

LITERATURE REVIEW



Militarised Masculinities in the DRC: A Literature Review and Case Study

BY SARAH LABLACHE COMBIER, DAPHNE GENATIO AND DEAN PEACOCK¹

Authors

Sarah Lablache Combier

Sarah Lablache Combier interned for the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom in 2021 and participated in the research for the initiative to confront militarized masculinities while pursuing a Master of Arts in Peace and Justice at the University of San Diego, USA. She has a Master's degree in Criminal Law from the University Panthéon-Sorbonne, Paris, France, and a certificate in Criminological Sciences from the University Panthéon-Assas, Paris, France.

Daphne Genatio

Daphne Genatio is a consultant for WILPF's initiative aimed at countering militarised masculinities and mobilising men for feminist peace. Genatio previously worked as an intern with WILPF's Human Rights Programme, and was a legal intern in the Victim Participation and Reparation Section of the International Criminal Court. She has an LLB in French and English law from Bangor University, a Master's degree in International and European Criminal Law from Limoges University, and a degree in Criminology and Criminal Psychology from Toulouse Capitole 1 University.

Dean Peacock

Dean Peacock directs WILPF's multi-country initiative to counter militarised masculinities and mobilise men for feminist peace. He has been involved in social justice activism ever since joining the End Conscription Campaign as a high school student in the mid-1980s in South Africa. Since then, his work has focused on issues related to men and masculinities, health and human rights, gender equality and peacebuilding. Peacock has published widely in major news outlets, books and academic journals. He is an honorary senior lecturer at the University of Cape Town's School of Public Health, a visiting fellow at the Joan B Kroc Center for Peace Studies at the University of San Diego, an Ashoka fellow, and a senior fellow at Promundo.

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01

INTRODUCTION

These norms are enabled by institutions that heroise violence and fund the war system.

This paper explores the causes and consequences of militarised masculinities in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and provides recommendations for how to address them. Here militarised masculinities are defined as socially constructed gender norms that associate masculinity with power, violence and control. These norms are enabled by institutions that heroise violence and fund the war system. Militarised masculinities shape, and are shaped by, institutions, communities, and intimate lives.

To frame the concept of militarised masculinities as precisely and holistically as possible, this paper firstly situates itself by providing background on the conflict in the DRC, and men's use of violence within in this context (I). Secondly, it reviews the academic literature on men and masculinities in the specific context of the DRC in order to examine the key concepts that have been looked at by other researchers (II). Thirdly, to effectively reflect on how to confront militarised masculinities, it explores the main debates related to men, masculinities and violence as they are understood by WILPF

and MenEngage partners in the DRC, interviewed for the paper (III). Finally, the paper shares the perspectives of several individuals involved with work on masculinities in the DRC, through interviews with Annie Mbambi, Patrick Siwala, Ilot Muthaka and Henny Slegh (IV). These interviews also explore these practitioners' perspectives on the academic and policy debates discussed throughout the paper.



02

HISTORY AND CURRENT CONTEXT IN THE DRC

History and current context in the DRC

The DRC is the second largest country in Africa, with more than 250 ethnic groups and over 240 different languages (Minority Rights Group International, 2018). It is one of the poorest countries in the world, with some of the worst social indicators in terms of education and health. According to the World Bank, the DRC ranks 175 out of 189 countries on the 2020 Human Development Index, and has the third largest population of poor globally. **Despite the fact that the DRC** is endowed with exceptional natural resources, including minerals such as cobalt and copper, hydropower potential, significant arable land, immense biodiversity, and the world's second-largest rainforest, the World Bank states "poverty in DRC is high, remains widespread and pervasive, and is increasing due to impacts from COVID-19. In 2018, it was estimated that 73% of the Congolese population, equalling 60 million people, lived on less than \$1.90 a day (the international poverty rate)" (The World Bank 2021)

The eastern part of the DRC includes the provinces of North Kivu, South Kivu and Maniema. Over the last two decades, labour migration and internal migration caused by conflicts in the region have led to the geographical spread of ethnic groups throughout North and South Kivu.

In 2015, the population of North Kivu was roughly 6 million, with about 800,000 people living in the city of Goma. According to La Commission de Mouvement de Populations, as of January 2020, over 1.6 million internally displaced people (IDPs) are in North Kivu. Over the last two decades, labour migration and internal migration caused by conflicts in the region have led to the geographical spread of ethnic groups throughout North and South Kivu.

The broader region in which the DRC is situated in West-Central Africa, was severely affected by hundreds of years of violence of the transatlantic slave trade and Portuguese colonialism, starting at the end of the 15th century.

West-Central Africa – including the contemporary DRC, Gabon, Republic of Congo, and Angola – was the area of origin and departure for approximately 40% of the Africans who were kidnapped, forcibly brought to the Americas, and enslaved – a total of 4 million people. In 1885, following the “Scramble for Africa” when European powers divided up the African continent under their imperial control, the DRC became a personal colony of Belgian King Leopold II. King Leopold extracted immense personal wealth from the Congo with the forced labour of the Congolese people. His brutality, described in 1890 as “crimes against humanity”, led to the deaths of millions of Congolese people, with estimates ranging from 1 to 15 million deaths. In 1908, because of his horrific abuses, the king was obliged to give up his private state to the Belgium government, which transformed the country in Belgium Congo. Resistance and opposition to colonial rule went on for decades until 1960, when the country became independent (Turner, 2013). However, international interference during the Cold War contributed to an ongoing state of instability in the DRC.

The Eastern DRC has been the site of a series of wars, following the genocide of Tutsis in Rwanda in 1994, which caused a massive exodus of Rwandans to the Eastern DRC. In the Rwandan refugee settlements in the DRC, atrocities, rapes and killings continued long after the end of the genocide in 1994.

The entrance of Rwandan armed forces into the DRC started a multi-year conflict known as the Great African War, in which Angola, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Chad, Rwanda, Burundi and Uganda participated. This series of conflicts, along with historical poverty and regional inequalities in the DRC, contributed to the development of more than 70 armed groups that are active in the Eastern provinces (Stearns and Vogel 2015, p5).

Such armed groups have become embedded in the social structures, and strive for access to power over land and mineral resources in the region (Stearns and Vogel 2015; Verweijen 2016, p11). Internal and regional displacements have fuelled conflicts about identity and land, contributing to xenophobia and rejection of perceived ‘foreigners’ (Kayser, 2017).

This complex history, and contemporary environment of conflict and violence, have weakened the Congolese society, economy, and governmental institutions, resulting in limited state capacity for providing basic services and security to the population. The humanitarian needs in Eastern DRC remain enormous. In this region, a large portion of the population has been affected by conflict, sexual violence, and human rights violations.

Congolese security institutions are characterised by a marked lack of control and transparency over weapons

An additional and often under-reported dimension of conflict in the DRC, is the relationship between conflict and corruption. Transparency International ranks the DRC as one of the most corrupt countries in the world. Using its Corruptions Perceptions Index, which ranks countries according to perceived levels of public sector corruption, it ranks the DRC as 169 out of 180 countries. Public sector corruption generates grievances against the government, including inter-group grievances which research shows are associated with armed conflict. Consistent with the context of widespread and pervasive public sector corruption, corruption

manifests in the military just as it does in other public sector entities. However, as Amnesty International reports, the form it takes there is especially pernicious: “Congolese security institutions are characterised by a marked lack of control and transparency over weapons, munitions and related equipment. This, in a climate of widespread corruption and impunity, makes theft and diversion of weapons and ammunition easier. Such a situation results in the persistent misuse of such arms by soldiers, police and armed groups to commit and facilitate serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law...” (Amnesty International 2012, p13).

In December 2011, the UN Group of Experts concluded that “[a]rmed groups continue to obtain most of their arms, ammunition and uniforms from FARDC. Leakage from FARDC stocks, whether through small-scale barter, larger transactions, abandonment or seizure on the battlefield, is widespread and largely uncontrolled”. (Amnesty International 2012, p16).

More recent research indicates that rebels are using ammunition from the military and police stockpiles (Misser 2020).



03

MEN'S USE OF VIOLENCE IN THE CONTEXT OF THE CONFLICT IN THE DRC

I.

Men's use of violence in the context of the conflict in the DRC

Like many countries around the world, the DRC is a country deeply affected by patriarchal systems and norms. Gender-based violence directed towards women, and discriminatory practices, are largely normalised by the gender roles that are embedded in historical, cultural, and religious practices. However, it is important to situate contemporary forms of men's violence against women in historical and political context, particularly within a wider context where racist tropes about the DRC and about Congolese men as violent, influence prevailing narratives.

It is critical to look at structural violence and inequalities of power in order to more deeply understand men's engagement in violence, both in the DRC and beyond. Here, by structural violence we draw on MacNair, who explains "structural violence" as chronic forms of harm such as poverty, racism, food insecurity, land dispossession, environmental damage, misallocated resources, gender inequality, and discriminatory government policies and practices (MacNair 2015, in Maternowska et al 2020, p143).

Taking a feminist perspective on looking at men's engagement in violence, we emphasise the impact of global structural violence and power inequality on constructions of masculinities and gender relations in Congo (and beyond).

In his piece, *An invitation to decoloniality in work on (African) men and masculinities*, Kopano Ratele criticises the body of work on men and masculinities for its lack of focus on colonialism. He writes: “Whereas colonialism reconfigured men’s lives and masculinities, it has tended to be peripheral in the global work on men and masculinity” (Ratele 2021, p1). In a similar vein, Sakhumzi Mfecane writes, “contemporary masculinity theories are characterized by [the] “erasure” of the experience of the majority of men from their foundation” (Mfecane, 2016, p3). Colonial violence in the DRC is certainly part of the foundation of contemporary forms of men’s violence. Adam Hochschild has documented extensively the particularly violent form of colonial occupation carried out by Belgium in the DRC. Writing about violence against women in the contemporary period, Hochschild reminds us of the historical continuity this has with the period of colonial rule:

“Rape was then also considered the right of armies, and then, as now, was how brutalized and exploited soldiers took out their fury on people of even lower status: women.”

From 1885 to 1908, this territory was the personally owned colony of King Leopold II of Belgium, who pioneered a forced-labor system that was quickly copied in French, German, and Portuguese colonies nearby. His private army of black conscript soldiers under white officers would march into a village and hold the women hostage, to force the men to go into the rain forest for weeks at a time to harvest lucrative wild rubber. “The women taken during the last raid...are causing me no end of trouble,” a Belgian officer named Georges Bricusse wrote in his diary on November 22, 1895. “All the soldiers want one. The sentries who are supposed to watch them unchain the prettiest ones and rape them.” (Hochschild, 2009)

Nevertheless, colonial violence did not end with Congolese independence. Belgium, the UK and the US were all involved

in the assassination of Patrice Lumumba, the DRC’s first post-liberation prime minister, orchestrated to ensure continued control over Congolese resources (Weissman, 2001; De Witte 2002). Lumumba’s successor, Joseph-Désiré Mobutu, later changed to Mobutu Sese Seko, was then financially and militarily supported for over three decades by the US and Europe despite his despotic, kleptocratic rule characterised by torture and public executions of his political opponents. During his “Authenticity” campaign, Joseph Desire Mobutu renamed himself Mobutu Sese Seko Kuku Ngbendu Wa Za Banga, which translates as “The all-powerful warrior who, because of his endurance and inflexible will to win, goes from conquest to conquest, leaving fire in his wake” (Wrong 2009, pp70-72). Any discussion about men and the legitimacy of forms of contemporary masculinity in the DRC must be situated within the context of the model of hegemonic masculinity that was popularized by Mobutu and by the Western powers that backed him.



04

THE LITERATURE ON MEN AND MASCULINITIES IN THE DRC

II.

The literature on men and masculinities in the DRC

In the DRC, contemporary forms of hegemonic masculinity, which refers to “gender practices aiming to perpetuate the patriarchal system and to ensure men’s domination over women” (Ayimpam et al, 2015, p.9), impact society at all levels. As Ayimpam et al. has emphasised, this hegemonic masculinity represents a burden for both men and women (Ayimpam et al, 2015). Men face pressure to fulfil their role as head of the house, and affirmation of their manhood is contingent on expectations for them to be providers and protectors. These duties also come with decision-making power and control over women. Women, in contrast, are expected to be housekeepers, to take care of children, and to be submissive to their husbands. Gender roles are often accepted by both men and women, but the resulting marginalisation of women contributes to gender inequality and tolerance of violations of women’s rights and autonomy (Slegh, Barker and Levtoy 2014, Lwambo 2011).

External factors interact with these social norms in ways that increase the risk of men to using violence as a way of performing their identities. The first is that the current economic and political situation affects the possibility of fulfilling these ideas about gender roles (Ayimpam et al., 2015). Economic crisis makes it difficult for men to meet the social and personal expectations of being a provider. The political situation, including protracted conflict, also inhibits men from fulfilling their expected roles as protectors. As Lwambo points out, “economic poverty and political instability thus polarize gender roles at the same time that they limit opportunities to perform them” (Lwambo 2011, p14). The frustration related to the difficulty of endorsing these roles often affects the household. As Ayimpam et al. explains, because the dominance can no longer be justified by the accomplishment of these tasks, another justification must be found for men to deserve the title of head of the household (Ayimpam et al, 2015). Violence serves then, not only as the instrument of domination, but also as the justification of this domination.

However, explanations of men’s violence solely as an instrument to perform masculinity neglects deeply rooted drivers of violence that can be found in in the psychodynamics of men’s responses to loss, trauma, grief and frustration. Violence is produced and reproduced in interactions between

people and their context, and research has found that men and boys are more likely than women and girls to respond to disempowering and traumatic experiences with violence.

Men’s exposure to violence both at home and outside the home, is the main driver of men’s perpetration of intimate partner (Slegh, Barker and Levtov 2014) and men’s violence in public places (Mariano et al., 2018). Men and boys who are exposed to state violence and social injustice as well as men who are directly or indirectly affected by armed conflict are more likely to engage in criminality and join armed groups (Slegh, Barker and Levtov 2014) or engage in violent extremism. (de Bruijn, 2018).

Trauma, grief, and marginalisation are drivers for men and boys to respond with violence to avenge their group, their families their male identities. IMAGES studies in Rwanda and the DRC have indicated that men and boys exposed to traumatic experiences and high stress frequently use cope with their trauma by using violence or engaging in behaviour that puts them at increased risk of engaging in violence, such as substance abuse (Male trauma and masculinities/Making the connection, Slegh, Spielberg 2021, IMAGES Rwanda 2012 (Slegh, Barker and Levtov 2014)).

Over the past 30 years, the DRC has experienced sustained instability in several distinct armed conflicts, including between 1996 to 1997; 1998 to 2003; and from 2004 to the present day. In 2018, Human Rights Watch was describing the conflict in the DRC as one of the “world’s deadliest since World War II” (Sawyer 2018). Eastern DRC, specifically North and South Kivu and Ituri provinces, are the current sites of conflict with a particular intensity around the Great Lakes. The conflict area shares a border with Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi and Tanzania. Some of the known causes of these conflicts are the fight over natural resources or territory, or are the result of conflicts from neighbouring countries spilling over (For example, the Rwandan conflict has had particularly important effects on conflicts in the DRC). However, this “conflict” in fact involves different sub-conflicts and dimensions, driven by the overlapping aims of various armed groups that aim to defend their villages or territories and group honour; or kidnap, loot, and rob with the aim to provide money and food. Armed groups also emerge and dissolve in response to the changing circumstances and evolution of conflict dynamics.

Political instability and conflict have an important impact on gender-based violence directed toward women and on the continuation of cycles of violence in conflicts. Conflict generates violence within the household due to social norms and expectations as well as the stress and suffering caused by war (Slegh, Barker and Levtov, 2014), but additionally leads to violence outside of the household. Sexual violence against women is especially prevalent, and is perpetrated both by intimate partners and other individuals. War has had a significant impact on sexual violence in the DRC. Combatants report significantly higher experiences than non-combatants of being forced to engage in sexual relations or witness others having sex (Slegh, Barker and Levtov 2014).

Conflict also has the effect of increasing militarised masculinities, and with them, the destructive effects of these norms and identities. Lopes has defined militarised masculinity as “a combination of traits and attitudes that are hyper-masculine, hegemonic, and are associated primarily with military soldiers” (Lopes 2012, p2). Militarization often impacts the masculinity of male soldiers and their behaviour, leading to the creation of the identity characterized as “militarised masculinity”.

However, Lwambo has highlighted that “militarization shapes not just the masculinity of soldiers, but also of civilian men in the regions torn apart by warfare” (Lwambo 2011, p19). Factors such as violence, trauma, and forced migration affect men and their notions of manhood. Thus responses to traumatic stress and men’s strategies to cope as a man, may blur the boundaries between military violence and civilian violence.

Vess, Barker, Naraghi-Anderlini, and Hassink emphasize the importance of understanding the root causes of militarised masculinity in order to transform harmful and inequitable norms and strengthen the possibility of long-lasting peace and stability (Vess, Barker, Naraghi-Anderlini and Hassink 2013). Mechanic explains that, often, militarised conceptions of masculinity are associated with use of force and violence, and with obtaining status through this violence (Mechanic 2004).

05

THE DEBATES RELATED TO MEN, MASCULINITIES AND VIOLENCE

III.

The debates related to men, masculinities and violence, including the violence against women and girls, in the DRC

Efforts to understand conflict in the DRC, and the impact that conflict has had on men's violence against women and on gender relations, have generated a set of debates. These debates are: 1) the simplification of narratives, 2) understanding the causes of increased levels of sexual and gender-based violence, and 3) the value of efforts to engage men in the work for feminist peace.

A. The simplification of narrative

The first debate is on the simplification of the narrative related to the conflict in the DRC and particularly on the focus on sexual violence in the context of the conflict. There are several elements related to this debate. As Autesserre points out, a prominent narrative is that the main cause of the conflict is the illegal exploitation of Congolese mineral resources; the main consequence the sexual abuses perpetrated against women and girls in the DRC; and the central solution the reconstruction of the state authority (Autesserre 2012). She argues that these claims are overly simplistic and counter-productive in several ways. First, she argues that the claim that the conflict has been principally about minerals fails to acknowledge the complexity of the situation, and consequently to represent and tackle the causes and consequences of the conflict. She also argues that the focus on sexual violence as the main concern about the war, important as it is, has had the effect of diverting attention from other horrific acts involving both women and men, such as non-sexual torture, recruitment of child soldiers, or the very high number of killings. In addition, she asserts that the focus on sexual violence perpetrated against women and girls has led other vulnerable groups to be ignored, including men and boys who are also victims of sexual violence.

This has had consequences: “the disproportionate attention to sexual violence has raised the status of sexual abuse to an effective bargaining tool for combatants” (Autesserre, 2012, p. 205) resulting in some armed groups using rape to generate attention to their cause. In this way, she argues, the international focus on SGBV can have opposite effects from those intended.

The over-attention, simplification and politicisation of SGBV have contributed also to what Hilhorst, Bouma and Nynke have framed as “commercialisation of SGBV” as a commodity to gain access to funds.

By failing to consider the complexity of the conflict, the narrative has manifested in ineffective international efforts to resolve SGBV, in some cases undermining the very stated goals. Simplification, Autesserre argues, leads to poor strategy, whether demanding a ban on minerals, or focusing resources on only one form of violence (Autesserre 2012).

B. The causes leading to the increase of SGBV

The second debate is about the causes leading to the increase of SGBV in the context of conflict in the DRC.

A wide-spread idea is that militarised masculinities perpetuate SGBV as a strategy orchestrated by the hierarchy, using “rape as a weapon of war” as widely portrayed in the media. However, there is disagreement among scholars about the ways in which sexual violence in conflict can be categorised and understood. Ayimpam et al (2015) asserts that rape has become a weapon of war, and more generally, a mode of expression of masculinity in the DRC. Baaz and Stern, however, suggest that rape has been often committed in the context of chaos and impunity, and it is then difficult to understand sexual violence as a part of a deliberate strategy (Baaz and Stern 2008). The soldiers interviewed in their studies pointed out the lack of order in the chain of command that evolved and facilitated rape and sexual violence.

Baaz and Stern report that soldiers indicated that their main motivations for sexual violence were frustration, disempowerment, humiliation, and violence as a livelihood strategy. For example, many of them reported experiencing precarious living situations due to living in poverty; inability to provide for their families; and rejection from their wives, which led to feelings of humiliation and disempowerment. Baaz and Stern emphasised that rape of women (and men) in conflict can be understood firstly as an expression of failed masculinities.

In examining the motivations of soldiers and militaries to commit sexual violence against women, their findings revealed that rape emerged in the blurriness and chaos of warring, and could hardly be framed as deliberate strategy (Baaz and Stern 2008).

Disturbingly, Autesserre argues that the singular attention on SGBV in international analysis and media coverage has created a perverse logic, whereby leaders of armed groups have used rape as a tool to increase their bargaining power (Autesserre 2012). She writes:

“The singular focus on sexual violence signals that this form of abuse is particularly forbidden and punishable, and thus creates incentives for various groups to exploit it. While this mostly takes the form of threats of rapes in order to push for negotiations or end military operations, there are also examples of such threats being enacted, such as during the August 2010 mass rapes in Luvungi. A local militia called Mai Mai Sheka, which allied with the foreign rebel group the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda, gang raped 387 civilians over the course of three days in a remote part of Walikale territory. According to several sources, Sheka ordered his soldiers to systematically rape women, instead of just looting and beating people as they usually do, because he wanted to draw attention to his armed group and to be

invited to the negotiating table. He knew that using sexual violence was the best way to reach this goal, because it would draw the attention of the international community, and various states and advocacy groups would put pressure on the Congolese government to negotiate with him – which is exactly what happened. Unfortunately, many other rebel leaders have used the same reasoning as Sheka and humanitarian organisations have observed an increase in the use of sexual violence by armed groups that have political claims.” (Autesserre, 2012, p.217)

C. The focus on men in the work for feminist peace

A third debate is related to whether feminists’ work for peace should focus on men, in what ways, and to what extent. Debate about the role of men in efforts to address men’s violence and advance gender equality are not new and they are not specific to the DRC, although they are also present in this context. Writing from South Africa, Meer raised concerns about men’s involvement in gender equality:

“The increasing focus on men and men’s organisations within development is seen by some as a new fad, the latest silver bullet to achieving gender equality, and a threat to women’s organisation and women’s movements. In this view, donor attention to men’s organisations seems to signify a shift of support away from women’s empowerment and women’s

leadership, and a handing over of the reins in the struggle for gender equality to men. Men are once more in charge – only this time they’re in charge of women’s liberation struggles. As confusion sets in over the core issues (is it masculinity?) and the leading actors (is it men?) in struggles for gender equality, the hard-won focus on women’s position within development, and the role of women’s movements in redressing women’s subordination, and their strategic gender interests seem to be under threat.” (Meer 2011, p2)

In her 2014 report to the UN Secretary General, Rashida Manjoo, the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, raised related concerns, arguing: “The feminist approach has commonly considered men as allies and targets of education in the quest for gender transformation. In recent years, many men’s groups have moved from being targets of engagement and allies, to being leaders of initiatives on gender equality, especially through the setting up of specialised men’s organisations to engage men and boys. The logic of the shift in focus appears to be self-defeating because it empowers the group to which perpetrators belong – and which overwhelmingly continues to maintain economic, political and societal structures of power, privilege and opportunity – to offer protection from violence and discrimination.” (Manjoo 2014, p20)

Anne-Marie Goetz, the former Chief Advisor for Peace and Security at UN Women, also has expressed concerns that the shift of focus from women to men regarding domestic abuse and sexual violence in conflict runs the risk of framing rape and domestic violence as gender neutral, and thereby slows down the progress of the feminist movement. She writes:

The recent focus on male victims of domestic abuse and of war rape can have the unfortunate effect of further postponing the feminist social change project. The exposure of the ways in which men and boys also experience these types of violence (and we still do not know the full extent) has helped to attract new allies in the prevention effort. However, it has also encouraged the framing of the problem of domestic violence as simply a criminal problem – to be addressed through crime-prevention efforts. Wartime rape has been framed as an almost gender-neutral weapon of war. Taking the feminist social change project out of the definition of and the solutions to these problems makes response effort patronising and in the end, ineffective. The project becomes the protection of victims. Not changing the social relations that make this violence so powerful as a means to control women. (Goetz 2014)

Michael Flood summarises the main concerns expressed by some women's rights activists about work to engage and mobilise men for gender equality:

While the growing emphasis on the need to involve men in stopping violence against women can be seen as a feminist achievement, it also may have had negative consequences for feminist work, in three ways. First, it indirectly may diminish the legitimacy of women-only and women-focused programmes and services, in prompting a mistaken belief that all interventions should include men...Second, an emphasis on and practice of including men in this work can fuel the invalidation and marginalisation of the expertise of women and the women's sector. Third, it can add to women's work and divert energy and focus, with women working to thank and reassure men and to manage or censor their own critical responses. (Flood 2015)

Addressing the roots of the violence by focusing on men as perpetrators and tackling the toxic constructs of masculinity is increasingly seen as an important dimension of efforts to advance gender equality and end men's violence against women (Flood 2015; Greig 2009; Peacock and Barker 2014). Growing insights from studies taking a multidisciplinary perspective show that men are not only perpetrators of violence but also victims, and many men, socialised to be tough and strong, are dealing with victimisation by using violence to keep up the imagined self-perceptions about being tough and in control (Slegh, Barker and Levtoev 2014).



06

THE PERSPECTIVES OF WILPF DRC ON MILITARISED MASCULINITIES

IV.

The perspectives of WILPF DRC on militarised masculinities

The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, (WILPF), in collaboration with the MenEngage Alliance, launched an initiative in 2020 to confront militarised masculinities and mobilise men for feminist peace. WILPF DRC is one of the WILPF National Sections that is participating in this project. Through interviews with Annie, Patrick, and Henny – three individuals engaged in this work – this section will analyse a) how WILPF DRC began working for feminist peace, b) why they chose to embark on a project focused on men and masculinity and c) their work to implement this project. The interviews also explore Annie, Patrick, and Henny's views on the debates discussed in the preceding sections. Additionally, Ilot, a MenEngage partner in the DRC, provided further insights in a separate interview.

Annie has been an activist for 25 years, and she is the director of WILPF DRC. Patrick has been working on positive masculinities and is a consultant for WILPF's Militarised Masculinities project. Henny is a WILPF consultant, psychotherapist and medical anthropologist specialising in gender, mental health and culture, and director of International Programs at the Living Peace Institute. Ilot is the founder of Congo Men's Network and has been working with men towards peace in the country since 2007.

A. Advocating for women's rights and a feminist peace

All the members of WILPF DRC have joined activism for women's rights in the DRC for varied and personal reasons; for some, these date back to childhood, for others, they are intimately related to the social and political situation in the DRC.

1. A personal vocation

Simone de Beauvoir wrote "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (De Beauvoir 2009). This is exactly what Annie, director of WILPF DRC, observed about the status of women in her own country. She explained that, "In the DRC, when you are born, you are taught to be a woman." Annie continued: "I am a woman, I have to be a real woman, I have to know how to clean, how to prepare, how to take care of my house and all that, and above all have children." The demands of what it means to be a woman are so deeply rooted in society, that women experience a lot of pressure from their community throughout their lives. For example, Annie explained that, "If during the first year of your marriage you don't get pregnant, the

problems start. Everybody gets involved, even your own family. They are worried that you will lose your husband and your home because you can't conceive."

Another type of discrimination that a woman will suffer, is if she gives birth to too many girls compared to boys. This is what Annie observed in her own family from an early age, and what made her want to advocate for women's rights. "It was at the age of eight that I had the idea to get involved in defending women," says Annie. It happened when she learned in biology class at school that a child's sex was determined by the father's spermatozoa, containing either X or Y chromosomes. Annie realised that the pressure and rejection by the community that her mother suffered was purely discriminatory and unsubstantiated, since it was the father who determined the child's sex. "I was revolted," says Annie. Outraged by this injustice, Annie knew at an early age that she would be an advocate for women. Thanks to the mentorship of another woman activist, Annie went to the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, where she finally became involved in activism.

2. Contributing to the development of the country

Patrick, consultant for WILPF's Militarised Masculinities project, explained that his personal commitment to addressing discrimination against women, stems from a desire to contribute to the development of his country. "It is first of all a personal commitment against discrimination against women, but also the fact that promotion of women's rights is for me a development issue." This is why he wanted to commit himself to promoting women's leadership in decision-making and equality of roles with men.

Patrick hopes through this work to change gender dynamics first at the family level, and to reduce violence against women in the private sphere. According to him, "The real source of this violence comes from the way in which we have constructed the relationship between genders within the family, within society, and this is what we need to address." Through social and legal norms, it is important to transform gender roles and hierarchies. Patrick stated that, "These changes need to be reflected in the family,

work and politics.” For instance, Patrick is convinced that the arrival of a significant proportion of women in politics would reduce corruption in this area by at least half. Finally, through his work, Patrick would also like to make the community understand that gender inequalities are not a cultural identity value, but rather a result of power dynamics. “There is a trap that tends to make people believe that the patriarchal societal construct is an identity value of a culture.”

3. *The right choice*

Ilot’s work towards peace and gender equality goes back to a choice he made after personally experiencing conflict and violence. “I was born and grew up in a very violent conflict. I lost the majority of my family members, and I was myself injured,” he explained. Deeply affected by the conflict in 1997, Ilot lost his brother and was wounded by the Rwandan army in the DRC. “There was only one option given to us: [a]venge our family. But my mother was a peaceful person and taught me that it was not the right way to handle the situation... when my brother was killed, my mother told me to choose love instead of hate.” At that time, Ilot made a life-changing decision: “I saw that most of the people I grew up with were either in

the army, as colonels or generals, or were engaged in rebels’ groups killing and looting people. I had to make a very clear choice.” Heeding his mother’s words, Ilot decided to work as a non-violent activist with a local NGO in the DRC.

Before working on gender equality, Ilot started to work with ex-combatants: “I could efficiently contribute because I knew the local people and the context personally,” he said. It was in 2007 that Ilot started to integrate a gender dimension in his work. “I attended a training on gender equality, [and] it was a revealing topic for me. In the work we were conducting with ex-combatants, we were focusing on men, but no attention was given to women and girls, yet they were there. I told my boss that we were missing something.” Although Ilot’s work now focused on the integration of women and girls into society, it was only in 2010 that the concept of masculinity would change his work. “I was working with the Women Peace Programme. I attended a training in the Netherlands focusing on masculinities and peace building, it is where I realised there was another problem. When I went back from the Netherlands, I realised that masculinities were something we needed to work on... I had the idea to

initiate a small men’s group: Congo Men’s Network.” Ilot created his own organisation, and started to address masculinities to promote gender equality.

B. Working with the initiative on militarised masculinities

WILPF DRC wanted to work on the project proposed by WILPF International and MenEngage on militarised masculinities for two reasons: because it includes men in building feminist peace, and because it allows them to understand the hyper-militarisation of their country.

1. *Including men in building feminist peace*

WILPF DRC has long included men in its work towards feminist peace. “We were interested in this project because we have always worked with men,” said Annie. She explained that through her experience as an activist, she understood that it was very difficult to achieve gender equality without integrating men into the cause. “To carry out this struggle without men on our side would be very difficult. If we want to build the nation together, we need to have everyone’s hands in it, whether they are women or men.”

However, many questions and challenging thoughts have arisen from working with and involving men in this work. Annie revealed that, “We asked ourselves, ‘Aren’t these men here come to stand on our feet again? Don’t we have to let ourselves as women continue to struggle on our own? Why are these men there?’” Moreover, as Henny has expressed, what is particular about including men is that “men are both victims and perpetrators”. Masculine social norms hinder men from being vulnerable, and explain how men’s victimisation is driving their use of violence.

Therefore, Henny thinks that focusing on men or masculinities could help by “putting down the barriers of gender roles and men can be vulnerable while women can also be powerful and strong”. On the other hand, Annie is of the opinion that because men have more power in the society and are often the decision-makers, having them as allies only helps women’s voices to be heard. So, when WILPF International and MenEngage proposed a project to work on militarised masculinities, it seemed like a natural fit. “I think men should be involved. I don’t agree with those who think otherwise, but I understand their concerns,” said Patrick. Including men and boys in

the feminist peace process also has an educational purpose. Patrick explained that prior activities and actions led by feminist activists on gender equality, may have been perceived by men as a threat. They were “a threat against the structural and cultural organisation, against the established order: against men”. But including men helps to explain and create an understanding of the benefits they can draw from a feminist peace. “The initiative to confront militarised masculinities with MenEngage was very welcome to try to fill in some of the misunderstanding that has been attached to feminist actions” and to build trust between feminist activists and men.

Patrick also believes that working with men and boys enables deeper work to be done on gender equality, including inner work. “You have to go in the deep waters,” he said. Including men in the debate allows them to reflect, engage with others, and understand their behaviour in intimate settings. It is easier for men to change when they undergo a personal journey of learning, and are able to relate broader social structures and norms to their own lives. For instance, Patrick explained that all too often, “When a law is promulgated, if we go and find out in practice and

question people in the communities and household, we observe that the law is [being] completely ignored and that no-one knows this law.” Therefore, working with men ensures that when gender equality laws are passed in parliament, they are implemented in practice, including in the household. Working with men and boys thus makes it possible to create alliances and combat the problem at its roots. “It is hand in hand that we can get out of militarised masculinities.”

In his experience, Ilot thinks that men should be included in feminist peace, because, “The violence inflicted on women and girls also affects the lives of men. It is not a favour to get involved in feminist work, but only a way to improve our own lives.” Indeed, Ilot thinks that men must be included, because they have interests and benefits in women’s empowerment: improved health, stable economy and peace. “By promoting women’s rights, we promote human rights in general,” said Ilot. He emphasised that, “Feminism is not just a women’s only issue, and as long as it continues to be seen as just a women’s issue it will not help the cause. We need to make sure there are lots of male feminists.”

In his experience, Ilot thinks that men should be included in feminist peace because “the violence inflicted on women and girls also affects the lives of men. It is not a favour to get involved in feminist work, but only a way to improve our own lives”.

2. Understanding the hyper-militarisation of the country

Centuries of colonialism and conflict have deeply shaped the DRC, and have led WILPF DRC to want to work to address the structural contributors to instability. “We live in a country that is highly militarised, and we would like to really understand the causes, the real causes, of this militarisation,” stated Annie. Indeed, the DRC is very militarised. “Everywhere you go in the DRC, you can see men with guns. In the DRC, you see the military on the street as if we were at war every day.” This militarisation has a severe impact on women, and on communities as a whole. “What is it that drives men to embrace this excessive militarisation?” asked Annie.

Working on militarised masculinities can provide answers as to why the country is hyper-militarised, as well as solutions for how to address it. Patrick is certain that militarised masculinities can be the cause, or the basis, of the various conflicts the DRC is experiencing. “This project allows us to question why this construction of masculinity is linked to violence,” he said. He argued that questioning norms about manhood is an important part of the process towards

feminist peace, because it gets to the root causes of armed conflicts. As an example, Patrick pointed to the limitations of a narrow focus on arms control, rather than the gender norms that make men invested in owning and using weapons. He said that with gun control, the material means by which the gunman will cause violence, ie the weapon, has been removed. However, the immaterial means, ie values that promote violence among men, have not been addressed. Patrick therefore made a difference here between the cause and the means of violence. “The cause of the violence, which is immaterial, is violent masculinity, and the material means by which it is expressed, is the weapon.” Thus, working on militarised masculinities enables activists to address the causes of conflict in depth, and to reach what Patrick called “true peace”.

Moreover, from his professional experience, Ilot testified that working on masculinities can contribute to building peace. When Ilot began working on masculinities, his first aim was to promote gender equality, however, this work also had ripple effects and contributed to community harmony. Ilot related a story about a group of men he trained on masculinities, who prevented a conflict from starting

in their village, where there were inter-ethnic tensions. Ilot explained, “It was the group we had formed that really put out the fire. They stood up and said, ‘No we can’t fight, we are all family.’ In the course of carrying out our activities and interventions, we realised that by working with men, they contribute to peace with their families first, but also with their communities.”

C. Implementing the initiative on militarised masculinities

The implementation of the initiative on militarised masculinities by WILF DRC will be monitored and evaluated through its goals, challenges and impacts. This implementation has raised several questions and debates in relation to men’s roles in feminism and the impacts and manifestations of militarisation.

1 Goals

WILPF DRC intends to confront militarised masculinities, by first creating male alliances, then conducting research activities on militarised masculinities, which will be finally used to undertake advocacy activities with national and local stakeholders.

Building alliances

Because of the prevalence of patriarchal norms, especially those related to domination, not all men are receptive to feminist awareness-raising and advocacy work. Because of this, WILPF DRC has targeted men who may be more likely to ally themselves with feminist movements, in the hope that this will have impacts on other men as well. Annie explained, “We carry out activities with men... who already somewhat aware of our problems... who are in favour of the work we are doing and are in favour of changing laws, and the laws that we bring to the parliament.”

Reflecting on the way in which men are involved as allies is crucial. Patrick said that, “It is the way [emphasis added] of involving men that is more important than the question of involving [them] or not.” He explained that his golden rule is to not create any discrimination in the work that he is undertaking. In practice, this means he supports the actions being undertaken, but leaves women to take primary leadership. “Women must be given primacy in the action, because they are not only activists but also victims at the same time.”

Ilot is of the same opinion and stated, “Men must join the feminist movement but leave the leadership to the women, because they are the ones who inspired us in the movement.” Annie agreed, “Anything that is done for us without us is against us.”

Annie assured that, “The collaboration between men and women in our work goes very well because we are all looking in the same direction.” One way that WILPF DRC builds alliances, is by organising discussion groups to talk about masculinity and women’s rights in collaboration with MenEngage and other civil society organisations. Annie said that to bring men on board, it is most often interesting to debate on issues that they can relate to. “That’s how you proceed with men. You have to take examples that really strike them, for them to understand and challenge themselves.” For example, if these men have daughters, WILPF will explain to them that their actions will help their daughters’ professional futures and private lives in the household.

Conducting research

WILPF DRC is also conducting research to study the factors that contribute to the construction of militarised and violent masculinities, in order to identify ways to resist these norms. This research is carried out for WILPF DRC by the Living Peace Institute in Goma, which is an NGO working with men in the police, military, and former combatants affected by war and conflict. Living Peace Institute field researchers carried out focus group discussions in Ituri and Goma with ex-combatants, with the aim of understanding their motivations for taking up arms, leaving armed groups, and their attitudes about future engagement in armed violence.

WILPF DRC also created a video demonstrating the omnipresence of armed men in the country, which shows armed men in front of everyday sites such as supermarkets. Annie explained, “The purpose of this project was to understand and to show how militarised masculinity [has] settled in DRC.” The major finding is that militarised masculinity is rooted in the mechanisms of strength, power and control.

These displays of power are closely linked to the country's history of colonisation. "The colonists were armed to the teeth in order to repress the local population and display their power and domination," Annie reflected.

Advocate at different levels

Based on the research findings, WILPF DRC aims to conduct advocacy work with national and regional institutions, to educate them about the importance of mobilising men for peace and gender equality, and assess their implementation of existing commitments in this regard. It is doing so in partnership with COMEN (Congolese MenEngage) and the Living Peace Institute. Furthermore, the team plans to use "solidarity dialogues" to bring together women's rights activists and organisations working with men and boys. The goal is to ensure that those working with men and boys understand existing women's rights priorities and expectations, and then work together to advance these, instead of working at odds with one another. Furthermore, WILPF DRC is working with the Ministry of Gender, Family and Children to bring this work to the national stage. Annie explained, "We plan

to advocate at the institutional level to explain all the work we are doing at the grassroots level, and how we can find solutions to reduce violent masculinity by making laws that... [promote] the specific rights of women."

2. Challenges

WILPF DRC has encountered different challenges during the implementation of this project, including the reluctance of men to participate in discussion and debate; varied definitions of militarised masculinities; and persistent insecurity in the country.

Resistance from the different actors

Ironically, Annie explained that militarised masculinities have been as much their focus as what has got in the way of the work. "When you work with men, you have to be patient," said Ilot, with a bit of a laugh. Indeed, WILPF DRC has experienced some resistance from different participants during the project. Patrick explained that resistance from men can come from the idea that women are only whining and exaggerating, and that a feminist peace is simply

out of reach. "They think it's favouritism, it's whining, that women whine too much," said Patrick. That is the reason why WILPF DRC must carefully choose its allies, to not encounter too much resistance or conflict, and in order to build effective alliances. "We choose our allies so that we can work well instead of having resistance," said Annie. Although the end goal is to change all men's perspectives and behaviours, WILPF DRC's theory of change has been that working first with like-minded men can help to build a critical mass of allies to support this work.

Nevertheless, Patrick explained that empathy is key to countering any resistance to this work. It is important to show men that they, too, are impacted by gender norms, and to bring out their vulnerability through dialogue in safe spaces. "Men are caught in a trap, [and are] victim[s] of their socialisation," he said. Rather than focusing on harms perpetrated by individual men, it is important to show the structural nature of the social norms, policies and customs that contribute to men's behaviour. Patrick continued, "If you take them [men] as victims of a certain socialisation, and you no longer take them as being

at the heart of this violence, your approach to action will be much more based on empathy.” Henny similarly emphasised the importance of listening to men’s stories and experiences. “Listen to them, and look at them as human beings, then comes a complete other story... Not to defend what they did, but we have to understand what their motivations are beforehand, to know what is needed to make them stop.” Ilot believes that the key to working with men on masculinities is to put yourself in their shoes. “I was also an abusive man, and I too have changed over time.” According to Ilot the key is, “Use the pronoun ‘I’, talk about yourself and your own experiences.”

Understanding the concept of militarised masculinities

The concept of “militarised masculinities” is a technical and academic one, and does not always translate well into community organising or grassroots work. “The concepts are quite technical, so the team had to get to grips with them first... if you don’t understand this project, I don’t know how you’re going to run it,” said Patrick. Indeed, the first challenge was for the WILPF DRC team to understand, analyse and

build a strategy about how to define the concept of militarised masculinities. For instance, Patrick said that he educated himself to understand the project. “I read a lot so that I could be in this project myself.” Moreover, once the team understood the concept, the next challenge to tackle was to make it understood by local communities. “The subject of masculinities is already a technical one, even for people who work on gender issues, so we had to find a way to explain it to people,” said Patrick. Furthermore, he explained that “there is a lot of prejudice and misinformation on the subject” which adds on additional work.

Indeed, Annie revealed that it has not always been easy to get the idea of confronting militarised masculinities across to the local women’s community. “At first women were a bit wary, saying, ‘No, you want to acculturate us; in our culture, it’s not like that, you take stories from Europe.’” Nevertheless, Patrick believes that these challenging ideas are easy to tackle, with the right approaches. “We get people to think about objectivity, justice and fairness.” Patrick said it is important to emphasise that confronting

militarised masculinities is not a colonial or Western project, but instead a people-led project for global justice and peace. “It’s insulting to say it’s Western,” he said, but he also believes that adapting language and strategy to the local context is key. “If you have a fairly European or Western explanation, in a fairly remote part of Africa, you will not be understood. You have to rely on the examples and experiences of the people in the context you are in.”

Ilot has also faced similar challenges in his work: “It [the Western argument] was an argument that came up all the time, always, but it was very easy to destroy.” Ilot took a similar approach to Patrick, and explained, “Whenever we went to a village, we had to know the village and its history. We really had to have arguments, and not arguments from elsewhere, arguments from the same background.” This specific knowledge provided the basis for trusting conversations, empathy, and locally situated dialogue.

The political insecurity

The persistent insecurity in many parts of the DRC has also been a barrier. It has been very difficult for the

team to travel to the North Kivu and Ituri provinces, because they are under siege and surrounded by military forces. This meant that WILPF DRC had to sometimes change its approach. Moreover, with the advocacy work, it can be difficult to target the right institution or identify co-operative stakeholders. “One of the difficulties we have, is to be able to meet people who can talk easily without worrying you or being worried,” said Annie. One of the ways to overcome these challenges, was through the partnerships with COMEN and the Living Peace Institute in the eastern provinces. WILPF’s strategy is to “cast a wide net” and, in the end, keep only one or two interlocutors, who will be very relevant and effective.

Throughout the world, activists, advocates and human rights defenders are facing threats, violence and reprisals for their work. This is also the case in the DRC, where Ilot’s experience provides a concrete example of the danger and threats activists sometimes face, including from the government. At one point, Ilot had to flee the DRC, after being arrested by the authorities after reporting human rights violations. Ilot and his colleagues tracked down

weapons owned by the national army, and located them in the rebel armed groups. “If you are in a good relationship with the government in Congo, it means that you are not doing your job, that you are not reporting anything” he explained.

3. *Impacts*

This initiative has resulted in deepened connections with male allies, research on masculinities and the causes of violence in the DRC, and expanded advocacy on structural drivers of violence.

Creation of allies

“There is a kind of masculinity in everything men do,” Annie explained. “Masculinity because they are men, masculinity because they have power, masculinity because they can dominate, masculinity because they can impose themselves.” Therefore, the creation of allies, according to Annie, ensures that, “Men do not experience this masculinity 100%”. Male allies support women by challenging gender roles in society and not performing the militarised masculinities expected of them, subverting existing power relations. Having

influential and powerful men allies also helps to pass reforms and laws for gender equality in parliament, resulting in systemic change.

Since the beginning of this work, WILPF DRC has noticed increased awareness of issues surrounding gender inequality.

Henny explained that, since 2010 when she started to work in the DRC, mentalities have significantly changed. “I really think that things changed, because there is much more awareness, there are many more women but also men informed.”

There is also an increase in organisations working in this field, as well as awareness-raising actions. These have been having impacts. Studies that Henny has conducted among groups of military men, have confirmed that after participating in training programmes, men became more respectful towards women and more involved in domestic work.

This specific knowledge provided the basis for trusting conversations, empathy, and locally-situated dialogue.

Deep understanding of masculinities and the causes of violence

Working with boys and men, allowed WILPF DRC to expand its knowledge of gender and masculinities in the DRC, as well as of the cyclical and interlinked causes of violence. “The violence is linked, according to me, very much to men’s feelings of disempowerment and failed masculinity,” said Henny. She related that, through her work, she has observed that “Men who are not able to meet masculine gender role tasks, which means you are a provider, you are seen as a respected man, you are a protector, you are a procreator... experience shame that affects their self-esteem. Furthermore, trauma, loss of property, of health, of their wives, is affecting them, is elevating stress levels, and men are trying to cope with all those vulnerabilities by staying in control.” Henny further explained that, “Men’s coping system is very much focused on repairing the masculine perception and the masculine role that you are able to be strong, and to be the boss, and that you are still potent.” In many cases, men hide their vulnerability and suffering by attempting to impose their power and domination on women and other men.

Understanding the many dimensions and manifestations of these norms, is critical for designing policy interventions and programmes that contribute to, as opposed to regress, women’s rights. For example, Henny explained that some economic empowerment programmes designed to financially uplift women, have indirectly resulted in increased gender-based violence. “We have seen in several studies that women who get access to economic empowerment, are more often exposed to partner violence than women who are not in economic empowerment programmes.” According to Henny, some men may respond with partner violence because they feel a loss of power due to women’s increased earnings. She added that violence used by men has many dimensions including “a lack of knowledge and appropriate skills on how to deal with your power, with aggression, anger and with sexuality”.

This provides evidence as to why men must be involved, engaged and informed, and get support to change and enable women’s empowerment in the society without increasing violence.

Patrick revealed that through his work, he learned that there was a parallel to be drawn between violence committed during conflict, and that committed in peacetime, particularly with sexual violence. According to him, sexual violence is not necessarily a strategy of war. Rather, the causes of sexual violence during conflict are the same as those of marital or street rape: the vision of the woman as prey and the seizure of an opportunity arising from a position of power. “It is the militarised masculinities in every man that degrade our perception of women.” Patrick explained that in the DRC, there is a belief that, “If he [a man] wants to satisfy his sexual needs, he can do so.” All this is a consequence of patriarchy and the socialisation of a violent masculinity. Henny added that husbands may abuse their wives because they believe they have the right to. There is a lot of ignorance about the terms of “consent”. For many, silence equals acceptance. Ilot, speaking about the root causes of sexual violence in the DRC for the BBC (Akinyemi 2019), tended to agree with Patrick. “When we talk about sexual violence only in the context of an armed conflict, we are a little bit lost. We have inherited this way of treating girls as our subjects.

Men know that they have a right to sex all the time. The cause of sexual violence is about the power and position Congolese men always wanted to hold.”

An eye-opening impact

Up to now, the project has enabled men to reflect on their own behaviours and change the patriarchal system at its root. For instance, Patrick reported the words of a religious leader after a discussion he had with him about toxic masculinities. “Everything you said made me think, I’m 52.

I wonder if I’ll have another 52 years in my life to correct the 52 years I’ve just spent.” The man confided to Patrick that he realised how toxic his masculinity has been towards women, and that he regretted his behaviour. This kind of wake-up call is crucial to achieve gender equality. This is why Patrick believes the best approach to confront militarised masculinities is to change individuals. “When he [the religious leader] told me this, I said to myself that it was the right approach to take. We have to develop tools that can transform individuals, because society is made up of individuals.

We need to transform individuals, so that individuals transform themselves and start questioning their masculinity.”

Furthermore, this project has impacted WILPF members themselves. Annie confided that she had to take herself out of social constructs that were engrained in her. Questioning gender made her understand that she could work as well as a man, because she had the same skills. “I studied, so I have the same skills as a man. I would like to help women who have not yet understood that being a woman is not being inferior, it is not a disease, and it is not living in submission.” Ilot reported the same inner change since he started working on masculinities. “I am different from the man I was before.” He said that he is happier since he changed his relationship with masculinity. “If I am where I am today it is because of that... Today I feel at peace with myself, because I tell myself that I don’t commit injustice any more. To have this inner peace is a feeling that goes beyond joy.”

07

BEYOND DECONSTRUCTING MILITARISED MASCULINITIES

V.

Beyond deconstructing militarised masculinities: in which direction to go? where are we heading?

Today, more and more people are putting the binary of gender into question, and hold gender-non-conforming or non-binary identities. This project, which focuses on confronting militarised masculinity, brings up another question. Once these men have deconstructed their violent masculinity, where do they go from here? Towards a “positive masculinity”, as many in the field call it, or simply towards a non-gendered humanity? How is it important that “men still be men”?

Henny believes that “there is no need to destroy gender roles”, but that “we have to take away the barriers of gender roles that make a prison of our gender roles”. She said one goal should be “to create more space”, ie the idea would be that “As a woman, I can do things that maybe some people will call male-like, and vice-versa for men... You cannot justify your behaviour by saying it is your sex or your gender.”

**From birth you are told that you're a man,
so you have to be tough, not cry and be
strong, so we grow up like that**

Patrick believes that the goal should be “deconstructing militarised masculinity towards a true masculinity that is called ‘positive masculinity’”. According to him, the idea is not to “deny biological masculinity”, but to simply withdraw from a violent masculinity that he calls “second nature”. He explained that, “Behavioural masculinity or femininity becomes a second nature of man through learning, experience and many things... work against this militarised masculinity is to deconstruct this second nature... A man is not born a leader, nor strong, nor intelligent, nor a commander.”

Ilott believes that, “Once we deconstruct toxic masculinity, we move towards the innocence of a child who is born, a child who is a person like any other, a human being.” According to him, human beings lose their innocence and their human nature because of social constructs. “From birth you are told that you’re a man, so you have to be tough, not cry and be strong, so we grow up like that.” He calls it “the box of negative masculinity”. Therefore, once a man deconstructs his own masculinity, he returns to a state of being human without a gendered construct. “When men leave the box of negative

masculinity, they live as human beings: they can express their emotions, and cry, they become healthy again.” He gave an example that he experienced during his work, Often, “In Africa men never go to hospital, [but] once they leave that masculinity, they start going to hospital and understand the importance of getting treatment and expressing their emotions.”



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LITERATURE REVIEW



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BY SARAH LABLACHE COMBIER AND DAPHNE GENATIO¹.