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Conflict and Gender: The Implications of the Burundian Conflict on HIV/AIDS Risks

Hakan Seckinelgin, Joseph Bigirumwami and Jill Morris*

Hakan Seckinelgin is Senior Lecturer in International Social Policy, Department of Social Policy, LSE and LSE Global Governance; **Joseph Bigirumwami** is Department of African Languages and Literature, University of Burundi; **Jill Morris** is the Country Representative of an International Non-Governmental Organization, based in Chad.

*Hakan Seckinelgin is Senior Lecturer in International Social Policy at the Department of Social Policy and LSE Global Governance, London School of Economics and Political Science; Joseph Bigirumwami is the National Officer for the International Organization for Migration in Burundi and teaches in the Department of African Languages and Literature, University of Burundi; Jill Morris is the Country Representative of an international nongovernmental organization, based in Chad. The authors would like to thank the AIDS, Security and Conflict Initiative of the Social Science Research Council and 'Clingendael' Netherlands Institute for International Relations for funding this research. In particular we thank Alex de Waal, Jennifer Klot, Georg Frerks and Steven Schoofs for their support and enthusiasm for the research. In Burundi, we are grateful to all of our interviewees who shared their life stories with us. We also thank Leanne Bayer, Elizabeth McClintock and Kassie McIlvaine. Hakan Seckinelgin was the principal investigator for the research, with responsibility for research framing, data collection and writing. Joseph Bigirumwami and Jill Morris contributed with data collection and initial discussions.

Abstract:

Sexual and gender-based violence in many conflict and post-conflict contexts are creating vulnerabilities to HIV. The paper is based on research conducted in Burundi in 2007-08. The country was in a long-term civil war from the early 1990s until recently and has been the locus of post-conflict disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes, providing a coherent and focused study. The research finds that the relationship between conflict and HIV/AIDS is a function of pre-existing gender relations that also regulate sexual life and determine critical female vulnerabilities. When put under stress by armed conflict, these vulnerabilities become amplified, creating conditions for increased spread of HIV. Analysis of how gender relations and vulnerabilities change according to the specific social and economic circumstances generated by military mobilization, organization and deployment, in relation to civilian displacement and insecurity, in a range of distinct circumstances, provides a framework for understanding HIV vulnerabilities during and after the conflict.

Conflict and Gender: The Implications of the Burundian Conflict on HIV/AIDS Risks

Sexual and gender-based violence in many conflict and post-conflict contexts are creating vulnerabilities to HIV. In this article we report our research conducted in Burundi. The research was focused on the question of how HIV/AIDS risks are changing as a result of the policies developed in post-conflict Burundi? With the underlying question of what are the gendered implications of these changes? The research was funded by the *AIDS, Security and Conflict Initiative* (ASCI). Here we report on our findings by focusing on to a particular part of our research. We argue that gender vulnerabilities change in a range of distinct circumstances according to the specific social and economic circumstances generated by military mobilization, organization and deployment, in relation to civilian displacement and insecurity. This then provides a framework for understanding HIV vulnerabilities during and after the conflict.

A direct empirical link about the relationship between conflict and HIV/AIDS has been questioned.¹ However, we argue that in the everyday lives of people in conflict people's

experiences point to a relationship which should not be ignored.² There are a number of implications of conflict processes in shaping the nature of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in a country. The pattern of conflict influences changes gender hierarchy, sexual behavior and sexual violence, as well as increasing constraints on women's access to livelihood resources. We argue that what matters in understanding the relationship between HIV and conflict are the ways in which patterns of conflict interfaces with the structure of gender relations that exist in a country. In this interface gender relations are put under pressure and they have implications for social outcomes in post-conflict contexts. We argue that the pre-conflict gender relations and what happens to them in conflict and post-conflict periods create structural vulnerabilities for the possibility of the spread of HIV.

The paper is divided into four sections. We discuss our methodology in the next section. Then we focus on the gender relations in Burundi as they are instrumental in the way sexual relations are framed and performed. The changes in these relations also influence risks for the spread of HIV. Next we look at the interaction between conflict and these gender relations to understand how they influence the possible spread of HIV infections. In the final section we look at the way gender becomes an important determinant for having access to resources in the post-conflict context.

Methodology

Our research plan was to follow qualitative methods on semi-structured interviews and carry out focus group discussions in Burundi. However this initial plan had to change and we believe that the reasons behind the change are important to discuss. From the beginning of our research we were aware that the questions we were interested in could not be asked directly due to sensitivity

to HIV/AIDS, gender and conflict in Burundi. Conflict remains a sensitive issue in Burundi while HIV/AIDS is a topic that is difficult to speak openly about. Moreover, questions about HIV/AIDS and policies dealing with it in the post-conflict context present a challenge for the current political authority. This was not only our assumption. Many Burundians and people who have worked in Burundi for a long time insisted that the research was going to be difficult because people do not like talking openly about sensitive issues. More importantly, at the individual level we were concerned with an issue pointed out also by Peter Uvin: ‘the risk of retraumatizing people, especially as we had nothing to offer in terms of services or support’.³ Thus, we altered our approach to allow interviewees to talk at ease about their experiences. This meant that we were going to ask open ended questions to allow interviewees to talk about their experiences in a life story narrative style. Bridget Teboh in her research experience in Cameroon states that after approaching people for interviews she was told that people associated ‘to interview’ with ‘to interrogate’⁴ and did not trust the researcher enough to talk about their experiences. The method is much closer to life histories methodology.⁵ We started with general questions that were seen as not threatening the individuals and gradually moved to more sensitive questions. Interviews were typically between one and three hours. In these narratives we hoped that details of the experience would allow us to understand the gender relations and perceptions of HIV/AIDS within three periods: pre-conflict, during the conflict, and post-conflict.

We realized immediately in our first few interviews and group meetings that our assumptions concerning people’s unwillingness to talk about sensitive issues was inaccurate. People were keen to talk about their experiences. This does not however imply that conversations were in any way easy. Given that we decided to ask people to talk about their experiences in the conflict

which were in variably leading to discussion of gender discrimination, most interviews were long and emotional for all involved. Furthermore, some of the individual and group discussions were difficult to finalize as people wanted to continue talking more. We realized that while it is central to be concerned about the dangers of retraumatizing people, it is also important to provide space for them to talk about their experiences in their own way. Furthermore, two reasons explain their wish to talk about their experience: a) many people told us that no one was interested in their stories; b) it was a way of resisting simple victimization which also removed their agency.⁶ In talking about their experiences they were reclaiming their agency and presenting their claims to the future. There were subtle differences among the female interviewees who occupy positions in the government related offices. In number of occasions we considered to be more appropriate for them to be interviewed by our female colleague.

This situation also puts an important responsibility on the researchers to make sure that we represent interviewees' views in the way they conveyed to us. Obioma Nnaemeka talked about how African women's voices were lost in the process of gathering, articulation and disseminating of knowledge.⁷ We feel that it is important to bring out what people wanted to talk about into the discussion without trying to fit them into an a priori framework or reducing their views to a generalized set of numbers. This links with Richard Mollica's question about how to assess 'traumatic outcomes without trivializing the horrific and brutalizing life experiences of those affected by violence'.⁸ As he points out the focus must be on the 'the life histories of affected individuals and their families and communities'.⁹ We also realize that individual accounts of experiences are narratives on society and the way society engaged with people both during and after the conflict. These accounts indeed 'amount to more than a sum of their individual painful biographies' and for us they present an ecological understanding of the

conflict and the potential for HIV spread in that conflict.¹⁰ Following these insights we here priorities the stories which are about the changes and outcomes of these changes experienced in Burundi over a long period of time.

The meetings with officials were based on more structured interviews. In general actors we interviewed included: women (rural/urban), men (rural/urban), youth, male and female ex-combatants (both former FAB and rebels), current military and police, policy actors (local, national, and international) , power brokers, self-identified female sex workers and women who intermittently have sex in return for benefits in kind or cash, migrant workers, Internally Displaced Peoples (IDPs), returnees, support and advocacy groups (self-help groups or local groups formed with non-governmental organizations' support). Our interests covered such areas as: gender roles (identity), possibility of negotiation within the family by women, land rights and ownership issues, HIV/AIDS, masculinity, stigma, sexual decision making (who goes to HIV clinics, how and why), cultural norms and practices, sexual violence and the role of policy makers. Interviews were conducted in the following areas: Bujumbura, Bujumbura Rural (Kamenge), Bururi, Rutana, Makamba, Gitega (including Itaba commune, a site of two massacres where 300 people were killed and on the route rebels used to travel in and out of the country during the conflict).

Gender in Burundi

Our research revealed that there are a number of foundational gender determinants regulating social life in Burundi. The structure of the family can be taken as the basic building block by which gender inequality is established and reproduced. It has patrilineal and patrilocal structure.

In this women have an ambiguous position. Their belonging is a function of their male relationships: they either come from other families (as brides and mothers) or will join other families (in the case of sisters and daughters). Thus, mothers, sisters and aunts are considered to be the unstable and moving part of a family (as their birth places differ from where they continue their lives after marriage). In Burundi, men constitute the central and root-founding element of a family whereas women join men in their families and lives. In talking about their experiences many women interviewees talked about problems associated with loss of a father or a husband who might be dead or away for long-periods due to the conflict.

My family chased me away; I do not live with them since July 2007. After I gave birth they chased me. I came to live here, I told them about my problems and they accepted me here. Came here in this house, we (my mother) do not want to live here [we found out later that her mother wanted her to be at home but her brothers did not]; I went to live in another house in the compound. Saturday I went and asked for forgiveness, but my two brothers refused. The problem is because the father of the child died in July. The husband, both, lived at home, his home near Songa, near the fuel tanks (large government fuel stocks). Then he dies and we were not officially married, his family pushed me away. I live with a lady; the women helped me, because I have no one to help me. She supports me. If she did not accept me, I would be on the streets with no food. I do not have money to go do business like others. I have relatives in Bujumbura but none of them will help, so no one will really help. I still wait for forgiveness. I am thankful to God for everything (unconfirmed sex worker [18]- with a son Gitega).

She should die, she is already dead” they (the in-laws) advise the kids to chase you (the HIV+ widow and mother), because we are HIV+, life is very bad. When divorced from my husband, found the house, (married in Songa, then divorced, and came to Rumonge) had a small place and fled because of the war, near to military position, returned, and people tried to chase me away. It is hard to follow medications because I have little money. When I returned, the house was burnt, then we built an unstable house, the commune asks for taxes but we have no money. The kids tried to go to the husband’s land but the uncles chased them away and I have them (female PLWHA in Rumonge, Bururi province)

I was chased away when husband died. I was accused of being a sex worker because I was not officially married. They took the kids and I [don’t] have them. I have no means to go to court. My husband bought land in Nyanza-Lac [Bururi province] (he was born in Buraza commune) and lived in Nyanza-Lac beforehand. The brother in-law came to chase me away and people agreed because we were not officially married. The Bashingtahe said come (to the traditional court) with pots of beer and I finally abandoned (the case because of the lack of funds). When the brother in-law had the kids, he used them to guard the cows and I was not happy with that so I took them back and they did not resist (female PLWHA in Nyanza-Lac, Makamba province).

In these extracts we not only have problems associated with the patrilineal family structures but also problems associated with the way these structures are reproduced and maintained. The problems highlighted in these extracts are related with the legal bar on women’s ownership of

property that allows husbands' male relatives to claim the house women live in or the land they use for food production if the husband is dead or absent. Furthermore, another aspect of this relationship is the difficulty in getting formal legally binding marriage. An overwhelming number of interviewees pointed out that when they were talking about marriage this was a traditional marriage which does not give entitlements to women and can be dissolved when the husband decides to do so. In Burundi traditional marriage involves bride-price. This supposes to make it binding. However it seems to make marriage binding for women as once married they cannot continue living in their parents' house and land. A married woman is linked directly to her husband's house. As result it gives more power to men to decide whether they want to stay in the marriage. This is also conditioned by the wife's male relations and their social position (they might be richer, larger in numbers or hold socio-political power). Independent of this context it is hard for a woman to invoke the bride-price in order to remain in a marriage. If he wishes the husband could use reasons such as disobedience, being disrespectful, even using reasons as wife staying out after dark, not cooking or being drunk to divorce. The combination of these factors makes women voiceless in marriage and vulnerable to the husbands' behavior. No doubt these conditions made women vulnerable even before the conflict. The culturally imposed attitudes of subservience further reinforce women's subjugation. This is maintained by the imposed and taught shyness of women. The acceptable behavior for them is not to be heard in public, in particular in mixed groups. This expected behavior is reproduced within the family or community by the older women and in most cases by the in-laws. In this behavior women are expected *not* to talk about sex, or participate in any discussion of, for instance, how many children they want to have or whether to use condoms or not. At the same time due to their perceptions of health men, that considers having a health problem as an affront to their masculine

status. They do not talk about HIV, do not participate in most sensitization efforts and they rarely test for HIV. In most cases when they are tested the disease is at an advanced stage. They then typically begin to accuse their wives for bringing the bad disease into the family. Even independent of the conflict context these gender constraints create important structural vulnerabilities for women in relation to HIV:

People say my husband was HIV+, I lived in Gatumba (a camp bordering DRC), and he raised cattle. When I became ill, I came here and got tested and received medicines. He became infected because he bought cows in Kanyosha (in Bujumbura) (female PLWHA Bujumbura Rural province).

My husband fled two times, the first time he came home he was single, the second time he brought home another wife. Many became infected this way because of sex outside marriage (female, Migera Hillside, Ngozi province)

Women complain, saying there is a large gender inequality and clearly injustice here. And adding as evidence: there are usually male condoms and no female condoms. We are vulnerable: if we declare we are HIV+ we are chased from our household. If we talk of condom, we are beaten, chased away or accused of being bad wives...its men who decide everything, all the time. It is difficult for women to express their opinion (HIV trainer in Gitega DC)

These circumstances create central livelihood vulnerabilities. While women are supposed to cultivate the land and look after the herds to care for the family, they cannot claim these resources if their husbands die. Some women can maintain their status within the family even after the death of their husbands due to their male children. However, this is contingent on the attitude of the husband's male relatives towards the wife and their past-marriage. Here, the influence of male relatives on women's life course is important. For instance, she might agree to have sexual relations with brother(s)-in law or uncles to be able to stay in the family home once the husband is dead or gone. In a number of cases both male and female interviewees talked about this logic using a proverb:

If men went abroad, the woman has to honor them (husbands' brothers) as guests; woman is separated [when the husband is away] and can have sex. Iyo So na Sowanyu bagwanye, ntumenya uwo ukubita, kuko ntuzi uwakuvyaye uwari we say-when father and uncle fight, don't quickly take a side, you never know who your real father is". Sex with brother's wife is likely to be tolerated in Burundian tradition. (male ex-combatant from Makamba).

Husbands move around more than women do. Men travel for regional markets or for other purposes while women's mobility determined according to their expected role in the household. Women are left behind to deal with the land and look after the family. Here, other men use this situation of woman's vulnerability to their sexual advantage without feeling obliged to consider the long-term implications for the woman. This creates two circumstances for HIV spread: men have multiple relations with women and their wives are left to deal with the advances of other

men (including male relatives) within their neighborhoods. It is possible that if the wife does not agree to these advances they can accuse her of having relations outside the marriage to make her husband leave her. This is a nuanced situation. It indicates that extra-marital sexual relations with other women are not publicly condoned. However, if a woman tries to deal with this in public the issue becomes her fault and her problem. In other words men can instrumentalise woman's social status against her in public to get out of this of situation. If the wife does not want to engage in these sorts of relations she has only one option and that is to leave the family home, in most cases with any female children she might have. This then leads to problems of material deprivation linked with impoverishment. Given that all livelihood resources are linked to the husband and his family, the option to leave a relationship means that a woman needs to find alternative ways of surviving. These include getting into a new relationship with another man; going back to one's parent's house if the male head of household accepts; or using her body to support herself and her children. Once again potential vulnerability to HIV appears increased.

The Conflict and its Impact on Gender

The conflict in Burundi put pressure on these gender relations and created further vulnerabilities for women in relation to HIV both during the conflict and post-conflict periods. Here the nature of the conflict is important. There are three important aspects of the conflict: its duration, the extensive mobility it created and the deployment structures of various groups. The conflict in Burundi started in 1993 with the assassination of the first elected civilian President Melchior Ndadaye and lasted until well after the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Accords, signed on 28 August 2000.¹¹ The conflict in fact intensified between 2000 and 2003 and again until the

elections in February 2005. This prolonged conflict meant that large numbers of people both in the military (*Forces Armées Burundaises*-FAB) and in the rebel groups were mobilized for extensive periods of time away from their families and communities. This created a vacuum in the traditional family structure where women and girls were no longer protected by the paternal linkages. In certain cases where the husband had been away too long, many families considered sending their daughter-in law away and reclaiming their land. As a result of this situation women found themselves mostly destitute. They had a number of strategies, some wanted to follow their husbands into the camps or as refugees into the neighboring countries. All of these involved extensive travelling which in the context of the conflict made them vulnerable for sexual violence, and some turned to transactional sex. The following extracts shed light on the issue:

My family chased me away; I do not live with them since July 2007. After I gave birth they chased me. I came to live here, I told them about my problems and they accepted me here. Came here in this house, we (my mum) do not want to live here [found out later that her mother wanted her to be at home but her brothers do not]; I went to live in another house in the compound. Saturday I went and asked for forgiveness, but my two brothers refused. The problem is because the father of the child died in July. The husband, both, lived at home, his home near Songa, near the fuel tanks (large government fuel stocks). Then he dies and we were not officially married, his family pushed me away. I live with a lady; the women helped me, because I have no one to help me. She supports me. If she did not accept me, I would be on the streets with no food. I do not have money to go do business like others. I have relatives in Bujumbura but none of them will help, so no one

will really help. I still wait for forgiveness. I am thankful to God for everything (unconfirmed sex worker [18]- with a son Gitega).

Before the war we had food, belongings and therefore we did not be desperate. Sure there was sex, but most unmarried women lived at home, and were not forced into this state (of having sex). During the war, the situation was very bad, people were close together (in camps) some women accepted sex for 100 FBU(for a piece of cassava) (Ex-combatant woman rural Rumonge).

War increased poverty. With war, people had no access to their land, they lost crops, and they could not get resources to live on. Because of that war we have more orphans, widows, and sex workers. The war also increased urban exodus. Many people came to town from rural areas for security reasons and also looking for jobs. War also caused people to be grouped in IDP camps. In those camps, people had no jobs; they were poor, with no access to land. Especially young girls were at risk of sexual abuses and HIV contamination (female social worker Gitega).

Soldiers were positioned in different places in the country and changed their locations regularly. Rebel groups established base camps in Kibira forest area and many of their troops were moving in and out of the country in Tanzanian or DRC border areas. The rebel groups were moving in from their bases outside the country to fight with the military around Gishubi, Mutaho, Nyarusange, Bukirasazi communes in Gitega province and in the regions of Ruyigi, Rutana,

Cankuzo leading into Kibira. This ever changing deployment of troops also created a much more predatory relationship between troops and local women.

When we were sent to a military position in the field, military took young girls who lived nearby. Military was sent to places where people were grouped in camps. When they were fighting in the bush, they could have a day out. Then 3 or 4 men could go together in a place looking for girls. They could then take [your] girls. They could take different girls or, three of them take the same girl, going in one after another. I would say this happened many times and for many soldiers. As I saw behavior among my colleagues, it happened regularly. For example, one of those deceased I told you about was born in Mivo. We were together, and we joined the army at the same time. We were in Bujumbura Rural, near Sororezo, then in Nyabiraba, then in Kabarore commune (in Kayanza province). Of course it is hard to know how and where a person was infected and from which women. But I would rather say he was infected in Kabarore. Then we were moved to Bujumbura Rural, I don't remember exactly where, maybe in Isale commune, then to Gasenyi, then to Mutimbuzi. Every three months we were moved to another military position, and other soldiers came to replace us, while we moved into another place to replace another group of soldiers. Some individuals from our group or from the previous groups were infected in that place [Kabarore], some of the women they visited were infected. And infected people went all over places, moved and left behind infected women, and infected other women in other places.

Infected women received new coming soldiers and more people were infected, you see (male ex-combatant FAB Ngozi Province).

The high mobility meant that many women stopped farming to avoid the soldiers' and rebels' movements. This created livelihoods problems for households and in particular for women looking after their families. This had a number of implications for women: they were becoming more immobile, some women decided to leave where they were living to attach themselves to militarized groups as a livelihood mechanism. The combination of these circumstances increased sexual exploitation of women in general. Here the relationship between local communities and the rebel groups should be distinguished from the relationship FAB had with the communities. The nature of the regular army's deployment did not allow them to establish long-term relations with communities. They had regular army structure in their camps and also were allowed to have regular visits to their homes. This clearly created a different kind of engagement with communities. Since, rebel groups created camps in the forests a new kind of social set up emerged. In this process women acquired a number of roles which changed as the conflict went on.

We had female fighters. I saw many female combatants joining us. I saw during the night, young women coming with food on their heads, and they did not return. We think they came from the near community. Some came willingly, but not really willingly. They were forced. They arrived, we trained them and some became fighters. Some came freely, day or night. You know in the community there was someone responsible to collect food-if there were not enough fighters to bring food, they forced people to transport. Some could

be fighters, some not. Some go back and responsible for food collection in the community. They had to be either fighters or food collectors. So in the camp there were two parts. We lived in bunkers for men, and across from those for women. If you were caught going across to the women's part, you could lose your rank from 1st to 2nd class for example. It was not possible for 2nd rank (unranked) to go to women. For ranked men it was possible to court women and some got pregnant and gave birth and sometimes women were ranked. It was unthinkable for unranked men, it was tough. If caught, he was beaten to half-dead so others did not think of going. It was secret even ranked men hid it; they did not want to lose rank. A woman would think twice before complaining because she knew that she would be punished for the initial relationship. There were other opportunities to meet women. Sometimes, few fighters, when time to go to the battlefield, some stole, broke into homes and raped women (male ex-combatant Ngozi province).

For those women and girls who joined the rebellion under pressure and without much education or political capital prior to their participation, life was not easy.¹² Independent of the above-mentioned regulations on male-female relations they experienced sexual and physical abuse. The following extract points out how, low ranking soldiers took advantage of new female recruits' lack of knowledge and forced them to have sex knowing that they could not complain about it.

They told that it is a military command you have to have sex. We were ordered to have sex. Most of them were ranked people, different ranked people. We had problem in the beginning you don't know who is ranked and which rank so everybody is coming to you

[to have sex]. In time we realized who were allowed to have sex. Then we know the ranks of people calling you and you can refuse but it means that you accept to be beaten. Because if you refuse you don't respect orders and you have to be punished. The relationships were dependent on the person's [officer's] feelings and mood. He can keep you for a long time (up to 2 years) or he could just come and go and have sex. We saw some changes during the war as the time was passing some men kept long-time partners. He would still have sex with others too (female ex-combatant CNDD-FDD).

The situation was different from the perspective of ranked female soldiers who were also politically active and joined the rebellion intentionally and ideologically as pointed out below:

They say we were just wives for male soldiers. They say we are accustomed to uncontrolled sex life. This makes me sad. I am married. I can say that no one single man came to me in the bush for sexual relations. In military they have strong tough regulations. Even some –I would say- not correct men who could come into the military and keep going into uncontrolled sexual life, they would encounter many punishments to get them on the right path. Some individuals were having wild sexual life; they had to come back to discipline and to follow regulation of the rebellion. Of course rape happened. I think it is normal. When men and women are together...Even in normal life...yes it happened. When grown up men and women, they are natural needs-besoins naturels. At the beginning it was not authorized to have couple life. After certain time, leaders saw it was natural, they saw they could not control it. They changed the rule. After that, when a man and woman wanted to go into couple life, they were asked to let it

be known to the commandant. Then they would become married. This was unofficial marriage, they were accepted as married. You could be in the same unit or be together, work, fight together. There were no separation between men and women in the bush except for lodging. In lodging we had separate place for women (female ex-combatant, CNDD-FDD).

It is important to point out that there is a fine line between a voluntary and non-voluntary participation in the rebellion. The extract below, and others, showed us that at times a willingness to join was induced by threats to women's and girls' personal security.

I was in the 6th grade in Mutumba commune. When the war broke out, they came and took the girls. They were writing letters to the headmaster or to the students directly. When we arrive in the school we would receive the letters. Many hand written letters spread around the school. They would kidnap one student, she will give those names and they [fighters] will come with a list and drop the list. When they come back there would be a copy of the list. They came to take students on the list, during the day they say come and meet us in the bush. We lived in the bush, life was very difficult. They raped us, we didn't know then, we did not know who they were (female ex-combatant with children Kamenge).

Here it is important to point out that officers exerted important control over men's behavior. Although they were not happy for low ranks to have sexual relations in the camps, they were able to order them to bring new women into the camps either for officers' use or for other needs such as labor as suggested by the extract from the interview with a male-ex-combatant above. In

this process, women and their bodies were entirely instrumentalized to assert the hierarchical power among ranks.

Another aspect of the conflict was the extensive mobility of people both within and outside the country. There are two aspects to this mobility. People trying to escape violence decided to join rebellion and moved into rebel camps. These included women. Others moved as groups into camps as internally displaced people within Burundi. According to the UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in May 2004, 'there were 140 000 people in IDP camps compared to 281 000 people in IDP camps in 2002'.¹³ The internal displacement monitoring centre also points out that 100000 people remained in IDP camps across the country in May 2008.¹⁴ Others moved out of the country into refugee camps in neighboring countries like the DRC and to Tanzania in particular.¹⁵ These camps were already established as a response to the consequences of the events of 1972, the 'Hutu rebellion', which created a large number of displaced people.¹⁶ These kinds of movements were not easy. They required individuals, including many women, to spend weeks on the roads. The Burundian Army was tasked to protect the IDP camps during this period. The attitudes of soldiers towards women and girls in these camps were important:

There is no saint in either the rebellion or the military. There is a link between military and IDPs at the camps, they did bad things. Some IDPs fled and came back ill-we think it is HIV/AIDS and could be from living in the camps guarded by military (female Batwa, Gitega province).

Military are supposed to protect however they raped women, especially in IDP camps.

There are many stories of women raped by rebels and they called for help. The military came but instead of helping they raped them again (nurse, Bururi).

In IDP camps where the military was ordered to protect its inhabitants, the soldiers often assaulted women, especially widows, many widows. They knew that the women had no mechanism to complain so they could get away with it (male ex-FAB officer).

From 1983-1993 there were sessions on HIV but from 1993 until the end of the crisis they ceased. People in the bush received no training, had widespread unprotected sex. There was no HIV information in the forces (male ex-combatant FAB).

All of these characteristics of the conflict its duration, particular style of deployment of forces, and the displacement/mobility created in Burundi produced complex outcomes for all parties involved. In particular these characteristics are important in creating conditions for the spread of HIV. During the conflict social mechanisms that provided some security within family and community life gradually become dysfunctional. At the same time, both military and rebel groups relied on existing gender norms in the society to justify women's adverse incorporation in the conflict. In particular the experiences of women with the rebel groups highlight the fact that sexual violence was not only cross-ethnic or political lines but very much an intra-ethnic experience too. The militarization radicalized the existing vulnerabilities for women as existential livelihood problems. In other words women experienced the conflict as a function of the existing social positions they had in Burundi. In many cases this led women to resort to

instrumentalizing their bodies. The process produced vulnerabilities for women from which they now suffer after the conflict.

Post-Conflict Burundi

The conditions discussed above created and maintained important structural vulnerabilities to HIV to spread during the long conflict. Some of these are the collapse of the traditional social networks allowing women to have access to livelihoods through their fathers or husbands; the creation of alternative livelihood mechanisms in relation to the various military groups' deployment characteristics, such as sex work, around the FAB and the emergence of women as support personnel for rebels in their camps; women becoming 'bush wives' in the camps for officers; and many others trying to get to the resources by moving often with their children within, the country thus creating a general vulnerability to sexual violence. Here, gender determinants of these conditions also meant that these vulnerabilities were experienced differently by women and men. Although young men also felt that under duress it was better to join the rebellion for safety reasons, as suggested by the extract below, their experiences while they were under arms were different from women's experiences in general.¹⁷

I was demobilized in June 23rd 2005. I married in 2000, then after two months I joined the rebellion. My life was very bad. My family was very poor. Also, there were fighters all around in the bush-neighbours suspected I collaborated with them. Police came and took me and beat me, I paid them and left. At the time, if people suspected you, they could kill you-I did not tell my wife or family and went, they (rebels) accepted me. I integrated into

the rebellion, and fought until the ceasefire, then I demobilized and came home (male ex-combatant Ngozi province).

Being part of armed groups might have provided some security and regular livelihoods for men. For women, even when they were part of such groups, their personal security was at stake at most times.

Conditions under which women live in the post-conflict period are determined by the way these vulnerabilities have been addressed by the system in the post-conflict period. Given the integrated relationship between the general population and the armed groups the process of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) is one of the processes that have implications for women and their long term vulnerabilities. Although the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement for Burundi was signed on Monday August 28th, 2000, the actual cease-fire and subsequent decrease in fighting did not occur until November 2003 when the main rebel group the *Conseil national pour la défense de la démocratie-Forces pour la défense de la démocratie* (CNDD-FDD) signed a peace deal (the *Forces Nationales de Liberation-FNL* remained outside this process until May 2008). Initially the African Union facilitated a disarmament, demobilization and reintegration; this was replaced in 2004 by a United Nations (UN) mission-the United Nations Operation in Burundi (ONUB). The Burundi DDR process was launched in December 2004. Ex-combatants were processed in demobilization camps (DC) from December 2004 to July 2005. The formal in-country program is funded by the World Bank Multi-country Demobilization and Reintegration Program (MDRP) and led by the national body *Commission National de Démobilisation, Réinsertion and Réintégration* (CNDRR). The objective was to downsize the army to 25,000 and police to 15,000. All together, FAB and the

rebel groups were estimated to have more than 55,000 troops. As of the summer of 2008 approximately 23,000 troops were demobilized, among them 3041 children and 494 women. There are severe social problems associated with the ex-combatant returnees after they left demobilization camps.

Reintegration was and is hard, sometimes I wished I could fly away somewhere where no one knows I am an ex-combatant. People blame stealing on ex-combatants, if in business you do well, people wonder how you are doing well. I have a business but it is hard, still authorities (hillside) perceive me as bad. We even collected small arms to make a better image, but it did not work. People said it was only a part of them, that we stole the rest or we disarm only certain political party people and not others. I wish to return to FDN [the National Defense Forces], I would give back my demob package, and return to the army if opportunity were given to me. An ex-combatant and local girl get together, her family pushes the ex-combatant away because of the bad image. It happened to my friends and me personally four times. Some have not succeeded to marry yet, this increase the HIV/AIDS as they are having sex with many people (male ex-combatant Kabonga, Makamba province).

The reintegration is hard for young ex-combatants. We need to build our houses and to marry, but there is not enough money. For married ex-combatants, it was easier, they come back home and find their wives, and however the land is not very kept as the wife was the only keeper. The husband was always welcomed home; however in the meantime,

the wife could have fled and may have had a child. Some husbands pushed their wives away, others understood that times were tough (male ex-combatant, Bururi province).

Many of the problems are associated with the long period most ex-combatants had been away. In some cases the families they left behind changed as wives were not waiting anymore or had their own traumatic experiences which needed to be reconciled with husbands. In other cases husbands' lives in the rebellion had serious implications for the waiting family. Some ex-combatants had their bush wives and children. There were attempts to reconcile these relations with their waiting families. It was not an easy process to deal with. In most cases the strict gender norms are instrumentalized to exclude one of the women from the family. This then results in direct livelihood problem for woman who starts another cycle of relations to secure herself in an environment where many ex-combatants are replicating their casual sex lives after the conflict.

I was divorced this January (2007). He has another life now. When married, we were not legally married. He was a rebel fighter and had no time for legal marriage. So after he came back from the bush we got married (traditionally). He did not want to have the legal marriage at the commune. I could not convince him. The other women, they were together in the bush, I did not know. They are both [working] in the police now. After the bush, the other was in Bujumbura. When we separated he went to Bujumbura to find her, now they are both in Bujumbura. The other woman now knows about me, both came to see me when I had the baby; he does not help with the baby. The child is legally recognized at the commune but there is no other help. I have no job, I only sell tomatoes

in the market but sometimes I only get 1000 BIF (approximately 1USD) or keep the tomatoes too long they rot, it is very small capital. I only had 5000 BIF and now only 3000 BIF. Also had a case of Primus (beer) however they recently stole the full case during the night. I live in bad conditions; I am not sure how I can get money. Beforehand I had capital so I did not have to work as a sex worker, now there are bad conditions I need to do it (female sex worker Ngozi Town).

Reintegration with women is hard question. In the Burundian custom, wife must obey and respect husband, therefore she must welcome him home without any issues that was tradition-women had no decision making ability. I saw problems, especially if the man was away for prolonged periods, 5 years, it was hard on women. It was hard especially if they had a child with someone-this caused separation and divorce. Sometimes the man had children as well and brought them home, causing tension, jealousy, and mistreatment of children by the wife (male ex-combatant, Buyenzi).

Here we are observing the emergence of new networks in the post-conflict context linking various outcomes of people's sexual experiences during the conflict. These networks mostly formed or integrated through men's relations and were maintained within the gender norms, as women cannot say no to their husbands in matters of sex or demand them to be tested before they have sex. This represents an important way in which women become vulnerable to HIV. While women considered some ex-combatants with money coming from their DDR packages as good candidates for marriage, they were made more vulnerable as a result of the social context of the life of ex-combatants during the conflict. In many interviews it is clear that women were infected

by their husbands. It was most often the woman, who would go testing and be found to be HIV positive, and it was at this moment when husbands placed the blame on the women, and the end result was either the man leaving or the woman being forced to leave. In both cases, the woman was left with no material support.

The DDR process in Burundi is 'framed through male paradigms' that ignored women's constant insecurity within the social relations created by the conflict.¹⁸ The DDR process that tried to bring the men under arms back to the community did not focus on women. The way people were selected to go through the process left a lot of women outside the system. Many women combatants who self-demobilized, who were members of militia such as the Peace Guardians, militant fighters and those who were part of street gangs were excluded from the process. Many others who were in the rebellion were not fighting but used as support personnel linking rebels with the communities. These women were not targeted or included under the category of formal ex-combatants; they are simply ignored. Here an important aspect is the way commanding officers were providing lists of people for cantonment in demobilization camps. There are women who were not listed by their commanders: they sent women back directly to their area of origin under the pretext they may be pregnant thus needed to rest at home. In this way, many 'bush wives' have been reportedly prevented from receiving DDR benefits. It is said that ranked fighters did not want their 'bush wives' to claim this 'married status' in the DC or after this would have challenged their social status in the post-conflict political context. This meant that women's problems associated with the nature of the conflict remained outside the system.

Of course there are problems in coming back. You have a child and not enough money. Combatants are not received well. If there is an attack ex-combatants are accused. They see us as bad persons. If you have parents they could be stigmatized. So family has a problem, they tell you, you are consistently creating problems. They say when you left for the bush, it was a problem, now it is a problem you come back with a child without a father. We don't get any support from fathers or others. Families are rejecting us. Because of poverty women could accept sex work. It is hard to marry for ex-combatant women with a child. Men are unlikely to accept us with child (female ex-combatant, Kamenge, Bujumbura province).

Arguably the post-conflict environment not only ignored the problems, including sexual violence, in women's lives during the conflict and the associated needs created by them, but also created a new set of problems for women which are exacerbating their vulnerabilities to HIV. Having been part of the rebellion in the bush a lot of women face stigma and this becomes even stronger if they come back with children without husbands. In most cases these women are disowned by their parents and don't have many resources. Having a child makes it harder to get into a new marriage arrangement. It leaves begging, low paid labor, transactional sex or sex work as possible options. The nature of peace has consequences. Given that the ruling political elite at present were mostly in the rebellion for a long-time, many of the fathers or people who were responsible for sexual violence are part of the victors of the conflict and thus among the new political classes of the country. It is very hard to engage them in questions about the treatment of women and the consequences of their treatment of women during the conflict. Most men do not

want to be reminded of their life then and this also includes their bush wives. This makes it very hard to for women to survive. In addition to resource implications this situation also creates important issues around self-worth and trust. It is clear that most women in these conditions feel that 'they had become utterly expendable in the minds of those they thought' they fought with.¹⁹ Furthermore the lack of public acknowledgement of women's needs in relation to the violence they experienced relocates these problems as a private problem for those individuals rather than considering them as the outcome of social attitudes. This in turn allows women to be exposed to further violence in their private lives.²⁰

The political leadership which they helped to establish now ignores them. Without extra resources are being made available they resort to sex work which has become a part of life in post-conflict period. This was partially facilitated by the large numbers of ex-combatants who were waiting for their DDR financial packages to be delivered in urban areas after they left DC. Many did not want to go back into their communities without resources but the payments were delayed by up to two year periods. Although they were supposed to receive the package three months after the DC process that took place between December 2004 and July 2005. The payment processes started in September 2006. These processes have complicated women's lives and those of ex-combatants who were waiting to be paid. These have come together to create further vulnerability to the HIV virus.

Conclusions

We argue that from the HIV/AIDS perspective, the long duration of conflict is most likely to have had an impact on the spread of HIV. It seems that the relationship between conflict and

HIV/AIDS in Burundi is about: a) the way armed groups mobilized and deployed, in particular, as rebel groups were dispersed across the country; b) displacement experienced by the population, and c) the duration of the displacement and the long-term mobilization of military and rebel groups in the country. We argue that these processes allowed gender disparities that we have highlighted to be exacerbated. Furthermore, the conflict created new sexual networks that would have been impossible without the conflict. These were important sites for the spread of HIV. Given the prolongation of the conflict and the mobility observed, the country and most importantly those who were mobilized and deployed as armed groups missed the possibility of being sensitized to HIV/AIDS. In other words the characteristics of the conflict had negative impact on the possibility of HIV interventions during this period in Burundi. Most of our ex-combatant interviewees pointed out that they first heard about HIV and condoms in DC when they came out of the conflict, but they did not have the right psychology to understand and absorb the information in a way that would have been useful for them in their lives after demobilization.

We realize that the Burundian experience is just one case study looking at the relationship between conflict and HIV/AIDS and it is hard to generalize from one case study. However, we believe that this case study provides important methodological insights to understand what matters in conflict contexts for the possibility of the spread of HIV. We argue that each conflict is different. Each will have different characteristics. The way these characteristics interact with a different set of gender relations particular to each context will have an important central role in relation to HIV infections. Gender relations provide a central frame of reference to think about the structural possibilities of HIV spread. Considering that DDR is another area where women, independent of their experiences, are excluded from HIV-related resources, the characteristics of

each conflict and the gender relations in that context should inform interventions rather than merely relying on general international tool kits, such as those employed in many DDR processes.

¹ Spiegel, 'Prevalence of HIV infection'.

² Seckinelgin, 'What is the evidence'; UN *UNICEF Campaign launches*; Jewkes 'Comprehensive response to rape'.

³ Uvin, *Life after Violence*, 27.

⁴ Achebe and Teboh, 'Dialoguing Women', 68.

⁵ Thompson, *The Voice of the Past*; Bron and West, 'Time for stories'.

⁶ see McGovern, 'Models of Resistance'.

⁷ Nnaemeka, 'Introduction: Reading the Rainbow'.

⁸ Mollica, 'Mental Health and Psychosocial Effects'.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Leaning et al., 'Human Security and Conflict', 18.

¹¹ Chrétien, *The Great Lakes of Africa*.

¹² see also Fox, 'Girl Soldiers: Human Security'.

¹³ OCHA, *Burundi: Number of Internally Displaced*.

¹⁴ IDMC, *Internally displaced Burundians*.

¹⁵ Loescher and Milner, 'The Long Road home', 158.

¹⁶ Lemarchand and Martin, '*Selective Genocide in Burundi*'.

¹⁷ Gardam and Charlesworth, 'Protection of Women in armed Conflict'.

¹⁸ Handrahan, 'Conflict, Gender, Ethnicity and Post-Conflict', 429.

¹⁹ Leaning et al., 'Human Security and Conflict', 19.

²⁰ Johnson and García-Moreno, 'Gender, Health and Security', 192.

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