

Lumo

72 minutes, 2006 DRC/U.S.A.

The Cinema Guild

Directors: Bent Jorgen Perlmutter/Nelson Walker III

In Swahili and French with English subtitles

Rape has been used as an effective weapon of war for centuries. It serves to dehumanize and humiliate the enemy by violating its women, as it is them whose defiling has historically led to the loss of the family's honor, which is supposed to be protected by the men. Women are also the most vulnerable individuals along with children in a society, and thus are easy targets of violence in conflict. In the end, rape in war (as in peace times) is about power: political, economic, social and human of those conquering or temporarily doing the killing over the weaker or conquered.

Lumo puts a face to the stories of rape in war at the beginning of the twenty first century. The film personalizes the consequences of rape as a weapon through the real life story of a young woman (Lumo) in the HEAL Africa hospital in Goma, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). It also shows the challenges of one non-governmental organization in its attempts to raise awareness in the region; secure commitment against rape from government officials and public servants; and its efforts to help, seek out and rehabilitate emotionally and physically women who have been raped since the fighting began as a byproduct of the Rwandan genocide in the 1990's and the fleeing of Interahawme militia into the Congo.

Many of the women at the HEAL Africa Hospital were so brutally violated that they have been rendered physically incapacitated. Interviews with the staff members reveal that these rapes had additional consequences to those that are visible. The survivors are now seen as social outcasts and undesirable mates. This is because some are unable to have children in a region where motherhood is the ultimate sign of womanhood, as prescribed by the cultural values and social norms of their communities. Those that did have children as a result of the rapes are also unwanted because their children's ethnicity is that of the fathers (i.e. the enemy). Unfortunately, despite their possible recovery, the plight of the women at HEAL Africa does not end with their physical healing. They are likely to be revictimized upon their return by other soldiers or militia as the context in which the rapes took place and the fighting will not have changed.

In Lumo, the filmmakers find a rare balance between the human stories portrayed and the necessary background information that enables the audience to understand the incidence of rape in armed conflicts in Africa, in particular the DRC. This is achieved through the contextualization of Lumo's story in the midst of the other girls, and the periodic inclusion of facts about rape in war and the situation in the DRC that is complemented by the testimonial of the staff that takes care of these women.

Lumo is a powerful documentary that showcases the ramifications of using rape as a weapon of war from the perspective of one of its survivors. Students (undergraduate and graduates), scholars and the public in general will be able to appreciate the value and educational importance of this film on the subject at hand.

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