

https://dspace.org/

Tokowa po ya ekolo The military body within the Congolese Army

Mulopo Lakika; R Essex

https://hdl.handle.net/10539/40435
WOS

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/

Check for updates

Article

Armed Forces & Society
2024, Vol. 50(2) 520–538
© The Author(s) 2022
Article reuse guidelines:
sagepub.com/journals-permissions
DOI: 10.1177/0095327X221120055
journals.sagepub.com/home/afs
SAGE

"*Tokowa po ya ekolo*": The Military Body Within the Congolese Army

Dostin Lakika[1,2] and Ryan Essex[3]

Abstract

This article explores the conceptualization of the body among former Congolese soldiers living as refugees in Johannesburg. The article draws on extensive fieldwork in Johannesburg, South Africa and employs the concept of *deterritorialization* and *reterritorialization* to explain the bodies of those who have decided to join the Congolese Army. The article reveals the complex ways in which the army manipulates soldiers' bodies to generate diverse lines of connection, coalition, and removal (or disconnection). We support that the soldiers' bodies are not necessarily owned by the country, but that soldiers' bodies become owned by military institutions, who employ nationalist rhetoric to justify their existence and actions. The act of joining the army could be considered a way of cutting ties with civilian life and joining a new world in which the individual is socialized into military culture. Through initiation, the soldier's body is *reterritorialized;* it becomes a national asset. While this study focuses on former Congolese soldiers, it has broader relevance, giving insight into how soldiers perceive their body shifting from individual possession to be reterritorialized as the body of the nation.

Keywords

DR Congo, bodies, soldier, deterritorialization, reterritorialization

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has a long history of violence and unrest. Over the last several decades, violence and civil war has left tens (hundreds) of

[1]African Centre for Migration & Society, Wits University
[2]French Institute of South Africa, South Africa
[3]Institute for Lifecourse Development, University of Greenwich

Corresponding Author:
Dostin Lakika, African Centre for Migration & Society, Wits University and French Institute of South Africa, South Africa.
Email: dostinlakika24@gmail.com

thousands either dead or displaced. Among those who have fled this violence are former soldiers. This article explores how former Congolese soldiers now living in Johannesburg conceptualize the soldier's body. Focusing on the conception of soldier's body within the Congolese Army is important for several reasons. First and foremost, this article helps to deepen our understanding of the socialization process of DRC soldiers along with its role in the construction of the military body and identity. It provides insight into how military indoctrination and conditions of training impose a level of sacrifice and suffering aimed to the dedication of soldiers' bodies to the nation. Here we support that the soldiers' bodies are not necessarily owned by the country, but that soldiers' bodies become owned by military institutions, who employ nationalist rhetoric to justify their existence and actions. This study also allows us to understand the slippages observed in the conduct of soldiers that are contrary to the military principles that they have inculcated throughout their training. Indeed, it is true that since Mobutu[1] until now the Congolese defense forces have deviated from the principles on which the army is founded. This study will also provide insights into the multiple transgressions of the DRC armed forces; human rights abuses, illegal practices and abuses of power, to name a few.

Below we will first provide context in relation to the political unrest and violence in the DRC, along with providing context in relation to those who have fled to Johannesburg, South Africa. We will then go on to introduce several concepts that better help us understand the nature of deterritorialization and reterritorialization and then discuss the relationship between the military body, masculinity, and nationalism. We will then go on to describe what is meant by deterritorialization and reterritorialization, discussing the nature of this research and its findings. Central to these findings were the complex ways in which the army manipulates soldiers' bodies to generate diverse lines of connection, coalition, and removal. The major argument this article advances is that individuals who join the army in the DRC are stripped of the narrow view of themselves. The socialization into the military culture leads them to be considered as national assets of their country. Through the initiation process, soldiers' bodies are reterritorialized to become national resources. Therefore, resocialization prepares soldiers to a new life consecrated to the protection of the nation.

War, Violence, Political Unrest, and the Congolese Armed Forces

The contemporary history of the Congolese armed forces can be traced back to 1960 after independence from Belgium was granted. The period immediately following was characterized by instability and unrest, politically and within the armed forces. During this time Joseph-Désiré Mobutu, an army officer was appointed as Chief of Staff of the army. After consolidating power, Mobutu succeeded in a coup, unseating the first president, Kasa-Vubu, and establishing military rule (McNulty, 1999, p. 58). Several units within the armed forces were set up with the sole purpose to protect Mobutu and his regime. By the late 1960s, Mobutu had neutralized all political

opposition, and in 1971, the country was renamed to Zaire, with the armed forces were renamed to the *Forces Armées Zaïroises* (FAZ). Since this time, the Congolese armed forces have been responsible for multiple atrocities, such as massacres and human rights violations; such as the massacre of Lovanium students in Kinshasa on June 4, 1969, the massacres of Luamuela and Katekelay in Kasai in July 1979, the massacre of Christians in Kinshasa on February 16, 1992, the Lubumbashi University massacre of students in May 1990, as well as the multiple murders of political actors and ordinary citizens in the so-called *Hibou*[2] operations from 1992 to 1995 (Matsanza, 2020, p. 16). Since Mobutu, the Congolese state has functioned not to increase the legitimacy of its structures but rather to guarantee the control of leaders over the population through repression.

After Mobutu took power, soldiers were recruited from the disadvantaged social areas. For the majority, this was not a choice made because of dedication but a necessity, due to poverty, limited opportunities, and poor standards of living (Lakika, 2019). The corrosion of the social, working conditions, and poor pay forced many into illegal practices to which authorities often turned a blind eye. While not necessarily a choice, recruitment into the army or police corps, therefore, also provided certain opportunities and power to verbally and/or physically abuse, racketeer, extort, steal and even rape without being held accountable (Matsanza, 2020, p. 30). Profit-making activities also attracted many men in uniform (Reno, 1997) with many senior officers of Mobutu's ethnic clan being involved in informal networks of trading mineral resources and soldiers, on the other hand, engaging in survivalism to top up their meager salaries. Stearns et al. (2013) report that soldiers are involved in protecting and taxing the trade in minerals or other natural resources such as hardwood, charcoal, cannabis, wild animals or fish, and selling arms and ammunition. According to these authors, the extent of these commercial activities varies greatly. While some high-ranking officers are at the head of serious commercial empires, lower ranked soldiers are more involved in the general Congolese survival economy, such as growing palm oil or vegetables. This corruption, while widely known, became public and disruptive on several occasions, with FAZ soldiers leading riots and looting in September 1991 and January 1993 because of unpaid salaries (Ebenga & N'landu, 2005; Matsanza, 2020).

Corruption, tribalism, and nepotism could be found throughout the armed forces. Ranks were distributed not on the basis of ability and merit but rather on the basis of ethnicity and tribal affiliation. Verweijen (2018) talks of "patronage networks" that were a source of disarticulation and dysfunction within the army, impairing meritocratic appointments, and inducing commanders to treat their troops unequally, which strengthened the parallel chains of command (p. 2). Most of the top members of Mobutu's ethnic group, Ngbandi, benefited of the preferential treatment by occupying top positions in the army. As Thom (1999) notes, Mobutu liked his top military leaders to be lackluster, malleable, and above all, ethnic followers.

Despite the military cooperation between Zaire and some Western countries that provided military training and equipment to the country, the FAZ was one of the most

poorly equipped armies in the world (Thom, 1999). On several occasions when the regime was threatened by secessions, Mobutu had to appeal for Western help to overcome dissidents (McNulty, 1999). While troops were trained by a range of international partners, this training did little to address the rampant corruption and unrest throughout the armed forces (McNulty, 1999).

In 1997, a coalition of Rwandan and Ugandan armies known as the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo (AFDL) invaded Zaire. Mobutu's army put up little resistance and the country was soon after under the control of the AFDL. After the removal of Mobutu from power in 1997, the country was marred by protracted war and political instability. Despite elections in 2006, followed by those which took place in 2011 and 2018, the DRC has never fully recovered with conflict ongoing and the presence of Rwandan and Ugandan armies within the DRC often reported.

While Congolese soldiers are trained to imbibe some slogans such as *Tokowa po ya ekolo* or *Makila na biso po ya ekolo*,[3] as history shows they often fail to live up to this principle in their actions and to protect the nation. Historically, the DRC armed forces have often been used for political expediency and their relationships with the population has often flared tensions (Baaz & Stern, 2010). This can be explained by multiple factors including the socialization of soldiers and the precarious life that soldiers are often subject to, developing survival mechanisms turning civilians to become their "field" through the slogan, *Civile azali bilanga ya militaire*[4] (Baaz & Stern, 2009; Verweijen, 2018). As such, the military in the DRC has become infamous as an instrument of terror and contributing to the lawlessness of the country.

The ongoing violence and political unrest in the DRC led to the internal and international migration of many citizens and soldiers alike. According to Ebenga and N'landu (2005) an estimated 20,000 Congolese ex-soldiers fled the country. This estimate only accounts for migration between 1996 and 2005 and is likely an underestimate. Large numbers of Congolese soldiers were temporarily accommodated in neighboring countries like Congo-Brazzaville, Uganda, Burundi, and Zambia. But because of the geographical proximity and security concerns, many of them decided, with the support of their relatives, to leave and seek asylum further afield in countries like South Africa. Unlike many of the countries neighboring the DRC, South Africa offered relative political stability and economic opportunities (Akokpari, 2001; Sichone, 2002 in Mbikayi, 2008). Refugees in South Africa including ex-soldiers are mainly dispersed in the major cities, such as Johannesburg (Morris, 1998). As there was already a substantial population from the DRC in Johannesburg, the city offered relative opportunity in terms of finding work and having social support from family and friends (Jinnah, 2010). Furthermore, a number of support services existed for those who recently arrived, with charities and religious organizations providing assistance (Nzayabino, 2010). A large number of former Congolese soldiers, like their fellow Congolese migrants are in low-skilled jobs (like petty trading) or work as drivers or security guards (Jinnah, 2010), spending long working hours with no benefits or protections.

Today the DRC Army is struggling to defeat the mushrooming rebellions threatening the country. During his recent visit to the eastern part of the country last June 2021, the current Congolese president bemoaned the dysfunction among the Congolese armed forces (Jeune Afrique, 2021).

Opportunities, Escape From Abuse and Nationalism

Various motivations can explain people's attraction to the army in the DRC. While the substantial motivation for joining the army is a sense of nationalism, we herein argue that this is not the only incentive to join. The DRC Army offered opportunities not available in civilian life, including stable employment and a steady income with educational opportunities. Many also joined as a means to escape abuse and coercion on behalf of military.

Opportunity

The army provided opportunities that were otherwise not available. Through military cooperation with Western, Asian, and African academies, as well as the existence of its own military academies and training centers, the Congolese (then Zairean) Army attracted talented young people (Stearns et al., 2013). Between 1960 and 1991, the country received financial, material, and human support from Western and Middle Eastern powers to train Congolese officers. For example, 400 North Korean trainers came to offer their military expertise to Congolese officers (Stearns et al., 2013 p. 46).

Large numbers of Congolese soldiers were recruited, and in the late 80s, military personnel had relatively good benefits, like rations at subsidized rates, shelter, education (for officers and children) and specialized training (Lakika, 2019, p. 98). Important to note, these opportunities have become scarce today—that is, the conditions in the DRC Army have significantly deteriorated (Baaz & Stern, 2009; Mbumba, 2016).

Escape From Abuse and Coercion

The army may also be viewed as a place that procures security to resist external threats which are directed either to soldiers themselves or to their family members. In the context of the DRC, military–civilian relations have always been characterized by hostility and disrespect (Baaz & Stern, 2009, 2010). Faced with meager salaries, state security forces consider civilians as a means to top up their income. The population is frequently harassed and extorted by soldiers, "either on the pretext of some real or fake transgression of the law, or simply by referring to them as soldiers' cornfield" (Baaz & Stern, 2010, p. 25). Thus, becoming a member of the army offers the guarantee of being safe from these forms of abuse. This protection is extended to soldier's families.

Nationalism

Nationalism is defined as "collection action designed to render the boundaries of the nation congruent with those of its governance unit" (Hechter, 2000, p. 7). The three pillars on which nationalism is built are "the cumulative bureaucratization of coercion, the centrifugal ideologization and the way these two processes envelop the hubs of micro-solidarity" (Malesevic & Malešević, 2013, p. 7).

McClintock (1993, p. 71) emphasizes that nationalism is "experienced and transmitted primarily through fetishism—precisely the cultural form that the Enlightenment denigrated as the antithesis of 'Reason.'" In the case of DRC armed forces, the process of inculcating military doctrine implied a series of rituals through which "the personal, the local and even the global are often subsumed into the national" (Malesevic & Malešević, 2013, p. 5). The primary motive in using the concept of nationalism, particularly in the army, is to underscore the way it promotes the spirit of self-sacrifice helping to "generate the individual commitment and the organized cooperation that make for combat power on the battlefield" (Posen, 1993).

After his 1965 coup d'état, Mobutu sought to forge a nationalist ideology, seeking to forge a national identity through natural and cultural resources (Smith, 1996) used to entrench this national ideology. In the context of soldiering, the love of the nation implies shedding blood in order to defend it through.

Mundane practices such as saluting the national colors (flag) which they also enforced among civilians, the wearing of uniform particularly when on duty as well as the use of deictic language such as "we," "our," "us," and "here" (Skey, 2009, p. 332) were visible enforcement of this nationalism.

Herein, we argue that nationalism is sustained by various forms of rewards that reinforce people's commitment to serving the nation as "contested systems of cultural representation that limit and legitimize peoples' access to the resources of the nation-state" (McClintock, 1993, p. 61). Failure to respond to the needs of those who have dedicated their lives to defend the nation may lead to the contestation or rejection of the notions of the nation. This is what happened in the case of military involvement in the DRC where soldiers have been hostile to the same nation they were called to defend.

Territorialization and Deterritorialization of the Soldier's Body

The work of Deleuze and Guattari (1987) is particularly useful in understanding military dispossession and the ways in which soldiers' bodies are embedded in the military forms of life in terms of ideology, training environments as well as beliefs in the national values. The military body will be analyzed using two concepts: decoding or deterritorialization and reterritorialization. Deleuze and Guattari consider that the characteristic of bourgeois capitalism formation results in "two simultaneous movements—decoding deterritorialization and overcoding-reterritorialization" (Deleuze

& Guattari, 2004 in Wilhelm-Solomon, 2016, p. 383). We argue here that the process of making a soldier within the Congolese Army responds to the logic of deterritorialization and reterritorialization. Reterritorialization implies the reorganization of an area or territorial environment that has undergone deterritorialization. Anthropologically, reterritorialization refers to a process of appropriating prevailing culture of a certain environment. In the context of this study, the terms are used to show on the one hand how the people who engage in the army are stripped of an individual conception of their being in order to embrace the values upon which the nation is based and to offer their being as a heritage that the nation can draw upon to protect its interests or values. In this conception, there is therefore individual immersion in becoming a national resource.

Military institutions have their own set of rules, structure, relationships, and hierarchies defining and informing the behavior of its members and the relationships between them. It provides an alternative social space, which simultaneously imposes and offers a new way of life, social, symbolic and forms of belonging, as well as the production of a new identity to its members. The various forms of violence and abuses the DRC armed forces have often displayed are associated with the military constructs of masculinity through indoctrination which is viewed as a powerful adult socialization process that involves a high degree of violence.

In the context of the DRC Army, the process of making a soldier consisted of making them as cruel and as merciless as possible when they faced the enemies (Lakika, 2019, p. 136) as well as promoting physical confrontation and quashing empathy. Cadets are also forced to sing "immoral songs" or smoke or sniff drug as a way to "adulthood" and "warriorhood." Thus, enrolling in the army involves entering a special behavioral frame that is governed by rules which are different from those of [civilian's] everyday life (Lomsky-Feder et al., 2008). In this process, soldiers are prepared to understand the role of the army for a country. Through this initiation, their bodies, spirits, and souls are transformed; young soldiers imbibe military ethos, which sometimes magnify killing and other forms of violence (Lakika, 2019, p. 136). Military training aims not only to improve the capacities of soldiers in the fulfillment of their duties but it also serves to refashion their behavior by making them less sensitive, less worried, more aggressive, and more interested in competition than cooperation.

The success of this initiation is dependent on the level of discipline and obedience that the army implements. Poor discipline is often seen as breach of mutual obligation between soldier and commander, and many members of the Congolese Army are accused and condemned not because of their abuses against civilians, but because of their disobedience to the commandment (see Baaz & Verweijen, 2013).

When the question regarding the body is raised, the first possessive pronoun "I" is excluded, reconceptualizing soldier's body as "what we are and as what we have or possess" (Campbell, 1992, p. 34). Soldiers' bodies are metaphorically conceptualized as "a kind of battleground in the war against disease and death" (Campbell, 1992, p. 35) and as the sacred space of the nation which cannot be polluted or desecrated by invaders.

However, this conception of de/territorialization is far more complex. The DRC has often struggled to come up with an integrated and nationalist army because the attempt to unify the militia groups (often led by people from different countries) which have burgeoned since 1996 to one military body has proved unsuccessful. Government's efforts to form an integrated army have been sabotaged by many factions who express reluctance to move from their spheres of influence and their constituencies (Baaz & Verweijen, 2013). The lack of appropriate socialization or indoctrination has led to an ill-disciplined army unable to defend the sacred principle of *Tokowa po ya ekolo*.[5] Apart from the absence of discipline and gross human rights violations which characterize the DRC Army, the dearth of economic (salaries) and symbolic (social status, recognition) retributions "has lowered soldiers' enthusiasm for risking their lives in combat" (Baaz & Verweijen, 2013b, p. 575).

Method

The majority of the soldiers who participated in this study belonged to the *Forces Armées Zaïroises*/Zairean Armed Forces (FAZ). Many were in the army until 1997, when at this time they faced violence, discrimination, and exile. When relations between Laurent-Désiré Kabila and his allies turned sour, many were forced to join rebel forces in 1998 and were exposed to a number of atrocities on behalf of the population who responded to Laurent-Désiré Kabila's appeal for popular self-defense.

Due to the chaos, divisions, and parallel chains of command (Baaz & Stern, 2010), many military personnel were forced to abandon the DRC armed forces in order to seek refuge abroad. To date, the exact number of Congolese soldiers who have left the country is unknown. Although the dearth of data, South Africa has a significant presence of former Congolese soldiers.

Findings presented in this study derived from the fieldwork that took place in the city of Johannesburg for 7 months from July 2015 to January 2016. Twenty-one former soldiers living as refugees in South Africa were separately interviewed and each interview lasted for at least an hour. In-depth interviews aimed to provide useful data about participants' involvement in the army, military experiences, and departure from the army as well as migration to South Africa. Depending on participants' preference, interviews with 21 former soldiers (all men) were conducted in a mixture of French and Lingala (the official language of the Congolese Army) by the first author who then translated them.

Data were analyzed and interpreted using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Data were transcribed and coded, categorized and analyzed manually following interpretivist approach (Lin, 1998). Finally, for the sake of confidentiality, names used in the findings are pseudonyms. This study complied with ethical principles and was approved by the University of the Witwatersrand's Ethics Committee and Social Research Association (protocol number: H15/05/17).

Verbal consent was sought prior to interview and the use of voice recorder by the first author, and care was taken to keep participants' identities confidential by using pseudonyms. Some horrific accounts of atrocities (e.g., eating human flesh in the battlefield) soldiers committed were traumatizing and given that these accountants raised some security concerns for participants and researcher, the first author was compelled to end interview.

Findings and Discussion

"Makila na biso po ya ekolo": *Dedication of the Soldier's Body*

There is a popular Lingala saying, *Okoki kosimba nioka* literally translated to "Can you touch a snake?" The adage refers to the rite of passage from childhood to adulthood that in African culture is less about age, but more about being able to take up difficult tasks which can sometimes involve shedding blood of their kinship (Hoffman, 2011). Through this kind of expression, the initiation's aim is to inculcate in somebody perceptions, attitudes, or habits, which are different from what is socially believed and accepted.

Many participants referred to this axiom to highlight how high-risky a soldier's life was. It was important for soldiers to break away from fear in order to fulfill one's duties fearlessly and efficiently. Participants in this study reported that they were prepared to face this tough experience when joining the army. For instance, the prevailing discourses about the sacredness of life changed. This initiation aimed to prepare soldiers "to do things that are otherwise prohibited, or at least governed by different rules" (Haldén & Jackson, 2016, p. 1). For instance, participants were forced to sing "immoral songs" in the army in order to remove shame and fear. Enrolling in the army involved "entering a special behavioral frame that is governed by rules different from those of [civilian's] everyday life" (Lomsky-Feder et al., 2008, p. 608). This is a form of deterritorialization from an ordinary life to embrace a different world whose values are opposed to those commonly known.

Training and Discipline

Accounts of former Congolese soldiers suggested that service is not what civilians often think it is; soldiers' bodies and minds were transformed to rationalize abuses and other crimes such as killing and sexual violence. These atrocities could be deliberately perpetrated against anyone considered as enemy of the nation. Participants referred to self-defense to justify their lethal acts; others even went on to explain that there was no feeling for anybody who massacred their colleagues and became a threat to the nation. They argued that even God would tolerate such execution. This preparation started in training in which soldiers were convinced that their bodies were bought by the nation and did not belong to them anymore. One of the interviewees whom we call John recounted how, through the recruitment process, the nation bought them:

> Right, in our time, once you enrol in the army, they give you let's say 6000 *Francs Congolais*. With that amount, it means that your body doesn't belong to you anymore; your body belongs to the country. You have no order to give to your body. You blood has been bought. *Tokowa po ya ekolo, makila ya biso po ya ekolo* (because you were bought, do you understand? We were inculcated this ideology, *tokowa po ya ekolo, makila na biso po ya ekolo*. (John interview, July 2015—First author's translation from a mixture of French and Lingala to English)

Speaking along the same lines, another participant added,

> When I was recruited by the French paratroopers,[6] they wanted to make sure that my parents approved my choice to become a soldier. They took me to our home. They gave me some money that I already put in my pocket. After consulting with my parents, I came to tell them that they agreed and that we could leave. The money they gave me was symbolic. It was a way of saying that I no longer belonged to myself, let alone to my family. Besides, I had given the money to my parents, insisting that I had become the product of the nation. Throughout the training process the moto *Tokowa po ya ekolo or makila ya biso po ya ekolo* was repeatedly reminded to us. (Mambo interview, July 2015—First author's translation from a mixture of French and Lingala to English)

Haldén and Jackson (2016, p. 6) support that the creation of warriors is about setting up new roles in a particular "lifeworld or habitus not only through rational instrumental training and education, or ideology and indoctrination, but through symbolic action."

The act of giving money symbolizes the parameters of capitalism (law of supply and demand). The soldier's body is bought by the nation to be shaped and transformed to become an asset to be used to manufacture war which is a product available for sale (Hoffman, 2011).

As such, the body of the soldier became increasingly "caught up in a system of constraints and privations, obligations and prohibitions" (Foucault, 1991, p. 11).

Another participant illustrates how by virtue of following seniors' commands they were trained to break familial ties through the use of violence:

> We are in the service commando, for example we used to do milling. They will ask you to go for milling. So, they give you gloves and they ask you to fight. Sometimes the adversary is your own cousin or friend with whom I was recruited the same day. They say for example X hit Y. I slap you there. They say, "Y slap X." You will slap me to the extent that some of my teeth fall down. It's like that. They inculcated in us toughness. (John interview, July 2015—First author's translation from a mixture of French and Lingala to English)

Opining this view, another participant narrated how even close friends were trained to become feelingless toward one another:

> You know, soldiering is another interesting experience. There were cases of friends who were recruited in the same area or they became close to each other after meeting in the army. They were good friends. But in the army things work differently. When the chief commander noticed that you are always together as friends, he always found a way to create enmity between you. How? When I made a mistake the person to punish me was my best friend. Sometimes he would be asked to pour cold water on me and would be given a strap to whip me seriously. It was a way of teaching us to break up with that friendly feeling and to treat everyone equally. (Kindu interview, July 2015—First author's translation from a mixture of French and Lingala to English)

These statements teach us that "the relation between the civil and the military is a relation between two different systems with different codes and symbolic repertoires" (Haldén & Jackson, 2016, p. 6). Cases of getting into altercation with their own kins or friends provided in the above quotes are a clear indication that soldiers were prepared to develop a "lower level of agreeableness." As Jackson et al. (2012) argue empathy or friendly affection would hamper soldiers' capacity to deal quickly with deadly situations. Since the aim of the training was to make soldiers oblivious to the suffering of others, they were prone to act aggressively and heartlessly even toward the people who were familiar to them.

Taboos and Rituals

Another example of *deterritorialization* can be seen through how former soldiers were trained to depart from their familial or religious beliefs considered as taboo. Resources available in the new environment were sufficiently used to modify the body of the soldier. The building of the national bodies of soldiers forced them to engage in martial arts to be able to face the enemy. They also relied on rituals to boost their physical strength and/or as a potential means of defense. Various rituals were performed on the individual body to turn it into a national body.

The aim of many ceremonies conducted was to emphasize the national meaning of the body of a soldier. The rituals aimed to dedicate soldier's body, to promote team-working spirit and to protect the soldiers against the opponent's bullets. One of the participants reported that they performed a ritual called *Tshizaba*[7]:

> *Tshizaba* often took place in the army before going to fight. After performing the ritual every soldier had to wash his face, hands and feet with this "magic" water [*Tshizaba*]. The rituals were sealed by the killing of a rooster of less than a month that one thousand members of the battalion were encouraged to partake of the flesh as a sign of their adherence to the rituals. The rituals concluded by asking each soldier to pass under the commanding officer's legs. (John interview, July 2015—First author's translation from a mixture of French and Lingala to English)

This quote teaches us several lessons: first, the rooster symbolizes vigilance and masculinity. *Tshizaba's* rituals are not only a source of power, but also foster unity

among the troop members. The act of sharing the rooster served "to establish a covenant, or a mystical union, between the god-symbolized by the sacrificial elements consumed- and those participating in the meal" (Kyalo, 2013, p. 43).

Speaking in the same way, another participant narrated that the rituals performed consisted of cooking them in a barrel for 24 hr and when they came out, they were immediately equipped with weapons to go to the battlefield:

> . . .They used to keep us in a drum for 24 hours; they cook you for 24 hours. We are in a drum and they light fire. . . This was water inside, water; they heat you in water for 24 hours, can you imagine! You don't feel pain; you stay there for 24 hours until tomorrow morning. Immediately when you come out of the drum, they give you a firearm for battle. (Makemba interview, December 2015—First author's translation from mixture of French and Lingala to English)

Ritual actions and myths led to the creation of intersubjective sense around "the existential experience not only of war but also of joining a military organization" (Haldén & Jackson, 2016, p. 6). In this case, the ritual performed portrays a symbolic death of the old self to allow the emergence of a new body that is tough and ready to fearlessly and heartlessly defend the nation.

A feature of the *reterritorialization* is related to the place where military training took place, usually a remote area afar from the family or the immediate environment of soldiers. These isolated sites were surrounded by trees, mountains, rivers, and cemeteries. These areas were generally regarded as the dwelling places of dead ancestors, who were celebrated for their role as protectors of the land. Entry to these sites was often prohibited to uninitiated people and especially to foreigners. Rituals were often made by the elders entitled to represent the ancestors prior to entering those sacred sites.

Before using the sites for military instruction, the elders representing the ancestors entreated the spirits and introduced the candidates who embraced the legacy of taking over the mission of protecting the nation. Thus, during their indoctrination in those locations, the soldiers communicated directly with the spirits (ancestors) who gave them strength needed to fight the enemies and to watch over the nation. A materialization of this communion is that military uniform underwent some ritual before soldiers put them on. According to some participants, these garments were first kept at the cemeteries before being worn by the soldiers. An important meaning attached to this ritual was that in the national defense mission soldiers could also encounter death and be counted among the ancestors:

> A soldier is not afraid of death; a true soldier can't be afraid of death, I tell you. Because you live with death. You eat with death. You clothe death. Witness, I tell you; I inform you that military uniforms are taken to cemetery where they spend two or three days before you wear them to tell you that you are a dead's friend; you are brother of those who are dead and you and those who are dead are the same. (Makemba interview, December 2015—First author's translation from mixture of French and Lingala to English)

In the same vein, another participant merely declared,

> You know that there are useless deaths. We were taught it was heroic to die in the frontline for the nation. Such a death was a good death. We used to claim we defended a country that ancestors passed down to us. Since we were doing the right thing, we believed that they were happy. We also believed that should we die for the nation we would join the ancestors and continue to defend the country even in the afterlife. So, death is the least thing we were afraid of. (Kindu interview, December 2015—First author's translation from mixture of French and Lingala to English)

The message to be drawn from these quotes is that through rituals soldiers' bodies, strengths and spirits are put at the service of the nation. As protectors, the ancestors oversee them in the fulfillment of their mission. This is a further example of *reterritorialization.* In safeguarding the nation, military personnel are no longer concerned with their cultures or beliefs, but rather with the national culture. The wearing of military uniform is a further reminder of their national defense mission.

Scholars have stressed the importance of the ritual actions (Haldén & Jackson, 2016; Mahanta, 2012; Obućina, 2011) pointing out their impact on people's beliefs. In this study, further reinforcing the sacredness of the uniform, soldiers stated that wearing military uniform symbolized great responsibility. Pfanner (2004) states that military uniform is a distinguishing feature of a state's army reflecting "order and discipline, and calls for subordination by displaying a variety of insignia, including badges that indicate rank and emphasize the hierarchical structure of armies" (p. 94). While it is true that military uniform has a powerful social meaning as part of national identify and recognition of soldiers' positions in the army, but for participants in this study military uniform also had a powerful cultural and supernatural meaning and that the rituals preceding its wearing symbolized power that controls soldiers' actions. Military uniform was the embodiment of power from dead people considered as ancestors, forerunners of the mission to protect the land.

Since this uniform was taken to the world of the dead, those who wore it were friends of dead and they were also able to cause death and terror. The discourse about uniform being the embodiment of death had an effect on civilians because in the DRC the first reflex of civilians in viewing soldiers wearing uniform was to escape because soldiers were considered as a danger that was coming. The findings of this study suggest that uniform means more than homogeneity, strength and power as proposed by Pfanner (2004). It could be seen as "a fetish object, sexualised by generations of men and women, representing as it does so many male attributes of disciplined strength and channelled aggression" (Mayes & Hetherington, 2012). Abandoning a uniform may impact the supernatural powers troop members believed they possessed. Although soldiers had undergone different military training to that known in the western world, this case reveals many more traditional practices that governed the beliefs of the members of the armed forces taking part in the hostilities.

Vows

The dedication of soldiers to the nation was accompanied by vows that were not mere slogans but were expected to be practiced in soldiers' daily life. A participant who was also deployed to back the troops of UNITA (National Union for the Total Independence of Angola) in Angola recalled how they imbibed vows they were taught:

> . . . There are vows we were called to make. For instance, in Congo we said, '*makila na biso po ya ekolo*' (in Lingala meaning our blood for the country); in Angola what were we taught by UNITA? When they said, "Gendelele!" we responded, "*keremus na pas de Angola*" (in Portuguese meaning until peace in Angola. (Makemba interview, December 2015—First author's translation from mixture of French and Lingala to English)

In the same way, another participant recalled how they imbibed vows and how remembering these vows forced them to become more resolute in the execution of their duties:

> *Tokowa po ya ekolo or Makila na biso po ya ekolo* is a motto that was instilled in us and became part of us to the extent that it often came back to us even on the battlefield. It was an oath that we made and internalized. On our uniforms and on our berets, this motto was always inscribed. Whenever we remembered it fear left us. We became courageous, fearless, forgetting and being determined in the fulfilment of our national defence mission. (Katona interview, December 2015—First author's translation from mixture of French and Lingala to English)

The discourse of "bloodshed" for the nation became a shared language through which former soldiers articulated their military commitment. Kraft's (2014, p. 23) study analyzing testimonies of perpetrators of violence at the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission found two categories of influences that support sustained violence in crimes of allegiance: "(a) an abbreviated ideology that idealizes oneself and vilifies one's adversary and (b) the use of war to justify any act of illegality." *Tokowa po ya ekolo* or *Makila na biso po ya ekolo* were not mere doctrines, but they became embodied. Importantly, from our interviews, many of them who lived up to this doctrine in their military activities were left with physical deformities which they presented as evidence of how they dedicated their bodies to serve under the national flag.

Military ideology and the wearing of uniform were so binding that those who tried to escape from the battlefield could be exposed to a heavy sentence such as death penalty. Specific to this theme was that soldiers were prepared during their training to be fearless complying with the army's rules. Part of the rules was the non-disengagement from the battlefield. During the training, it was emphasized to them that dying in the frontline was more heroic rather than escaping from the enemy which was viewed as a serious hindrance and transgression of the vow of "*tokowa po ya*

ekolo" they made on the reception of the military uniform. Disengaging in the battlefield was also seen as an appropriation of civilian status and femininity. Refusing to fight for the country was constructed as a betrayal of the ideals of the army and those soldiers caught in that attitude could be viewed as contesting the national making of a soldier's body. Those soldiers being caught in the state of disengagement could be depicted as "undisciplined" betrayers for not living up to their vow and duty to protect the nation and could be exposed to heft sentence. Participants stressed that a fearful soldier particularly in the time of war who disengaged from their mission, unless ordered by their superiors, could probably suffer the fate of being "*passer par les armes*"[8] for denying the nation its right over their body:

> Ah, it is a very big offense. During war for instance when we went to war, if you run away from the war [you refuse to fight], if they catch you, you will be judged by the martial court. You are judged. If the martial court decides that you must *passer par les armes* [you must be executed], they make you *passer par les armes* [they execute you]. They shoot, that's *passer aux armes*. (John interview, July 2015—First author's translation from a mixture of French and Lingala to English)

Running away from the war was seen as betraying the vow made to die for the nation; it was betraying the ideals of the army by which soldiers had to abide; it was betraying the body of the nation. It shows the power that this institution has to force its members to live up to their military vows. *Passer par les armes*, a French expression, is used to mean death sentence and the shootout as a response to a destructive, blasphemous, treacherous or sacrilegious action of a soldier who has desecrated the moral values or principles of the defense force. Such soldier was regarded as a commoner whose death was viewed as an *oppressive death* or useless and unworthy of being celebrated. Foucault (1991, p. 8) argues that "the execution itself is like an additional shame that justice is ashamed to impose on the condemned man." On the other hand, a soldier who fell with a weapon in his hand was regarded as a hero since states "give meaning to individual human death if this death occurs on the battlefield in the service of the state" (Haldén & Jackson, 2016, p. 4). His death was a *redemptive death* because his blood was not vainly poured out. Of importance to stress here is the complexity of ways in which the "codings of [soldiers' bodies through military and national] idioms are conjoined to spiritual and ancestral codings" (Wilhelm-Solomon, 2016, p. 388). Military spaces of training are not only conceptualized as physical. They are also spiritual places where soldiers enter into contact with supernatural forces of ancestors believed to be a source of power that they need in the accomplishment of the mission of protecting the nation. Military experiences in these areas "shape intersubjective relations and ways of coding bodies and spaces" (Wilhelm-Solomon, 2016, p. 386).

Dying for one's country was seen as constructive. It is important to note reports from participants that the distinctive clothing worn by military members was first kept in the cemetery to be presented to the forbearers, who are believed to be the first

protectors of the nation, before being put on. The belief surrounding such death was that the deceased joined the forefathers in the continual mission of protecting the land. Death, in this case, was a way of relocating, what Campbell (1992) refers to as "extraterritoriality" (p. 35). Drawing on sacred scriptures, participants compared soldiers' death in the field of operations with the death of Jesus as reported in the bible. Espousing the meaning of Jesus' death in the bible viewing it as redemptive for mankind, soldiers were ready to sacrifice themselves in order to save their fellow citizens. With this belief, soldiers were not afraid of death. They were moved by the conviction that "the claim of respect or reverence for the body does not cease automatically upon death but is embedded in common rituals regarding the dead" (Campbell, 1992, p. 35).

Conclusion

Through the concepts of deterritorialization and reterritorialization, this study aimed to demonstrate the conception of soldier's body within the Congolese Army. The article reveals the complex ways in which the armed forces manipulated soldiers' bodies to generate diverse lines of connection, coalition, and removal. The act of joining the army implied relinquishing civilian life and embracing military norms. Through initiation to the army's ideology, the body of soldiers was viewed as a national body empowered with various forms of corporeal and social coding. In this context, soldier's body was *reterritorialized* after going through physical, cultural, and ideological preparations. The transition from civilian to military enrolment not only involves soldiers' spatial detachment but also the disruption of their relationships with families, culture, and environment.

One particular limitation is worth acknowledging, however, the military personnel who participated in this study were all from the Zairean Armed forces (FAZ). This means we are somewhat limited in the generalizations we can make about the socialization of the DRC armed forces to this day, as since many of these participants fled, the nature of the DRC armed forces has shifted significantly. In saying this, there is still substantial evidence to suggest that many of the same problems remain, with the DRC armed forces, criticized for being ineffective and corrupt.

The case of Congolese soldiers provides an insight into how soldiers' body transits from individual possession to the body of the nation. However, among our sample, the degradation of the political situation and the poor living conditions led many to the loss of *Tokowa po ya ekolo*. Rather than fulfilling the mission of protecting the nation, many military personnel have turned to become serious threats to it, abusing civilians and committing gross human rights violations.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Notes

1. Mobutu Sese Seko Kuku Ngbendu Wa Za Banga Joseph-Désiré was born in October 1930 and died in September 1997 in Morocco. He was a politician and military officer, he seized power in a political coup and became the President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo from 1965 to 1971, and later Zaire from 1971 to 1997. He was also chosen as the Chairperson of the Organisation of African Unity from 1967 to 1968. He was overthrown by the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo (AFDL) rebellion in May 1997 after ruling for about three decades.
2. *Hibou* (Owl) is a nickname given to the elements of the special units of the Zairian security forces who secretly murdered many opposition leaders and targeted soldiers who stood against the Mobutu's regime.
3. In Lingala, literally translated "We will die for the nation" or "Our blood will be shed for the nation" is the oath of the army to mark their loyalty and their attachment to the nation that must be protected at all costs.
4. This sentence is in lingala (the language mainly spoken in the army) and literally means the civilian is the cornfield of the military.
5. *Tokowa po ya ekolo* [a Lingala sentence translated as We will die for the nation] was the oath of the Zairian armed forces.
6. French paratroopers were in Zaire in the 1980s as part of the military cooperation between Zaire and France, to start the 31st Parachute Brigade, of which some of the participants in this study were part, as an elite unit of the Zairean armed forces.
7. *Tshizaba* (in Tshiluba, one of the local languages of the DRC) is a "magic potion" blended with herbs and roots providing physical and protective power, which is useful as an initiation ritual for people who are about to engage in a battle.
8. *Passer par les armes* is a French expression, which means to kill somebody, a convict, by shooting them.

References

Akokpari, J. K. (2001). Post-cold war international relations and foreign policies in Africa: New issues and new challenges. *African Journal of International Affairs*, *4*(1–2), 45818.

Baaz, M. E., & Stern, M. (2009). Why do soldiers rape? Masculinity, violence, and sexuality in the armed forces in the Congo (DRC). *International Studies Quarterly*, *53*, 495–518.

Baaz, M. E., & Stern, M. (2010). *The complexity of violence: A critical analysis of sexual violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)* [Working Paper on Gender Based Violence]. Nordic Africa Institute.

Baaz, M. E., & Verweijen, J. (2013). The volatility of a half-cooked bouillabaisse: Rebel–military integration and conflict dynamics in the eastern DRC. *African Affairs*, *112*(449), 563–582.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *3*(2), 77–101.

Campbell, C. S. (1992). Body, self, and the property paradigm. *Hastings Center Report*, *22*(5), 34–42.

Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F. (1987). *A thousand plateaus: Capitalism and schizophrenia*. University of Minnesota Press.

Ebenga, J., & N'landu, T. (2005). The Congolese national army: In search for identity. In M. Rupiya (Ed.), *Evolutions and revolutions: A contemporary history of militarisation in Southern Africa* (pp. 63–84). ISS.

Foucault, M. (1991). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison*. Penguin.

Haldén, P., & Jackson, P. (2016). *Transforming Warriors. The ritual organization of military force*. Taylor & Francis.

Hechter, M. (2000). *Containing nationalism*. Oxford University Press.

Hoffman, D. (2011). *The war machines*. Duke University Press.

Jackson, J. J., Thoemmes Jonkmann, F., Lüdtke, O., & Trautwein, U. (2012). Military training and personality trait development: Does the military make the man, or does the man make the military? *Psychological Science*, *20*(10), 1–8.

Jeune Afrique. (2021, June 20). RDC: Félix Tshisekedi dénonce la « mafia » dans l'armée et les institutions (DRC: Félix Tshisekedi denounces the "mafia" in the army and institutions). *Jeune Afrique*. https://www.jeuneafrique.com/1191024/politique/rdc-felix-tshisekedi-denonce-la-mafia-dans-larmee-et-les-institutions/

Jinnah, Z. (2010). Making home in a hostile land: Understanding Somali identity, integration, livelihood and risks in Johannesburg. *Journal of Sociology and Social Anthropology*, *1*(1–2), 91–99.

Kraft, R. N. (2014). *Violent accounts: Understanding the psychology of perpetrators through South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission*. New York University Press.

Kyalo, M. P. (2013). Initiation rites and rituals in African cosmology. *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology*, *1*(1), 34–46.

Lakika, D. M. (2019). *Living the past in the present: A reconstruction of the memories of war and violence of former Congolese soldiers living in South Africa* [Doctoral Thesis], ACMS, Wits University.

Lin, A. C. (1998). Bridging positivist and interpretivist approaches to qualitative methods. *Policy Studies Journal*, *26*(1), 162–180.

Lomsky-Feder, E., Gazit, N., & Ben-Ari, E. (2008). Reserve soldiers as transmigrants moving between the civilian and military Worlds. *Armed Forces & Society*, *34*(4), 593–614.

Mahanta, M. (2012). Myth, stereotype and illness: It's effect on human life. *International Review of Social Sciences and Humanities*, *3*(2), 230–235.

Malesevic, S., & Malešević, S. (2013). *Nation-states and nationalisms: Organization, ideology and solidarity*. Polity Press.

Matsanza, G. A. (2020). Culture de la violence: Répression policière et résistance en milieu urbain (Culture of violence: Police repression and resistance in urban areas). In G. A. Matsanza (Dir.), *Violences Urbaines En RD Congo, Que Faire?* (pp. 15–45) Academia—l'Harmattan.

Mayes, S., & Hetherington, T. (2012). The theatre of war. *Or 'La Petite Mort*. http://spot.hcponline.org/pages/the_theater_of_war_or_la_petite_mort__2470.asp

Mbikayi, A. B. (2008). *Why do African migrants with a tertiary education do menial jobs in Cape Town?* [Master's Dissertation], Development Studies, University of Cape Town.

Mbumba, D.-M. (2016). *La précarité des conditions de vie et la survi des militaires dans la ville de Bukavu* (Precariousness of living conditions and the survival of military in the city of Bukavu) [L2 Dissertation]. ISDR Bukavu.

McClintock, A. (1993). Family feuds: Gender, nationalism and the family. *Feminist Review*, *44*, 61–80.
McNulty, M. (1999). The collapse of Zaire: Implosion, revolution or external sabotage? *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, *37*(1), 53–82.
Morris, A. (1998). 'Our fellow Africans make our lives hell': The lives of Congolese and Nigerians living in Johannesburg. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, *21*(6), 1116–1136.
Nzayabino, V. (2010). The role of refugee-established churches in integrating forced migrants: A case study of Word of Life Assembly in Yeoville, Johannesburg. *HTS Teologiese Studies/ Theological Studies*, *66*, 1–9.
Obućina, V. (2011). A war of myths: Creation of the founding myth of Kosovo Albanians. *Contemporary Issues*, *4*(1), 30–44.
Pfanner, T. (2004). Military uniforms and the law of war. *IRRC*, *86*(853), 93–124.
Posen, B. R. (1993). Nationalism, the mass army, and military power. *International Security*, *18*(2), 80–124.
Reno, W. (1997). Sovereignty and personal rule in Zaire. *African Studies Quarterly*, *1*(3), 39–64.
Skey, M. (2009). The national in everyday life: A critical engagement with Michael Billig's thesis of Banal Nationalism. *The Sociological Review*, *57*(2), 331–346.
Smith, A. D. (1996). Culture, community and territory: The politics of ethnicity and nationalism. *International Affairs*, *72*(3), 445–458.
Stearns, J., Verweijen, J., & Eriksson Baaz, M. (2013). *Armée nationale et groupes armés dans l'est du Congo: trancher le noeud gordien de l'insécurité* (National army and armed groups in eastern Congo: Cutting the Gordian knot of insecurity). Institut de la Vallée du Rift.
Thom, W. (1999). Congo-Zaire's 1996-97 civil war in the context of evolving patterns of military conflict in Africa in the era of independence. *Journal of Conflict Studies*, *19*(2), 93–123.
Verweijen, J. (2018). Soldiers without an army? Patronage networks and cohesion in the armed forces of the DR Congo. *Armed Forces & Society*, *44*(4), 626–646.
Wilhelm-Solomon, M. (2016). Decoding dispossession: Eviction and urban regeneration in Johannesburg's dark buildings. *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography*, *37*, 378–395.

Author Biographies

Dostin Lakika is a postdoctoral fellow at the African Centre for Migration & Society, Wits University, and a research associate at the French Institute of South Africa. His research interests include migration and displacement, militarization, violence and memory, food, health, and illness as well as (ir)regular migration and resilience.

Ryan Essex is a research fellow with the Institute for Lifecourse Development at the University of Greenwich. His research is focused on refugee and migrant health and the intersections of health and resistance.