

Rape as a Weapon of War and Genocide:

An Examination of its Historical and Contemporary Tactical Uses, Effects on Victims and Societies and Psychological Explanations

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Introduction

Rape, and other forms of sexual violence, is a crime perpetrated against women in every country in the world. In the United States, 1 in 4 women are victims of sexual violence. On US college campuses, 1 in 5 women are likely to be victims of sexually assault. And according to Amnesty International, 1 in 3 women around the world are victims of gender-based violence. In developing countries where political instability, suppression of human rights and gender bias, inequality and discrimination are commonplace, cases of sexual violence perpetrated against women are exponentially higher, with figures ranging from 35–70% in some countries.

The traditional definition of rape includes the lack of consent to sexual activity; however, this definition is not the standard used when discussing rape implemented as a method and weapon of war. In the document, “UN Action Against Sexual Violence,” the United Nations asserts that “Rape committed during war is often intended to terrorize the population, break up families, destroy communities, and, in some instances, change the ethnic makeup of the next generation. Sometimes it is also used to deliberately infect women with HIV or render women from the targeted community incapable of bearing children.”¹ For centuries, rape has been used as a spoil of war and as a weapon—possibly the most brutal weapon of war—in order to exercise power and dominance over women and undermine the social fabric of society. It is a method of torture², both physical and psychological, and is a crime, just like murder, and in many cases

¹ The United Nations, “Background Information on Sexual Violence used as a Tool of War.” The United Nations. Accessed on 4/26/16.

² Former Special Rapporteur on Torture, Professor Kooijmans, noted that “[s]ince it was clear that rape or other forms of sexual assault against women in detention were a particularly ignominious violation of the inherent dignity and the right to physical integrity of the human being, they accordingly constituted an act of torture” U.N. Econ. & Soc. Council, Common on Human Rights, Special Rapporteur on Torture, Question of the Human Rights of All Persons Subjected to Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment, in Particular: Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

women may be “raped to death.”³ The statistics are always daunting and shocking: In Rwanda, between 100,000 and 250,000 women were raped during the three months of genocide in 1994; more than 60,000 women were raped during the civil war in Sierra Leone (1991-2002); over 40,000 in Liberia (1989-2003); up to 60,000 in the former Yugoslavia (1992-1995); and at least 200,000 in the Democratic Republic of the Congo since 1998. Rape, sexual violence, and forced female genital mutilation are outlawed under the Geneva Convention.

Even after the end of wars and conflicts, rape and sexual violence perpetrated against women and girls leaves a permanent mark, both physically and psychologically: unwanted pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS, victim shaming, stigmatization and the ostracizing of women. Sexual violence may also persist following a conflict, often as a consequence of impunity or due to government and societal instabilities. The United Nations Human Rights Commission passed a resolution identifying rape as a war crime in 1993, an act that allows for crimes of rape and sexual violence to be prosecuted as war crimes and crimes against humanity, and allowing for victims to seek reparations.

Rape and sexual violence have been committed against women and girls for as long as man has inhabited the planet. These acts have been cited in historical documents, including the biblical Old Testament and other religious works, depicted in sculptures and art pieces, and found in literary tomes such as Homer’s *Iliad*. The notion that women are prizes—objects—to be claimed as a reward for military conquests is one that still exists today. It is embodied in the beliefs of male superiority and dominance over women, leading to a culture of impunity. So gender violence is widely accepted in many countries. Oftentimes, rapists are state actors and

³ Carol Rittner and John K. Roth, Rape: Weapon of War and Genocide. Minnesota: Paragon House (2012). Xiii.

not likely to be punished. Few, if any, ever face trial. Impunity only increases the practice of utilizing rape as a weapon.

Guatemala experienced a brutal ethnic cleansing campaign against indigenous peoples and their supporters during the 1990s that left an estimated 200,000 people dead or disappeared, 150,000 displaced, and countless rapes.⁴ The targeting of this group and the acts committed against them legally constituted genocide. Similarly, the horrific ethnic cleansing campaign unleashed by the Serbians against Muslims from Bosnia-Herzegovina included the establishment of ‘rape camps’ in which ‘non-Serb’ women and girls were taken from their homes, raped and brutalized, often for weeks at a time. In each of these cases, impunity was a significant reason for its widespread use.⁵

Arguably, rape is the most violent, humiliating, and brutal offense inflicted on a woman and her community, and serves as a daily reminder of the brutality of war. Rape leaves scars, physical, emotional, and psychological. In the aforementioned countries, rape was repeatedly used as a tool of war and constituted war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Background

When pressured by the international community to report crimes of sexual violence and rape, government representatives and other state actors have insisted that these ‘methods’ are not employed strategically, but were a result of the transgression of a few ‘bad apples.’ History has shown us that rape has been used as a tool of war, a weapon of destruction. More research is needed on the psychology and mindset of *genocidaires* and their soldiers. Other research has

⁴ “UN-backed commission says security forces were behind 93% of all human rights atrocities committed during the civil war, which claimed 200,000 lives, and that senior officials had overseen 626 massacres in Maya villages.” “Guatemala profile – Timeline.” BBC online. 2016.

⁵ Victoria Sanford, Buried Secrets: Truth and Human Rights in Guatemala. New York: Palgrave Macmillan (2003).

attempted to examine the psychology and mindset of *why men rape*. Why do armed forces consistently commit sexual violence against women and young girls?

The answers to these questions are not always simple ones. Studies examining sexual violence during conflicts emerged following the horrific atrocities committed in Rwanda and Bosnia-Herzegovina in the early 1990s. Widespread, calculated and systematic rape were remarkably high during these genocides with reports emerging of gang rape, sexual slavery, forced impregnation, and the establishment of ‘rape camps’ that shocked and sickened the international community. Rape as a tool of war has been used as a tactic during conflicts and ethnic cleansing campaigns throughout history. Rapists often target their victims based on race or ethnicity and many sexually violate women and girls with the specific intentions of forced impregnation and damaging a woman’s reproductive system. The rationale for forced impregnation is to breed out the ethnic lineage of children born to “undesirable” ethnic groups and introduce the “desirable” bloodline of the rapist’s ethnic group. Damaging a woman’s reproductive system so she is unable to bear children severs the ethnic lineage. Rape often does not end with the act itself. Women are also beaten and physically mutilated and subjected to genital mutilation and blinding (so women would not be able to identify her attackers), amputation of limbs, and cutting off breasts, nose, ears etc.

In most cases, victims of rape and sexual violence come from politically and economically disenfranchised populations - people often living in extreme conditions of poverty. Upset with their living situations, members of these communities often rebel against an oppressive government in the hopes of achieving political, social and economic equality. Many theories propose that the act of rape is a way for those in power to weaken opposition groups and to maintain their control. As opposition grows, unrest sets in and those in power employ vicious

tactics in order to ensure their control and to protect the interests of national elites, often at the expense of human rights and basic human dignity. In these cases, state actors respond to opposition with disproportionate levels of violence and repression, targeting those directly opposing the state and those who are the most vulnerable: women and children. In the genocides mentioned earlier, this was certainly the case

The first goal of a genocidal campaign aims to “spread fear and terror indiscriminately throughout the civilian population.” In this case, the oppressors hope that by creating fear, opposition groups will be dissuaded from joining or providing aid to members of the opposition. The physical and psychological violence unleashed during conflicts serves to cause damage and wreak havoc on individuals and on entire communities. Sexual violence and rape are tactics that target the most vulnerable members of a community to achieve their goal of sending a frightening message. Rape serves as a tool to demoralize and dehumanize, and to punish ‘enemies of the state.’

The purpose of this paper is to illustrate several reasons why rape is an effective tool of war, genocide, and ethnic cleansing and examine the lasting effects it has on the victims and on society as a whole. I will argue that rape is a global crime, an epidemic of massive proportions. I will not offer suggestions on how to eliminate the use of rape as a tool of war, rather, I will show the severity of the crime, address the psychological factors of men who rape, and prove that rape is a weapon which demoralizes and destabilizes entire communities, removes cultural and ethnic connections, and leaves lasting effects on societies and the global community as a whole. Rape, femicide, and sexual violence are problems the global community must address, as they can no longer be left up to individual states and government bodies to act alone to stop them.

Key Themes to be explored:

- 1) What are the historical contexts of rape during armed conflict and who are the perpetrators?
- 2) What makes rape a widespread occurrence during war?
- 3) Why are rape and other forms of sexual violence used as a prevalent tool of war?
- 4) Why do men rape? Is there a psychological approach to examining rape as a tool of war?

Historical Cases of Wartime Rape:

Bosnia-Herzegovina

The 1943 founding of Yugoslavia was established as a nation of six republics (Serbia, Montenegro, Slovenia, Macedonia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina) under “brotherhood and unity,” a concept that was envisioned as a way to transcend ethno-national loyalties. Decades later with the rise of Serbian leader Slobodan Milosevic, the Federation’s stability, prosperity and strategic importance began to plummet. Milosevic blamed the fall of Yugoslavia on ethnic related causes, attributing all of these problems on the “ethnic other” and advocating “Serbian unity” against ethnic minorities.⁶ War broke out in April 1992, pitting three ethnic identities against each other - Bosnian Serbs, supported by Milosevic and his brutal regime, Bosnian Croats, backed by Croatian President Franjo Tudjman, and Bosnian Muslims known as Bosniaks. The conflict lasted for over four years during which the world witnessed unspeakable acts of violence, mass rape, and horrific atrocities including the establishment of concentration and rape camps, ethnic cleansing campaign, forced deportations, and genocide.⁷

⁶ Rittner and Roth, 45-47.

⁷ Ibid, 47-51.

The proliferation of rape as a tool of war in the former Yugoslavia shocked the world. For the first time in modern history, historians documented the calculated and methodical use of rape and sexual violence as a weapon of ethnic cleansing and genocide. The emergence of “rape camps” was very common in the conflict; The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia estimates that between 20,000 and 50,000 women and girls were raped by Serbian forces in these specifically designated camps^{8 9}. Most of these women, according to the Tribunal, were women of Bosniak identity. The victims ranged between six to seventy years old and were raped repeatedly and often held as captives for several years.¹⁰

Many women were forcibly impregnated and held captive until termination of the pregnancy was impossible. Furthermore, many women were held as virtual slaves, forced to not only engage in sexual acts with their rapists but also forced to cook, clean and tend to the needs of their attackers, an act meant to further humiliate and dehumanize the victim. The act of dehumanization allowed for Serbian soldiers to see Bosniak women as property, bought and sold at their captors will, traded amongst each other, and offered as gifts or rewards to other men. In the case of Bosnia, rape was used with the intent to intimidate, humiliate, and degrade.¹¹ Serbian soldiers raped women and young girls as young as six with no regard for their humanity or their lives, often raping them so brutally to the point of death.¹² Many human rights organizations reported that the acts of sexual violence against Muslim women and girls reached new heights of brutality: one report explains that “rapes of young girls [were] performed in front of their fathers,

⁸ Danise Aydelott, “Mass Rape during War: Prosecuting Bosnian Rapists under International Law.” Emory University School of Law. 604.

⁹ Rittner and Roth, 47.

¹⁰ Ibid, 605.

¹¹ Yolanda S. Wu, “Genocidal Rape in Bosnia: Redress in United States Courts under the Alien Tort Claims Act.” *UCLA Women’s Law Journal* 4(101). 1994. 102.

¹² Rittner and Roth, 47.

mothers, and siblings; and rapes committed explicitly to impregnate Muslim women and hold them captive until they give birth to Serbian babies.”^{13 14}

The Bosnian case had one serious problem, as do many other armed conflicts: impunity for soldiers who rape. The war in Bosnia served as one of the most horrific examples of wartime rape; yet few soldiers faced repercussions for their crimes. Impunity served as an excuse or “get out of jail free card” for perpetrators of rape, femicide, and sexual violence. Serbian soldiers raped women and children without “regard for witnesses, and, on occasion, identify themselves to their victims.”¹⁵ Soldiers did not fear retribution, but rather took pride in their “work.” Furthermore, Amnesty International argues that most perpetrators act with impunity, making prosecution and legal action nearly impossible.¹⁶

Guatemala

The case of Guatemala proves a unique case in the “war-rape” rhetoric. Guatemala, a small country in Central America, has a long history of colonialism that left a legacy of misogyny, cultural oppression and a distinct divide between “real Guatemaltecos” and “Indios Sucios” (“dirty Indians”). Spanish colonizers created a racial hierarchy in Central and South America: those who had lighter skin and appeared to be more European were treated well, considered higher class, and were given political, economic and social advantages. Yet darker skinned “Indios” were, and continue to be, treated like animals, living in rural poverty and

¹³ Ibid, 599.

¹⁴ : See also: “Serb soldiers beat us and tore our clothes off...They pushed us on the floor. Two of the men held me down while two others raped me. As they raped me they said they’d make sure I gave birth to a Serbian baby, and they kept repeating that during the rest of the time they kept me there.” Ibid, 599.

¹⁵ Wu, 102.

¹⁶ Amnesty International, “Bosnia-Herzegovina: Rape and Sexual Abuse by Armed Forces. 1993.

isolation, shunned from society and living on the outskirts of the country. In Guatemala the Mayan Indians made up 42 percent of the country's population. The Mayan peoples were, and continue to be, some of the most politically and economically disadvantaged in the country. In 1980 for example, over 87 percent of Mayans were living in poverty.¹⁷ These factors allowed indigenous Mayan populations to become easy targets of government-sponsored genocide.

The Guatemalan civil war took place between the years of 1991-1996 and was characterized by a series of government sponsored human rights violations against the Mayan people, including the use of rape against Mayan women and girls, and genocide against the indigenous population. Guatemalans lived through a series of dictatorships and authoritarian regimes following the US backed coup d'état in 1954 that installed the military regime of Carlos Castillo Armas. The worst of these dictators was Efraim Rios Montt whose military regime during the 1980s assumed almost absolute government power. Members of his government and military successfully infiltrated every institution and sector of Guatemalan society and eliminated enemies who spoke against him. Rios Montt targeted any and all who supported "leftists" groups or ideologies. The bloody civil war that ensued during his Presidency pitted his conservative, US backed government against various leftist rebel groups supported by peasants and indigenous Maya. The civil war claimed the lives of over 140,000 people who had been killed or disappeared.¹⁸ Government forces, through official state sanctioned terror, perpetrated an overwhelming majority of these killings.

¹⁷ Michele L. Leiby, "Wartime Sexual Violence in Guatemala and Peru." *International Studies Quarterly*. 53. 2000. 447.

¹⁸Rashida Manjoo and Calleigh McRaith, "Gender-Based Violence and Justice in Conflict and Post-Conflict Areas." *Cornell International Law Journal* Vol. 44, 2011. 28.

Of the human rights abuses that occurred, the use of rape as a way to control, suppress, and ethnically cleanse the Maya population served as a staple of the genocide. Government forces used rape and sexual violence as a way to spread fear and terror within Mayan communities. This policy held two objectives: to demoralize and to spread fear. Rape served as a particularly effective tool in demoralizing women and societies as a whole. Rape was the method used to inflict severe physical and psychological damage to the individual and her community. Yet, rape and sexual violence took on another purpose during the Civil War: to spread fear and terror in the civilian populations. As opposition to Rios Montt's regime increased, so did the state's brutality. Government forces used terror, coercion and violence in an attempt to suppress the opposition and regain territorial control.¹⁹ The state intensified its repressive campaign against the Mayan populations in the hopes that their fears of being raped, tortured, or killed by government agents would dissuade recruitment into leftist guerilla groups.²⁰ Rape was used a means to intimidate Mayan populations: soldiers sought out the mothers, daughters, sisters, wives of suspected guerillas and raped them in front of the suspected guerilla. This was an attempt to force complacency in communities and force the indigenous populations to stand down. Furthermore, sexual violence served to "weaken the opposition even when committed on a more limited and targeted scale, to punish or eliminate specific "enemies of the state."²¹ By this logic, targeted repression on civilian populations inherently undermines, or at least seeks to undermine, the ability of rebels to recruit members and retain supporters.²² Professor John Roth argues that the rape of Mayan women had several ramifications: "To rape, torture, and kill a woman especially in front of her family or community, dishonors not only the woman but also

¹⁹ Leiby, 449.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid, 450.

²² Ibid.

her family, community, and ethnic identity. Being raped in Hispanic Roman Catholic or traditional Maya cultures creates profound and traumatic shame and guilt. Such violence destroys a woman's emotional, physical, and mental health; it irrevocably damages familial and communal cohesiveness."²³

Rape creates physical and psychological damage for the individual and the whole community.²⁴ "The State's militarized approach to resistance exacerbated misogyny and gender inequality in Guatemala, a nation with the most extreme gender inequalities in the Western Hemisphere, and, as stated earlier, one of the most dangerous places in the world for women and girls."²⁵ The practices of state sponsored femicide and gender violence reached unprecedented and epidemic proportions during the genocide of the Mayan people. State sponsored rape and sexual violence sought to silence female political activists such as Rigoberta Menchu, Rogelio Cruz and even American activists and nuns. Sister Dianna Ortiz is a US nun who worked as a teacher in Guatemala during the genocide. She was threatened with rape and murder as a tactic to scare her out of the country—a tactic that was hugely successful in intimidating and scaring women from joining or supporting the guerillas. Sister Dianna's commitment to the Mayan communities in Guatemala made her a target of state sponsored aggression, with the government labeling her an enemy of the state and a guerilla subversive. "In September 1988, a local bishop warned Sister Diana that he had received an anonymous letter accusing her of working with the guerillas. Later Sister Dianna received two death threats. "Eliminate Dianna, assassinate, decapitate, rape," announced the first written threat. "The army knows who you are. Leave the

²³ Rittner and Roth, 121.

²⁴ Leiby, 449.

²⁵ Rittner and Roth, 125.

country,” warned the second one.”²⁶ Since the beginning of the civil war, Maya women were instrumental in defending their lands, communities and cultures, making them special targets of state sponsored aggression and sexual violence.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

The conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) holds the heinous distinction of being the deadliest conflict since World War II. Since its independence from Belgian colonizers, the Congolese population has not benefitted from the vast natural resources of the country. Rather, the DRC has faced decades of extreme brutality under colonial rule, military dictatorships, and extreme poverty and destruction of resource rich lands. Today, the DRC is in the midst of a bloody conflict over its vast natural resources (primarily tin, tantalum, tungsten, and gold) involving foreign armies and several militia groups. Because of its devastated economy, widespread fighting for control of natural resources, rampant poverty, and complete breakdown of state functions, the DRC finds itself in the middle of “Africa’s first world war” with over 5.4 million people killed and hundreds of thousands displaced.²⁷

The DRC is suffering from another war; a war on women. The United Nations states that more than 200,000 women have been raped in the country since 1998, designating the DRC as the “worst place in the world to be a woman.”²⁸ The level of sexual violence is the worst the global community has seen in recent decades; physical injuries from rape are often so horrific that many women require surgery and have lasting symptoms years after their rapes. Human

²⁶ Sanford, 58.

²⁷ Maria Eriksson Baaz, “Why do Soldiers Rape? Masculinity, Violence, and Sexuality in the Armed Forces in the Congo (DRC).” *International Studies Quarterly*. Vol. 53, 2009. 500.

²⁸ Human Rights Watch, “The War within the War: Sexual Violence against Women and Children in Eastern Congo.” Human Rights Watch. Web.

rights organizations report that the rapes are so brutal that many Congolese women are “raped to death,” contract sexually transmitted infections and diseases (such as HIV/AIDS) and are violently raped with objects: “...in the DRC, these injuries are largely due to violent rape with objects--gun barrels for example, or sticks and bottles--that perforate the vagina and other organs.”²⁹ On CBS’s 60 Minutes program, “War against Women,” which aired on January 11, 2008, Dr. Denis Mukwege, director of Panzi Hospital said: “It is a method of torture. It is a way to terrorize the population. When I see some of the injuries on the women and children, I realize this type of violence has little to do with sex and much more with power through a sort of terrorism.”³⁰ According to Mukwege, 48 women were raped every hour in Congo during the height of the conflict in 2006-7.³¹ Recent reports from local health centers in South Kivu claim that an estimated 40 women continue to experience sexual violence every day.

Human Rights Watch reported that “[Sexual violence] It's become a weapon of war in eastern Congo, used by soldiers and rebels, sometimes ... the Congolese army soldiers ... are going out on a looting and raping rampage and it's almost random those that they target. In other cases, we've seen rebels or soldiers use rape specifically to target members of a particular ethnic group ... ” “Women’s Bodies as a Battleground,” a study by the NGO International Alert, identified four types of rape carried out by militia groups on women in the Congo: “individual rape, gang rape, rape in which victims are forced to rape each other, and rape involving objects being inserted into the victim's’ genitals.”³² Rape in the Congo does not have one purpose.

²⁹ Rittner and Roth, 145.

³⁰ CBS News, “War against Women: The Use of Rape as a Weapon in Congo’s Civil War,” 60 Minutes, January 11, 2008, updated August 14, 2008.

³¹ Preethi Nallu, “Rape is being used to terrorize the population, says DRC gynecologist.” The Guardian online. 2015.

³² International Alert, “Women’s Bodies as a Battleground.” International Alert online. 2005.

Unlike the cases of Bosnia and Guatemala, rape in the Congo encompasses a number of explanations: the first, rape is considered a spoil of war, men rape and commit acts of sexual violence for their own pleasure. Second, rape is used by militia groups to terrorize communities into submission. Third, rape is used as a weapon of ethnic cleansing with many soldiers hoping to sever the bloodline by so violently raping Congolese women that they become sterile and unable to reproduce.³³ According to the organization Women to Women, “when a woman is raped, it’s not just her that’s raped. It’s the entire community that’s destroyed. When they take a woman to rape her, they’ll line up the family, they’ll line up other members of the communities to actually witness that. . . . They make them watch. And so, what that means for that particular woman when it’s all over, is that total shame, personally, to have been witnessed by so many people as she’s being violated.”³⁴ Soldiers rape in order to sever the bloodline and ties of a particular community, thereby making that community weak and vulnerable.³⁵

Often times, the effects of rape in the DRC last far longer than the act itself. For instance, the fear of rape prevented women from working the fields, thereby contributing to extreme poverty and food insecurity³⁶. In addition, women who are not rendered infertile by their rape often are forced to bear their rapist’s children (as abortion is illegal in the DRC). Along with the physical scars from rape, women often carry psychological wounds resulting in severe depression, fear, anxiety, shame, guilt, and persistent nightmares. Psychological counseling is, in most cases, unavailable for victims of rape and sexual violence and they are forced to relive their

³³ Carly Brown, “Rape as a weapon of war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.” *Torture*. 22(1). 2012. 27-28.

³⁴ Solidarity, “Congo’s War, Women’s Holocaust.” Solidarity online publication. 2008.

³⁵ Jonathon Zilberg, “Chapter Title: Mass Rape as a Weapon of War in the Eastern DRC.” Narrating War and Peace in Africa Boydell and Brewer (2010).

³⁶ Rittner and Roth, 148.

trauma every day without emotional support or guidance. Many women who are raped are abandoned by their husbands or families and labeled as “impure” “unclean” “dirty.” Women are often re-victimized by their communities or families or by the public, often facing verbal and physical abuse and public humiliation.³⁷ In the DRC, no one is safe from sexual violence or rape. Victims of rape range from four months to 84 years old.³⁸

Rape as a tool of Genocide: Why it is Effective

“Rape has been used historically as a form of genocide, as the...destruction of a race...It produces a sense of inadequacy on the part of the collective heart of the race, a sense of helplessness, a sense of worthlessness.”

It is important to understand how the international community defines rape. The United Nations Commission on Human Rights defines war rape as “a deliberate and strategic decision on the part of combatants to intimidate and destroy the enemy as a whole by raping and enslaving women who are identified as members of the opposition group.”³⁹ The International Criminal Court (ICC), tasked with prosecuting rape as a weapon of war, defines rape in several elements. The first describes the perpetrators’ invasion of an individual’s body “by conduct resulting in penetration, however slight, of any part of the body of the victim or of the perpetrator with a sexual organ.” This may be done by “any object or any other part of the body.” The second element states, “the invasion was committed by force, or by threat of force or coercion,” (detention, duress, violence, and psychological oppression, etc.) Finally, the ICC explains that

³⁷ Rittner and Roth, 145.

³⁸ Pratt and Werchick, 7.

³⁹ Nancy Farwell, “War Rape: New Conceptualizations and Responses.” *Affilia*, 19(4). 2004. 392.

rape is considered “as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against a civilian population,” and that the perpetrators were aware of these intended motives.⁴⁰

Scholars of war and genocide argue that a weapon of war is any “tool or device for use in attack or defense in combat fighting of war.” Furthermore, a weapon of war must be “used as a part of systematic political campaign which has strategic military purposes.”⁴¹ The use of rape as a weapon of war is one of the most aggressive, violent, and humiliating offenses perpetrated against an enemy, or member of the enemy group. The act of rape is still committed in many armed conflicts today because of its effects on the individual, community, and society. This begs the questions however, *why is rape such a tactful and useful weapon?*

The effects of rape often go beyond the individual, impacting her family, village, and community. “Rape, as with all terror-warfare, is not exclusively an attack on the body--it is an attack on the ‘body-politic.’ Its goal is not to maim or kill one person but to control an entire socio-political process by crippling it. It is an attack directed equally against personal identity and cultural integrity.”⁴² The effects of rape are detrimental to the individual as the victim feels shame and guilt, is plagued with physical and psychological ailments, is often shunned from her society and made to feel alone, isolated and abandoned.⁴³

The effects of rape are endless. According to Ruth Seifert, “[a] violent invasion into the interior of one's body represents the most severe attack imaginable upon the intimate self and the

⁴⁰ International Criminal Court. Elements of crimes. 2002.

⁴¹ Leiby 449.

⁴² Cassandra Clifford, “Rape as a Weapon of War and its Long Effects on Victims and Society.” The Foreign Policy Association, New York, NY. 2008. 3.

⁴³ Carolyn Nordstrom, “Women and War: observations from afield.” Minerva: Quarterly Report on Woman and the Military, 9.

dignity of a human being: by any measure it is a mark of severe torture.” In addition to physical injuries, scars, and wounds, victims of rape and sexual violence suffer from extreme psychological consequences. Victims often develop a fear of intimacy, are likely to engage in self-mutilation and injury, suffer from flashbacks, sleep disorders, shame, depression and anxiety, have recurring nightmares of their rapes and experience post-traumatic stress disorder and psychosomatic disorders.⁴⁴

“Rape has been used historically as a form of genocide, as the...destruction of a race...It produces a sense of inadequacy on the part of the collective heart of the race, a sense of helplessness, a sense of worthlessness.”⁴⁵ In the Bosnian case, the use of rape and sexual violence served as a particularly effective tool of genocide. Rape, in the conservative Muslim religion, is not only an attack upon the individual; rather it is a direct assault on the woman’s family and communal identity. One Muslim woman described the impact of rape on the Muslim culture: “For Muslim women, virginity is divine, incredibly precious...once it is lost, an unmarried woman will not be accepted. A married woman who is raped may not be accepted by her husband.”⁴⁶ Many genocide scholars as an attack on and an attempt to erase the cultural identity of a particular ethnic group consider rape; it is an attack on the collective identity. It is an attempt to completely remove the cultural ties and closeness felt in a particular community. Scholars argue that the mass rape of women in a particular society undermines the cohesion and fabric of that society.⁴⁷ Rape offers a mechanism by which perpetrators can slowly sever the ties

⁴⁴ Coleen Kivlahan and Nate Ewigman, “Rape as a weapon of war in modern conflicts: Families and communities are victims, as well as individuals.” *British Medical Journal*. 341(7771) 2010. 469.

⁴⁵ Aydelott, 602

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ “The effects of rape and mutilations are far reaching. Community leaders willing to speak out noted that the frequent and extreme brutality committed with impunity during wave after wave of armed occupation resulted in the disintegration of the moral and social fabric in many localities.” Though

a victim has with her community—oftentimes the victim is shunned and pushed out of her community, leaving her isolated, vulnerable, and alone.

Rape vs. Ethnic Cleansing

Rape is a direct attack on the ethnic ties of a community and constitutes ethnic cleansing. Ethnic cleansing is defined as “the mass expulsion or killing of members of an unwanted ethnic or religious group in a society.” Rape is considered “an attack on culture and safety of the community and is accompanied by other acts of terror that disrupt basic services such as education, farming, commerce and access to healthcare. The threat of rape restricts core activities, such as collecting water and firewood and working on the family farms. This results in fewer cooked meals and endangers family nutrition.”⁴⁸ The effects of rape are devastating on a cultural and community level, leaving the community as a whole vulnerable, at risk of collapse. Communal ties are often essential for the survival of a community and rape, femicide, and sexual violence are inflicted intentionally to obliterate communal connections through levels of extreme cruelty.⁴⁹ Ethnic cleansing implies the *deliberate* killing or expulsion of a particular ethnic or religious group; yet, few definitions include the use of rape and sexual violence as a particularly brutal form of ethnic cleansing. The use of rape purposefully tears a community apart at the seams, eliminating culture and denying individuals’ rights to existence. Professor John Roth

authors Marion Pratt and Leah Werchick were observing the effects of rape in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, these effects apply to many instances of mass rape.

Marion Pratt and Leah Werchick, “Sexual Terrorism: Rape as a Weapon of War in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo.” USAID/DCHA Assessment Report. 2004. 7.

⁴⁸ Kivlaham and Ewigman, 469.

⁴⁹ Rittner and Roth, 125.

argues that rape (most notably in the case of Guatemala) seeks to “[wreck] the social fabric [of a community], most notably through the extreme violation and profound humiliation of the women, these genocidal acts systematically sought to eliminate the Maya and insurgents alike.”⁵⁰

In the case of the former Yugoslavia, many argue that this was the first successful campaign of ethnic cleansing in modern times. "Considered in the context of the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, 'ethnic cleansing' means rendering an area ethnically homogenous by using force or intimidation to remove persons of given groups from the area."⁵¹ Ethnic cleansing is accomplished through the use of "concentration camps, torture, sexual violence, mass killings, forced deportations, destruction of private and cultural property, pillage and theft, and the blocking of humanitarian aid."⁵² Likewise, the Guatemalan genocide saw similar uses of rape as a tool of ethnic cleansing. Light skinned Guatemalan soldiers raped Mayan women in an attempt to “mejorar la raza” or “make the race better” by making the race whiter. Colonial legacies left irreparable damage in the colonized countries, creating a racial hierarchy with lighter skinned men and women deemed superior to dark skinned and indigenous populations. Guatemalan men raped Mayan women in the hopes of making the offspring whiter and more “Guatemalan.”

The United Nations Commission of Experts concluded, "the practices of 'ethnic cleansing,' sexual assault and rape have been carried out by some of the parties so systematically that they strongly appear to be the product of a policy."⁴² In a follow-up report, the United

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Drazen Petrovic, “Ethnic Cleansing—an attempt at Methodology.” *European Journal of International Law*. 1994. 351.

⁵² Cherif Bassiouni and Marca McCormick, “Sexual Violence: An Invisible Weapon of War in the Former Yugoslavia.” 1996. in Todd Salzman, “Rape Camps as a Means of Ethnic Cleansing: Religious, Cultural, and Ethical Responses to Rape Victims in the Former Yugoslavia”. *Human Rights Quarterly* 20 (2). Johns Hopkins University Press: 348–78. 1998. 354.

Nations General Assembly asserted that it was "[convinced that this heinous practice [rape and abuse of women] constitutes a deliberate weapon of war in fulfilling the policy of ethnic cleansing carried out by Serbian forces in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and ... that the abhorrent policy of ethnic cleansing was a form of genocide." Even beyond the case of Bosnia, the United Nations recognized the use of rape as one of the most egregious forms of human rights violations and a weapon used in war, ethnic cleansing campaigns, and genocide.

Why do Men Rape? Psychological Explanations

Biosocial Theory

Biological theory explains that wartime rape may be explained by biological factors and determined by biological dispositions. Taken on its own, biosocial theory argues that men are more aggressive and, in turn, have a more aggressive sexual disposition than women due to higher levels of testosterone, making them genetically more aggressive. The theory explains that men are simply unable to fight the "urge" to rape and use violence in a sexual setting (Seifert 35-36). This theory offers a biological determinism arguing that all men are likely to rape in many contexts, it further explains that all men have the urge to rape due to a primal subconscious drive to pass on their genes and successfully reproduce. Simply put, evolution and biology force men to rape and commit heinous acts of sexual violence in order pass on their genes to the next generation.⁵³ According to biosocial theory, rape is inevitable.

This theory may be compared to the "pressure cooker" theory of wartime rape: "the idea that all men possess instincts for sexual aggression that are restrained under normal conditions

⁵³ Gottschall, Jonathan. "Explaining Wartime Rape." *The Journal of Sex Research*. 41.2 (2004): 129-136. Web. 13 July 2011. 134.

but that, in the chaotic wartime milieu, spew for the like the vented gas of a pressure cooker.”⁵⁴

The pressure cooker metaphor is modeled after the hypothesis of aggression put forth by psychologists Sigmund Freud and Konrad Lorenz. This theory relies on four main components: (Ellis, L. (1991). A synthesized (biosocial) theory of rape. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 59, 631-642):

1. All men possess a sex drive and a drive to possess and control that underlie most rapes and other forms of aggressive sexual behavior.
2. Natural selection has favored men who have learned “forced copulatory tactics” over women who are more likely to resist “forced copulations.” The techniques involved in most rapes are learned. Evolution has selected males who have secured several sexual partners.
3. The tendency of males to use force during sexual intercourse is a function of the male sex drive (which is usually higher than women’s) in addition to the “estimates of the probability of success minus the probability of being punished, divided by sensitivity to aversive stimuli.”
4. Genetic makeup, particularly those genes that have evolved on the Y chromosome affect “neurohormonal functioning,” which alters the strength of the sex drive that may affect or encourage an individual to commit rape.

However, biological theory relies too heavily on biological factors and dispositions, not fully taking into account sociocultural influences. Sociocultural behaviors, according to Gottschall are learned over a lifetime and are extremely important in the development of pro social behaviors and behaviors towards others. Biological theory merely depends on present circumstances such as war or conflict. Biosocial theory overlooks the influences of culture, an important factor in social behaviors of individuals. This theory falls short in its analysis of rape as a weapon and

⁵⁴ Ibid, 133.

strategic tool of war because it reduces an individual to his biology, rendering him an organism that is controlled entirely by impulse and evolution. The theory lacks the proper explanation of the specific phenomenon of wartime rape and its aftermath both in the victims and perpetrators.

Sociocultural Context

The sociocultural context is essential in the study of wartime rape. The role of the patriarchy in developing countries offers two explanations for mass rapes committed during conflicts. Context and situation primes societies as breeding grounds for sexual violence and rape. Cultural norms and values create a state that virtually trains societies to engage in rape and sexual violence on a large scale. The manifestation of these norms and values, translates to the militarization of community members and “arm them” against those whom they consider the enemy, creating a desire to perpetrate horrific acts of sexual violence. In countries in which most wartime rape takes place are extremely patriarchal societies; societies in which women are treated as inferior to men and receive little support as victims of rape, perpetuating a culture of impunity for rape and sexual violence. This is articulated in the study done by psychologists in India: “Socioculturally transmitted attitudes toward women, rape, and rapists can predict sexual violence. Such stereotypes are often internalized from the male dominated sociocultural milieu. Sexual violence can result from a misogynist attitude prevalent in a culture.”⁵⁵ The study goes onto to explain:

“It is possible that in cultures where man and his manly role are prized better, additional perceived or real power may encourage them to think of their “rights.” If a woman resists sexual intercourse, it may be perceived as a direct threat by men to their masculinity, triggering a crisis of male identity and contributing to sexual control and violence as it is seen as a way of resolving this crisis. It has been reported that victims who attempt resistance or escape from the situation

⁵⁵ Gurvinder Kalra and Dinesh Bhugra, “Sexual violence against women: Understanding cross-cultural intersections.” *Indian Journal of Psychiatry*. 2013 Jul-Sep; 55(3): 244–249.

are more likely to be brutalized by the offender, thereby giving an inflated sense of power to the abuser...”

In most societies, men hold the highest positions of power, controlling land, capital, control of the household, leadership in the state and community etc. Some feminist scholars argue that even these patriarchal norms are a form of institutionalized violence: pervasive, oppressive, and permanent. In these cultures, such as in the DRC, typically “masculine” attributes such as aggressiveness, strength and power are desired while traditionally “feminine” traits such as sensitivity, tranquility, and purity are unfavorable. This forces women into the role “second-class” citizens with little agency, thus rape serves as both an attack on the physical body and an attack on the personal and cultural identity—and what it means to be a woman.⁵⁶ This renders rape as the most vicious and effective weapons of war, an attack on every part of the individual.

Strategic Rape Theory

Strategic rape theory is arguably the most influential theory of rape in modern times, being widely accepted and credited by activists, psychologists, and scholars. This theory expresses that rape can be used as a tool to achieve certain political, social, and economic goals-- “rape is a tactic executed by soldiers in the service of larger strategic objectives.”⁵⁷ This strategic use of rape as a weapon by one group against another differentiates strategic rape theory from the popular *feminist rape theory*.⁵⁸ Rather than examining one individual's actions in regards to gender dominance, strategic rape theory postulates that rape has the intention of controlling, suppressing, eliminating, and destroying the *enemy*. Sexual violence and rape are focused on

⁵⁶ Kivlahan and Ewigman, 468.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 131.

⁵⁸ Feminist theory differs from the Strategic Rape Theory in several respects however Gottschell makes the effort to explain feminist theory in his article: “The classic feminist orientation is to extend the so-called power hypothesis of rape into the wartime milieu. That is, rape in war, like rape in peace, is identified not a crime of sexual passion but as a crime motivated by the desire to exert dominance over a woman.” Gottschell, 130.

destabilizing a community with little focus on the pain inflicted on the victim; rather SPT examines the effects rape has on a community.

Rape is a systematic attack upon every level of society: the individual, community and collective, an attack that affects the entire group. In short, “rape is a crime against a collectivity.”⁵⁹ Scholar John Gottschall argues that rape is a calculated, methodical tactic used by enemy groups. “Wholesale rape represents just another ordinance-like bombs, bullets, or propaganda—that a military can use to accomplish its strategic objectives. While supporters of this position do not always claim that military planners explicitly instruct soldiers to rape, the implication is clear: Wartime rape is a coherent, coordinated, logical, and brutally effective means of prosecuting warfare.”⁶⁰ Furthermore, rape is used to terrorize, humiliate, demoralize, and dehumanize enemy groups for political, social, and economic gain. Men use rape as a weapon to instill fear, control and submission, capitalizing on a group’s collective weakness and defenselessness. Gottschall further argues that “[rape] is credited with spreading debilitating terror, diminishing the resistance of civilians, and demoralizing, humiliating, and emasculating enemy soldiers who are thereby shown to have failed in their most elemental protective duties.”⁶¹ ‘War rape’ is particularly brutal and is usually committed in a public forum, in front of family and community members. Women are raped in front of their husbands, fathers, sons, and brothers, an act that is intended to emasculate men as they are forced to remain helpless, unable to protect their wives, sisters, daughters, and mothers. This type of rape is employed strategically in an attempt to destroy a community’s cohesion and stability. In addition, this type of brutality utilizes traditional gender and patriarchal values such as ‘female purity’ and ‘masculine

⁵⁹ Davis Buss, *Sex, Power, conflict: Evolutionary and feminist perspectives*. UK: Oxford University Press. 1989. 150.

⁶⁰ Gottschell, 131.

⁶¹ Ibid, 131.

protection.’ The attack and rape of women is an act that destroys a group's social bonds and humiliates and demoralizes the community as a whole.⁶² Other cultural norms about honor and cleanliness have led to many rape victims being removed from and shunned by their communities, destroying the family unit and the “social fabric of society.”⁶³

Strategic rape theory may be used to explain the genocidal and ethnocidal means of rape. Rapes carried out in an attempt to ethnically “cleanse” a particular group or region is an attack not only on the physical body of a woman, but also on the bloodline of a group as a whole. An attack on a woman’s body, in this sense, is an attack on the source of human life and reproduction. Strategic rape seeks to end the bloodline of a targeted community as in the case of the Democratic Republic of the Congo or in the former Yugoslavia, It attempts to render the women in a community infertile, unable to reproduce. In other cases, rape is used to “cleanse the bloodline” while the rapist seeks to impregnate a woman in order to create future generations of children with their desired bloodline. This was seen in the cases of Guatemala and the former Yugoslavia where women were forced to give birth and raise their rapists’ babies. By attacking women, rapists are simultaneously attacking the representations of culture and ethnicity of a specific group.⁶⁴

The effects of rape are profound and long term, inflicting physical, psychological, and emotional damage on the victim and her community. Victims of rape often contract HIV/AIDS and other life threatening sexually transmitted infections/diseases. Women are often shunned by

⁶² Bülent Diken and Carsten Bagge Laustsen. “Becoming Object: Rape as a Weapon of War.” *Body & Society*. 2005 SAGE Publications. 11(1): 111–128

⁶³ CBS News, “War against Women: The Use of Rape as a Weapon in Congo’s Civil War.”

⁶⁴ Ruth Seifert, “War and Rape: A Preliminary Analysis,” Mass Rape: the War against Women in Bosnia-Herzegovina. 54, 55. in Todd Salzman, “Rape Camps as a Means of Ethnic Cleansing: Religious, Cultural, and Ethical Responses to Rape Victims in the Former Yugoslavia”. *Human Rights Quarterly* 20 (2). Johns Hopkins University Press: 348–78. 1998. 355.

their communities and suffer from emotional and psychological issues such as depression and post-traumatic stress. Many feel shame and guilt. Some relive the horror of their rape every day by being forced to live or interact with their rapists. Victims of rape often do not receive adequate physical care or psychological counseling. The first example of rape on a massive and calculated scale in modern times was perpetrated against Bosnian Muslim women in the former Yugoslavia. Serbs sought to ethnically “cleanse” and remove the Muslim bloodline from Yugoslavia. Rape has also been utilized as a tool of intimidation to spread fear in the indigenous communities of Guatemala. Of the numerous human rights violations that occurred during that country’s bloody civil war, the use of rape as a way to control, suppress, and ethnically cleanse the Maya population proved to be the most brutal weapon employed against the Maya communities. The Democratic Republic of the Congo has been labeled “the worst place to be a woman,” due to the massive scale of rape, sexual violence, femicide, and female genital mutilation.

The study of psychology offers many theories on how “war-rape” may be explained. The first of these examines the bio-social and evolutionary aspects of rape. Biosocial theory addresses the biological dispositions and outward aggression of the rapist. This theory, however, has been somewhat discredited for not taking into account the sociocultural contexts of what motivates rapists to commit heinous acts of sexual violence. A more credited approach, known as the Strategic Rape theory, argues that rape is a tactic executed by soldiers in the service of larger strategic objectives. The three case studies of Guatemala, Yugoslavia and DRC demonstrate that rape is the most violent, humiliating, and brutal act that can be committed against a woman. It leaves scars that are physical, emotional, and psychological and devastates communities. The United Nations has determined that rape, as a weapon of war, constitutes war crimes and crimes

against humanity and that the victims have a legal right to reparations. The international community must ensure that perpetrators are held accountable and justice is meted out. And in countries like the DRC, where the victimization of women continues on a horrendous scale, the global community must denounce this violence and seek solutions on how to end it.

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