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HANNO BRANKAMP, *HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY, VICTIMHOOD AND MALE BODIES AS ‘BATTLEFIELDS’ IN EASTERN DR CONGO, “IREFLECT – STUDENT JOURNAL OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS” 2015, VOL. 2 (1), PP. 5-28.*

This particular paper is not exactly new. Still sheds light on a very little discussed topic: gender violence against men. Although sexual violence against men is not particularly new, either. Perhaps it is still under explored.

This article in question brings up, precisely, the issue of violence against boys and men in times of armed conflicts. Not only does the author conduct an empirical analysis of this point in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in its two wars. As well as the author performs a vast literary review about violence against girls and women. However, its nodal point is mostly a theoretical discussion about gender roles, as an omen for the concept of hegemonic masculinity.

In order to deal with gender identities and hierarchies, it is necessary to bring gender violence against girls and women into the debate. According to the author, who raises this debate, despite not being its focal point, sexual violence against girls and women is quite well covered especially by the media. In this way, female victims manage, in a way, to get the attention they deserve. But the author points out that the same attention is not given to male victims. The author even states that international standards as well as international laws fail to deal with this issue.

This particular academic work highlights several aspects in a range of vectors. It is not believed here that debating the empirical issues related to the two wars in Congo and the involvement of other African states is the most interesting, but no less important.

However, the focus of this review will be to raise questions about the central theme of the author's research: hegemonic masculinity and its connection with militarization. As well as bringing up some questions about the construction of gender identities, how these constructions are used as weapons of war. Likewise, it is believed that sexual violence against male victims is not something intrinsic to conflict/militarized situations, which would be a first criticism of the article. Recalling that sometimes it seems the author neglects

that sexual violence is not restricted to theatres of war, but it also does not bring anything about other social situations in which this type of violence occurs. Gender violence is happening even outside conflict zones, but also little is explored in this area.

Gender violence isn't just about sexual violence against men or women. Although since the construction of roles in a variety of societies the author is also shedding light on the deconstruction of these roles. Since women is "naturally" perceived as mother, non-violent and has a nurturing nature, he puts that women can also be perpetrator of violence even against men and play a very active role in war scenarios.

On the other hand the hegemonic masculinity is also a social construction, again, not only in war times. The social construct of masculinity is based on a militarized identity, men are supposed to be the protectors, the family providers, the fighters, they are raised (in a generic way) to take care of women. In this sense hegemonic masculinity is not just about being a man, this social identity carries a heavy burden, it's additionally about superiority in relation to other men. In determined scenarios, for example in war, local militias, proxy forces and guerrillas members have to establish a new social order: which man is at the top of the food chain.

In this sense terrorize, torture and practice sexual violence against other men diminish them in society, they're bodies become less than others, their bodies no longer belongs to them. They are humiliated, and because of men's social identity it seems they are even more ashamed than a woman who is a victim of sexual violence.

This is a very sensitive topic, a very difficult one to be treated. The author asserts that male victims are not treated equally as women/girls victims. He focuses that the media coverage is different and that can be one of the reasons for the disparity in taking sexual violence against men more seriously. But there's also another problem, men are coming up to denounce they were victims of sexual violence?

If it's already complicated to deal with violence against women because of shame, and many other reasons. Probably most men don't ever reveal they suffered sexual violence. That's still a taboo for women, researches show that almost never men look for help or denounce their aggressors. It's an even greater taboo for men to deal with this kind of situation, in Congo and elsewhere. Masculinity has to be maintained, their social identities have to remain stainless.