/the-congo-war-rape-as-a-weapon-history-essay/>

funds at my disposal for the humanitarian work needed in this area.

Nonetheless, the Democratic Republic of the Congo is one of the areas that we have selected to make certain that, safety is provided to prevent more of this from happening, and that victims of sexual violence do receive the comfort and support during this trying time.[47](This concludes the interview)" Aid for DRC Rape Victims" <http://mideastshuffle.files.wordpress.com/2010/03/hillary-clinton.jpg?w=237&h=300>[48]This is an image of Hillary Clinton that was featured within an article regarding a different conflict. Hundreds of thousands of Congolese women and children have been raped, and more than five million people have died in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, since 1998.[49]However, the violence began to worsen against women and children in 1999.[50]Racism was believed to be the reason behind the worldwide response to this humanitarian catastrophe. Numerous Congolese women stopped believing in the promises and were convinced that assembling women might be the only way to change things, once an eighteen-month old baby, died on her way to the hospital with a broken and raped body in September 2000.[51]However, in August of 2009, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton visited the Democratic Republic of the Congo.[52]Hillary Clinton used this visit as an opportunity to focus on ending the sexual violence that was taking place in the Congo, by guaranteeing 17 million dollars for economic assistance, legal support, counseling, and medical care.[53]Clinton believed that the security and the liberation of women were vital to the future of the Congo. Mrs. Clinton bought hope and encouragement to the Congolese women by visiting them and with her words. But the violence continued after her trip. Loads of women still continued to come to the Panzi Hospital in Bukavu weekly for the injuries <https://assignbuster.com/the-congo-war-rape-as-a-weapon-history-essay/>

that they suffered with from sexual torment.[54]It was believed that the West had conventionally concentrated on handling the consequences of sexual violence instead of its causes. Nevertheless, DRC activist did not give up they showed the West that the corruption of the Congo's natural resources was a major factor in the endless massacres and more needed to be done to address this ongoing crisis. They also expressed that change would only come to the mining industry with international pressure for ethical business practices and human rights. Misconceptions of Wartime Sexual ViolenceAlthough, it was often suggested that that sexual violence and wartime rape happened in every wartime conflict, contemporary studies have shown that the patterns vary extensively. The Democratic of the Congo has been repetitively called the rape capital of the world; however it has been reported that many of the prominent cases of widespread wartime rape have transpired in Sub-Saharan African countries, including Sierra Leone, and Liberia.[55]Though, reports of wartime rape cases were not partial to one specific geographical location. Very high levels of civil war related rapes were reported in practically all regions around the globe between (1980-2009).[56]Human rights reports from the U. S. State Department specified that only thirty-six percent (ten of twenty-eight) of the wars in this area indicated evidence of the highest level of wartime rape, even though Sub-Saharan Africa experienced the most civil conflict during this study period. [57]But, in Eastern Europe, State Department statistics conveyed the highest level of rape in forty-four percent (four of nine) of conflicts during this study. [58]Consequently, Eastern Europe civil wars were more likely than Sub-Saharan African conflicts to feature information on immense levels of rape, on a per-conflict basis. However, in recent years State department reports <https://assignbuster.com/the-congo-war-rape-as-a-weapon-history-essay/>

have showed at least one year with extraordinary levels of rape in the common war-affected countries and later statistics of global patterns suggested that wartime rape was a serious problem in most regions in the world. These outlines contest that wartime rape was an African problem and ratify the scale of the problem. However, the patterns do little, to identify the origin of wartime rape. Though wise conservatives often advocated that sexual violence and wartime rape transpired in all armed conflicts, past studies have shown that the patterns usually differed in most areas. Nevertheless, the variances in sexual violent perpetration by these armed players were primarily well documented. For example, scholars have discovered that rape by a soldier was prevalent in some conflicts, but not others. Scholars also exposed that armed groups even within the same war did not commit sexual violence to the same degree or in the same methods, and that armed groups that abstained from sexual violence at one period in the war might execute it on a larger scale within that same battle. Wartime rapes reports often imply that rape is primarily perpetrated by unruly and uncontrollable rebel forces. Nonetheless, through research and numerous studies it has been established that state armed groups are more likely to be reported as perpetrators of rape and other sexual violent acts than rebel groups.[59]ConclusionThe prevalence of sexual violence as a weapon of conflict did not transpire overnight it was an uninterrupted result of Congolese warfare. However, as indicated in this research paper the increase of sexual violence against women in the eastern Congo became prevalent in 1996.[60]These acts of violence were a demonstration of an intricate rural conflict, which involved many groups of armed combatants and at least seven nations. The warfare in the DRC also caused the unending rapes of <https://assignbuster.com/the-congo-war-rape-as-a-weapon-history-essay/>

thousands of women as well as the deaths of more than 5.4 million people. [61] Nonetheless, this paper revealed that within the larger war, the eastern DRC warring parties carried out another war: a war of sexual violence against women, men, and girls. This quarrel was ultimately uncovered by exposing the status of women and girls prior to conflict, the consequences of the usage of sexual violence/rape as a weapon of war, as well as clarifying the misconceptions of wartime rape. This paper also uncovered that there was not a sole exempt from the wartime sexual violence that continues to plague the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Even though many believe that this conflict ended in 2009 or earlier, do you agree with the last statement or do you also believe that the conflict is over?