Stop the Rape of Women

February 13, 2009 By Kate Ferguson

It's been ages since I last blogged. But recently I went to a meeting at the 92nd Street Y in New York City which got my attention and has compelled me to get yours. The event was a "public conversation" with playwright Eve Ensler. Yes, that Eve Ensler of The Vagina Monologues fame. She was onstage at the Y with a Congolese doctor named Denis Mukwege, with whom she's teamed for a campaign called the "Turning Pain to Power Tour." Ensler is also the founder of V-Day, a global movement to bring attention to the ongoing violence against women in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

A surgeon, Dr. Mukwege is the director and founder of Panzi hospital in Bukavu in DRC. Here, he performs fistula surgeries on women who have been brutally raped and mutilated in the Congolese war. But before I continue, let me tell you what a fistula is. it is an abnormal connection between an organ, vessel, or intestine and another structure. Fistulas are usually the result of injury or surgery and lead to constant, uncontrollable loss of urine and stool through the vagina. For these women who are victims in the Congo war, fistulas are the result of savage and repeated rapes and torture by armed men who use this kind of sexual terrorism to destabilize their families and communities. Why? To destroy their communities so people will leave the area and the resources there for them to loot. Dr. Mukwege calls these acts of terror "barbaric" and I agree. What I can't understand is the mentality that breeds these barbaric acts. Is it simply greed? Are these men just following orders to rape, loot and pillage as a means to an end? Is there no man there to step up and say what we are doing here is wrong? In a comment to the audience, Ensler observed her belief that most men are not rapists, that most men are not perpetrators, but that most men do nothing to stop the violence and the abuse. I agree.

The fact is that women have been casualties of war throughout history. Research shows the victimization of women as "spoils of war" has been a male prerogative which has yet to be addressed in a society that calls itself "civilized." In war and peace the objectification of women as commodities to be used, abused and exploited has been one of the prices paid for living in a male-dominated society. But in wartime, for women, there have been no saviors as females, young and old, have been raped, mutilated and killed by soldiers on every side of a conflict, everywhere in the world.

What makes this kind of thinking okay? What makes a man think that a woman's body is his to use and abuse in any way he wishes? And, yes, I know that this is not the mindset of all men. But the fact is there is an attitude of dominance and sexual entitlement present in enough men's minds, however, to create a problem for women everywhere.

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