

Constructing the Rape Capital of the World:

How the U.N. Responds to Violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

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For the past 20 years, sexual violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has been perpetrated on a scale that has known no parallel. The violence in the DRC has continued to increase dramatically, and Congolese women and girls have been victims of rape on a scale never seen before. To respond to this humanitarian atrocity, the United Nations Security Council authorized a series of peacekeeping missions, beginning in 1999 and continuing to the present day. Violence has escalated despite UN involvement, particularly instances of sexual or gender-based violence; statistics show an alarming rise in rape in the DRC within the past few years.¹

This is curious because the UN adopted the first resolution concerning Women's Peace and Security (WPS) in 2000. Resolution 1325 is a landmark resolution that "reaffirm[s] the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peace-building, and stress[es] the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security."² The goal of 1325 was to adopt a broad understanding of WPS that uses a gendered perspective to ask questions about the impact of armed conflict on women and girls. The issues that Resolution 1325 addresses are participation of women in all levels of decision-making, protection of women and girls from gender based violence in conflict, prevention of violence against women and girls, and the specific needs of

¹ "UN News - New UN statistics show alarming rise in rapes in strife-torn eastern DR Congo," *UN News Centre*, accessed November 13, 2013. <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=45529#.UoQn-Y3QFFA>

² U.N. General Assembly, 52nd Session. Report of the Economic and Social Council for the year 1997. Supp. No. 3 (A/52/3). Official Record. New York, 1997.

women and girls in relief and recovery situations. Through this broad but important understanding of women's security, Resolution 1325 sought to address and redefine the way that the international community conceives of peace and security.

Since 2000, this broad notion of WPS has narrowed with the adoption of several additional resolutions. It has narrowed to a specific part of the original resolution that called for all parties to "take special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence, particularly rape and other forms of sexual abuse, in situations of armed conflict."³ The resolutions passed after 1325 center primarily on "rape as a weapon of war" and clearly connect the war tactic of sexual violence to issues of WPS. Despite the attention that the UN has given to this critical issue of WPS, both through international law and on the ground, empirical data shows an increase in sexual violence in armed conflict since 1325 was adopted in 2000. For example, though most recent resolutions about the DRC briefly recall WPS resolutions and commitments to these resolutions, the DRC remains "the rape capital of the world" and "the world's worst place to be a woman."⁴ Yet the resolutions also suggest that special attention must be given to children and women in order to protect them from sexual and gender-based violence. This raises an important question: why has the UN failed to mitigate the issue of sexual violence in the DRC?

I will argue that this has to do with the nature of international politics, which "has always been a gendered activity in the modern state system."⁵ By exploring the UN intervention and involvement in the DRC, I will seek to discover why sexual violence has increased despite UN presence.

³ "OSAGI Landmark resolution on Women, Peace and Security" accessed October 27, 2013. <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/wps/>
⁴ <http://www.hrw.org/world-report-2010/democratic-republic-congo-drc>

⁵ J. Ann Tickner. *Gender in International Relations: Feminist Perspectives on Achieving Global Security* (New York: Columbia Press, 1992), 5-30.

(2) Woman, The State, and War

J. Ann Tickner wrote, “politics is a man’s world.”⁶ Even more than being a ‘man’s’ world, however, the international political world is a gendered one. The very “body of language and thinking that foreign policy elites have generated filters out to the military, politicians, and the public, and increasingly shapes the way we think” about things such as the state system and war.⁷ The way international relations and state actors are defined have the effect of valorizing concerns that are traditionally masculinist, and devaluing to the point of rendering invisible concerns that are traditionally feminist. Thus, through the very language of international relations, through the definition of critical issues and concerns, certain actors and issues are defined as unimportant and irrelevant to the very conversation about issues concerning the state. Therefore, any actor that is not a state and any violence that is not war-related is not of concern. That is not to say that these actors and violence do not exist; rather, they are not important in the logic of this theoretical school of thought. In fact, what gets left out of the international system is “the emotional, the concrete, the particular, the human bodies and their vulnerability, human lives and their subjectivity - all of which are marked as feminine in the binary dichotomies of gender discourse.”⁸ What we do and do not think is important is constructed through this gendered lens.

This gendered construction of international relations reflects the public/private distinction that is found in much feminist scholarship. The distinction serves to disempower certain groups of people and deemphasize certain types of problems, whereas other actors and problems are over valorized. Issues that occur in the private sphere are women's issues, such as the choices

⁶ Tickner, *Gender in international relations*, 27.

⁷ Carol Cohn, "Wars, wimps, and women: Talking gender and thinking war." *Gendering war talk* 37 (1993): 228.

⁸ Cohn, "Wars, wimps and women," 232.

women make, taking care of children and taking charge of home life. If a problem is domesticated, it is cast into the private sphere and the problem is normalized and naturalized.

This public/private distinction is reproduced in international relations through the distinction between international politics and domestic politics. Public and private are labels used to describe “spheres or clusters of activities that are presumptively outside the legitimate bounds of government coercion and regulation (the private sphere) from those where government has a legitimate role (the public sphere).” Anything in international relations that is of concern is therefore public, including the state as the actor and war as its business. All other actors and forms of violence are therefore domesticated. Thus, the public/private distinction is used to disempower certain actors and certain problems.

(3) The United Nations: Peacekeeping

Peacekeeping, as a gendered activity, is first and foremost about maintaining the state and consenting institutions, and preventing war. Lower priority is placed on other goals such as protecting civilians and other humanitarian goals. The UN is focused on protecting “the interests of states, which almost invariably revolve[s] around the promotion of state security and the preservation of state sovereignty.”⁹

So long as war does not exist, a state is understood to be in a state of peace. Based on this definition, violence perpetrated at a non-state level is domesticated, and thus not a concern to the gendered international system. When the UN seeks to assist in restoring the rule of law, it aids by basing its assistance on “national ownership and the needs and priorities identified by national

⁹ Barnett, *Eyewitness to a Genocide*, 24.

authorities... consistent with the culture and legal traditions of the host country.”¹⁰ This does not account for a country with an exploitative and oppressive culture, nor does it leave room for local voices to be heard. It is completely focused on national authorities, many of which can be corrupt, and excludes the possibility that peace may not be kept if oppression continues. The focus is on the public sphere, or the state; in other words, the focus is on the masculine because the state is a masculine actor.

If a peacekeeping mission exists, then it is assumed there is a peace to keep and thus, there is not a war. There is not grey area for the middle, which is where most conflicts and post-conflict countries fall. “Bureaucratic categories and organizational boxes do more than simply separate relevant from irrelevant information” because these broad categories produce our way of seeing conflicts. This lens, through which we see conflict, is inherently gendered because the mission is to preserve the state and to interact with and engage in the prevention of war.

(4) Rape as a Weapon of War

Gendered discourse shapes how peacekeepers address sexual violence in their missions. Resolution 1325 was adopted in 2000 with a broad notion of peace and security. Over the years, however, it has narrowed its scope to concentrate on sexual violence in conflict, and particularly on rape as a weapon of war. Women and children are seen as the victims and the ones in need of being taken care of while men are given the responsibility and role of violent actor and caretaker. Fortunately, this narrowing came with the recognition that rape as a weapon in wartime is not simply a by-product, but is planned and targeted.¹¹ Unfortunately, there have been unintended consequences of this categorization. The recognition and categorization of rape as a weapon of

¹⁰ The United Nations, “Rule of Law,” accessed December 2013, <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/issues/ruleoflaw.shtml>

¹¹ Doris E. Buss “Rethinking ‘rape as a weapon of war’.” *Feminist legal studies* 17, no. 2 (2009): 145.

war “makes it difficult to ask questions about rape: such as why and how rapes were connected to social structures that are irrelevant of the war.”¹²

Rape as a weapon of war means that the rape is furthering militaristic, masculinist and/or nationalist goals. Categorizing rape as a weapon of war prevents the rape of individuals from being on the record of convictions, because there is a focus solely on those who are targeted by armed groups using rape as a weapon.¹³ The very construction of rape as a weapon of war assumes that “rape is always available as a weapon and that women exist as always raped or inherently rapable,” and this “reduces all rape to male violence against women victims and treats rape as relatively uniform in practice and experience.”¹⁴

Thus, it is obvious that even the best intentions of the international system fall victim to the underlying masculinist discourse at play. Resolution 1325 was foundationally appropriate – it attempted to broaden the notion of women’s peace and security such that a multidimensional approach could be had. However, resolutions following 1325 that also pertained to WPS narrowed in scope so as to focus solely of violence perpetrated against women in war. This constructs our knowledge in a certain way – it defines the issue about violence against women in war, which leaves war in its place and creates a victim out of women. Seeing this violence as a weapon of war over valorizes weapons in general, and legitimizes the use of rape as a weapon.

(5) History of the DRC Conflict

Those who live in the present day DRC were once “members of a myriad of state-like entities that governed their various realms, sometimes for centuries, with varying degrees of

¹² Ibid., 148.

¹³ Ibid., 153.

¹⁴ Ibid., 155.

sophistication and competence.”¹⁵ In fact, the DRC, long ago called the Kingdom of Kongo, was a dominant state in its area both economically and socially. Today, however, the DRC is host to an ongoing, twenty year long conflict that is characterized by sexual violence, the exploitation of natural resources and interstate wars. The present day violence and constant warring of armed forces has been a fixture of the present-day DRC government led by President Joseph Kabila, first elected in 2006 and reelected in 2010 in an election of questionable legitimacy. The elections seemed to make things worse by increasing violence; the number of rebellion groups that formed began to rape the country and its people. Michael Deibert writes that the government under Joseph Kabila is:

A younger, more sophisticated, more polished version of his father’s, relying on an extremely narrow circle of trusted individuals and a network of international alliances to keep itself at the top of the heap of those scrambling for control of Congo. It is a power structure that has built a patronage base rather than a political base on which it can draw. It has not created institutional structures that will resolve Congo’s underlying issues.

The Kabila government has put many of the worst human rights abusers in the greatest political power positions, and the international community has not condemned these practices in effective ways, essentially legitimizing the corruption. The UN is understaffed and is therefore impotent in its ability to change underlying issues in the structures of the Congo’s system.

Of the seventeen years for which we have mortality figures, it has been estimated that over five million people have been killed in the ongoing conflict in the DRC. Additionally, there are more than three million displaced persons mostly in the eastern Congo. The peace process has created many tensions in the DRC because it has deeply marginalized the strongest belligerents supported by the Rwandan government that occupied a third of the country. The bias in the peace process has produced a new round of violence in the DRC.

¹⁵ Michael Deibert, *The Democratic Republic of Congo: Between Hope and Despair*. Zed Books, New York. 2013: 9.

In April 2012, a new group called the Congolese Rebel Army, or the March 23 Movement (M23) formed and led a rebellion against the DRC government. The group has “been responsible for widespread war crimes, including summary executions, rapes, and the forced recruitment of children.”¹⁶ This group received substantial support from Rwanda, but was finally defeated in November 2013 through a combination of diplomatic and military tactics.¹⁷ The defeat of the M23 opened up considerable space for broader stabilization of the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) and other Rwandan and Ugandan rebels; if these groups can also be defeated, regional tensions will be decreased. If regional tensions are decreased, the focus can shift towards national and local tensions. When national and local tensions can be focused upon, the state has a better chance of surviving.¹⁸

(6) Constructing the Problem

The construction of the problem in the DRC is one that is gendered with descriptions and conversations revolving around resource exploitation, armed groups, killings in the course of the conflict, and rape insofar as it is a weapon and tactic of war. This rendering of the conflict emphasizes the state as the main actor because these problems are ones that threaten the security and sovereignty of the state. Histories and statements about the DRC similarly create a representation of the problem by describing only the visible issues. This leaves out a host of issues and defines problems away, reproducing a gendered discourse that only identifies a particular kind of insecurity related to the state.

¹⁶ “Q&A: Who are DR Congo’s M23Rebels?” *Al Jazeera*, November 5, 2013.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2013/08/201382411593336904.html>

¹⁷ Jason Stearns, “Update on the Congo” (discussion during Council on Foreign Relations Conference Call, March 26, 2014).

¹⁸ Stearns, “Update on the Congo.”

It is fairly easy to see how the conflict in the DRC has been constructed and how certain issues – namely, women’s insecurity – have been left off the table, or have been discussed in such a way so as to highlight the masculine underpinnings of the international system. There are ways in which the UN discusses the conflict in terms of the war and ways that it looks at the conflict in terms of women’s peace and security. Regardless of intentions, both seem to hold the state as the referent object and are concerned mostly about state security and war. All talk of rape and sexual violence is in reference to the issue only insofar as it is a weapon of war.

During the early stages of the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC), conversations generally revolved around the killings, mutilations and horrors of the conflict in the DRC. This is how the conflict became constructed as a masculine one – one that produced war, killings, warlords, and heinous violence. By 2010, when MONUC was renamed The United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the DR Congo (MONUSCO), this representation of the DRC had been normalized. The UN had internalized an understanding on the problem, and so discussions ceased being about visceral descriptions and concentrated more on political solutions and spaces for dialogue. In a 2011 meeting, the five topics of importance being discussed were the foreign and Congolese armed groups, elections, the rule of law, governance and institution building, and economic development.¹⁹ Discussing women’s issues – women’s peace and security – was a rarity and when it was discussed, it was specifically in terms of the conflict. In other words, these discussions left war in its place and saw women as the victims of conflict rather than independent agents.

¹⁹ U.N. Security Council, 66th session. *The situation concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo*. Official Record. New York 2011. S/PV.6539 : 3.

The following quotes from various Security Council meetings clearly show how the conflict is constructed in the DRC and what issues are of the utmost importance to the international community:

“All parties... continue to resort to human rights violations as a means of creating an atmosphere of terror and oppression and, thus, of keeping their control over the population and lucrative natural resources”²⁰

“There is a denial of justice, which will contribute to the cycle of reprisals and the culture of impunity”²¹

“Destabilization and recurrent wars... are impending [the DRC’s] progress towards development”²²

As a representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo said in 2012, “in brief, the situation is one of widespread insecurity and a major humanitarian crisis.”²³ But where is the talk of the humanitarian crisis, which has manifested itself primarily in sexual violence perpetrated against civilians, mainly women and children?

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In a 2011 meeting concerning the situation in the DRC, no one on the Security Council mentioned sexual violence, even though it was thought that in that year, women were being raped at a rate of *one woman per minute*.²⁴ Although many meetings left out sexual violence from all conversations, there were several meetings that *did* mention sexual violence. The sexual violence discussed is violence insofar as it manifests itself as a weapon of war. That is to say that the sexual violence being discussed is violence that is planned and perpetrated by armed groups or rebels. “Those acts included systematic and massive rape, sexual slavery, mutilation with

²⁰ Ibid., 8.

²¹ Ibid.

²² U.N. Security Council, 68th session. *The situation in the Great Lakes region*. Official Record. New York 2013. S/PV.7011: 9.

²³ U.N. Security Council, 67th session. *The situation concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo*. Official Record. New York 2012. S/PV.6866: 3.

²⁴ Jeffrey Gettleman. “Congo Study Sets Estimates for Rapes Much Higher.” *The New York Times*. May 11, 2011. http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/12/world/africa/12congo.html?_r=0

sharp weapons and other inhuman and degrading punishment.”²⁵ The rapes occurring are seen as abnormal rapes because they are being used as a biological weapon, hence the construction of the term “rape as a weapon of war.”

In 2010, “rape [was] increasingly selected as the weapon of choice in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, with numbers reaching endemic proportions.”²⁶ This is problematic because it blends all forms of sexual violence into one form – that which occurs during conflict. This means that there is no distinction “between the different perpetrators, or between the different types of victims.”²⁷ Despite the gender specific component that has been implemented in the work of MONUC and MONUSCO, constructions like this do *not* actually lead to a gender specific implementation.

The absence of sexual violence from large portions of discussion is not to say that sexual violence in the DRC is unproblematic. Contrarily, “sexual violence remains a dominant, even escalating, feature of the conflict.”²⁸

A particularly important aspect of the protection of civilians is the fight against sexual and gender-based violence. This scourge has accompanied the conflicts in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, but we have also seen violence against women and girls in provinces that have been at peace for some years.²⁹

One member of a 2010 meeting correctly said “a ceasefire is not synonymous with peace for women, if the shooting ceases but rapes continue unchecked.”³⁰ Herein lies the main problem with associating mass rapes with war. In a country like the DRC, that is determined to be post-conflict because a ceasefire occurred, peace still does not actually exist because it is effectively defined as *not war*. That same member’s suggestion is that we must “increase the recognition of

²⁵ S/PV.4784 (July 2003): 10.

²⁶ U.N. Security Council, 65th session. *The situation concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo*. Official Record. New York 2010. S/PV.6378: 8.

²⁷ Meger, *Women, Peace and Security*.

²⁸ S/PV.6302 (April 2010): 4.

²⁹ U.N. Security Council, 64th session. *The situation concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo*. Official Record. New York 2009. S/PV.6159: 4

³⁰ S/PV.6302 (April 2010): 4.

rape as a tactic and consequence of conflict”³¹ However, it is recognized now that rape is *not* a byproduct of war, and that this thought gives rape a certain logic in the world of war. Casting rape as a weapon gives it legitimacy as a tactical tool and, more importantly, leaves out the majority of rapes occurring. Rape as a weapon of war implies that “rape is primarily committed by armed groups; and that it is used strategically toward rational ends.”³² The majority of rapes occurring, however, do not fit these narrow criteria. While “armed conflict continues to have a devastating impact on women and girls”³³ in the DRC, everyday life outside the context of the conflict does too.

In addition to constructing rape as a weapon of war, and thus empowering rape as a logical tactic, members of the UN further disempower women by equating them with the peace process, silencing their agency. Some argue “the impact [on women and girls] is all the more debilitating because it most affects the very people we rely on to rebuild a society and to deliver lasting peace and long-term stability.”³⁴ Women should not be equated with the peace process in the same way that men should not be equated with war; this furthers the gender binary and makes the public/private dichotomy relevant and emphasized. This also causes women to be seen as victims that need to be saved whereas men are the protectors and are seen as those who need to do the saving.

Some members of the Security Council believe that “women in conflict situations [must] enjoy the safety and prosperity they need to fully participate in peace building efforts in their societies.”³⁵ Women in conflict situations should enjoy safety and prosperity simply because they are human and have basic rights. Furthermore, they should enjoy safety and prosperity in

³¹ Ibid.

³² Meger, *Women, Peace and Security*.

³³ S/PV.6302 (April 2010): 8.

³⁴ Ibid., 7.

³⁵ Ibid., 11

order to live their lives, not simply to participate in peace building efforts. This also implies in a way that men do not deserve or are not entitled to these kinds of things. One member claimed “the women of the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo deserve better. They are the backbone of the country and the mainstay of its largely agricultural economy.”³⁶ This equates women with peace and security and disempowers both women and peace and security by making one depend on the other. It also creates an environment where women are beholden men for their security; thus, men are the providers and women are the homemakers. In other words, women are the victims.

Those who believe that women are peacemakers and should not be victimized so that they can add to the peace process often believe that “it is time for us all to count the number of women at the peace table, the numbers of women raped in war...” in order to emphasize the need for more women representatives in higher positions of power.³⁷ Surely, “the need to increased women’s participation in peace processes and to combat sexual violence in conflict zones has not abated,” but is this really a requirement?³⁸ An increase of women in high policy positions would not rid the world of the rape as a weapon of war construction, and would not destroy the broader problematic discourse. Thus, war would still be left in its place as the main business of the state and the story would not change.

“Rape does not end when the violence is over.”³⁹ This statement could not be truer. However, it should lead one to see that the construction of rape as a weapon of war is an ineffective construction, because it does not recognize the majority of instances of sexual violence, which in the DRC, are “perpetrated by civilians and within marriages.”⁴⁰ Another

³⁶ S/PV.6378 (September 2010): 7.

³⁷ U.N. Security Council, 64th session. *Women and peace and security*. Official Record. New York 2009. S/PV.6196: 7.

³⁸ S/PV.6302 (April 2010): 9.

³⁹ S/PV.6378 (September 2010): 7.

⁴⁰ Meger, *Women, Peace and Security*

problem with gendered discourse in the UN is that it is believed that “where sexual violence is planned, it must also be viewed as preventable. Systematic responses to sexual violence have been elusive because, until recently, it was dismissed as an unavoidable consequence of war.”⁴¹ This insinuates that where sexual violence is not planned in a systematic way (and the majority of sexual violence in the DRC is *not*), it is not crucial that it be viewed as preventable, and cannot be prevented by the UN. Additionally, this suggests that sexual violence is no longer dismissed as an unavoidable consequence of war. Although scholars are beginning to understand that rape is not a byproduct of war, it is still discussed in the UN as if it is.

(8) The Intervention

The first UN mission to the Congo, mandated by Security Council resolution 1258, was adopted in 1999 but was only an observational mission; in fact, the UN troops “could do little more than report on the violations of the Lusaka accords.”⁴² It was not until 2000 that the UN passed a resolution that allowed for peacekeepers to engage with the armed forces and work to keep the assumed peace in the Congo. In 2010, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1925, which is still in effect today. Its mandate includes completing the “ongoing military operations in North and South Kivu as well as the Orientale province; improving government capacity to protect the population; and the consolidation of state authority” in the DRC.⁴³ The problem with consolidating state authority in the Congo is that the State is just as corrupt as the rebel groups; they sometimes surpass rebel groups in their use of sexual violence. This mission did not work to create an environment where sexual violence was mitigated. In 2013, “the increasing tension on

⁴¹ S/PV.6378 (September 2010): 8.

⁴² Deibert, *Between Hope and Despair*, 74.

⁴³ M H A Menodji, “Problematic Peacekeeping in the DRC: From MONUC to MONUSCO,” *Think Africa Press*, February 4, 2013. <http://thinkafricapress.com/drc/problematic-peacekeeping-drc-monuc-monusco>

the ground in recent days particularly near Goma, [was] worrying.”⁴⁴ Despite the new mission, violence persisted and sexual violence in particular did not abate but actually increased in intensity and numbers.⁴⁵

While MONUSCO works to preserve the state, it does not focus on the roots of the conflict, which is much further from national conflicts and have more to do with local and ethnic issues. “Indeed, most UN operations are mandated to protect or sustain post-conflict electoral processes; however... the political processes initiated in the DRC mostly failed.”⁴⁶ The UN is backing a corrupt government and an army that is full of human rights violations; without seeking to mitigate the local tensions, nothing will change and the underlying problems will continue to produce conflict and violence.

(9)

The preceding story is one of gender, invisibility and rape. The United Nation has been unable to stop sexual violence in the DRC because its missions are inherently gendered. Because sexual violence in the DRC is considered conflict-related and rape is considered to be a weapon of war, the peacekeeping missions define away and render invisible the problem of rape as part of the UN mandate. This allows the majority of sexual violence, which is understood to be outside the realm of the state and war, to be ignored and met with impunity

By defining rape as a weapon of war, and thus making it a masculine construction, we assume a logic of rape as a rational tool of war. This causes the international community to ignore the host of other factors that contribute to sexual violence, including socio-economic factors, cultural norms, and gendered social constructions. A focus on rape as a weapon of war

⁴⁴ S/PV.7011 (July 2013): 5.

⁴⁵ Stearns, “Update on the Congo”

⁴⁶ Menodji, “Problematic Peacekeeping in the DRC.”

constructs women and children as victims and creates essentialisms that leave “the dominant political and epistemological frameworks untouched.”⁴⁷

A radically different way to approach the issue of sexual violence in the DRC is to look at and engage with the problem from the ground up, rather than top down. This includes more holistic and organic measures, such as the Congolese project of the Foundation Panzi, City of Joy, “a transformational leadership community for women survivors of violence... [that heals] women from their past trauma through therapy and life skills programming.”⁴⁸ City of Joy is not a shelter for victims, but a home for survivors who will learn to be leaders by being surrounded with “love and community.”⁴⁹ City of Joy is located in eastern DRC and, run by local Congolese, began operating in 2011. It serves 90 women at a time ranging in age from 14 years to 40. It was co-founded by Eve Ensler, known for her play *The Vagina Monologues*, after she traveled to the DRC and asked survivors what would be most helpful in their road to recovery, namely “a place to turn their pain into power.”⁵⁰ Healing at City of Joy is based on building self-esteem and learning skills that train women to be powerful leaders.

City of Joy operates outside the discourse of the UN and concentrates its efforts on the “essential ingredients needed [by traumatized women] to move forward in life – love and community.”⁵¹ What makes City of Joy different from organizations which operate within the discourse of the UN is its basic ideas and beliefs. To be specific,

- Each woman is unique, valuable to her society, and has a right to be treated with dignity, respect, love, and compassion
- Women are not broken “victims”; rather they are survivors who have been through unjust gender traumas

⁴⁷ Carol Cohn. “Mainstreaming Gender in UN Security Policy: A Path to Political Transformation?” *Boston Consortium on Gender, Security and Human Rights*, Working Paper No. 204. 2003-2004: 18.

⁴⁸VDay “About City of Joy,” accessed April 1, 2014, <http://drc.vday.org/about-city-of-joy/>

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ VDay, “Origins of the City of Joy,” accessed April 1, 2014, <http://drc.vday.org/about-city-of-joy/origins-city-of-joy/>

⁵¹ VDay, “About City of Joy.”

- Each woman is capable of activating her own ability to recover, heal, and be an empowered and transformational leader
- Rebirth is possible⁵²

This approach to mitigating the issue of sexual violence is completely different from that of the UN. Whereas Resolution 1325 leaves women in a political space that is structured through a gendered lens, City of Joy makes women agents that are therefore radically free of this gendered discourse. At City of Joy, women are not seen as victims or as peacemakers, but as powerful agents that have been through unjust traumas based on their gender. Even more important are the ten guiding principles of City of Joy:

1. Tell the Truth
2. Stop waiting to be rescued; take initiative
3. Know your rights
4. Raise your voice
5. Share what you've learned
6. Give what you want the most
7. Feel and tell the truth about what you've been through
8. Use it to fuel a revolution
9. Practice kindness
10. Treat your sisters' life as if it were your own⁵³

It is important to note that the goal of City of Joy is not to save women from the scourge of rape as a weapon of war, but rather to heal women from injustice. Each principle is telling of how City of Joy's approach to healing women is powerful and different. Telling the truth is not only encouraged at City of Joy, but is revered. In a culture where it is shameful to be the victim of a rape attack, telling the truth and facing no consequences is a very new idea. City of Joy invites women to tell the truth, to live with what happened without shame, and to use the trauma to help and teach others. The community teaches women about their rights, and seeks to stop violence through education and empowerment.

⁵² VDay "Program Philosophy: What Makes It Different," accessed April 1, 2014, <http://drc.vday.org/about-city-of-joy/program-philosophy-makes-different/>

⁵³ VDay, "10 Guiding Principles," accessed April 1, 2014, <http://drc.vday.org/10-guiding-principles/>

Patrick Cannon writes that women are “made physically and psychologically stronger” in programs like City of Joy, and as a result, “Congoese women have begun to critique the domestic and international political systems that have ignored rape.”⁵⁴ Cannon posits that three significant results stem from City of Joy. First, City of Joy addresses all aspects of recovery for women, and, thus, could be a model for foreign aid in the future. What makes City of Joy an excellent model for foreign aid is that it addresses the “needs of recipients rather than economic interests of the donor.”⁵⁵ Second, City of Joy has raised awareness of the issue of sexual violence nationally and internationally. Women are taught that sexual violence is an injustice and that their legal rights prohibit rape. Finally, City of Joy has created a “nascent Congoese feminist movement” that empowers women as agents of change.⁵⁶

City of Joy is a solution in progress; the community attempts to mitigate the issue of sexual violence in the DRC by raising awareness, teaching about rights, and treating women as powerful agents rather than as victims. It is the hope that with this awareness, women and their families will understand the injustice and brutality they are experiencing as something that is wrong and not simply something they must live with. What makes City of Joy different from other international responses is that it operates outside the discourse of the UN, and therefore is not blind to the problem of sexual violence outside the boundaries of war. It is not stuck in a structural box of gendered discourse, but gives agency to those who previously did not have it or did not know they could have it. The leaders of City of Joy recognize the problem of sexual violence as one that occurs in the DRC as a country, not the DRC as a war zone. This means that after the war has stopped, City of Joy still understands and recognizes that rapes continue to

⁵⁴ Patrick Cannon, “A Feminist Response to Rape as a Weapon of War in Eastern Congo,” *Peace Review: A Journal of Social Justice* 24 (2012): 481.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 482.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 483.

occur incessantly. By teaching legal rights, self defense and skills for economic empowerment, City of Joy attempts to address sexual violence with a bottom up approach.

Sexual violence has been used to torture women and their families in the DRC for decades. The UN has not been successful in mitigating this problem, despite being involved in peacekeeping missions in the DRC for years. In order to make real progress, grassroots organizations like City for Joy, that operate outside the discourse of the international system, must continue to grow and to empower women in a way that treats them as agents rather than as victims who need to be saved. The discourse used by City of Joy is radically different, as its mission is to heal and grow, not to save and hide. With this type of thinking and discourse, there is hope for the survivors of sexual violence and for future generations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.