Imaginative Rape Geographies-
Cartography of Violence or Violent Cartography?

andra-mirona dragotesc
Babeș-Bolyai University

In the context of globalizing interactions, instances of violence are publicly addressed in a web of international relations and (re)actions. Within this framework, identities and power relations between them are constructed, allowing for a further shaping of imaginary borders and global hierarchies. This includes spatial identity construction processes. Hence, violence is arbitrarily connected, or rather attached, to space, giving it meaning and positioning it in the global imaginary. However, while offering the possibility to map violence, discourses on violence also fuel the development of a culturally violent social cartography. The following analysis illustrates these ambivalent consequences of (violent/) violence discourses in regards to processes of imagining places. It does so by analyzing humanitarian re-presentations of wartime violence against women.

Premises for connecting wartime gendered violence and spatial identity through humanitarian re-presentations

In an article that explores the “culture of violence” thesis in the context of global relations and communications, post-transitional Cambodia, neoliberalism and the imagined savage other Simon Springer posits the question: “culture of violence or violent Orientalism?”1. Alongside this type of argument, I will eventually ask: cartography of violence or violent cartography?... in humanitarian/ awareness raising re-presentations of wartime violence against women. The analysis aims at setting a ground for answering the following questions: how/why does spatial identity become essential(ized) in humanitarian discourses on wartime violence

---

against women? What is an imaginative rape geography? What (b)orders do re-presentations of the wartime violent or violated other intermediate within the global(?) imaginary? In order to respond to these questions, the essay firstly offers a theoretical perspective on the premises of connecting the issues and processes of wartime gendered violence, awareness raising and spatial identity. It, then, addresses the intersection of these matters through a case study on re-presentations of wartime gendered violence in the last decade’s war in Congo. Finally, the findings of the case analysis will be connected to the matter of violent social cartography. It will do so in an interdisciplinary theoretical framework intersecting notions of post-colonialism, nationalism, orientalism, social geography and feminist critical theory.

During the last two decades, especially following the civil wars in the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda, a particular instance of violence, namely wartime gendered violence, has known an increased degree of publicity and politicization, being, literally, brought into what may be called an international existence. By wartime gendered violence I understand all acts of violence realized in the framework of war on criteria of gender. Despite the fact that many problematize this matter as an aspect of a specific conflict or its conceptualization within the framework of war, very few question the ways in which it is re-presented for the public and the indirect and subtle implications these re-presentations have for the people involved in this phenomenon either as subjects or objects. Dubravka Zarkov has analyzed such re-presentations and their implications, but she has done so in relation to the local public sphere and the political mobilization they engendered. The following paper will focus on the implications of politicizing wartime gendered violence in the international sphere, where, I argue, it is mainly the object of humanitarian-in-character discourses. It will do so in relation to spatial identity construction practices, turning space into place by defining it within a specific paradigm.

Re-presenting wartime gendered violence is mainly done nowadays inside an awareness raising type of discourse defined through its aims to provide information as a base for (re)action; thus, one can argue that they are humanitarian re-presentations. By humanitarianism I understand here an ideology “affirming the common dignity of humankind regardless of differences” and arguing for political (re)actions which will ensure its realization. But, as Belloni also argues, it is an ideology also because it legitimates an unequal relationship through false consciousness and mystification. The hypothesis of this essay is that the infusion and diffusion of wartime gendered violence re-presentations in the global imaginary intermediates

---

2 One example is the fact that the United Nations have passed Resolution 1325 addressing women’s experiences of war, available online at http://www.un.org/events/res_1325e.pdf, last accessed 06.06.2010.
the (humanitarianly veiled) (re)production of problematic identity constructions defined within a violence paradigm. In this context, international awareness raising, for example, as an instance of addressing wartime violence against women in a humanitarian framework, has the potential to become an act of cultural violence\textsuperscript{7}. The re-presentation of violence allows, thus, if it is not problematized, contained and reflexive, for the violence of re-presentation. It does so regardless of noble purposes of aid, salvation and development stated in humanitarian re-presentations of wartime violence against women. The epistemological violence of naming (violent spaces) rests within a reality that that humanitarian re-presentations (of wartime violence against women), especially those aimed at raising awareness, function also as knowledge production means.

The link between wartime gendered violence and the (re)production of spatial identity, as well as the mapping of social space through gender(ed) practices is not a new issue to be addressed. The metaphor of woman as nation/ community and what may be considered its extrapolation, the metaphor of the female body as national/ ethnic territory, has been explored at the intersection of theories of nationalism and critical feminism\textsuperscript{8}. It resurfaces in academia or public discourse mostly when different communities’ encounters are characterized by divergent socio-cultural opinions and actions or, moreover, conflict; especially when gendered violence is a component of that conflict. This perspective, however, involves mostly a local dimension within which such connections are analyzed. (Post)colonial theory adds an international dimension to the symbolizing/ bordering of communities and spaces through women and their bodies, focusing on racialized/colonial encounters\textsuperscript{9} or so called First World- Third World relations, especially in regards to development and humanitarianism\textsuperscript{10}. Moreover, postmodern geography, as it is defined, for example, by Edward Soja- the study of the social production of spaces or the linkages around space, knowledge and power\textsuperscript{11} has offered a ground for feminist researchers to contribute to the conceptualization of space, the discussion of spatial identity and social cartography\textsuperscript{12}.

\textsuperscript{10} See, for example, Reina Lewis and Sara Mills (eds.), \textit{Feminist Postcolonial Theory} (London/ New York: Routledge, 2003).
Focusing on this issue, Cynthia Enloe describes the act of increasing the visibility of wartime rapes as a political one and warns about the fact that those performing this act should be aware of the complexity of women’s rape stories. The most pervasive instance of wartime gendered violence is rape. This paper focuses on it primarily, but not exclusively. Additionally, the analysis refers to rape as an act of gendered violence against women not because wartime gendered violence against men does not exist, but because it is not relevant for the thesis argued hereafter. The authoress also claims that wartime rape is something that shocks. The shock element is undeniably a characteristic of awareness raising re-presentations, especially because it is the reaction trigger, but one which needs to be handled with care. The deployment of rape in awareness raising re-presentations of wartime gendered violence is problematic because it tends to re-present rape as pathological—“meaning that normal people would not act this way”—and, moreover, pathologize spaces and peoples connected to this act and render them abnormal.

The concept developed as a result of connecting wartime gendered violence and spatial identity through awareness raising re-presentations, namely the imaginative rape geography, which will be (de)constructed with reference to a specific example, is an illustration of such a pathological, or rather pathologized, space. By geography I mean a social, cultural, political and economical space. What is particular about it is that it is articulated as violent due to the fact that it has gained visibility in the global imaginary, thus existence(?) on the global map (of mass communication and humanitarianism), (also) through the deployment of rape in re-presentations aimed at awareness raising in regards to the issue of wartime gendered violence. The case study comprises Western re-presentations of wartime gendered violence acts which have occurred during the wars in the Democratic Republic of Congo, hereafter the Congo, and their aftermath, beginning with 1996.

Edward Said’s concept of “imaginative geographies” in relation to Benedict Anderson’s „imagined communities“ will function as a theoretical point of departure for defining the identity of Congo as space in/ for the West in relation to the most pervasive

---


Ibidem, p. 108.


According to Said, the process of imagining geographies is “the universal practice of designating in one’s mind a familiar space which is <ours> and an unfamiliar space beyond <ours> which is <theirs>” in an arbitrary way. See Edward W. Said, Orientalism (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), pp. 49-73.

instance of wartime gendered violence in Congo brought forward by Western awareness raising re-presentations, namely rape.

The political act behind choosing the case of Congo in order to illustrate my arguments relies on this wars’ invisibility in the international political arena for quite a long period of time, although their casualties in terms of numbers and violence competes with those of the second World War. Thus, I agree awareness raising is necessary, but I disapprove of mechanisms which serve this purpose in a way that lacks responsibility and ethics for agency and unequal power relations between subject positions of those re-presenting and those re-presented.

Considering methodology

Regarding the methodological aspects of this project, it is necessary to firstly clarify what will hereafter be referred to as re-presentation. This is not a static object of analysis, but rather an active one comprising simultaneous and connected processes of presenting an issue to the public, developing symbols for it which will further become representative of it, and repeating the presentation (of those symbols) up to the point when a discursive pattern is established and perpetuated in connection to that particular issue; in this case, wartime gendered violence. I am arguing that such processes of re-presentation engender the creation of identities because they develop into a discursive construction as Foucault defines it: “whenever, between objects, types of statement, concepts, or thematic choices, one can define a regularity (an order, correlations, positions and functionings, transformations), we will say, for the sake of convenience, that we are dealing with a discursive formation”\textsuperscript{19}. Thus, the purpose of re-presenting wartime gendered violence in a humanitarian framework, as the common denominator of the analyzed materials, is most significant. Therefore, I will focus on newspaper articles, organizations’ reports and campaigns available in English, produced mainly in English speaking Western countries such as the United States of America and the United Kingdom, beginning with the year 2003 and up to 2010, but available online for an international public. The criterion for their inclusion in my research will be their humanitarian character. Positioning myself as a feminist reader of the texts, I coded the re-presentations provided by the texts around recurrent issues in the awareness raising discourse regarding mass wartime rapes in Congo and will focus in this essay on those which I have included in the category: Congolese (violent?) space and place. Their reading with a feminist “lens” has motivated the writing of this essay and grounds its’ hypothesis.

My exploration of the above mentioned re-presentations is grounded primarily in a discourse analysis practice which can be understood as drawing upon the work of Michel Foucault and the reflections of Stuart Hall concerning this method. It is grounded primarily in a

social constructionist view of discourse analysis which departs from the idea that “our ways of talking do not neutrally reflect our world, identities and social relations but, rather, play an active role in creating and changing them”\textsuperscript{20}. Furthermore, although attentive to linguistic constructions, I am focused on the notion of discourse as that which „constructs the topic. It defines and produces the objects of knowledge. It governs the way that a topic can be meaningfully talked about and reasoned about”\textsuperscript{21}. In order to shed some light on what do I mean by critical discourse analysis, I will employ Roger Fowler’s definition exactly because it is connected to the most pervasive ideas which will be analyzed hereafter. Thus, by critical discourse analysis:

„I mean a careful analytic interrogation of the ideological categories, and the roles and institutions and so on, through which a society constitutes and maintains itself and the consciousness of its members... All knowledge, all objects, are constructs: criticism analyses the processes of construction and, acknowledging the artificial quality of the categories concerned, offers the possibility that we might profitably conceive the world in some alternative way”\textsuperscript{22} (emphasis added)

Pathologizing the Congo

The argumentative thread of this section follows the idea of (de)constructing the Congo as an imaginative rape geography with rape as paradigmatic for constructing this space’s identity. By paradigmatic I understand something which functions as a trope, a mechanism for understanding various aspects of an issue, something which is significant and symbolic for them and holds the potential for connecting them. Also, I use the concept of imagining in reference to its creative dimension and potential. And, insofar as rape is the most pervasive form of gendered violence during wartime and the one which is most publicized in the discourse surrounding this matter, the following case study will focus on it extensively, but not exclusively. Moreover, it is necessary to understand that imagining a people, a community, a collective, requires both a commonality of experience and it is also about an “attachment to places”\textsuperscript{23} and, even more, giving meaning to abstract space through that particular experience,


thus, transforming it into a place that may be comprehended. Therefore, space is essential(?) to understanding and addressing processes of imagining community.

To begin (de)constructing the imaginative rape geography as the identity of Congo it is important to focus on the imaginative rape geography’s counterpart, which is a Western humanitarian collective identity. Benedict Anderson grounds his theory of nationalism in the idea that print capitalism had made a great contribution to the production of nations as imagined communities. Moreover, in an analysis regarding the coverage of Islam in the United States media, Edward Said argues that Islam is for the Western scholar and reporter, as well as for the Muslim, “an act of will and interpretation which takes place in history”.24 He, then, provides arguments for defining “communities of interpretation”25 as a ground for constructing identities we can recognize. Acknowledging the situatedness of knowledge produced through the awareness raising discourse, this essay attempts to address the constructions of identities based on that knowledge. However, in a foucauldian manner26, I will not discuss the issue of the authors of the analyzed re-presentations since they were chosen based on their awareness raising character, nor will I debate over the ethical or moral issues of such processes. Cindy Patton argues for the existence of spaces of knowledge as an expansion of Andersonian imagined communities and in defining these spaces focuses on the idea of “imagining community from face-to-face contact to mediated hyperspace and everything in between”27. Additionally, Donna Haraway (1988, 1997) has suggested that scientists’ control over technologies of visualization has positioned westerners as distant observers of others' problems28.

Drawing on the above definitions it can be argued that an imagined interpretive community of the awareness raising discourse articulates the imaginative rape geography. I define it as a community of people sharing the knowledge of violence due to their interaction with wartime gendered violence re-presentations, sharing a certain degree of humanitarianism and who, through their particular reading of the texts, participate in the production of meaning.

It is in relation to this collective identity that the imaginative geography’s identity is constructed, as their antithesis of our non-rape Western norms. Thus, the imagined interpretive community of the awareness raising discourse may be articulating Congolese identities, including the spatial one, by rendering them as abnormal, exceptional. Insofar as exceptionality is rendered abnormal, it means that in the process of (re)presenting it as such, normality is set up/constructed.

27 Cindy Patton, Globalizing AIDS (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), xxi.
When trying to define the complexity of the armed conflicts in Congo, explain the occurrence of mass rapes as a characteristic of these conflicts and depict the rapes and the raped women, the awareness raising discourse constantly employs the idea of exceptionality and difference, rendering this particular wartime gendered violence instance as pathological:

“The sexual violence in Congo is the worst in the world.”

“In conversation with Amnesty International delegates, experienced United Nations delegates and international humanitarian non-governmental organizations staff were unanimous that they had never come across as many victims of rape in a conflict situation as they had in the Democratic Republic of Congo.”

“<I think what's different in Congo is the scale and the systematic nature of it, indeed, as well, the brutality.> she (senior Congo researcher at Human Rights Watch) explains.”

Differ, aside from aiming to attract increased attention, encourages hyperbolization and exceptionalization. In the case of the awareness raising re-presentations of mass rapes in the Congo wars and their aftermath this is followed by stigmatization. For example, provinces in Congo are rendered “the rape capital of the world” or the country itself is even referred to as “hell”. By collapsing these processes, it can be argued that a feature of the awareness raising re-presentations is the pathologization of both the experience of rape as instance of wartime gendered violence in Congo and of Congo itself.

One problematic aspect of two thirds of the texts, especially newspaper and magazine articles, is the extensive usage of a medical discourse. The medicalized re-presentations of rape aren't only rendering visible the occurrence of violence against women during war but, they are also constructing the people and the space of Congo as pathological. In the process of close reading the referred texts I found that the occurrence of mass wartime gendered violence in the Congo wars and their aftermath is done by employing medical terminology while, simultaneously, discussing specific medical consequences of the violence, the necessity to resolve them, the impossibility to do so without aid. Thus, by interchangeably using a medical vocabulary for abstract and also specific illustrations a certain degree of healing power is attached to those aiming at caring for social, cultural, political and economical wounds which have offered the possibility for the physical ones to appear. Western paternalism is reproduced

---

through its potential to intervene. The first observation one can make regards the usage of the medical “epidemic” term in order to present the actual occurrence of mass wartime rapes of women, with “the epicentre of Congo’s rape epidemic” being the South Kivu province of the country. Furthermore, the mass rapes of women are also depicted as a “problem which has metastasized into a larger social phenomenon,” leaving room for the imaginary of the interpretive community to establish just enough links between rape and any other serious disease.

By offering presentations and analyses of the rapes in a framework using medical terminology one directly points towards the idea that rape is not necessarily an act of will to (enforce) power (of men over women, of men over communities, etc), but that it is a sickness, a deviation. The question is whether this is a deviation of the male nature or of the nature of Congolese society itself? Moreover, this idea actually enforces a symbolism of men raping women as a paradigm of understanding Congo. War, in this equation, functions as a trigger for the development of rape of women into a social phenomenon, rather than an act of man, functioning actually as a legitimating stance for rape (“war gives men a tacit license to rape”) when accountability and responsibility in regards to the act of rape is shifted from man onto the environment, the social, cultural, political and economical space, the imaginative geography of Congo. I want to argue that by rendering the mass rapes as an epidemic, one stigmatizes the Congo itself as a dangerous area infected with rape.

This process mediates the development of a gaze between the interpretive community of the re-presentations which is usually summoned to become aware and (re)act and the discourse’s objects. I am referring here to the idea that in a humanitarian frame, the imagined community of interpretation is enabled through these representations to not only render the Congo as an imaginative geography where rape is pathological, but also to construct itself as having healing and reconstructing (respons)abilities which could resolve the rape problem, engendering change in the functioning of that society. I am quoting here at length from the description of a raising awareness campaign in order to illustrate this idea:

“The Turning Pain to Power Tour”—beginning February 11th in New York City before moving to Los Angeles, San Francisco, Atlanta and Washington D.C.—supports a joint V-Day and UNICEF campaign to expose the devastating impact of rape on Congolese women's health, their families and their communities.”

---

34 Idem.
35 Susan Brownmiller, Against our will: Men, women, and rape (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1975), 33.
36 V-day campaign website http://www.vday.org/pain-to-power-tour, last accessed at 06.06.2009.
“If 250 women who have been raped, torn, starved and tortured can find the strength to dance us up a mountain, surely the rest of us can find the resources and will to guarantee their future.”37 (emphasis mine)

A discourse of “othering” is visible in the latter quote, but issues of us as potential providers of good government (as opposed to Congo’s “tradition of epically bad government”38) for them are also brought up. This is another instance when „Africa flickers across America's <radar screens> and it is automatically coded as a crisis or catastrophe, allowing any political and social turmoil and upheaval to be imagined as Africa's natural environmental condition”39 (emphasis added). The “horror that is Africa”40 is rendered changeable due to Western identification of rape as a problem and of this space as problematic. The identification of violated “suffering strangers”42 and the “space of victimhood”43 that is Congo may also reproduce what Moeller called “the pornography of suffering”44 or which Rozario described as “a strange voyeuristic fascination that borders on titillation”45. In this context, we can conclude that a humanitarian postcolonial gaze exists in re-presentations of wartime violence against women aimed at raising awareness and generating (re)action in the international community.

The culture of violence thesis which is hinted by the above mentioned quote is supported by categorizations of Congo as the „ground zero of rape”46, a space where wartime rape is the

39 Africa on camera, p. 49
41 The idea of visibility is recurrent throughout the awareness raising awareness discourse and is focused mainly on the lack of media coverage and international (re)action towards the mass rapes of women in Congo. In this context, reporters and campaigners self-position themselves as a sort of spokespeople mediating the process of rendering the rapes visible.
42 Kevin Rozario, “Delicious Horrors: Mass Culture, The Red Cross, and the Appeal of Modern American Humanitarianism”, in American Quarterly, Vol. 55, No. 3 (Sep., 2003): 417-455, 441. The article’s argument is constructed around the idea that “It may be dismaying to acknowledge that our virtues are commingled with our vices, that the pain many feel on behalf of suffering strangers is often inseparable from a sense of relief that it is them not us, and perhaps even from a strange voyeuristic fascination that borders on titillation” (emphasis mine).
43 See François Debrix, “Deterritorialised Territories, Borderless Borders: The New Geography of International Medical Assistance”, in Third World Quarterly, Vol. 19, No. 5 (Dec., 1998), pp. 827-846. He argues that this is a form of territorial marking, to a social identity, to a globally recognised profile. These reterritorialised zones of initial deterritorialisation are the geographical containers for a new type of universal population, the hapless ‘victims’ (p. 12).
“norm” and is “almost a cultural phenomenon”. Given these re-presentations, Peggy Reeves Sanday’s concept of rape-prone society may complete the culture of violence thesis in (de)constructing Congo as an imaginative rape geography. This is a useful concept if one takes into consideration shifting discussions from rape as a weapon of war, as it was considered in the Bosnian or Rwandan cases, to rape as a cultural norm in Congo. In the later case the issue of military command is rarely brought forward, the rape as a weapon of war thesis seems to be used just because it is nowadays possible to do so. However, re-presentations mainly focus on the socio-cultural nature of gendered violent acts. Sanday focuses on rape, not as an act that “keeps all women in a constant state of intimidation” but rather as “an act that illuminates a larger social scenario”. Sanday argues that “rape is an enactment not of human nature, but of socio-cultural forces” (emphasis added) and that the “prevalence of rape should be associated with the expressions of these forces.” Furthermore, she also presents a causal relation between war and rape: “when warfare is reported as being frequent or endemic (as opposed to absent or occasional) rape is more likely to be present.” It can be argued that Sanday’s conceptualization of rape occurrence offers the possibility to categorize the Congolese imaginative geography as a rape prone society based on the previously analyzed re-presentations. Insofar as the matter of wartime gendered violence, more specifically rape, is re-presented as exceptionally normal in this case, Congo itself may be considered, through extrapolation, a “space of exception” with reference to Giorgio Agamben’s philosophy. A space of exception is one where exception becomes the norm. In this case our so-called exception is their norm.

Additionally, through claims of a “tradition of epically bad government” the awareness raising discourse functions as a mechanism of orienting accusations towards abstract socio-cultural features of Congo in searching for a reason to explain impunity in regards to the mass

52 Ibidem, p. 70.
wartimes rapes. This transforms the lived experience of wartime gendered violence into an abstract construction, transforming rape into a trope. It is never only people, women mostly, that are raped, it is also Congo. One of the main features of the awareness raising re-presentations is the idea of a rape of Congo, thus referring to rape as a metaphor, an almost institutionalized act, rather than the experience of gendered violence. Furthermore, in regards to the identity of the wartime raped woman, Cynthia Enloe argues that “the women who suffer rape in wartime remain faceless” (thus, in my opinion, not women, but a monolithic woman) because they merge with the war torn landscape and their rapes are included most of the times in the category loot, pillage and rape. Also, re-presentations don’t solely present the “rape of Congo”, but actually illustrate the mass wartime rapes of women as “merely part of a larger rape, the rape of Congo”. Such re-presentations are reproducing problematic symbolisms of the female body as territory and woman as community even within an international dimension. Moreover, women’s experience of rape is rendered as less than the experienced rape of resources suffered by the community.

Furthermore, the description of the unfamiliar is done in familiar terms. This is yet another instance of over-simplification that can be associated with humanitarian representations, aside from what Belloni criticizes as problematic features of humanitarianism which reproduce over-simplified views of the other’s crisis. Thus, the mass wartime rapes of women are presented to the reader in a manner which allows for comparisons with known and largely used concepts, events, or ideas in the West. Therefore, one of the features employed especially in the newspaper articles (probably because they are oriented towards the idea of mass knowledge production at a clear and fast pace) is the usage of titles or presentations which refer to phrases such as: “the war against women” or “Congo’s rape war”. The unfamiliar is thus appropriated or rather apprehended “properly” by being presented in a familiar terminology about war. The exceptionality of their violence may be, thus, interpreted as historical and comparable only to the most symbolic of Western tragedies, process which may contribute to misinterpretations of the illustrated crisis, but which is also deeply embedded in orientalist practices.

55 I am borrowing this term from Chandra Talpade Mohanty in order to place my argument along the side of her criticism of Western academia as a producer of a monolithic “Third World Woman”. See Mohanty, Op. Cit., p. 49.
53 Ibidem, p. 132.
Thus, the imaginative rape geography of Congo is an unfamiliar space which is arbitrarily mapped/articulated inside a rape paradigm developed through the deployment of rape in awareness raising re-presentations regarding wartime gendered violence. It is an exceptional and pathological imaginative geography in terms of rape occurrence which offers the grounds for defining its counterpart, the familiar and normal West.

**The potential violence of mapping violence**

The argumentative thread of the essay will now develop towards addressing the imaginative rape geography of Congo as an instance of cultural violence in the framework of a global web of (power) relations between identity positions. It is in this context that I define cultural violence in the framework of spatial identity construction processes as an act which legitimizes the imaginary bordering/mapping of spaces based on the criterion of violence. I will focus hereafter on three concepts: abject, social cartography and violent cartography. In order to do so, it is necessary to recall the underlying questions of the orientalistic debate: what are the implications of articulating a certain type of space? Are boundaries set up in order to position “their” space or “our” space? The imaginative rape geography, rendered abnormal because of its exceptionally pathological occurrence of rape functions as an abjected space which, then, allows for non-(wartime?)rape spaces to exist. This argument was based on the idea of abjection as it appears in the philosophy of Georges Bataille and is used by Julia Kristeva as a departure point in her essay on abjection. Bataille defines abjection as “the inability to assume with sufficient strength the imperative act of excluding object things (and that act establishes the foundations of collective existence)”62. By pathologizing the Congo as an imaginative rape geography, the awareness raising re-presentations situate it on an abject position, rather impossible to fully comprehend or define as it is beyond normality, but offering the opportunity to imagine its opposite, which is established (a posteriori??) as standard of normality.

Considering the above, what are the implications of orientalising spaces of conflict through re-presentations of wartime, or any other instance of, gendered violence? Ideologies of safe and dangerous places for women are, thus, materialized on a global scale and materialized through the re-presentations themselves. Issues such as the rape of men are rarely brought up because they are more scarce and involve more culturally embedded tabu, but also because, in the case of awareness raising, they would undermine such ideologies which actually stand at the base of reacting against gendered violence because it happens to women and modern (Western) civilization is also perceived as one which stands against violence against women. Nevertheless, one needs to ask if in this case the West is safe from rape or just safe from war? When directly

---

linking rape and war, this is a difference which is difficult to grasp. Furthermore, while this is a violent space illustrated as being produced through local unequal gendered power relations, it is also a space towards which cultural violence is inflicted through global unequal power relations between collective identity positions. In both cases the Congolese women occupy inferior positions. What seems to legitimize and/or blur them is the humanitarian veil. The paradox in this is illustrated by one of the most important humanitarian campaign concerning this issue which affirms: “Stop raping our greatest resource- power to women and girls in the Democratic Republic of Congo”\(^{63}\). Neoliberal implications of western empowerment and/or protection of women in order to produce socio-political change in Congo aside, I find this to be a problematic re-presentation of wartime gendered violence in the Congo wars and their aftermath because it eventually reproduces ideas of women as belonging to a community, of women as equated with a geography in the context of Congo’s wars being about mineral resources.

Turning now to aspects of theoretical approaches to a social construction of geographies, I draw on the argument that spatial identity, just as any other identity, is the result of interactions and relations\(^{64}\) and that marking difference, which is (re) through symbolisms, is crucial for the construction of identities\(^{65}\). In this framework, dichotomies are necessary in order to construct, position and value identities. Adopting a dialogical perspective on constructing identities between the Congolese imaginative rape geography and the aware Western imagined community raises an important question regarding the implications of defining the identity of a space inside a violence paradigm: what are the power relations between the two? The public discourse preoccupied with wartime gendered violence generates, in my opinion, a situation in which the imagined community is situated on a position from which it literally has access to and the possibility to articulate the geography, setting, thus, the grounds for a hierarchical relation between the two. Rape- as an instance of wartime gendered violence- becomes potentially paradigmatic for constructing a particular space into an essentially violent one and, furthermore, for enforcing imaginary borders and hierarchies between spaces and people in connection to it. Such borders and hierarchies are grounded in a contemporary post(-)colonialist\(^{66}\) perspective, defining, for example, Western imagined communities of saviours and non-Western imaginative geographies of violence. Through their enforcement, the re-presentation of violence in/by some imagined communities becomes the violence of re-presentation altering some (other) imaginative geographies.

\(^{63}\) The details of the campaign are available online at [http://drc.vday.org/](http://drc.vday.org/) last accessed 06.06.2010.


Connecting the concept of re-presentation, which I introduced in the methodological part of the essay, with the process of spatial identity construction, I will refer at this point to social cartography. Summarily, it is defined as "the creation of maps addressing questions of location in the social milieu." More specifically, it is developed through "a process composed of a series of psychological transformations by which an individual acquires, codes, stores, recalls, and decodes information about the relative locations and attributes of phenomena in ... [the] everyday geographical environment." Thus, social cartography is a process of situating meaning in the social milieu. Advancing the argumentative thread linking the imaginative rape geography of Congo to that of cultural violence references will be made subsequently to what I consider to be an instance of social cartography, meaning Michael Shapiro’s "violent cartographies". He argues that the way in which we internalize the world is directly connected to the shape we impose on that world according to ideological engagements and institutional practices through which spatial and temporal models of identity difference are performed. Violent cartographies are articulations of geographical imaginaries and antagonisms based on models of identity difference. Shapiro argues that:

"Geography [...] is a primary part in the ontology of a collectivity which, along with other ethnographic imaginaries constitutes a fantasy structure implicated in how territorially elaborated collectivities locate themselves in the world and thus how they practice the meanings of self and Other that provide the conditions of possibility for regarding others as threats or antagonists. Gramatically, then, it is appropriate for me to recognize cartographic violence instead of speaking of the geographic causes of violence."

To make an analogy, it is appropriate for me to recognize the cartographic violence of constructing the imaginative rape geography of Congo instead of (only) speaking of the geographic causes of wartime gendered violence in Congo. Thus, one may argue that this particular spatial identity construction is an instance of violent cartography brought about by acts of re-presenting violence which, indirectly, create and impose violence as meaning, as representative of a space, stigmatizing it, rendering it as abnormal. The cartography of violence implies, thus, in this case, the cultural violence of cartography. Insofar as this essay’s argument has begun from Said’s imaginative geographies, where the process of imagining is a creative one (as it is in the case of Andersonian imagined communities), but moreover clearly a culturally violent one because it is arbitrary, I wish to argue that the imaginative rape geography

---

69 Michael J. Shapiro, Cinematic geopolitics (Routledge: New York, 2009), pp. 18 – 19.
of Congo is an illustration of what may be called an imaginative cartography of violence, a social cartography of violence which is simultaneously culturally violent.

Thus, the violence paradigm or more specifically the rape paradigm inside which the imaginative rape geography of Congo is developed is a mechanism of social mapping of the global space in a dual relation focused on antagonisms such as self-other/us-them. Space is, thus, a divisible object on which post(-)modern imaginative borders are drawn. Keeping in mind the above arguments focused on the deployment of rape as paradigmatic for drawing Congolese spatial identity, this space is not only bordering violence, but violently bordered. Thus, the cartography of violence becomes the violence of cartography. Moreover, representations of violence become mechanisms which fuel processes of territorial hegemony.

Considering that the us-them dichotomy can be translated in one of the First World-Third World type, this territorial hegemony only reproduces a colonial gaze in a post(-)colonial era posing serious power relations issues.

In the context of a multiplicity of positionalities which identities, even spatial ones, may occupy, Congo definitely occupies that of an imaginative rape geography, paradoxically situated in Central Africa from a geographic cartography perspective and at the world’s (or West’s) periphery from the social cartography perspective based on criteria of wartime gendered violence. The problem is that it was positioned there arbitrarily and without taking into consideration far reaching implications of awareness raising for spatial identities-stigmatization and its time-proof consequences. Even if identities are not fixed and fluid, stigmas tend to be difficult to overcome.

Conclusions

The argumentative line of this paper eventually aimed at problematizing the (geo)political consequences of constructing spatial identities through a discourse on wartime

---

72 Monica Duffy Toft, The geography of ethnic violence: identity, interests, and the indivisibility of territory (Princeton, Princeton University Press: 2003), 10. Territory as indivisible subject (nonmaterial value- can neither be divided, nor exchanged) and divisible object (material resource, can be divided and exchanged).

73 Sankaran Krishna in Michael J. Shapiro and Hayward R. Alker, (eds.), Challenging boundaries: global flows, territorial identities (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press: 1996), 204. Krishna argues that quotidian realities may unveil the ways in which cartography produces borders, the arbitrariness involved in the creation of normality, as well as the fluid definitions of space and place which triumph in front of efforts to hegemonize territory.
gendered violence, as well as the epistemological violence associated of mapping space through naming it violent. Moreover, it indirectly focuses on the idea that in a presumably deterritorialized, borderless global world of humanitarianism, imagined territories and borders are drawn as a consequence of globally available awareness raising re-presentations (of wartime gendered violence). The paradigm of reterritorialization based on other factors than just territorial borders is probably the most suited one to situate the imaginative rape geography in. I am by no means dismissing the stated reasons or purposes of these re-presentations. Nevertheless, I argue that, because they intermediate important processes of knowledge production which intermediate the construction/imagine of identities, such re-presentations need problematization and containment. Thus, criticizing them and their implications will contribute to future improvements in humanitarian-in-character-or-scope awareness raising practices and undermine the unequal power relations involved by such processes. Also, the above argument aimed at pointing out ways in which, again, women’s experience is materialized and objectified, transferring rape from the realm of lived experience to that of paradigmatic abstraction.

Additionally, the model developed for the (de)construction of an imaginative rape geography, if slightly altered, can be used in order to approach various other identity constructions floating in the global imaginary and based on re-presentations of violence. To conclude, addressing the idea of a cartography of violence, however appealing it may be in order to point towards so-called violent geographies as a means of setting the grounds for resolving their problems, is, however, an endeavour that may need more self-reflexivity than one may imagine at first or than contemporary humanitarianism may be able to provide so as to avoid violent cartographies and end up constructing imaginative rape geographies.

Bibliography:


---

74 See Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson, (eds.), *Culture, power, place: explorations in critical anthropology* (Durham: Duke University Press).
Miller, Ruth A. (2007),The Limits of Bodily Integrity, Boston, Ashgate.
Patterson, Cindy, Globalizing AIDS (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).
Shapiro, Michael J., Cinematic geopolitics (Routledge: New York, 2009).
Shapiro, Michael J., Violent Cartographies. Mapping Cultures of War (University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, 1997).


V-day, http://www.vday.org/pain-to-power-tour, last accessed at 06.06.2009.


