

Publication

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Love in Times of Humanitarian Intervention– Sex, Gender Relations and Humanitarian Intervention in Goma, DR Congo

Goma there is no love – everything is about dollars“ is a common saying of young men in Goma, the provincial capital of North Kivu in the Democratic Republic of Congo. More than just referring to 'love', this statement illustrates the complex terrain of moralities and materialities in Goma and refers to dynamic gender relations in the context of protracted violent conflict and humanitarian intervention.

This contribution focuses on the underresearched interactions and social practices going on in the contact zone of peacekeeping missions and the local population. This contact zone will be conceptualised as market of intervention, where sex becomes a commodity. The market of intervention influences economic opportunities, sociopolitical hierarchies, normative stereotypes as well as the urban infrastructure and shapes local imaginations of 'modernity' being characterised by western goods and life style.

Zooming into the social practice of transactional sex, I analyse how the market of intervention might aggravate sexual exploitation, yet opens up manifold opportunities and enhances conceptions of the self at the same time. Young women engage in transactional sex reflecting on their obligations towards their family, striving for income or trying to fulfil certain desires. Men, too, identify the opportunities generated by the market of intervention, yet are often marginalised because of social, ethnic and gender-related reasons. The unequal distribution of resources and asymmetric relations of exchange perpetuate patrimonial relations on the one hand, while on the other allow some actors (mostly educated young women) to perform their dream of a life' - at least to a certain extent. Without downplaying the prevalent images of rape and sexual abuse, I shed light on often neglected yet very present heterogeneous experiences and social practices of and dealing with long-term humanitarian intervention.

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