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Workshop report

“International Interventions against Sexual and Gender Based Violence in Conflict”

**Organized by Alex Veit & Lisa Tschörner at the University of Bremen,
21-23 June 2017**

The United Nations Security Council’s recognition of conflict-related sexualised and gender-based violence (CRSV) as a threat to international security has set in motion a number of changes in the field of humanitarian intervention. International organisations and NGOs are committing large resources to reduce CRSV and to alleviate its effects. In ways previously not envisaged, their projects seek to change social conceptions of gender in areas of armed conflict in the global South. International projects and programs against CRSV have become part of discourses on gender, violence and sexuality in societies under immense stress. These interventions meanwhile take place while scholars and practitioners are still far from finding common ground regarding causes and consequences of CRSV.

The workshop “International interventions against sexual and gender-based violence in conflict”, organised by Alex Veit and Lisa Tschörner from 21-23 June 2017 at the University of Bremen, brought together scholars working on questions related to causes and consequences of CRSV, intervention discourse and practices, and evolving relations between intervention organisations, host states and societies. The workshop was divided into three sections: In a first part, the causes and consequences of CRSV and the practice of intervention were discussed. The second section focused on gendered interventions as well as gendered outcomes of interventions. In a third section, the links between CRSV, peacebuilding and state formation practices have been scrutinised.

Three major topics crystallized during the presentations and discussions. The first revolved around academic discussion and diplomatic/media representations of causes of CRSV: while on the diplomatic and media level, rape in conflict-settings is very often presented as a strategic, rational choice of non-state armed groups, academic discussion has moved on towards gender-theoretic approaches and military sociology. A move which is, secondly, partly reflected in policy approaches of implementing organisations. However, as CRSV interventions primarily aim at supporting CRSV victims, they tend to neglect the political and structural conditions underlying these forms of violence. A number of victim groups are neglected, while projects at the same time promote heteronormative norms, reproduce unequal gender divisions, and undervalue the agency of survivors. To reduce CRSV, peacekeepers meanwhile focus on military approaches, even while being aware of their non-appropriateness. A third topic has been unintended consequences of the CRSV hype, such as the neglect of other forms of suffering and the diversion of resources towards the abolishment of underage sexual relations.

After some introductory words by the organisers, CARLO KOOS (University of Konstanz) opened the first section with findings from survey research in the province of South Kivu in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The dominant discourse assumes that CRSV always destroys the social fabric of affected communities and puts stigma on survivors. KOOS' however found rising social support for survivors in some communities, and an increase of survivors' social engagement. These correlations were specifically notable in communities in which CRSV levels were high. These findings suggest that interventions against CRSV should embrace survivors as agents of change, rather than treating them as passive victims. The study indirectly also puts into question the hypothesis that armed organisations perpetrate CRSV as to undermine an adverse community's social fabric.

In the second talk JUDITH VERWEIJEN (Ghent University) confirmed some of these latter findings. Her micro-research on the logics of violence committed by non-state armed groups and the national army focused on similar rural areas in the Congo. VERWEIJEN argued that there is only a weak correlation between intercommunal conflict dynamics and violence against civilians. Armed group's violence against civilians, including sexual violence, is more often associated with income generating activities (e.g. extortion) among these groups' constituent communities. CRSV in the context of military clashes is significant, but seems opportunistic rather than strategic. Contrary to many earlier reports by the United Nations, the Congolese army, perhaps due to international reform projects, was not the main perpetrator within the study period. Nevertheless, individual norms in different battalions differ significantly.

JELKE BOESTEN (King's College London) suggested to conceptualise CRSV along a continuum of violence. In her case studies, Guatemala and Peru, sexual violence in conflict shows many parallels with peacetime violence against women. BOESTEN argued that CRSV is enabled by societal structures in peace time such as the gendered division of labour and female subordination. Consequently, CRSV should not be conceptually separated from SGBV. She added that the exclusive focus on CRSV, as well as its exceptionalisation by framing it as 'weapon of war', fails to address the continuum from peace to war and vice versa, and risks to normalise SGBV in peacetime. However, this does not mean that differentiated legal categories are not necessary for the sake of prosecution and justice.

In her keynote presentation, ELISABETH WOOD (Yale University) took a different perspective on the emergence of permissive norms regarding CRSV. She emphasised the role of socialisation processes within military organisations for the occurrence of CRSV. She argued that military organisations may develop sexual violence norms distinct from these in society. In the following, WOOD developed a typology of wartime rape, and suggested to differentiate between rape as a policy and rape as a practice. Rape as a policy serves a military or reproductive purpose. It is more frequently authorised than ordered. Examples of such intentional adoption of sexual violence exist. However, rape does not need to be a policy to occur. In WOOD's typology of rape as a practice, sexual violence is neither ordered nor authorised but also not punished. While it may be prohibited, in small units the commander's attitude is crucial.

In the first presentation of the section on gendered interventions and outcomes, LISA TSCHÖRNER (University of Bremen) analysed international interventions against sexualised violence in Eastern Congo. She analysed how international organisations are 'doing gender', i.e. how the Congolese gender order is conceived and performed during interactions with local actors. She argued that on a discursive level, international organisations increasingly frame CRSV as a problem of gender relations. However, employees on the ground refuse gender-changing approaches as too political and exceeding their mandate. Rather than tackling structural inequalities, actual implementation projects continue to ask individual female survivors to adapt and become more resilient. TSCHÖRNER argued that such intervention approaches reinforce asymmetrical gendered global power relations and weaken local agency.

CHARLOTTE MERTENS (University of Melbourne) in her following presentation discussed the exceptional character that has been assigned to sexual violence through humanitarian practices and framings. MERTENS asked whether humanitarian interventions on sexual violence could address the structural conditions in which it occurs? Could the end of Congo's 'rape crisis' be the start of a long-term approach to tackle the problem? Her questions were founded on focus group discussions conducted in South Kivu where her research in the Congo revealed that for the affected population, sexual violence is only a peak, a moment of crisis embedded in chronic structural violence such as severe poverty, insecurity and material inequalities. Humanitarianism is, however, selective in its recognition of suffering and often ignores the pluralities of violence. Ultimately she urged to draw attention back to violence as it is lived, experienced, and articulated by all those affected by violence.

In Sierra Leone, the donor focus has already shifted away from sexual violence in general, towards a more specific attention to the problem of teenage pregnancies. As ANNE MENZEL (University of Marburg) observed, even it is common for underage girls to have sexual relationships with older men, international and local actors increasingly frame teenage pregnancies as a form of sexual violence. Campaigns call on school girls to abstain from sex and not to rely on men for material gratifications. Instead, education is presented as key to upward social mobility, even if girls' access to such education is, in reality, often only possible through financial support by older men. Young girls embrace the campaign messages but do not know how to put them into practice. What is asked from them is an almost impossible task already set up for failure.

HENRI MYRTINNEN (International Alert, London) shed light on the heteronormativity of most CRSV interventions, which for a long time put an exclusive focus on female survivors. More recent approaches also seek to engage men by fostering "positive fatherhood". These new approaches

focus on individual moral betterment of men, especially the poor and under-educated. By building these programs around the idea of a middleclass nuclear family, these new approaches continue the marginalisation of non-heterosexual and gender diverse groups, neglect single men as well as female agency, and overlook marital rape and female perpetrators.

HELEEN TOUQUET (KU Leuven) pointed to another blind spot in the response to CRSV. Even though cases of male survivors of sexual violence have been documented in Bosnia- Herzegovina, they have hardly been included by most projects. Services are geared to the numerous female survivors. The numerous Bosnian women's organisations are not open to men. Until recently, there has been no opening in the discursive space for male survivors to disclose their experiences. Due to changes in Bosnia-Herzegovina and on the international level, discursive spaces now gradually open up, e.g. through film documentaries focusing on the testimonies of both male and female survivors. In the discussion, it was pointed out that some feminist groups contest such new developments as to preserve shrinking resources for female survivors.

The last part of the workshop focused on CRSV, peacebuilding and state formation. ALEX VEIT (University of Bremen) introduced his concept of "the international state". VEIT suggested to understand political authority in the Congo as permanently shared between the state and international organisations. Local NGOs serve as intermediaries between international organisations, the state and the population. This internationalised form of authority neglects rural areas and reproduces class divisions. VEIT highlighted an example of how this plays out in the field of sexual violence: instead of investigating CRSV committed by armed groups in the countryside, the internationally-funded justice system prosecutes non-violent sexual relationships of poor underage girls in periurban areas.

AIKO IIRIS HOLVIKIVI (London School of Economics) analysed CRSV trainings for peacekeepers. Grounded on feminist pedagogical theory, she conceptualised these trainings as a site of knowledge production, not only knowledge transfer. In the trainings, she argued, CRSV is framed in terms of technical peacekeeping strategies. Emotional aspects of dealing with CRSV however is neglected. In training discussions, peacekeepers respond to this gap with embracing a colonial logic of othering the problem as one from which they as non-African soldiers are essentially removed, and by reaffirming their military identity, even if militarized approaches to CRSV have been questioned by the soldiers themselves.

Following this discussion of peacekeeper training, JANOSCH KULLENBERG (University of Bremen) presented how the UN peacekeeping mission in Congo (Monusco) subsumed fighting sexual violence under the premises of its protection concept. Pushed by UN member states to include sexual violence in its mandate, Monusco personnel sought to translate an ambiguous definition of protection into peacekeeping practice. KULLENBERG noted that although gendered vulnerabilities have increasingly been taken into account in the framing process, Monusco implements protection essentially with military tools, which fall short of appropriate gender-sensitive approaches.

DOROTHEA HILHORST (Wageningen University/ Erasmus University Rotterdam) closed the discussion with a look on the previous hype around CRSV in Congo. Hypes are fed by the media and serve the material interests of both humanitarian organisations and beneficiary communities. However, they often have problematic consequences, including a strong theoretical simplification and the neglect of

other important humanitarian issues. While it remains questionable whether CRSV interventions achieved their aims, they generated social tensions. The approach to tackle the issue significantly shifted since the peak of the hype around 2010 to a better regulated and coordinated response. Nevertheless, a remarkable gap between the international discourse of rape as a weapon of war and actual implementation persists. Similar to MERTENS, HILHORST noted a decline of the hype and raised the question of what will happen once it is completely over.

Conference Overview

1. Carlo Koos (University of Konstanz): Conflict-related sexual violence and prosocial behavior: Evidence from a survey experiment in eastern Congo
2. Judith Verweijen (Ghent University): Patterns of violence in the eastern DRC: Evidence from Fizi and Uvira territories (South Kivu)
3. Jelke Boesten (King's College London): "He used me as his wife": CRSV along the continuum of violence
4. Elisabeth Wood (Yale University): Rape as a Practice of War: Towards a typology of political violence
5. Lisa Tschörner (University of Bremen): Doing gender in the Congo. International peace interventions and the depoliticization of sexual violence in conflict contexts
6. Charlotte Mertens (University of Melbourne): Sexual Violence and Narratives of Response in Eastern DRC
7. Anne Menzel (University of Marburg): 'Without education you can never become president': Sexual violence sensitization and 'proper' female aspirations in Sierra Leone
8. Henri Myrtinnen (International Alert): Stabilising Patriarchy? Notes on the heteronormativity of post-conflict interventions on SGBV
9. Heleen Touquet (KU Leuven) The (in)visiblity of male victims of wartime sexual violence in Bosnia-Herzegovina
10. Alex Veit (University of Bremen): Interventions against conflict-related sexual violence and the international state of the Congo
11. Aiko Iiris Holvikivi (LSE): CRSV training for peacekeepers: Pedagogic practice and knowledge production
12. Janosch Kullenberg (University of Bremen): UN Peacekeeping as Protection against Sexual Violence
13. Dorothea Hilhorst (Wageningen University / Erasmus University Rotterdam): Beyond the hype? Responses to sexual violence in DRC in 2011 and 2014