

ATROCITIES IN THE ‘HEART OF DARKNESS’

Sexual Violence as a Weapon of Colonial Control
in the Congo Free State, 1885-1908.

By:
Daniel Fabricius
History



ABSTRACT: This article will provide an in-depth analysis on the colonial usage of sexual violence as a weapon of superiority during the Congo Free State during 1885-1908. The evaluation aims to uncover how white settlers systematically and intentionally utilised sexual violence as tool of colonial warfare. Literature shows that rape was a common occurrence which caused psychological, economic and physical hardship towards the Congolese. Crimes relating to sexual violence transpired through atrocities like rape, abduction, blackmail, forced incest and kidnapping. It will be illustrated that sexual violence was fuelled by motives like economics, sexual lust, psychological dominance and military tactics. Sexualised atrocities proved effective as they inflicted unprecedented injuries while also manifesting social hierarchies. Sexual violence served as reliable weapon of colonial warfare which remained unbound by controversy and objections. Rape and sexual violence were effective tools in causing psychological and physical injuries while simultaneously displaying its perpetrator as the superior force.

KEYWORDS: colonialism, racial encounters, war crimes, imperialism, racism



Introduction

The article aims to broaden our current knowledge on Leopold's Congo by analysing how colonialists implemented sexual violence as a weapon of superiority between 1885-1908. The Berlin Conference, November 15 1884 – February 26 1885, provided King Leopold II of Belgium with absolute authority over the African region of Congo. Unlike other African colonies, the Congo Free State remained under legal dictatorship of Leopold until its disestablishment in 1908 (Vanthemsche 2012: 14-32). The private ownership of Congo became a controversial topic shortly after its establishment as numerous missionaries, journalists and rights activists proclaimed that it exercised slavery, mutilation, genocide and sexual violence (Rutz 2018: 25-107). The highlight of such atrocities gave birth to political and humanitarian organisations such as the *Congo Reform Association (CRA)*, which sought to discontinue Leopold's private ownership of Congo as a colony (Hasian 2015: 178-192). The work of CRA and Alice Harris, Roger Casement, Joseph Conrad and Edmund D. Morel proved vital as their photographs, journals and testimonies acted as key evidence for the political liquidation of the Congo Free State (Hawkins 1982: 65-82).

This article will provide an in-depth analysis on the Belgian weaponisation of sexual violence against the Congolese. The extent of sexual violence and its weaponisation as tool of racial suppression will be in the centre of this analysis. Sexual atrocities will thus be evaluated with the purpose of determining whether and to what extent sexual violence impacted the physical and psychological wellbeing of the Congolese population. These impacts will be investigated through a variety of primary and secondary sources. The information gathered from journals, diaries, books and photographs will thus be the backbone of this particular research. primary sources include documents from first-hand witnesses like Roger Casement, Joseph Conrad and Edmund D. Morel. The impact of sexual violence will be determined through factors like psychological influence, racial intimidation and militaristic superiority. This article will uncover how colonialists used sexual violence as a weapon of superiority in the Congo Free State during 1885-1908.

White Peril: Colonial Sexualisation and Pornification of African Bodies

Literature shows that African bodies, especially female, proved significant in relation to how a majority of Europeans perceived people of darker skin. Late 19th century writings such as Joseph Conrad's fictional novel, *Heart of Darkness*, provides an interesting narrative on European sexualisation of Congolese women. Conrad portrays them through a highly sexualised language, by which he refers to an African female warrior by stating that "She was savage and superb, wild-eyed and magnificent" and "naked breasts, arms, legs, glaring eyes."¹ Although fictional, Conrad's novel demonstrates that the sexualisation of African bodies was a common occurrence within the Congo free State as white Europeans such as himself viewed Congolese women as savage, wild, and erotic. His statements are especially relevant as they manifest the link between African sexualisation and fetishes like exoticism through racial intercourse and dominance.

Another notable example of African pornification occurs at the case of *Hottentot Venus*, also known as Saartjie (Sara) Baartman in 1810. Baartman rose to fame due to being publicly displayed in French and English exhibitions, which paired her womanly features to the sexualisation of African women. These were displayed in 19th century posters like *La Belle Hottentote*² and William Heath's *the Hottentot Venus*.³ The historian, Corrie Decker, provides an interesting examination of Baartman's case by demonstrating a link between African sexualisation and Darwinist theories by stating that, "Europeans employed representations of African female bodies like Baartman's in pseudoscientific studies of racial difference as fodder for Social Darwinist theories" (Decker 2021: 21). She also argues that this particular correlation remains an issue within colonial studies due to "the enduring legacy of colonial racial sexual stereotypes that portray African men and women as hypersexualized" (Decker 2021: 42).

¹ Conrad, Joseph, "Heart of Darkness," Blackwood's Magazine, First published: 1899 (serial), 1902 (book), *Penguin Classics*, 1989, pp. 101.

² *La Belle Hottentote*, a 19th-century French print of Saartjie (Sara) Baartman, *Les Curieux en extase ou les Cordons de souliers*, published by: A Paris chez Martinet, Libraire, rue du Coq, N° 15, et Chez Charon rue Saint Jean de Beauvais No. 26. 1 January (1815).

³ Heath, William, "Love at first sight, or a pair of Hottentots, with an addition to the broad bottom family," Sarah Bartman (Saartjie Baartman, Saat-Jee, "the Hottentot Venus"), *London, (50 Piccadilly): S.W. Fores*, Date: 15 of Nov. (1810).

Available sources illustrate the colonial pornification of African bodies to be more nuanced than previously suggested. The complexities of sexualised violence become clear as European fetishism of African women is closely tied to broader ideas like scientific racism and white dominance. The link between African sexuality and scientific racism can be found in 19th century writings such as Joseph A. Gobineau's *Moral and Intellectual Characteristics of the Three Great Varieties*.⁴ Gobineau relies on scientific explanations when discussing the sexual characteristics of African peoples by stating that "They have a decided taste for sensual pleasures."⁵ The arguments presented by Gobineau provide for an interesting frame of reference as he highlights the correlation between African inferiority and sexuality. His perspective and arguments on the scientific research towards African inferiority occurs through statements like "The dark races are the lowest on the scale" and "The shape of the pelvis has a character of animalism".⁶ Additionally, the link between scientific inferiority and African sexualism during the early 19th century has been investigated by scholars such as Saul Dubow (Dubrow 1995).

His study reaches a fascinating conclusion by arguing that the European belief in racial inferiority strongly increased the sexualisation of African bodies. Scholars such as Philippa Levine (Levine 2008: 189-219) and Felix Lösing (Lösing 2020: 47-196) provide a more in-depth analysis on this topic by debating the link between African fetishes and sexual violence. Their studies prove informative as they place this linkage within a colonial context which concludes that numerous 19th century colonialists perceived African bodies as physical vessels to be conquered and tamed. Their works provide for an engaging narrative by demonstrating that African pornification was closely tied to the social and political power struggles within European colonialism and superiority.

Belgian Superiority: Rape and Sexual Violence in the Congo Free State

It is shown that instances of colonial rape and sexual violence was a common occurrence within Belgian Congo during 1885-1908 (Hawkins 1982: 65-80; Hasian 2015: 178-192; Louis 1964:

⁴ Gobineau, Joseph Arthur, "Moral and Intellectual Characteristics of the Three Great Varieties," In: Harlow & Carter (Eds), *Archives of Empire: The Scramble for Africa*, Duke University Press, Vol. 2, 2004, pp. 143-153.

⁵ Ibid. P. 148.

⁶ Ibid. P. 145.

99-120). Underlining sexual violence as a frequent occurrence has been illustrated by 19th century publications of Edmund D. Morel, Roger Casement and Alice Harris. Sexual violence towards Congolese became increasingly investigated since 20 May 1903 as the House of Commons confirmed its overseas examination of Congo by deploying political diplomats such as Roger Casement. Casement began his investigation in early June where he served as a diplomatic eyewitness during July, August and September 1903 (Reid 1974: 460-480) His investigation proved lucrative as his diaries contained numerous instances of sexual violence. The highlight of physical and sexual violence within Belgian Congo became a controversial topic in early 1904, as Casement published his eyewitness accounts through the book, *the Casement Report*.⁷ Academics should therefore consider that such sources were often fuelled by European economic and political interests rather than eliminating moral injustice within colonial Africa.

The social elements of sexual violence within Casement's report have been examined further by historians like Peter Singleton-Gates and Maurice Girodias (Singleton & Girodias 1959: 144-176). Their work, as well as the report by Casement, shows that sexual violence mostly occurred between white perpetrators and African women as victims. As documented by Casement, sexualised violence was also utilised by African men who were employed by the Belgian militia. White colonisers and African sentries were therefore the main perpetrators of rape. In parallel to the perpetrators, Conrad demonstrates that sexualised violence often targeted young African girls. Prior to the rape and murder of two village girls, one Congolese armed sentry stated according to Casement that "We might keep them both, the little one is not bad-looking."⁸ His report is valuable within this study as it establishes a link between sexualised violence and ideals such as colonial superiority. A same conclusion is reached by scholars like Ann Laura Stoler, who highlights sexual violence as being tools of colonial superiority by stating that "sexual domination has figured as a social metaphor of European supremacy" (Stoler 1989: 638).

⁷ Casement, Roger, "The Casement Report: Correspondence and Report from His Majesty's Consul at Boma Respecting the Administration of the Independent State of the Congo," *Harrison and Sons*, The Project Gutenberg, Vol 1-64, No. 1, 1904, pp. 1-84.

⁸ Casement, Roger, "The Eyes of Another Race," In O'Sicohain, Seamas and O'Sullivan, Michael (eds) *The Eyes of Another Race: Roger Casement's Congo Report and 1903 Diary*, University College Dublin, 2003, p. 153.

Sexualisation and perceived racial inferiority produces various consequences within the social and psychological elements of sexualised violence. One such consequence transpires as colonialists regarded African women as being socially, racially and sexually inferior. This view proved consequential towards Congolese women as their bodies were perceived as erotic vessels to be conquered. Most white colonialists regarded therefore the rape of Africans as being morally acceptable. A similar acceptance is also illustrated within Casement's report which proclaims that colonialists did not regard sexual violence as a criminal or moral offence.⁹ Singleton and Girodias reach a similar conclusion by arguing that "these men themselves never made any concealment in committing these acts" (Singleton & Girodias 1959: 166). The acceptance of sexualised violence was attached to elements like white superiority, as it allowed for the colonial rape which weaponised physical and psychological terror.

The acceptance of sexual violence becomes further proven when analysing statements within 19th century documents such as Mr. De. Bernhardt's, *Cases of Ill-treatment by officials in the Congo Free State, 1891-1900*.¹⁰ Bernhardt's source is striking as it rarely refers to sexual violence while simultaneously containing numerous statements on mutilations, beatings and floggings. His few statements on sexualised violence are often downplayed as he marks them as incidents rather than crimes. The lack of coverage becomes apparent as the report does not contain words such as "rape", "ravish" or "forced intercourse." Its chosen vocabulary and lack of mention strongly suggests that sexual violence was lowly prioritised.

Its downplay is also noticeable within Edmund D. Morel's *King Leopold's Rule in Africa*¹¹ and *Red Rubber: The story of the Rubber Slave Trade which flourished on the Congo for twenty years, 1890-1910*.¹² Morel downplays sexual violence by arguing that rape and forced incest, as they might

⁹ Ibid. Pp. 147-152.

¹⁰ Mr. De. Bernhardt, "Cases of Ill-treatment by officials in the Congo Free State, 1891-1900," Confidential Print: Africa, Print No. 7315, Accessed Through: *The National Archives*, FO 403/304, Printed for the use of the Foreign Office, August, 1900.

¹¹ Morel, Edmund D. "King Leopold's Rule in Africa," Accessed Through: Internet Archive, Open Library, *London: William Heinemann Publishing*, First Edition, 1904, pp. 31-102.

¹² Morel, Edmund D. "Red Rubber: The story of the Rubber Slave Trade which flourished on the Congo for twenty years, 1890- 1910," Accessed Through: Internet Archive, Open Library. Accessed on: 07.12.2022, *The National Labour Press LTD*, 1906, pp. 18-225.

damage the social power structures of colonial Africa (Burroughs 2016: 40-51). Morel's refusal to highlight sexualised violence has been studied by historians like Charlotte Mertens, who states that "In his diary, Morel also makes clear that some atrocities did not have to be published, such as forced incest" (Mertens 2016: 6). Toni Smith provides a similar argument as he concludes rape to be downplayed due to more controversial atrocities like beatings and mutilations (Smith 2020: 144-161).

However, it is important to state that such primary sources should be examined with care and scepticism when being referenced as historical evidence. Firstly, a majority of documents which rely on eyewitness accounts contain biased sources as their purpose of creation was to liquefy the Free State of Congo. Secondly, these sources were not created with the intent on highlighting sexual violence, but rather, to conclude that Belgium violated its economic agreements with Europe. The correlation between European self-interest and anti-colonial organisations such as CRA has been debated by Derrick M. Nault. When concluding the origin and purpose of primary sources such as *The Congo Report*, he states that "British economic and political self-interest helped make the Congo Report possible" (Nault 2020: 18).

Correspondingly, social, racial and religious factors proved highly influential. Firstly, societal views like racial inferiority played a vital role in justifying sexual atrocities. Sexual violence towards Congolese was therefore rarely regarded as punishable. The historian, Robert Burroughs, provides a similar argument by stating, "Even if Africans did speak of their experiences, justice was not guaranteed, even in cases of extreme violence" (Burroughs 2019: 16). Corrie Decker reaches a similar conclusion by stating that "white men in colonial Africa rarely, if ever, faced charges for raping African women or girls" (Decker 2021: 21). Secondly, the rape of Congolese remained socially acceptable due to European marriage laws and customs. Its acceptance transpired as a majority of Congolese women were regarded by colonisers as being mistresses and wives. Sexual violence towards Congolese women was thus accepted, as European marital laws during the early 20th century did not perceive sexual violence towards spouses as a punishable crime (Roberts & Miers 1988: 32-44).

Sexualised violence towards Congolese spouses was additionally impacted due to Christian influences. A moral and juridical acceptance occurred as European missionaries did not regard sexual intercourse between spouses as a moral sin. The Christian downplay of rape is proven further as most 19th century missionaries within Congo did not document such atrocities. Most missionary sources contain instead information on other atrocities like beatings and mutilations (Peffer 2008: 55-77). The correlation between rape and Christian acceptance has also been discussed by Toni Smith who claims that “missionaries connected African forms of marriage and slavery through discussions on bridewealth” (Smith 2022: 374). The lack of moral judgement concludes that the acceptance of sexualised violence was fuelled by European racism, Christian sexual morality and marital laws. These factors remained consequential towards the Congolese as their influences fostered a systematic justification of colonial rape and sexual violence. Colonisers were therefore rarely held accountable or punished (Smith 2022: 366-393). The lack of legal punishment, as well as social stigmatisation, demonstrates that colonisers within Leopold Congo utilised such atrocities as tools of dominance and superiority.

In parallel to this debate, sexualised violence occurred through social masses and groups rather than by individual incidents. The argument that sexual violence was initiated as a systematic weapon has been made by scholars such as Singleton and Girodias who states that “It was the deliberate act of the soldiers of a European administration” and that sexual perpetrators “were but obeying the positive orders of their superiors” (Singleton & Girodias 1959: 166-167). The close correlation between sexualised violence and authoritative orders concludes that such atrocities were deliberately and systematically instigated rather than being random occurrences. Adam Hochschild supports this theory by proclaiming that sexualised violence regularly transpired through colonial social groups (Hochschild 1999: 150-195). More particularly, that the rape of Congolese women was frequently used as a reward which would increase and manifest the social authority of European colonisers. According to Hochschild, sexualised violence was linked to colonial social struggles such as intimidation and mockery as colonisers would “unchain the prettiest ones and rape them” (Hochschild 1999: 162). There exists therefore a strong case that colonialists weaponised its usage due to social ascendancies such as colonial intimidation and superiority.

Scholars such as Richard N. Price have also demonstrated that psychology proved highly consequential as it impacted racial encounters, social hierarchies and colonial superiority (Price 2018: 25-52). He takes this debate further by illustrating that physical and sexual violence within colonial states occurred due to settler fear, ignorance and self-victimisation. Price indicates that psychology remained solidly attached to sexual violence by stating that “narratives were invented about the threats posed by the native people to the security and safety of settlers, which served to justify violence as a defensive, pre-emptive strategy” (Price 2018: 32). The use of force was thus justified as a means of self-defence, which strongly increased hostilities as colonialists simultaneously implemented sexualised violence as a tool of psychological dominance as “Settlers paid no attention to the indigenous ties of attachment and felt free to use violence to secure their sexual partners” (Price 2018: 29). The weaponisation of sexual atrocities and its justification exemplifies that psychology acted as a useful tool in displaying colonialists as the superior force. Sexualised violence should therefore be regarded as a weapon of superiority as its purpose was to install fear and obedience within indigenous populations.

Psychological consequences of rape have proven highly visible in numerous 19th century documents and statements. The historian, Kevin Grant, provides an interesting narrative by demonstrating that psychological terror played a major role in the colonial weaponisation of rape (Grant 2001: 27-58; Grant 2015: 64-88). Grant examines instances of sexual atrocities like the case with “Mingo of Ilua”. In early January 1905, the Congolese girl, Mingo, became a victim of sexual violence as a group of colonisers forced her to undress where they subsequently cushioned her reproductive organs with clay. There remains a firm sense of psychological terror within Mingo’s case as the purpose of her sexual assault was to deliver bodily injury rather than providing sensual pleasure for her perpetrators. Firstly, the usage of psychological terror is demonstrated through mockery and contempt and as her assault was orchestrated by several individuals. Secondly, the usage of clay acted as a double-edged sword as it caused physical and psychological harm. The clay, as described by Grant, would greatly harm a woman’s reproductive ability while simultaneously causing psychological and social humiliation by marking her body as vulgar due to its coverage of clay.

Psychological terror was also implemented through forced incest and public intercourse (Hunt 2016: 27-60). The work by Charlotte Mertens provides an informative study on forced incest within Belgian Congo by examining its purpose as a tool of psychological warfare. She provides an example of forced incest by stating that “men installed transparent mosquito nets in the open and made a brother and a sister or a mother and her son enter and force them to have sex” (Mertens 2016: 8). Similar to the usage of clay, forced incest served multiple purposes in terms spreading psychological terror among the Congolese population. Its psychological weaponisation is demonstrated as it took place within public and local locations. The psychological damage caused by this atrocity was often far viler as colonisers occasionally forced other Congolese to listen and observe. The forced participation proved highly harmful in relation to its psychological impact as it defiled its victim with emotions such as shame, guilt and humiliation. Public incest and intercourse were thus implemented as a tool of colonial superiority due to its ability to spread psychological fear and terror. Its impact proved devastating as it brought suffering towards the Congolese while simultaneously manifesting colonial superiority.

A Devastating Tactic: The Militaristic and Strategic Weaponisation of Sexual Violence

The link between sexual violence and militaristic tactics has been debated by numerous studies and human rights organisations. The tactical utilisation of rape is underlined by organisations such as *Human Rights Watch* (HRW), (Chamberlain 2002: 2-44). Their report delivers a useful narrative to this debate by demonstrating that European colonialists implemented sexual violence as a deliberate tactic in that “Soldiers and combatants raped and otherwise abused women and girls as part of their effort to win and maintain control over civilians and the territory they inhabited” (Chamberlain 2002: 23).

Belgian colonisers militarised sexual violence due to strategic advantages like indigenous obedience, economic exploitation, as well as increasing colonial morale. There is also firm reason to believe that economic exploitation strongly fuelled sexual violence. Economic motives are presented by David M. Gordon, who underlines sexualised violence as the main weapon of colonial warfare in relation to optimising economic profits and interests (Gordon 2017: 133-168). More particularly,

the economic exploitation of Congolese transpired due valuable products such as rubber and ivory. The link between the militaristic weaponisation of sexual violence and economic exploitation occurs as colonialists implemented rape as a punishment towards Congolese men. Colonisers would in most cases abduct, imprison and sexually abuse Congolese women and children. Forceful removal gave therefore white settler a strategic leverage over Congolese men. Additionally, the price of freeing Congolese women was often in the currency of rubber and ivory. Charlotte Mertens supports this claim by stating that “The practice of taking women hostage was a common tactic amongst the colonial officials as a way to force the native men into the forests to collect rubber” (Mertens 2016: 7). The abduction of Congolese women was weaponised as it provided the colonisers with numerous tactical and economic advantages.

One such advantage transpired as the gathering of rubber and ivory kept the Congolese men occupied, which decreased the colonial need for physical violence. The lessened usage of violence was advantageous as it allowed colonisers to increase their economic opportunity rather than engaging in militaristic combat. Similarly, the lack of violence provided the colonisers with a steady number of soldiers and guards. The imprisonment of Congolese women bestowed the colonisers with a safer work environment as their task was to guard the hostages rather than venturing into dangerous territories. decreased risks of danger supplied Belgian authorities with multiple strategic assets as it decreased the vulnerability of colonial soldiers which increased their tactical advantages. The abduction of Congolese women proved less controversial when compared to instances of mutilations, which allowed colonisers to operate on a broader scale. The method of obtaining raw materials did not receive the same level of controversy, as it was perceived as an honourable agreement between European and Congolese. However, in actual fact, this exchange of goods should not be regarded as an agreement as the Congolese were, according to Hochschild, forced to accept the terms presented by colonialists due to “if necessary at gunpoint – to accept extremely low prices” (Hochschild 1999: 118). The strategic usage of sexual violence through abduction has also been presented by Toni Smith, who states that “Belgian Congo was fixated on controlling women’s lives and sexualities as a strategy”, and that its strategic purpose was “to serve its own economic ends and exert its will over local communities” (Smith 2022: 369). The colonial

utilisation of sexual violence and abduction was thus weaponised as it marked colonisers as the most dominant force within Belgian Congo.

The abduction and rape of Congolese women also increased colonial morale. The study by Martin A. Klein contains an interesting narrative as it demonstrates that African women in French Sudan were distributed as gifts and prizes amongst French soldiers (Klein 2014: 61-83). The usage of women as sexual rewards contains multiple elements of tactical warfare as it decreased the number of conflicts within the colonial hierarchy. Firstly, the allowed rape proved useful as it kept colonisers busy and occupied. Rape within Congo contains numerous similarities as sexual violence remained firmly attached to colonial morale, lust, hierarchy and sentiments of superiority.

Additionally, the abduction of women and children was strategic in terms of colonial blackmail as it required firm obedience from Congolese communities. Abduction was therefore utilised as a weapon of war as it installed distress among the male population which increased rubber and ivory productions. Forceful removal occurred as colonialists promised safety and freedom to hostages whose male relatives managed to deliver sufficient amounts of raw materials (Mertens 2016: 9). The abduction and safeguarding of Congolese women remains firmly attached to strategic warfare as it was a tactical manoeuvre which installed psychological terror and obedience.

The purpose of sexual violence was also to place Congolese at the bottom of the social and economic hierarchies. The idea of racial suppression through sexual violence has been presented by historians such as Osumaka Likaka, who concludes that rape impacted social hierarchies and colonial intimidation (Likaka 2009: 108-123). Sexual violence was therefore in the centre of the colonial warfare as it manifested colonial dominance. Rape and sexual violence remained a deadly weapon within colonial warfare as it granted its user with militaristic advantages which placed him at the top of the social hierarchy.

The link between sexual violence and colonial warfare has been taken further by scholars such as Maria Baaz Eriksson and Maria Stern (Baaz & Stern 2013: 12-64). Their study demonstrates that sexual violence proved beneficial due sexual satisfaction and proof of militaristic superiority. Firstly, “the military makes use of the notion of rape as a result of biological heterosexual urges” (Baaz &

Stern 2013: 48), which provided colonialists with tactical benefits such as decreased internal conflicts. Their study argues that the usage of African women as spoils of war remained efficient. Secondly, sexual violence was used as a measure of colonial rank, as the obtainability of African women signalled power and superiority. The implementation of sexual violence was far from uncommon as it commonly occurred in the Caribbean. The scholar, Nicole Bourbonnais, provides an informative comparison by concluding that sexual violence experienced a similar weaponisation within the Caribbean colonies. She demonstrates that European colonialists implemented rape as a display of superiority by stating that “plantation records illustrate how European men used their position of power to sexually dominate enslaved women” (Bourbonnais, 2021: 31). Comparing the work by Baaz and Stern to that of other scholars such as Bourbonnais illustrates that the sexual violence also transpired within other European colonies.

The idea of an interconnection between the obtainability of women and colonial power has been presented by Amandine Lauro, who similarly concludes Congolese women to be utilised as tools within hierarchical authority (Lauro 2021: 361-373). Using women as spoils of war provided colonial soldiers with moderate motivation for battle while simultaneously decreasing internal conflicts due to sexual urges being extinguished. Baaz and Stern provide a similar idea by stating that “Armed forces use sexual violence as the spoils of war for soldiers who see the rape of women as their entitlement” (Baaz & Stern 2013: 54). Women as spoils of war proves that sexual urges played a major role within colonial warfare. Sexual violence was therefore not only used as a weapon against the Congolese, but also as a strategic benefit within colonial groups and hierarchies. Furthermore, utilising sexual intercourse as a colonial reward proved devastating towards Congolese women as it displayed their physical bodies as trophies of militaristic dominance and superiority.

Conclusion

The presented arguments have shown to which extent colonialists systematically weaponised rape and sexual violence as displays of European superiority within the Congo Free State during 1885-1908. The humanitarian work by Alice Harris, Edward Morel and Roger Casement are vital sources as their statements have increased our comprehension of colonial violence (Hawkins 1982:

65-82). Their evidence requires cautious analysis as most European witnesses often excluded or downplayed sexual atrocities. Deliberate downplay proves sexual violence to be lowly prioritised when compared to the documentation of other atrocities like flogging and mutilation. Analysing such works remains vital in relation to racial encounters as their research provides for a clear substructure on the social, psychological and sexual relations within colonial studies.

The article concludes that European colonialists systematically weaponised sexual violence. Crimes such as rape were linked to strategic warfare as their purpose was to provide tactical advantages by increasing colonial dominance and superiority. The systematic utilisation of sexual violence was impacted by factors like racism, sexuality, economics, white superiority and strategic warfare. sexualisation and pornification of Africans during the early 19th century played a significant role in relation to sexual violence as a weapon of colonial superiority. Prior to the establishment of the Congo Free State, Africans bodies, especially female, were regarded as erotic vessels which colonialists perceived as exotic and fascinating. The sexualisation increased the social and moral acceptance of sexualised violence which further fuelled the implementation of rape as a weapon of colonial superiority (Singleton & Girodias 1959: 144-176).

The utilisation of sexual violence as a tool of war transpired as a systematic strategy by colonial officials rather than occurring through individual incidents. It also manifested colonialists as the superior force while simultaneously striking its victims with psychological terror. Psychological intimidation transpired due to rape, abduction, forced intercourse and enslavement. Apart from erotic satisfaction, sexual violence also served the purpose of implementing bodily injury and pain. White settlers often used Clay in order to cause physical pain towards its victims by damaging their reproductive organs while simultaneously displaying them as filthy and tainted (Grant 2001: 27-58; Grant 2015: 64-88).

Sexualised atrocities remained successful tools of colonial warfare as they exhibited European superiority. The tactical implementation of sexual violence remained a common and systemic tactic as it provided Belgian authorities with numerous strategic advantages. Firstly, the implementation of rape increased colonial morale by allowing colonialists to extinguish their sexual urges through sexual violence (Baaz & Stern 2013: 12-64). Secondly, the rape of Congolese women remained a

sought-after atrocity among soldiers as the possession of women symbolised colonial power. Thirdly, the abduction and rape of women allowed colonialists to blackmail Congolese men to gather rubber and ivory which highly increased economic productions. The enslavement of women became systematically weaponised as it demanded the absolute obedience from Congolese men which allowed colonialists to assert colonial superiority.

Colonialists were able to operate on a larger scale due to sexual violence being less controversial than flogging and mutilations. This lack of controversy transpired due to legal and Christian influences, which did not regard 'marital' intercourse with as a moral sin or crime (Smith 2022: 366-393). The acceptance of sexual violence proved devastatingly consequential towards the Congolese as it paved the way for colonial superiority through acts of rape and sexual violence. Sexual violence was thus a highly reliable tool of colonial warfare as its utilisation remained unbound by controversy and objections. Finally, the weaponisation of rape and sexual violence proved highly effective as it delivered psychological and physical injury towards its victims while simultaneously displaying its perpetrator as the superior force.



Bibliography

- Baaz Eriksson, Maria and Stern, Maria 2013: "Sexual violence as a weapon of war? Perceptions, prescriptions, problems in the Congo and beyond", Nordic Africa Institute, *Zed Books Ltd*, pp. 12-64. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350222557>

- Bourbonnais, Nicole 2021: "Sexual hierarchies and erotic autonomy: Colonizing and decolonizing sex in the Caribbean" In: (eds) C. Schields and D. Herzog, *The Routledge Companion to Sexuality and Colonialism*, Routledge, 1 Edition, pp. 30-41. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429505447-2>
- Burroughs, Robert 2019: "African Testimony in the Movement for Congo Reform: The Burden of Proof", *Routledge Studies in the Modern History of Africa*, p. 16-123. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315208664>
- Burroughs, Robert M 2016: "Savage times come again': Morel, Wells, and the African Soldier, c.1885–1920", *English Studies in Africa*, Vol 59, pp. 40-51. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00138398.2016.1173276>
- Casement, Roger, "The Casement Report: Correspondence and Report from His Majesty's Consul at Boma Respecting the Administration of the Independent State of the Congo," *Harrison and Sons*, The Project Gutenberg, Vol 1-64, No. 1, 1904, pp. 1-84.
- Casement, Roger, "The Eyes of Another Race," In O'Sicohain, Seamas and O'Sullivan, Michael (eds) *"The Eyes of Another Race: Roger Casement's Congo Report and 1903 Diary"*, University College Dublin, 2003, pp. 147-152.
- Chamberlain, Randy 2002: "Human Rights Watch", (eds) Michele Alexander and Rona Peligal, Human Rights Watch Reports 2001/2002, *Annual Report*, pp. 2-44.
- Conrad, Joseph, "Heart of Darkness," *Blackwood's Magazine*, First published: 1899 (serial), 1902 (book), *Penguin Classics*, 1989, pp. 1-144.
- Decker, Corrie 2021: "Sexuality in Colonial Africa: Current trends and new directions", *The Routledge Companion to Sexuality and Colonialism*, *Routledge*, 1st edition, pp. 42-54. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429505447-3>
- Dubrow, Saul 1995: "Scientific Racism in Modern South Africa", *Cambridge University Press*, First Edition, pp. 20-66.
- Gobineau, Joseph Arthur, "Moral and Intellectual Characteristics of the Three Great Varieties," In: Harlow & Carter (Eds), *"Archives of Empire: The Scramble for Africa," Duke University Press*, Vol. 2, 2004, pp. 143-153. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1220psq.21>
- Gordon, David M 2017: "Precursors to Red Rubber: Violence in the Congo Free State, 1885–1895", *Past and Present*, Volume 236, Issue 1, pp. 133-168. <https://doi.org/10.1093/pastj/gtx018>
- Grant, Kevin 2001: "Christian critics of empire: Missionaries, lantern lectures, and the Congo reform campaign in Britain", *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 29:2, pp. 27-58. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03086530108583118>
- Grant, Kevin 2015: "The Limits of Exposure: Atrocity Photographs in the Congo Reform Campaign.", In: H. Fehrenbach and D. Rodogno (eds), *In Humanitarian Photography: Human Rights in History*. Cambridge University Press, pp. 64-88. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107587694.004>
- Hasian, Marouf Jr 2015: "Alice Seeley Harris, the Atrocity Rhetoric of the Congo Reform Movements, and the Demise of King Léopold's Congo Free State", *Atlantic Journal of Communication*, 23, pp. 178–192. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15456870.2015.1047495>
- Hawkins, Hunt 1982: "Joseph Conrad, Roger Casement, and the Congo Reform Movement", *Indiana University Press*, *Journal of Modern Literature*, Vol. 9, No. 1, pp. 65-80.

- Heath, William, "Love at first sight, or a pair of Hottentots, with an addition to the broad bottom family," Sarah Bartman (Saartjie Baartman, Saat-Jee, "the Hottentot Venus"), *London, (50 Piccadilly): S.W. Fores*, Date: 15 of Nov. (1810).
- Hochschild, Adam 1999: "King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa", Mariner Books, *Houghton Mifflin Harcourt*, 1st Edition, pp. 150-195.
- Hunt, Nancy Rose 2016: "A Nervous State: Violence, Remedies, and Reverie in Colonial Congo". *Duke University Press*, pp. 27-60. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780822375241>
- Klein, Martin A 2014: "Sexuality and Slavery in the Western Sudan", In: (eds) Campbell, Gwyn and Elbourne, Elizabeth, "Sex, Power and Slavery", *Ohio University Press, Athens*, pp. 61-83.
- "La Belle Hottentote", a 19th-century French print of Saartjie (Sara) Baartman, *Les Curieux en extase ou les Cordons de souliers*, published by: A Paris chez Martinet, Libraire, rue du Coq, N° 15, et Chez Charon rue Saint Jean de Beauvais No. 26. 1 January (1815).
- Lauro, Amandine 2021: "Violence, Anxieties, and the Making of Interracial Dangers: Colonial Surveillance and Interracial Sexuality in the Belgian Congo", In: (eds) Shields, Chelsea and Herzog Dagmar, *The Routledge Companion to Sexuality and Colonialism*, pp. 361-373. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429505447-29>
- Levine, Philippa 2008: "States of undress: nakedness and the colonial imagination." *Victorian Studies*, 50, pp. 189-219. <https://doi.org/10.2979/VIC.2008.50.2.189>
- Likaka, Osumaka 2009: "Naming Colonialism: History and Collective Memory in the Congo, 1870-1960", The University of Wisconsin Press, 1st edition, pp. 108-123.
- Lösing, Felix 2020: "A Crisis of Whiteness in the Heart of Darkness: Racism and the Congo Reform Movement", Bielefeld: Transcript Publishing, pp. 47-196. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783839454985>
- Louis, William Roger 1964: "Roger Casement and the Congo.", *The Journal of African History* 5, no. 1, Cambridge University, pp. 99-120. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021853700004539>
- Mertens, Charlotte 2016: "Sexual Violence in the Congo Free State: Archival Traces and Present Reconfigurations", *The Australian Review of African Studies (ARAS)*, Vol.37 No.1 June, pp. 6-21. <https://doi.org/10.22160/22035184/ARAS-2016-37-1/6-20>
- Mesquita, Bruce Bueno de 2007: "Leopold II and the Selectorate: An Account in Contrast to a Racial Explanation", *Historical Social Research*, Vol. 32, No. 4, pp. 203-221.
- Morel, Edmund D. "King Leopold's Rule in Africa," Accessed Through: Internet Archive, Open Library, *London: William Heinemann Publishing*, First Edition, 1904, pp. 31-102.
- Morel, Edmund D. "Red Rubber: The story of the Rubber Slave Trade which flourished on the Congo for twenty years, 1890- 1910," Accessed Through: Internet Archive, Open Library. Accessed on: 07.12.2022, *The National Labour Press LTD*, 1906, pp. 18-225.
- Mr. De. Bernhardt, "Cases of Ill-treatment by officials in the Congo Free State, 1891-1900," Confidential Print: Africa, Print No. 7315, Accessed Through: *The National Archives*, FO 403/304, *Printed for the use of the Foreign Office*, August, 1900.
- Nault, Derrick M 2020, "The Congo Free State, Atrocity Tales, and Human Rights History", *Africa and the Shaping of International Human Rights*, *Oxford University Press*, pp. 9-37. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198859628.003.0002>

- Peffer, John 2008: “Snap of the Whip/Crossroads of Shame Flogging, Photography, and the Representation of Atrocity in the Congo Reform Campaign”, *Visual Anthropology Review*, Vol. 24, Issue 1, pp. 55–77. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-7458.2008.00005.x>
- Price, Richard N 2018: “The Psychology of Colonial Violence”, In: P. Dwyer and A. Nettelbeck (eds.), *Violence, Colonialism and Empire in the Modern World*, palgrave Macmillan: Cham, *Cambridge Imperial and Post-Colonial Studies Series*, pp. 25-52. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-62923-0_2
- Reid, B. L 1974: “A Good Man: Has Had Fever Casement in the Congo”, *The Sewanee Review*, *The Johns Hopkins University Press*, Vol. 82, No. 3, pp. 460-480.
- Roberts, Richard & Miers, Suzanne 1988: “Introduction: The End of Slavery in Africa”, (eds) Roberts and Miers, In: *The End of Slavery in Africa*, *University of Wisconsin Press*; 1st edition, pp. 32-44.
- Rutz, Michael A 2018: “King Leopold’s Congo and the “Scramble for Africa”: A Short History with Documents”, *Hackett Publishing Company*, (Passages: Key Moments in History, pp. 25-107.
- Singleton-Gates, Peter and Girodias, Maurice 1959: “The Black Diaries of Roger Casement: With an Account of His Life and Times”, *New York: Grove Press*, 1st Edition, pp. 144-176.
- Smith, Toni 2020: “Colonial Attitudes Towards Women, Slavery and Gender-Violence in the Congo, 1900–1930s,” PhD diss., *The University of Birmingham*, pp. 144–161.
- Smith, Toni 2022: “Liberators or Perpetrators? Co-Opting, Committing, and Condoning Sexual Violence against Women and Girls in the Early Belgian Congo”, *Slavery and Abolition, A Journal of Slave and Post-Slave Studies*, Routledge, pp. 366-393. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0144039X.2022.2063235>
- Stoler, Ann Laura 1989: “Making empire respectable: the politics of race and sexual morality in 20th-century colonial cultures,” *American Ethnologist* 16, pp. 634-660. <https://doi.org/10.1525/ac.1989.16.4.02a00030>
- Vanthemsche, Guy 2012: “Origin of the Colonial Phenomenon in Belgium”, Chapter. In *Belgium and the Congo, 1885–1980*, Cambridge: *Cambridge University Press*, pp. 14-32. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139043038.002>