

Analysis of the Reluctance of Male Congolese Victims of WSV to Seek Help

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NINA MARIE ROESLER, OCT 21 2019

The discussion on wartime sexual violence (WSV) continues to be characterized by a biased representation of men as perpetrators and women as victims, although an increasing number of reports have drawn attention to male-directed WSV (Féron 2018). After the recognition of rape as a war crime, the topic was widely discussed, and several international policy documents were invented. Explained through the argument that women and girls are much more likely to experience WSV, the initial focus was solely on female victims (Touquet and Gorris 2016: 38; Ward 2013: 190). However, despite a higher number of female victims, it is important not to neglect the experiences of affected men and boys. DelZotto and Jones argued, that “males, as well as females, are frequently targeted for sexual assault in wartime” and that “the feminized construction of such assaults has a negative impact on male survivors at both legal and institutional levels, denying them representation and protection by both governmental and non-governmental actors” (2002: 1). Though male WSV-victims are increasingly recognized, there is still a lack of scientific literature that attempts to explain in detail their reluctance to seek help (Touquet and Gorris 2016: 36). I am, however, convinced of the importance to address this issue, as it is likely that the reluctance to seek help will also complicate the victims’ processes of overcoming traumatic experiences. As long as a group of people has to live on with traumas, a society cannot be regarded as safe and peaceful.

Therefore, my research aims to look at reasons that prevent male WSV-victims from seeking help. I will focus exemplarily on male WSV-victims from the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), as this region is known for its extreme prevalence of WSV (UNOCHA 2017: 1). The guiding research question will be *how can feminism and masculinity studies contribute to understanding the reluctance of male victims of wartime sexual violence from the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo to seek help and what approaches are there to solve this problem?* To answer this question, I initially discuss and define WSV, explain its relation to power and briefly analyze the extent of male-directed WSV. Afterwards, I describe the concept of patriarchy from a feminist standpoint and explain gender as a social construct. Furthermore, I discuss the concept of heteronormativity and finally link all findings to the concept of masculinity. The following chapter starts with a general overview of male-directed WSV in the DRC. Subsequently, I discuss different explanations for the reluctance of male Congolese WSV-victims to seek help by combining the knowledge from the theoretical part with information from various sources about their situation. It is important to note that my paper cannot provide a complete list of reasons that prevent male WSV-victims from seeking help. I will therefore focus on two factors that have a particularly strong influence on male WSV-victims’ reluctance to seek help in a society which, as will be explained later, is structured by heterosexuality and belief in ‘normal’ gender behavior. I initially discuss the effect of fixed gender roles with a special emphasis on the role of masculinity in the DRC. In the subsequent section I analyze how a general stigmatization as well as the criminalization of homosexuality in neighboring Uganda, where many Congolese have found refuge, influences the male victims’ reluctance to seek help (UNHCR n.d.: 1f.). As a last step, I discuss possible solutions to break the silence around male-directed WSV by introducing two organizations working with affected men and boys. The final evaluation offers an outlook on further research opportunities.

Theoretical Approaches

As mentioned, the first chapter starts by examining WSV from different angles. In the following section three core

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areas of feminism, namely patriarchy, the social construction of gender and heteronormativity will be described to be then expanded by the concept of masculinity. These theoretical approaches were chosen because they are well suited to explain the entanglement of power, entrenched notions of 'normality' and sexual acts that, as will be discussed later, play a role in the reluctance of male WSV-victims to seek help.

Defining Wartime Sexual Violence

Cockburn (2011: 192) identified several wars in the 20th century, such as both World Wars or the Vietnam War, where rape was practiced extensively. In these and other conflicts different forms of WSV have occurred and continue to occur "in homes, fields, places of detention, military sites, and camps for refugees and displaced persons [...] at the height of conflict, during population displacement, and [...] after conflict" (Bastick et al. 2007: 13). Although this widespread WSV occurrence has been publicly known for a vast amount of time, it was long considered "an inevitable consequence of warfare, and thus irrelevant for analyses" (Houge 2015: 79). However, the effort of feminist activists in the context of mass-rapes of women during the conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina, contributed largely to the consideration of rape as a war crime before the International Criminal Tribunal for Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in the 1990s (Engle 2005: 778f.). Later, the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) and the Special Court for Sierra Leone further contributed to international efforts to draw attention to the serious problem of WSV (Bell and O'Rourke 2007: 27). During that time, the dominance of feminist researchers with a "focus on women as the silenced victims of men's violence" resulted in a shortened definition of WSV as vaginal rape (Houge 2015: 80).

This shortened definition changed, at least in terms of international law. Based on lessons learned from the ICTY and the ICTR, the statute and drafting of rules for the International Criminal Court (ICC) have been developed (Engle 2005: 783). The ICC is a permanent tribunal to complement domestic courts in dealing with cases of genocide, war crimes, crimes of aggression and crimes against humanity (Chambliss 2011: 272f.). Rape, sexual slavery, enforced sterilization, prostitution and sexual violence (SV) are categorized as crimes against humanity. To be categorized as such, the different SV-acts must be part of a widespread attack directed against civilians (ICC 2011: 8ff.). The ICC defines SV broadly as "an act of a sexual nature against one or more persons or [the causing of] such person or persons to engage in an act of a sexual nature by force, or by threat of force or coercion" (2011: 10). Rape, as a form of SV, is described as the invasion of "the body of a person by conduct resulting in penetration [...] of any part of the body of the victim or of the perpetrator with a sexual organ, or of the anal or genital opening of the victim with any object or any other part of the body".[1] The term 'invasion' is intentionally used to keep the definition of rape gender-neutral (ICC 2011: 8).

Seemingly, the ICC is aware of the importance of a gender-neutral language. However, the realization that men and boys can also become WSV-victims has been slow to emerge in research. Houge (2015) argues that by neglecting their experiences "scholars have simultaneously been blind to or even contributed to the definitional silencing of male victims" (ibid.: 81). The one-sided perception of women as victims and men as perpetrators meant that male WSV-victims were either completely ignored or only included in analysis if they were homosexual, as can be seen in Cockburn's otherwise detailed WSV-description (2011: 191). In addition, the exclusive focus on women as victims had the effect that theories about the etiology of the perpetrators' actions were only based on hypothesis derived from the victims' statements (Houge 2015: 81). Excluding the perpetrator's view, however, makes it difficult to analyze reasons for the frequent occurrence of WSV. Nevertheless, Houge offers some explanations, distinguishing between a structural macro-level and an individual micro-level. Considering the macro level, she agrees with the prevailing opinion in research that WSV is "about power, terror and control" but highlights that "sexual intent, lust or desire" might play a role on the micro level (2015: 80).

It is difficult to accurately assess the extent of male-directed WSV. However, Sivakumaran argues that, "male sexual violence has been recognized as regular and unexceptional, pervasive and widespread" when WSV has been thoroughly examined (2007: 259). According to Féron (2018) most WSV-victims are female but in conflict zones, such as Syria or Eastern DRC, men and boys make up a third of all victims. He further explains that male-directed WSV has been a regular occurrence since the Antiquity and that it "is perpetrated by soldiers, police officers, members of intelligence services, as well as members of armed groups involved in civil wars" (Féron 2018).

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Nevertheless, due to several reasons, male-directed WSV is often under-reported (IASC 2015: 5). Based on this under-reporting, male victims receive less attention in various institutions, which also worsens their chances of receiving qualified help (Baaz and Stern 2010: 45). Analyzing the reasons for male WSV-victims' reluctance to seek help can therefore help breaking this vicious circle. The following sub-chapter provides the theoretical basis for the subsequent analysis.

Patriarchy, Gender, Heteronormativity & Masculinity

The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) argues that male-directed WSV is often committed with the purpose to reinforce "gender inequitable norms of masculinity and femininity [...] and is based on socially constructed ideas of what it means to be a man and exercise male power" (2015: 5). This sub-chapter will build on this explanation and describe the theory of patriarchy, gender, heteronormativity and masculinity. These concepts are helpful in identifying obstacles that prevent male WSV-victims from seeking help.

From a feminist perspective, patriarchy generally refers to a system of oppression and exploitation, or a relational and gendered process of dominance by men over women. This system is based on the existence of gendered relations, where the perceived duality of two distinct genders "construct[s] appropriate positions and responsibilities for women and men and allocate[s] resources differentially based on these divisions" (Tyner 2008: 649). As opposed to sex as the biological classification, gender refers to the socially constructed characteristics of typical 'feminine' and 'masculine' behavior (Dugan 2008: 391). This includes material conditions such as gender-based division of labor, ideological and psychological forms and imprints of masculinity and femininity, as well as the distribution of violence and power between the two sexes (Krell 2009: 319f.). Sideris describes gender as an "organizing principle of social relations across widely differing cultures" and argues that "within a dominant discourse of male domination and female subordination, particular forces [...] frame divergent experiences of what it means to be man or woman" (2003: 714).

Connected to that, the concept of heteronormativity describes the perceived naturalness of the existence of only two sexes as well as the perceived and expected conformity of sex and gender. Heterosexuality is regarded as natural and, therefore, as the only legitimate sexual orientation. Degele (2008) describes these ideas as the stabilizing core of human everyday knowledge and argues that heteronormativity is unconsciously internalized and thus undisputed by most people. This unconscious internalization reduces the complexity of social interactions and leads to the reliability of expectations, since everyone 'knows' how 'men' and 'women' should behave (ibid.: 88f.). Butler (1991) describes a forced coherence of body, sexual desire and social role based on an idealized forced heterosexuality. For her, gender can be understood as an act and the image of 'man' and 'woman' is created by the recurring performativity of gestures, actions, expressions, etc. (ibid.: 199f.). She further describes that the maintenance of two gender identities functions as a strategy for cultural survival. Therefore, a rebellion against the permanent representation of the perceived unambiguous gender identity is often sanctioned by society. As a result, most individuals adapt to the idea of a natural gender identity and permanently present themselves coherently with their ascribed gender (ibid.: 205f.).

Hooper (2001) argues that the concept of patriarchy is "associated with universalizing, ahistorical theories and vague generalizations". She therefore suggests using the concept of masculinity instead. The distinction between men and masculinity reveals that power is not related to the anatomy of men per se but to "their cultural association with masculinity" (ibid.: 41). Masculine/feminine are terms that are constructed as opposites, where masculinity is valued over femininity. Both terms create a binary symbolism, linked to other dichotomous pairs like hard/soft, strong/weak or tough/tender (ibid. 43). However, masculinity is not a monolithic category and men, or women are not homogenous groups. Carrigan et al. argue that gender relations must always be analyzed at the intersection of class and race and that masculinity is divided into "hegemonic masculinity and various subordinated masculinities" (1985: 590). Masculinities are differed by psychological processes but also by institutional, collective practices. The definition of a collective hegemonic masculinity has the effect that women and specific groups of men are subordinated (ibid.: 591). Hegemonic masculinity is further connected to heterosexuality and "depends for its existence on the presence of a stigmatized subordinate homosexual masculinity" (Hooper 2001: 55).

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Male Congolese Victims of Wartime Sexual Violence

By the beginning of 2014 almost 500,000 refugees had fled the DRC, caused by several violent conflicts from the 1960s onwards. About half of these refugees remained in the *Great Lakes Region* (UNHCR n.d.: 1f.).[2] Many people from Ituri and Kivu, regions in the east of the DRC that were particularly affected by serious human rights violations, including WSV, fled to neighboring Uganda. Here, Congolese asylum seekers account for 65% of all registered refugees. Besides other vulnerable groups, most Congolese refugees are people who have experienced SV (ibid.; Bastick et al. 2007: 41). A report by the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative (HHI) states that “[t]he war and ongoing political instability in Eastern DRC have been marked by extreme violence including widespread rape” (2010). HHI (2010: 6) further mentions, that the exact number of male Congolese victims remains largely unknown. However, some sources claim that male victims accounted for approximately one third of all WSV-victims in Eastern DRC (Féron 2018). A population-based assessment of the prevalence of SV in Kivu and Ituri showed further that about 22% of the male study participants were exposed to WSV, indicating widespread male-directed WSV in that region (Johnson et al. 2010: 558ff.).

Rape and other forms of WSV generally serve as an effective tool of humiliation and intimidation and lead to severe physical consequences and shame, a feeling that influences the reluctance of both female and male victims to seek help (Baaz and Stern 2010: 41). However, the following sub-chapters bring the perspective of male Congolese WSV-victims into focus and analyze the influence of fixed gender roles and the stigmatization of homosexuality on their reluctance to seek help.

Fixed Gender Roles

The theoretical part of this paper discussed the socially constructed concept of gender as well as heteronormativity, where certain forms of behavior or acts are seen as either typical ‘masculine’ or ‘feminine’. In addition, it was concluded that the separation between two genders reduces the complexity of social interactions and serves as a strategy for cultural survival (Degele 2008: 88f.; Butler 1991: 205f.). Male WSV-victims openly seeking help are shaking this previously structuring situation. But why is that?

Being a man is generally connected to attributes like strength, power, dominance or toughness. Women, on the other side, are normally seen as weak, submissive and tender. As in the aforementioned one-sided perception of sexual offenders, women are furthermore generally regarded as victims and men as aggressors (Hooper 2001: 43). Armed conflicts often reinforce these perceived gender-differences and have the effect, that “men tend to self-identify with masculine stereotypes more strongly” (Sivakumaran 2007: 255). Sideris describes war as a “male-dominated arena” which “can pose threats to traditional notions of masculinity” (2003: 719). In North Kivu, respondents to a research study argued that war-related trauma can have the effect that men lose their masculinity and thus be reduced to the status of women (Lwambo 2013: 54). Masculinity is particularly ‘at risk’ when men and boys become WSV-victims, since many myths entwine around this topic. For example, the idea exists that men cannot be raped at all (Turchik and Edwards 2012: 211f.). This also became clear in the shortened presentation of WSV as vaginal rape, mentioned at the beginning of this paper, which indicated that only women can become victims (Houge 2015: 80). Fixed perceptions about gender and myths around WSV lead further to the perception that ‘real’ men should be strong and therefore able to protect themselves from attack. Additionally, it is expected, that men who become WSV-victims will still behave strongly and tough after the act, as seeking help, becoming emotional and showing weakness is perceived as feminine behavior (Sivakumaran 2007: 255). Atim, a doctor from Uganda, working with male WSV-victims, explained their reluctance to seek help by arguing that “[i]n traditional culture, men are brought up to believe they are strong, they can handle everything and they are not supposed to fall into depression or seek psychological help” (cited in IRIN 2011).

Fixed gender roles and the feminized construction of sexual atrocities make it virtually impossible for male WSV-victims to seek help without fearing to lose their masculinity. Baaz and Stern explained that a “strong disjuncture between masculinity and victimhood” increases the stigma around male-directed WSV and equates victimhood with failed masculinity and weakness (2010: 44). In the DRC, however, men are supposed to be providers and heads of households and “[m]asculinity is (...) regarded as something precious that must be maintained through continuous

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performance in order to preserve male dominance” (Lwambo 2013: 51ff.). If male Congolese WSV-victims openly seek help and talk about their experiences, there is a high risk that they will lose their previous role in society, become stigmatized and sometimes even ostracized (IRIN 2011). Especially in their own family, male WSV-victims must reckon with exclusion. Some wives leave their husbands as soon as they learn of their suffering. Atim explains that these Congolese women question the masculinity of their violated husbands by asking “[i]s this still a husband? Is it a wife?”. They fear that a man, who cannot protect himself from being raped will not be able to protect his family either (cited in Storr 2011).

Butler (1991: 205f.) explained that gender can be understood as an act, that the maintenance of gender identity serves as a strategy for cultural survival, and that any violation against this is sanctioned by society. By applying her explanation to the present case, it becomes apparent, that an WSV-act against men leads to the loss of attributes associated with masculinity. Men who are seeking help, are not acting according to their masculine role and are thus no longer clearly recognizable as men. This violation of the expected gender identity endangers familiar structures and is thus sanctioned by society. In the DRC, where men must be masculine to preserve dominance and to fulfill their expected role, the sanction is often the exclusion from the family or community. Because male Congolese WSV-victims fear stigmatization and rejection, they tend to deal alone with the often serious physical and psychological consequences. Interestingly, the situation is different for male WSV-offenders: a male perpetrator increases his masculinity while violating another male. A survey on rape in prison concluded that rape serves as a means of asserting power and masculinity. A study participant expressed the opinion that “[a] male who f**ks another male is a double male” (cited in Segal 2007: 208). Seemingly the loss of masculinity is not connected to the same-sex act itself, but rather to the exercise of power. Nevertheless, WSV is often associated with sexuality on the part of the male victims by portraying them as homosexual (Nguyen 2014). The following sub-chapter will examine the significance of the link between male-directed WSV and homosexuality for the male victims’ reluctance to seek help.

Stigmatization of Homosexuality

As already described, there are many myths around male-directed WSV. The inability to ward off attackers, for example, is not only seen as an emasculation of the male victim but also often attributed to his assumed homosexual tendencies (UNHCR 2012: 4). Individuals hearing from the atrocities that men and boys experienced, such as doctors, police or family members can aggravate the situation by believing and expressing such myths to the victim and by acting according to them. This worsening of the already traumatic situation can be described as a ‘sanctuary trauma’ in which “the victim is further traumatised [sic.] in environments in which he should feel safe” (Ellis 2002: 35). As previously stated, societies are characterized by the perceived naturalness of heterosexuality, and the demarcation and stigmatization of homosexual men is necessary to maintain a ‘normal’ order as well as hegemonic masculinity (Degele 2008: 88f.; Hooper 2001: 55). Homosexuality is regarded as abnormal in many countries and men, who are portrayed as homosexual, are seen as feminine and weak. Male WSV-victims fear to be further traumatized when seeking help as the stigmatization as homosexual would endanger their previous role in society.

However, this problem does not only affect heterosexual men but all male WSV-victims, no matter what their actual sexual orientation is. Oosterhoff et al. argue that “[i]n homophobic environments, homosexual survivors of rape may be seen as inviting rape by their very nature” (2004: 68). Male victims who had an erection or ejaculated during the WSV-act are additionally discouraged from seeking help by questioning their own sexual identity (Ellis 2002: 35). Linking WSV to homosexuality leads gay victims and victims who have had physiological arousal during the act to fear that they themselves will be blamed for the atrocities they have experienced. At the same time, the tabooing of homosexuality has the effect that all male victims fear stigmatization and exclusion from society, which discourages them to report the atrocities they experienced (Oosterhoff et al. 2004: 68). While homosexual acts are not explicitly illegal in the DRC, the situation is more complicated for male Congolese WSV-victims who fled to Uganda, where homosexual acts can be punished with life sentences (LOC 2014: 4 & 18). Based on this criminalization, male WSV-survivors “are at risk of being interrogated about their sexual orientation and prosecuted for having engaged in same-sex activity” (UNHCR 2012: 10). The fear of being classified as homosexual and of being criminalized based on this classification makes it difficult for affected men and boys to seek help.

In order to be able to solve the problem that male Congolese WSV-victims fear to seek help, ways need to be found

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to deal with homophobia and the fixed perception of gender roles and masculinity at the level of the individual victim, but also at the level of the family and community. Men and boys must be able to speak about the atrocities they have experienced without fearing stigmatization, discrimination or exclusion. The next sub-chapter will introduce two organizations working in Uganda that aim to solve this problem.

Approaches to break the silence

There are different approaches to break the silence around male-targeted WSV and to help victims overcome their trauma. The growing attention in scientific literature and the media is a good step in the right direction. In addition, there are local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that cooperate directly with affected men and boys to improve their situation. In the following, two NGOs are presented that came to work with WSV-affected men and boys by chance but are now taking a holistic approach to advocating for them.

The *Refugee Law Project* (RLP) is a Uganda-based NGO working to “empower asylum seekers, refugees, deportees, [internally displaced persons] and host communities to enjoy their human rights and lead dignified lives” (RLP n.d.). Their aim is, inter alia, to address all cases of rape, often working with affected refugees from the DRC (IRIN 2011). After starting to talk to a handful of male survivors of WSV, the RLP-led support groups soon grew. Here, male WSV-victims are offered counselling services and medical care. RLP further creates an environment in which WSV-survivors can speak freely about the atrocities they have experienced, which helps them to overcome their trauma. At the same time RLP is working to change the educational curriculum so that medical students are adequately trained to deal with cases of male-directed WSV (Ndinda 2013). This measure is especially important, as Turchik and Edwards (2012: 214f.) have shown that prejudices and myths around male rape are still strong in medicine and that male victims have fewer opportunities to receive help. Medical staff, who are often the first instance for WSV-victims to ask for help, must be trained to work with affected males, as stigmatizing, discriminatory treatment could further traumatize and thus discourage them to continue their process of healing.

Another NGO working with male WSV-victims in Uganda is the *African Centre for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture Victims* (ACTV). ACTV offers holistic care to victims of torture (including WSV) in the Great Lakes Region consisting of medical treatment, legal advice as well as psychiatric rehabilitation and psychological counselling. They furthermore aim to empower and reintegrate torture survivors through livelihood programs and create awareness in communities through dialogues, media advocacy and other means (ACTV n.d.: 1 & 26). Among other findings, ACTV has observed that male WSV survivors do not want to describe their experiences as rape but prefer to use words such as torture or abomination (IRIN 2011). This is an important finding, as it can help individuals working with male WSV-victims to respond sensitively to them. As elaborated in the previous chapters, the connection between male-directed WSV and weakness or homosexuality leads to male victims' fear of being stigmatized or marginalized. Avoiding words and phrases which are rejected by affected men and boys can contribute to motivating them to accept help[3].

Conclusion

In this paper, the initial discussion of WSV showed that male victims received and still receive less attention than female victims. Although it can be assumed that the number of male WSV-victims is significantly higher than previously thought, their under-representation reduces their opportunities to receive qualified help. This, in turn, increases the likelihood that male victims will not report the crimes committed against them. Breaking this vicious circle is an important task and the responsibility of politicians, scientists, journalists and NGOs.

This paper contributed to breaking the cycle by applying the concepts of patriarchy, gender, heteronormativity, and masculinity to the case of male Congolese WSV-victims. The theoretical part concluded that the firm and unconscious belief in gender differences and heterosexuality structures societies and plays an important role in the power dynamics of patriarchal societies. It was furthermore shown that the concept of masculinity can explain existing power-divisions between men. The subsequent analysis emphasized the significance of fixed gender roles and the stigmatization of homosexuality for the male Congolese WSV-victims' reluctance to seek help. Here it became clear that the WSV-act emasculates male victims but not perpetrators. Furthermore, it was concluded that

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this emasculation is sanctioned by the victim's immediate environment through exclusion and stigmatization. The link between male WSV-victims and homosexuality, which is seen as downgrading in a society where masculinity is connected to power, makes seeking help even more difficult for affected men and boys. Especially male Congolese WSV-victims who have fled to Uganda are afraid to seek help, as the country considers same-sex intercourse a criminal offence.

The last section, however, introduced ways to help affected men and boys to break the silence around male-directed WSV. The paper made clear that there is a strong need to create incentives for male WSV-victims to seek help by tackling homophobia and the fixed perception of gender roles and masculinity at the individual victim-level as well as at the level of the family and community. Organizations such as RLP or ACTV offer the opportunity to create safe places for male victims where they can speak openly about their experiences and work through their traumas without fearing stigmatization, discrimination or exclusion. In addition, RLP and ACTV create incentives to change firmly anchored structures in institutions and society. However, the fact that notions of gender, masculinity and heterosexuality are so firmly anchored makes the process of bringing about change difficult and protracted.

Lastly it remains to be emphasized that the paper did not mean to belittle the suffering of women and girls in conflicts by focusing on male WSV-victims. It is impossible to put the experiences of men and women into a hierarchy and say who suffers more or who deserves greater attention and help. Many of the obstacles that prevent male WSV-victims from seeking help may also be similar for women and girls. The recurring portrayal of men as perpetrators and women as victims, as well as the retention of the image that female WSV-victims suffer 'more' than male victims, strengthens patriarchal and heteronormative structures as well as the fixed notion of gender roles. It also prevents an open discussion on the subject and thus harms every WSV-victim. For future research it would be interesting to analyze whether there are common barriers, such as shame, that prevent both male and female WSV-victims from seeking help and whether there are solutions that benefit both groups. Perhaps the theoretical concepts applied in this paper could also offer starting points for analyzing the causes of WSV.

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Notes

[1] In the further course of this paper, the term WSV will include several forms of SV, such as rape, sexual slavery or torture. Although Sivakumaran argues that every form of SV is subject to different dynamics and should therefore be analyzed separately and many authors solely discuss rape, when talking about WSV, this paper deliberately includes several forms of SV under the term WSV (ibid. 2007: 254; Isikozlu & Millard 2010: 16). Contrary to the definition of

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the ICC, this paper also considers actions as WSV if they are directed against non-civilians. Some actors within the humanitarian sector use the term gender-based violence (GBV) to highlight the gendered dimensions of WSV committed against men and boys (IASC 2015: 5). Acknowledging this gendered dimension, I will, nevertheless, stick to the term WSV as I am not going to discuss other cases of GBV against men and boys, such as forced recruitment (Bastick et al. 2007: 18).

[2] The *Great Lakes Region* in Africa, named after the freshwater lakes and river basins in the central and eastern part of the continent, consists of 12 states: Angola, Burundi, Central African Republic, Republic of Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Republic of South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania, and Zambia (ICGLR n.d.).

[3] It is important to note that the revised wording should only be used in direct contact with those affected and with the aim of overcoming traumatic experiences. From a legal perspective, it is important to define WSV as precisely as possible. Organizations such as the RLP had to fight, for example, to ensure that rape against men was legally recognized as an existing problem (Ndinda 2013).

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