WOMEN AND CONFLICT IN MT. ELGON: ASSESSING RAPE AS A WEAPON IN ARMED CONFLICT, 1991 – 2008
HERI RYANGA
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Abstract
The objectives of the project are to determine the use of rape as a weapon in the Mt. Elgon conflict, its effectiveness as a weapon and its impact on society. The study used the strategic rape theory which propagates that sexual violence is calculated and premeditated to achieve a certain end. This theory was complemented by the conflict theory of sexual stratification which bases the roots of violence towards women as a consequence of societal stratification that exalts male domination which manifests in the battle field through the violation of women.

The study was carried out in Kapsokwony, Cheptais and Kopsiro Divisions. Primary and secondary data was used in the study. Secondary sources included books, scholarly journals and articles from the University of Nairobi’s Jomo Kenyatta Library as well as newspaper and magazine articles and Non Governmental Organization reports. Primary sources included women and men victims of the violence as well as former Sabaot Land Defence Force (SLDF) militia men (fifty seven in total) in the area that were targeted through the snowballing technique. This data was collected using interviews, focused group discussions and open ended questionnaires. This data was then analyzed and conclusions reached.

The study established that rape was the ultimate weapon of terror and the SLDF used it to their advantage. Rape when wielded as a weapon is often used to terrorize the masses and demoralize the enemy in a way only sexual violence can do. Rape is the violation of the woman. It signals the enemy’s failure as a man to protect his woman. It is an effective way to dishearten and break the enemy’s resistance. Physical weapons, such as pangas and guns, were used but they were not as damaging as rape as a weapon. A broken leg heals faster than a broken heart or spirit which is exactly why rape was used. This is because it has destructive effects. In the Mt. Elgon conflict, rape achieved what bullets and guns could not; humiliation, abject fear and total submission of the enemy.

The study concludes that sexual violence not only affected the women but the entire society. It not only impacts the victim, but the perpetrator as well. They both grapple with the wide range of consequences that have shattered the values and integrity of the Mt. Elgon community. These ramifications run from social issues, such as the rise of prostitution and divorce, to physical impacts.
like miscarriages, disabilities or diseases like HIV to psychological results like depression, low self esteem and even suicide. These and a host of other consequences have indeed torn the fabric of the Mt. Elgon community in terms of trust, security and harmony.