

# The Greatest Silence: Rape In Congo

## Filmmaker's Statement

My objectives in making this film are political and personal. I am propelled by the urgency to expose an unimaginable, growing humanitarian crisis, and I have my own personal quest to understand the universal stigmas that attach to rape and its survivors.

I myself am the victim of a gang rape and have always felt a powerful connection to women and girls who have suffered the same plight. I've often found in conversations with survivors of sexual violence that our numerous differences are often trumped by our shared trauma, and that that commonality can build un-common bridges. And this is what I discovered in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

In May and June of 2006 I traveled to the DRC, embarking on a voyage into a literal heart of darkness to find women who would bear witness to their own experiences and break the silence that envelops the subject of rape both in their country and around the world. I returned for a follow-up in November, and filmed chilling interviews with self-confessed, and unabashed, rapists.

I ask: Why has the systematic rape and sexual enslavement of tens of thousands of women and girls in the Democratic Republic of Congo escaped the world's attention? Is it compassion fatigue? Racism? Is the political situation in Congo too impenetrable? Is there something about sexual violence that makes us all turn away? And, most importantly, where are the voices of the women themselves? Where are their stories?

I met with rape survivors in numbers that were overwhelming and found that our shared experience of victim-hood was a means to connect. I am white, healthy, in charge of my own life, living relatively free from ostracism and fear: living a favored life. They had not been so favored. And yet, we have all survived.

Several dozen women and girls spoke to me with surprising openness about their experiences, their nightmares and dreams. Their stories need to be told and, more importantly, they need to be the ones doing the telling, which is another important goal of the film: to explore, witness and contribute to these women's healing through the empowerment of personal narrative.

By bringing these women out of the shadows, the film will be a catalyst in focusing world attention on their plight, bringing opprobrium upon those in power who turn their backs, and sparking conversations and policy change concerning the fate of women and girls in a world consumed by armed conflict.

**Lisa F. Jackson**  
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