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How Can You Call Her a Woman? Male Soldiers' Views on Women in the DRC Armed Forces

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Abstract

There has been a longstanding body of literature on women in the armed forces at least since the 1970s (Segal, 1999). This literature varies considerably in its approach, from feminist work that reflects on the forms of masculinity produced through military and militarization, to work that considers women's role in the army and attitudes towards women in the army. Furthermore, policy efforts to increase women's participation in the army (such as UN Security Council Resolution 1325) have explicitly called for the inclusion of women in peace and security efforts. In this paper, we contribute to this literature by assessing how male former combatants from the Democratic Republic of Congo, living in Johannesburg, talk about the women they fought alongside. In doing so, we reconsider the impact that war and associated forms of militarization have on notions of masculinity and femininity both in times of war and its aftermath. We further explore how men's notions of gender were challenged by the presence of women in the army and how they negotiated this in light of the highly masculine contexts they operated in. We argue that the inclusion of women in the armed forces is heavily shaped by the context and meaning given to conflict and cannot automatically be assumed to have a positive impact on the functioning and practices of the army. We draw out the implications for how the gendered nature of the army is restructured in post-war contexts and how this impacts on demilitarization.

Keywords: *military, armed forces, gender, soldiers, women, violence, DRC*

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Dostin Lakika Mulopo holds a master's and PhD degree in Forced Migration Studies from the African Centre for Migration and Society (ACMS), University of the Witwatersrand. His master's dissertation explored the perception of illness and treatment of Congolese forced migrants, victims of violence. As part of this research, Dostin participated in formulating a research project at ACMS on upholding the psychosocial rights of forced migrants and publishing a report entitled, *Exploring psychosocial and health rights of forced migrants in Johannesburg*, and a book chapter entitled, *Violence, suffering and support: Congolese forced migrants' experiences of psychosocial services in Johannesburg*. His PhD entitled, *Living the past in the present: A reconstruction of the memories of war and violence of former Congolese soldiers living in South Africa* focused on the lives of former Congolese soldiers living as refugees in South Africa with a particular focus on how the change of status and new environments contributes to different discourses of war and violence.

Dostin's areas of research include migration and displacement, militarization, violence and memory, food, health, and illness. He is also a reviewer for the African Security Review, the African Journal of Food, Agriculture, Nutrition and Development, and IGI Global publications.

Ingrid Joined UJ as a Professor in January 2018. Prior to that, she worked at the African Centre for Migration & Society at Wits University from 2005 -2017. Ingrid completed her PhD (psychology) at Manchester Metropolitan University, UK. Before entering academia, Ingrid worked at the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation as a senior researcher. Her research has been in the field of gender, violence and displacement. She has published in numerous international journals and is the co-editor of Gender and Migration: feminist interventions published by Zed Press; Handbook of International Feminisms: Perspectives on psychology, women, culture and rights published by Springer; Healing and Change in the City of Gold: Case studies of coping and support in Johannesburg published by Springer. She is the author of Gender, sexuality and migration in South Africa: Governing morality published by Palgrave.

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Dostin M. Lakika and Ingrid Palmary

The military is perhaps the epitome of a masculine work environment, both because of the male bodies that typically occupy it and the culture of hegemonic masculinity it (re)produces (Hinojosa, 2010). Despite this, Yuval-Davis (1987) gives examples as far back as Roman times of women's active involvement in battle. In the European context, women certainly became more active in the military, and had their roles more formally recognized, during World War II (Dandeker & Segal, 1996; Dandeker, 1994). Exemplified by the image of Rosie the Riveter (see Belou & Carida, 2016 for more analysis), women entering the military and military support structures created shifts and changes to its nature and form. Whilst this literature is useful for reminding us that women have always played a role in war, most armed forces are still overwhelmingly made up of men. Indeed, the rapid demobilization of women across Europe after World War II and reinforcement of gendered roles in post-war economies reproduces the apparent inappropriateness of women in the armed forces (Santana, 2016; Riley, 1993). And yet, there has been a sense within some armed forces that this needs to change.

Attempts to rectify the overwhelming dominance of men in the armed forces include the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, which notes the importance, as part of its attempt to integrate a gender perspective into peacekeeping operations, of having more female military personnel. Despite this, women were only actively recruited into U.N. peacekeeping forces from 1994. By 2013 only 4% of those forces were women (Dharmapuri, 2013). In 1996, Dandekar and Segal noted that NATO members varied a great deal in terms of whether women were allowed to participate in the armed forces, and if so, what role they were allowed to play. Thus, there is a need to consider not just whether women are involved in the armed forces but how they are involved and why their inclusion is deemed positive or negative.

The rationale for the inclusion of women and its underlying gendered assumptions has therefore varied a great deal. Some have argued that more women in the armed forces can be a practical advantage, for example by increasing the acceptance of international peacekeeping forces among communities or conducting female body searches (Dharmapuri, 2013). As just one example of this logic, Moore (2017), documents how the U.S. Female Engagement Team "[w]ere deployed to Afghanistan to 'meet with Pashtun women over tea in their homes,

assess their need for aid, gather intelligence, and help open schools and clinics'" (Eager, 2014, p. 58 cited in Moore, 2017, p. 2).

Thus, women have tended to be included in the military because of their presumed gendered attributes and the benefit these can bring to both war and peace. Indeed, as Erikson et al. (2011) note, Resolution 1325 implicitly assumes that women are an "ethically regulating presence" in the armed forces (p. 566). The assumption here is that women's presence in the army reduces (gendered) violence and abuse of power and their femininity is therefore a positive and at times, a professionalizing contribution.

Drawing from this presumably positive, feminizing impact, women have often participated in the military on the basis of gender stereotyped roles, where men engage in active combat and women are relegated to feminized support roles such as cooking or nursing. But this has extended into far more insidious forms of gendered inclusion. For example, Yuval Davis (2004) shows how in the 1970s there was an explicit sexualization of women in the armed forces to provide men with the perceived comforts of home. This included providing women with cosmetic application lessons and other activities designed to serve the needs of male soldiers. This kind of inclusion of women in the armed forces reproduces gendered violence, finding extreme expression in the abduction of women as wives in the Sierra Leone (Coulter, 2008) or the Japanese "comfort women" of the second world war (Soh, 2020). Similarly, even in contexts where women are part of the active armed forces they are usually released when they start to take on reproductive roles such as marrying or having children.

Even where women's inclusion into armed forces does not play an explicitly sexist function, many armed forces still retain the belief that women are ill suited to active fighting. Women are typically excluded from participating in certain roles such as fighter pilot and submarine positions (Dandekar & Segal, 1996). Documenting the changing nature of women's roles in the U.K. military, Dandekar and Segal, (1996) note that:

> Women are excluded from employment in commando helicopters (Sea Kings), submarines and minor war vessels such as mine hunting and fisheries protection. The exclusion from commando helicopters is because these deploy in and around the front line in close support of infantry. (p. 36)

These brief examples illustrate how the nature and logic of women's involvement in armed forces has varied considerably across contexts and time. However, some gender activists have argued that gender equality should mean all kinds of equality including participation in armed conflict (see Yuval-Davis, 1987 for early debates). Whilst some have claimed that increased

numbers of women in the armed forces represents equality in the army, others have suggested that the recent willingness to include women in the armed forces in the global north might be more a reflection of decreasing conscription and low numbers of voluntary male recruits than a commitment to equality. To overcome the low numbers of men joining the army, several countries have increased emphasis on eliminating all gender differentiation in the army (Brown, 2012). Still others have argued that the change in women's participation in what had been an almost all male field service is the result of INGOs and treaty ratification (Stiehm, 2001; Hughes, 2009) and has remained at the level of policy, seldom translating into practice. This discussion makes evident why some gender activists have been critical of a simplistic celebration of women's inclusion in the military.

Professionalization, Ethics, or Threat: What It Means When Women Join the Army

As women have entered the armed forces, researchers have increasingly sought to better understand the perceptions of both men and women in these forces. For example, Stiehm (2001) showed that male soldiers were more likely to feel that women were unsuited to combat roles more than men. Men were also more likely to think that men and women working together in the army would have a negative effect, in particular that the quality of the army would deteriorate if women were in command positions. Other research suggests that male combatants believed the presence of women in the armed forces would disintegrate "unit cohesion through fraternization and sexual distraction" (Baaz & Stern, 2012, p. 40). In addition, some research has shown that "military women are …seen as disrupting both traditional stereotypes of women's roles and the traditional ways in which men have demonstrated their masculinity" (Winslow & Dunn, 2002, p. 650).

As Alison (2004) concurs, women in the armed forces threaten "the psychological security of clear cut, gender differentiated roles" (p. 460). In Alison's research, male soldiers resisted working with women not because they did not believe women could or should be involved, but "because they believed they would feel too responsible for the well-being of a female comrade" (p. 456). As noted by Erikson et al. (2011) in research with soldiers in the DRC, four main discourses were drawn on to justify the exclusion of women from the armed forces. These included that the army was not ready for women; that women lack the physical strength for fighting; that women are untrustworthy and lack the psychological and ethical attributes needed for being in the army; and that women who did enter the army were in some ways not real women. In this paper we develop this latter discourse further by delving into the ways in which the masculine logic of the armed forces is applied to the presence of

women and how their femininity is questioned in ways that uphold its masculine logic and practices.

Women's Roles in Conflict in Postcolonial Contexts

Whilst this literature is a useful starting point, much of it implies an armed force recruited and controlled by the state with clear regulations for gender inclusion. In many parts of the world, armed forces take the form of rebel groups, mercenaries, or splinter forces with uneven control by the State. This can mean that the norms, practices, and regulation of armed forces take a different form with different implications for the role that women play and its gendered significance. This has led authors such as Coulter (2008) to argue that "our hackneyed 'Northern' views on women's innate non-participation in war prevent us from seeing the specific needs of young women during and in the aftermath of wars" (p. 5). Whilst we would critique the idea that these gender divisions represent a northern view, what is clear is that women have been part of the armed forces of anti-colonial liberation struggles and of rebel groups across the former colonies with little understanding of the implications thereof.

Geisler (2004) notes how many African women joined the 1950s nationalist movements and the armed struggles associated with them even though the ideologies and philosophies of the movements seldom made specific mention of women. As has been documented globally, sometimes women joined as active combatants and sometimes they took on gendered and often sexist roles such as posing as prostitutes in bars to gather information or stealing arms from British soldiers (Otieno & Presley, 1998). Thus, we see familiar gendered inclusion that does not necessarily challenge inequality. For example, at an official level, Mau Mau legislation dictated that women "should be fetching firewood, cooking and serving the whole camp, cleaning utensils, mending warriors' clothes and washing clothes" (Barnett & Njama 1986, p. 222 cited in Giesler, 2004). Giesler (2004) goes on to note that women who joined nationalist forces in Tanzania and Zambia were few and they too were often subjected to discrimination both within the armed forces and within their families for having transgressed gender norms. Mkonto WeSizwe, in South Africa, was exceptional for its gender inclusion and yet still only 20% of the armed force was female (Cock, 1992, p.3). Thus, research exploring women's roles in independence struggles tends to focus on their exceptionalism. As has been the case in many parts of the world, women have often been relegated to women's branches of the armed forces focusing on seemingly more gender appropriate tasks. As has been argued by feminists from other parts of the world, the inclusion of women in armed forces was often driven more by a need for human resources rather than a desire for gender equality. Despite this reluctance to include women in the

armed forces, Geisler (2004) notes that "their leaders have all tended to advocate the image of heroic women fighters and have proudly advanced the myth that women's participation and role in the struggle equaled that of men" (p. 51).

Evident throughout writing on the independence struggles is the assumption that war represents a temporary situation and that when it ends, women should return to their pre-war feminized roles (Horn et al., 2014; Goldstein, 2003). The following section focuses on the female presence in the armed forces of the DRC. It presents the various events that have marked the integration of women into the country's military personnel in a male-dominated society and the implications for women in the armed forces.

Military and Gender Equality in the DRC

At the dawn of the Congo's independence, the Belgian administration reinforced many structures of male domination common across the colonies (see Freedman, 2016). Despite the post-independence adoption of various constitutions, and the country's accession to numerous international conventions and treaties in favor of gender equality, women's rights in the DRC remain an area of grave concern (Freedman, 2011). The Constitution of the first Republic adopted in 1964, in its articles 13 and 14, emphasized gender equality, the right to education, and access to public functions without discrimination. This same provision was repeated in article 5 of the Constitution of the Second Republic adopted in 1967. Resolution 3520 of the United Nations General Assembly in 1975, which established the International Decade for Women, was an open avenue for Congolese women to be admitted in several institutions. However, this was undermined by some discriminatory provisions of the Congolese family code which required women to have marital authorization to work, travel, or open a bank account. It also established unequal punishment for cases of adultery (Hallward-Driemeier & Hasan, 2012). The Constitution of the Third Republic, adopted in 2006, instituted the notion of gender mainstreaming in different domains of national life.
In reality, the implementation of all these provisions remains problematic and the Congolese political landscape is still strongly male dominated. For example, under Mobutu's regime, female participation in government varied between 2 to 7% in different sectors operating from 1966 to 1990. But in 1976, due to the Women's Decade, female participation rose to 9%. When the National Assembly was merged after the 1987 elections, the Transitional Parliament included 5% women. Less than 2% of women were appointed as ambassadors between 1960 and 1999. However, some improvement could be noticed in the judiciary, where average female representation nationwide was 8.4%. Although the current government has made considerable progress by increasing the female presence to 27% gender equality is

still a goal that has not yet been achieved in Congo (Touché, 2014, p. 18; see also Vyas-Doorgapersad & Lukamba, 2011).

When it comes to the army, the integration of women in the paratrooper unit was remarkable in the late 1960s even though their number remains unknown (Kayumba, 2013). Most women who joined the army were single simply because the Congolese Family Code (which remained in force until 2016) banned women from taking legal contracts without their husbands' written permission. Furthermore, singlehood particularly for women was often linked to prostitution, which was not only stigmatized but also regarded as a hindrance to the country's prosperity (Nzoma, 1988). Therefore, the army became a haven for unmarried women who risked abduction as sex slaves if they chose to remain civilians. These women, alongside men, were sent to foreign countries for training and were among soldiers trained as parachutists (Baaz & Stern, 2013). With the fall of Mobutu, the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire (AFDL) army which became the current Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo [Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC)] has been "fractured, with parallel chains of command and internal conflicts" (Baaz & Stern, 2013, p. 6). As a result, many soldiers, particularly those from Forces Armées Zaïroises [Zaïrian Armed forces (FAZ)] who were demotivated, decided to leave the army to seek haven elsewhere.

In the early 1990s the DRC was struck by protracted conflicts. This was the point of departure for a strong female presence in the army. However, these women "received neither the same training nor enjoyed the same status as the first generation of women military staff" (Baaz & Stern, 2013, p. 7). Despite their remarkable presence, women hardly occupy the top ranks of the police or army hierarchy. A few of them have reached ranks of colonels in the military administration. Baaz and Stern (2013) report that in most cases, women held administrative, medical care, intelligence, and logistics functions, mostly in urban areas. The rank title of general in the DRC army had mainly been granted to male soldiers until 2013 when three women were admitted to this rank, following the Southern African Development Community (SADC) protocol on gender and development aimed to increase female presence in public institutions, adopted by all its members (Kayumba, 2013).

Methodology

This paper is based on interviews conducted by the first author with former Congolese soldiers living as refugees in the city of Johannesburg, South Africa. The study was qualitative and made use of narrative interviews and participant observation. The research investigated the social and political factors that affected former Congolese soldiers' lives in

South Africa. Twenty-one former Congolese soldiers who were all men were interviewed. These former soldiers were recruited from the first author's own social networks using snowball sampling. As a teacher of basic English to refugees at an adult learning center in Yeoville, the first author met a senior officer (a colonel) as a student. He was particularly struck to learn from him how he used his past military experiences as a coping strategy in South Africa where he had lived as a refugee for many years. The colonel initially introduced the first author to some respondents and others were found using snowballing. In addition, the first author worked for as a security guard where he met some fellow Congolese who served in the Congolese armed forces before coming to South Africa. He was particularly interested to note how their military background helped them to secure employment in the South African security industry. These former soldiers used to share some of their military experiences with the first author and taught him basic techniques of army drills and weapons. These interactions solidified the first author's desire to understand how militarization, war, and violence were conceived in the Congolese context and remembered in the migration context by former Congolese soldiers.

In addition to snowballing techniques, former Congolese soldiers were recruited through community and church leaders. Criteria for inclusion in the study were having served in the Congolese army and living in Johannesburg. These criteria tended to exclude those who might have been part of rebel groupings in the DRC and so the findings relate more to official armed forces although there are many complex armed groupings in the DRC conflict as mentioned above. The first author had some difficulty identifying whether former soldiers were part of rebel groups or official armed forces. This can be explained by the fact that rebel identity is negatively perceived by the Johannesburg-based Congolese community as it is associated not only with widespread rapes but also with the looting of the Congo's mineral resources in collusion with neighboring countries like Rwanda and Uganda. There is therefore a stigma associated with the rebel identity.

Whilst the study had not intended to include only men, no former women soldiers were identified. However, the women about whom these men spoke are mainly those who were recruited in the Congolese armed forces (FAZ) during Mobutu's rule as the majority of study participants joined the army in the second republic. As the initial research question was one of their integrations in Johannesburg, the commentary that emerged on gender was surprising. However, the depth and meaning that men attributed to their views on women in the army encouraged the researchers to follow up on this topic during interviews. By focusing

on men, we were able to gain greater insight into gender in a context in which men felt able to freely express their views on women soldiers.

Most of the participants were interviewed either in their homes, their workplaces, or in quiet corners of public spaces. Interviews were mainly conducted in Lingala (the official language of the Congolese army) and sometimes in French or a mix of Lingala and French depending on participants' preference. In addition, the first author used participant observation during some social gatherings where these former soldiers took part. These, for example, included church services and community meetings. Through observation the first author was able to see their reworking of military identity in the everyday social situations in which they now found themselves.

Data were analyzed and interpreted using thematic analysis, a method aimed at "identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79; see also Clark & Brown, 2015). Thematic analysis offers a theoretical freedom, allowing "a flexible and useful research tool, which can potentially provide a rich and detailed, yet complex, account of data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 78). Beyond this, the study drew broadly on discourse analysis techniques as outlined by Parker (2014); in particular, Parker's attention to the power relations in discourse helped map out the gendered meanings that soldiers made of their military past. Pseudonyms were used throughout and, at the request of participants we used the NATO phonetic alphabet to identify them.

This study was approved by the University of the Witwatersrand's Ethics Committee and Social Research Association. Verbal consent for the interview and for voice recording was sought prior to interviews. Verbal consent was used because of a deep fear respondents had about their safety and possible identification. As a result, particular care was taken to use pseudonyms and remove identifying information from the interview transcripts. The major ethical challenges concerned the guarantee of security to participants and researchers. In some instances, the interviewer worried about the interviewees disclosing details regarding the violence they had committed in case this was overheard. In other cases, the first author in particular was afraid for his own safety as it seemed that participants might be trying to lure him into unsafe places, and he lived in the same community as many of the respondents. In addition, violent stories told by former soldiers were deeply disturbing as the men disclosed extensive and brutal violence in which they had participated, often in great detail. This had a significant personal effect on the first author (for more reflections see Lakika, 2019).

Results

Becoming a Man: The Perpetuation of Militarized Masculinity

The analysis that follows focuses on how men understood the presence of women in the army and how this shifted or challenged their notions of the army as a masculine place. A key finding of this research was that men in the army constantly negotiated the fluid nature of military masculinity. As Gero, one former soldier noted:

> How will you call her woman because she has already worn male body; it is a matter of fighting; you must be clever. We are one; we are doing the same job without any distinction of sex; we are doing the same job; we have one aim how can you call her woman? We are playing the same role to reach the same goal. She is no longer a woman of *makusa* [kitchen], no! Will you take her as a woman of *loyi-loyi* [laziness], no! You are running away, she is also running away; you are carrying weapons, she is also carrying weapons. Why will you call her woman?

In this extract, Gero maps out what a man is and what a woman is. In his narrative, a man has a "worn body." Translated from Lingala into English it means that she has put on a military spirit or identity. She has become a man in a woman's skin. In addition, a man is clever, well-suited to the need for strategic thinking in war and able to run away from the fighting when necessary; in contrast, a woman is at home in the kitchen. In his understanding, this is a lazy and soft life resulting in a body that is not worn. By referring to women as people who are typically lazy, pampered, and staying in the kitchen, he draws on stylized femininity in order to argue for why women in the army really cannot be considered women any longer. As he asks, "We are one; we are doing the same job…how can you call her a woman?" What is significant in this extract is that what appears to be a statement of equality— "we are one"— is in fact a claim that women who excel in the army lose their status as women altogether. In this way, the place of the army as a masculine preserve is retained and women who take on male roles, in effect, become men.

By framing women performing well in the army as non-women, the presence of women in the army does not contradict its inherently masculine logic. Rather than the army becoming non-masculine, the women—as an out of place body—becomes non-woman. This argument is reiterated by Tango who says:

> No, I'll tell you this. A woman is a woman, but there are women like those we worked in the army. They received the same training as us. We did not consider them as women anymore; they were like men, they received training as men. There are women we parachuted with in CETA barracks. After training they appoint you

> [somewhere] based on your performance, but not because you are male or female, never. We saw women who were stronger than men ..... another example, when we were in CETA barracks there were men who fled when they saw that training became hard, but there are women who endured until the end. Now what do we say? Those who fled are not men; they are women because a man endures. At that moment, as I said, the woman becomes a man because she has endured. She is stronger, tougher than the man who escaped and she will not even accept to be called *mwasi* [woman]. Another example, there are soldiers like we saw at the training centre, when the whistle blows for morning drill, you will always see them in bed, *abeleke* [malingerer]; they pretend to be sick to avoid racing; but there are women who get up at 4 o'clock, 3 o'clock to run. Women did this, but the men *abeleke*.

As in the previous extract, Tango reiterates that women and men are indeed different in their essential attributes and abilities as indicated in his starting claim that "a woman is a woman." It suggests that despite the information he is going to share, a woman can never fully be the man required of the military. However, the speaker continues with a statement of equality. Men and women in the army are the same in that they receive the same training and they receive equal treatment. Unlike the literature reviewed above, he is adamant that there is no discrimination in activities or training. However, his logic is that when women show that they are as good as men, they cease to become women. In the same way, the men who fail to endure, who flee, who stay in bed or who pretend to be sick, become women. In this way, the sexist logic of women as inferior to men remains and the women who succeed in the army become men through their exceptionalism. To excel a woman must become a man since women cannot excel in the army.

Women Becoming Men: Consequences for Practices of Violence

The section above hints at another key theme in the research, which is that when women become men in the army it is because they are even tougher than men are by embodying an even more prototypical version of militarized masculinity than biological men do. The extra effort that women make to embody militarized masculinity functions to ward off accusations of femininity, viewed as a threat to the masculine space of the army. Thus, women must show themselves to be extreme in their masculinity precisely because it cannot be assumed.

Although this study focused on men, other research has noted that women constantly have their commitment to performance of militarized masculinity tested (Duncanson, 2009). In this study, respondents spoke about how when extreme violence was needed or when

choosing a leader for a difficult mission, command would often select a woman. Gero spoke about how women leaders were more ruthless and aggressive than their male counterparts. He stated that, “Women soldiers are tougher and hardly understand people. If you fall in their hands, you are in trouble. Look at what policewomen do even here [in South Africa]. If they want money from you, they will get it.” Another respondent, Olenga, said, “You know, when we saw that some civilians were so stubborn, we sent women soldiers to give them good lesson.”

It could be argued that in order to earn the status of man in the army women were required to act in more brutal and violent ways than their male counterparts. Once a woman became a man, she lost the compassion associated with femininity, becoming even more brutal than the men. When civilians failed to accede to the demands of soldiers in the expected manner, women would discipline them more violently than men.

Calling a soldier, a woman, perhaps because of the way that women in the army do not change its masculine character but rather reinforce it, was described as a disciplinary technique aimed at insulting the recipient. Amani, another respondent, said, “…When you make a mistake or fail to perform duties, they treat you as a woman, because a woman is physically viewed as weaker than a man.” However, this sexist disciplining was not only reserved for men who failed to perform in the army. For the women one of the greatest insults was reminding her that she was a woman. One respondent, John, told us that:

> Oh, the women we parachuted with, if you call her *mwasi* [woman], she will say, “No, I'm not a woman. I am a man.” She will ask you the question, “You see me wearing a loincloth here; we are all wearing military uniforms; we are parachuting together, we all make the free, high altitude and opening jumps with or without equipment, day or night.”

Another respondent, Yenga, noted:

> You know, sometimes the chief of the troop selected a brave woman to lead us. We had to obey her. She was very strong to [the] extent that she could punish [those] who failed to perform well. She would shout at those men who were lazy calling them women which was viewed as an insult in the army.

In this way women performed excessive masculinity, which included the use of gendered insults to discipline men. Arguably, the insult of being called a woman by a woman had an even greater disciplinary effect on the male soldiers than being called a woman by a man. This strategy mobilized militarized masculinity to increase the work rates and violence of

soldiers. Femininity became something that both male and female soldiers constantly needed to avoid.

Where Women Remain Women

This is not to suggest that femininity had no place in the army. Rather in a context of idealized masculinity and femininity as described in the literature review, women were seen to play manipulative roles in intelligence gathering relying on an essentialized notion of female sexuality, as Taty outlines:

> The body of a woman is a valuable asset. Are you able to steal the enemy's information? Do you know how to flatter men as women do? We were successful in many of our tasks especially during war thanks to women. But you must know that this is a specialization. They did not do it anyhow; they were prepared for that. The spying area was their most valuable domain, and it was riskier because they could or could not come back alive.

In keeping with established literature, women were therefore thought to be particularly skilled at using their sexuality to manipulate enemy men for information. This idea is rooted in the belief that men lack control over their sexual drives and so are open to manipulation and that women are naturally skilled at sexual manipulation. Thus, male soldiers developed a notion of military women and their roles as ones of espionage and trickery.

In the extract above, what is fascinating is that although women could become men by emulating excessive violence and by excelling in their duties, men could never become these military women. Whilst the civilian woman occupied the status of belonging in the kitchen, a status so denigrated it was used to insult and discipline those in the army who had failed somehow, a military woman was somewhat admired for her ability to exploit men's sexual desires and use otherwise denigrated femininity to further the aims of the army. This is achieved because the skills needed to become the military woman were seen as essential to woman's sexuality. Even though this role was seen as something not necessarily natural to women but rather something they learned, a man could never learn it. The role of spy was one category for women that earned them some respect among men without abandoning the category of women. However, this respect was precisely because the role was a supportive one – in keeping with ideas of women assisting men in their primary roles. Furthermore, it is a role that is in keeping with the male soldiers' constructions of masculinity and femininity and thus does not unsettle the gender norms that they hold.

Conclusion

In this article, we have researched the DRC male soldiers' views on the presence of females in the army. Unlike many war contexts, there was less of a gender difference in the work that men and women do in the DRC than in many contexts, with men referring often to women actively involved in fighting. This in itself challenges the often-cited binary of female victim and male barbaric warlord that has been so evident in the rhetoric and news reporting on the DRC (see Erikson-Baaz, 2013 for a more detailed analysis). We have argued that when women were involved in active fighting they needed to excel in the work and become even more ruthless in their violence than men. Where they did this, rather than shifting the logic of masculine militarization that underpins the armed forces, women were instead given the privileged status of men. The women who did not lose their status as women were those who played sexualized and gender normative roles in spying and intelligence gathering. In this way, rigid gender norms are upheld, and femininity continues to be viewed as an affront to the logic that prevails in the military. Whilst overtly using a language of equality – claiming that men and women did the same activities and women could perform them as well as men – men rationalized this by exceptionalizing women.

Thus, the attributes of femininity that men valued were ones that reinforced the danger women posed to men through manipulation of their sexual drives. This is a well-documented role for women in war. However, whilst in some historical accounts of women playing this role, they are lauded for creating modern intelligence systems in war, the men in this army saw a form of sheer manipulation rooted in a quality that was essential to women. Although women could become men if they performed adequately, men could never take on this component of women's war work. Men could only become women in contexts where they were deemed to have failed as men. This essentialism further defends the army from femininity, retaining it as a place of masculine embodiment.

These findings begin to explain some of the reasons why women in the armed forces in the DRC have faced ostracization by civilians after conflict. As Baaz and Stern (2013) note their reintegration has been particularly difficult. This is likely because of the extremes of violence demanded of women within the army, but also likely because they have transgressed gender norms that mean the perceived essential attributes of a woman can no longer be assumed. Whilst losing the status of women in the army may have been a sign of success, in post conflict settings women may struggle to rejoin socially valued models of femininity. Thus, beyond the impact of women in the army that we have documented here, there is value in future research exploring their impact on broader civilian communities because of the gender

transgressions they have committed. This goes beyond the existing research into, for example, rape and how women who are tainted by rape are assumed to be unchaste or not worthy of marriage. Rather it is essential that we understand how women from the armed forces challenge the very notion of gender that is one of the underlying logics of society.

Post conflict societies often remain highly militarized after war has officially ended. Societies and the gender norms inherent in them continue to be structured by the logics of war long after peace has been officially declared. Understanding the relationship between the armed forces and gender goes beyond the inclusion of women in the armed forces and toward understanding how gender relations are shaped by men's and women's experiences of participation in war and the implications for shifting gender norms and practices. This paper supports and extends existing feminist work that questions whether women's presences in the armed forces is indeed a positive indicator of changing gender norms, particularly given the forms of hegemonic masculinity that are celebrated in times of war. Instead, we argue that women's involvement in armed conflict does not necessarily change gender norms and may well solidify ever more rigid notions of gender difference in the ways that femininity is denigrated. In developing post-conflict peacebuilding initiatives that are gender inclusive it is essential to understand the way that women are incorporated into and represented within the armed forces. This allows for interventions that address the needs of both male and female former combatants and civilians given their gendered roles in conflict.

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