



RAPE, WAR AND CIVIL STRIFE From “inevitable” spoils of war to military strategy

Amikam Nachmani

It is a myth that rape is an inevitable part of conflict. There's nothing inevitable about it. It is a **weapon of war** aimed at civilians. It has nothing to do with sex, everything to do with power.

Angelina Jolie, Film star, Special Envoy for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, The Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict, **CNN**, 11 June 2014¹

Rape and sexual abuse are not just a by-product of war but are used as a **deliberate military strategy**... The opportunistic rape and pillage of previous centuries has been replaced in modern conflict by rape used as an **orchestrated combat tool**. ... [I]t was a mistake to think such assaults were primarily about the age-old "spoils of war", or sexual gratification. ...

Medecins Sans Frontieres says it first came across rape as a weapon in the 1990s [in the civil wars in ex-Yugoslavia, particularly in Bosnia and Herzegovina]. ... **The strategic use of rape in war is not a new phenomenon but only recently has it begun to be documented** ... [The victim who is] trafficked into sexual slavery by an occupying force, the sexual abuse will shape not just her own but her community's future for years to come.

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¹ Laura Smith-Spark, “Angelina Jolie: Rape in war is not inevitable, shame is on the aggressor”, **CNN**, 11 June 2014 (emphasis added), <https://edition.cnn.com/2014/06/10/world/violence-against-women-summit/index.html>, accessed: 10 FEB 2018. Jolie was a Special Envoy of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. She and the British Foreign Secretary William Hague co-chaired the Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict, London, 10 – 13 JUNE 2010.

Laura Smith-Spark, "How did rape become a weapon of war?" **BBC News**, 8 DEC 2004²

[H]uge numbers of men are also victims [to sexual violence] ... male rape is endemic in many of the world's conflicts ... Everybody has heard the women's stories. But nobody has heard the men's.

Will Storr, "The rape of men: the darkest secret of war", **The Guardian**, 17 July 2011³

A good quotation (loathsome, revulsive, racist and chauvinistic as it may be) should do the job of introducing the reader to a work's content, mood and atmosphere. The quotations above could serve as mottos for a thorough research on rape and war, more specifically: on perceiving rape as weapon and strategy rather than as an "inevitable" result of "unfortunate" encounters between men fighters and enemy civil populations, mainly rape of women but also of substantive numbers of men.

Rape in war is not a new phenomenon, neither using rape as a weapon and strategy. It occurred in ancient times and it has been prevalent since then, certainly in the 20th and 21st centuries where women and also men have been subjected to rape during armed conflicts. Also, rape in war is part of a wide range of sexual violence against women and men during armed conflicts. The United Nations' definition of "conflict-related sexual violence" refers to rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, forced abortion, enforced sterilization, forced marriage and any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity perpetrated against women, men, girls or boys that is directly or indirectly linked (temporally, geographically or causally) to a conflict.⁴

Rape: Documented as Strategy

The above mentioned motto quoted from Laura Smith – Spark (2004) correctly mentions that although the phenomenon is not new, the **documentation** of rape in war being a **strategic weapon** was first noticed in the 1990s wars in ex-Yugoslavia. (During WWII mass rape was rampant, all sides to the conflict were

² Laura Smith-Spark, "How did rape become a weapon of war?" **BBC News**, 8 DEC 2004 (emphases added), <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/4078677.stm>, accessed: 10 FEB 2018. **Medecins Sans Frontieres** (MSF) or Doctors Without Borders, is a humanitarian medical NGO of French origin (founded: 1971). MSF is active in war and conflict areas and in countries that suffer from medical disasters. The majority of staff are volunteers (doctors, nurses, medical professionals, water and sanitation engineers, etc.). The Organization grants medical help across national boundaries irrespective of political affiliation, race, religion, or gender.

³ Will Storr, "The rape of men: the darkest secret of war", **The Guardian**, 17 JULY 2011, <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2011/jul/17/the-rape-of-men>, accessed: 10 FEB 2018.

⁴ Report of the UN Secretary-General on conflict-related sexual violence, Security Council Distribution, United Nations, S/2016/361, 20 April 2016, <https://www.un.org/en/events/elimination-of-sexual-violence-in-conflict/pdf/1494280398.pdf>, accessed: 23 JAN 2020.

accused of doing it, yet neither of the two courts set up by the victorious allied countries to prosecute suspected war crimes - - in Tokyo and Nuremberg - - recognized the crime of sexual violence).⁵ It was not until 1992, in the face of widespread rape of women in the former Yugoslavia, that the issue came to the attention of the UN Security Council. Subsequently, the Statute of the [International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia \(ICTY, Security Council Resolution 827, \[1993\]\)](#), included rape as a crime against humanity, alongside other crimes such as torture and extermination, when committed in armed conflict and directed against a civilian population.

Rape: Ethnic Pollution

To justify an investigation of rape and war the reader should first be introduced to some of the key aspects of this phenomenon, ethnic pollution for example. Since the second half of the 20th century internal ethnic wars compose the majority of wars (in comparison to international wars whose frequency declined). When the crux of the issue in inter - ethnic wars is to get rid of the "other" and his "otherness" lest they contaminate and pollute us, then the best strategy to create such a dramatic ethnic change is to set in motion a process of ethnic pollution, an act often committed by rape.

Rape: Genocide

As Catherine Mackinnon already observed rape is considered the ultimate weapon because it produces genocide.⁶ Women are perceived as the human group in charge of the demography of the ethnic group. Living in orthodox, conservative, or traditional cultures and communities, a raped woman is usually deducted from the women group with whom the community's men would parent children. The demography of the community then decreases. Men refuse to marry raped women; parents refuse to let their sons marry raped girls. These are all elements that allude to a pre - planned act to eliminate or to reduce the enemy's population, often through rape that produces genocide.

Rape: Feminization

Since early times wars were waged, among other reasons, to increase the population of a community of people: capturing and impregnating the enemy's women has been a means to attain this aim. In addition, ancient peoples and ethnic groups, as well as modern nations, wage wars to commit feminization of their enemies: by killing the enemy's men; by raping the enemy's men; and by raping the enemy's women. Along history these three strategies propelled feminization within human societies. Elaboration on the phenomena of feminization will clarify the contribution of rape to it.

⁵ Ms. Zainab Hawa Bangura, UN Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, United Nations, "Outreach programme on the Rwanda genocide and the United Nations (2013?), Background Information on Sexual Violence used as a Tool of War", <http://www.un.org/en/preventgenocide/rwanda/about/bgsexualviolence.shtml>, accessed: 1 July 2019.

⁶ Catharine A. MacKinnon, **Legal Feminism in Theory and Practice** (Hebrew), Translation from English: Idit Shorer), Tel Aviv, Resling, 2005, *passim*.

Feminization results from the **mass killing of the enemy's men**: from now on the surviving community is composed mainly of women and girls. Feminization also results from the **rape of the enemy's men** - - a known Biblical and classical times' strategy that never failed to recur. This is a strategy that practically proves that enemy's men are no better than their women: the sovereignty of both has been violated and their bodies being invaded and defiled. Modern times are no exception. Recent African civil wars recorded 40 percent of rape cases to be of men. As a result, the United Nations Security Council has recently (June 2013) included, for the first time, rape of boys and men as sexual conflict crimes.⁷ "[H]uge numbers of men are also victims [to sexual violence] ... male rape is endemic in many of the world's conflicts ... Everybody has heard the women's stories. But nobody has heard the men's".⁸

Will Storr of **The Guardian** elaborated on the gendered perceptions that relate to rape of men in times of conflict and war. In many countries and societies patriarchal gendered images are very strict as regards men and women - - there are specific behavioural expectations from men; when they fail to meet them the conclusion is that they are actually females or homosexuals. As shown in the quotation below, the failure of these men bear extreme implications on their families, wives, societies and ethnic groups. Although Storr refers below to gay-relations in Africa, it should be noted that perceiving them as criminal offence is not confined to Africa. Seventy two countries globally still considered homosexual or lesbian relations as criminal offence (July 2019), to be punished in some places by 15 years in prison, or worse by capital punishment.⁹

[M]ale survivors [of rape] often find, once their story is discovered, that they lose the support and comfort of those around them.

In the patriarchal societies found in many developing countries, gender roles are strictly defined.

"In Africa no man is allowed to be vulnerable ... You have to be masculine, strong. You should never break down or cry. A man must be a leader and provide for the whole family. When he fails to reach that set standard, society perceives that there is something wrong."

Often ... wives who discover their husbands have been raped decide to leave them. "They ask me: 'So now how am I going to live with him? As what? Is this still a husband? Is it a wife?' They ask, 'If he can be raped, who is protecting me?'"

In Uganda, survivors are at risk of arrest by police, as they are likely to assume that they're gay - a crime in this country and in 38 of the 53 African nations.¹⁰

⁷ United Nations Security Council 2106 (60). See also Chris Dolan, "Into the Mainstream: Addressing Sexual Violence Against Men and Boys in Conflict". A briefing paper prepared for the workshop held at the Overseas Development Institute, London, 14 May 2014, p.1. https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Into_The_Mainstream-Addressing_Sexual_Violence_against_Men_and_Boys_in_Conflict.pdf (accessed: 26 JAN 2020).

⁸ Will Storr, "The rape of men: the darkest secret of war", **The Guardian**, op. cit.

⁹ Professor Marek Glezerman, Chair, The Israeli Society for Gender Medicine, letter to **Haaretz**, 17 July 2019, p. 11.

¹⁰ Will Storr, "The rape of men: the darkest secret of war", **The Guardian**, 17 JULY 2011, op. cit.

The third means to produce feminization is by **raping the enemy's women**. Alas, the target here is not necessarily synonymous with the victim. The latter - - a girl or a woman - - is the immediate victim, but the attacker's aim is to expose the weakness and febleness of his men enemies: they proved to be incompetent and useless. Gender speaking, these men should have defended and protected their female sector. By not doing this successfully they proved their weakness, mainly physical weakness. Alas, being physically weak is a female trait. Here, too, the community's men are not better than their women.

Rape: The Arab Spring

Using rape as a planned strategy assumes that it would create extreme intolerance and acute hostile reactions and retaliation against it. This violent counter-reaction by an enemy, is now used as an excuse to turn a non-violent clash into a vicious all-out war. Conducting rape in war guarantees that whoever planned a non-violent protest, would eventually resort to an armed struggle if faced by rape of his women and daughters. In many cases it is the interest and the strategy of the stronger side - - the one who enjoys weapon superiority and is determined to defeat his enemy, even to exterminate it, but lacks the excuse to do this - - to provoke his enemy and cause him to abandon his non-violence strategy.

This exacerbation is often achieved when the rival sides apply rape against each other's women. An all-out war then erupts. Extermination weapons, even unrestrainable ones, are freely used. In many societies, certainly in conservative or traditional ones, defiling and desecration of women is extremely intolerable. It is expected from men whose women had been raped, even from those who initially opted for a non-violent struggle, to use extreme aggression and vengeance against their women's attackers. Blood, in particular of virgin girls, is countered and avenged only by blood. Death then prevails because uncrossed codes and taboos had been infringed:

It is [rape which is] the most dreadfully_silent crime currently perpetrated in Syria. A mass crime ... that relies on the most deep-rooted taboos of traditional Syrian society — and on the silence of the victims, convinced they will be rejected by their own family, or even sentenced to death.¹¹

Professor Burhan Ghalioun, the first President of the Syrian Opposition Transitional National Council (August 2011 – May 2012), and prominent member of the Syrian resistance against the regime of President Assad, was very clear when describing the outcomes of rape by Syrian regime's soldiers. Rape is depicted as the ultimate weapon that propelled the extreme violence used in the Syrian civil war:

¹¹ Annick Cojean, "Syria's Silent War Crime: Systematic Mass Rape. Evidence is piling up that the Damascus regime has used rape - of daughters in front of fathers, wives in front of husbands - as a targeted weapon", **Worldcrunch**, 11 MARCH 2014, available at: <http://www.worldcrunch.com/syria-crisis/syria-039-s-silent-war-crime-systematic-mass-rape/human-rights-prison-torture-assad-free-syrian-army/c13s15245/#.U4WE0vk0Wfw> (accessed: 25 SEPT 2016).

International attention should be focused on the mass rape carried out by the regime. "This is this weapon that made our revolution, which aimed to be peaceful, turn so violent: Daughters were raped in front of their fathers, wives in front of their husbands. **Men became crazy with anger** and yelled that they would defend themselves and avenge their honor. I used to think we had to do everything we could to avoid getting into a militarized phase, and that arming the revolution would multiply the number of dead by 100, ... **But the use of rape [against our women] decided otherwise. And I think [the enemy] wanted it this way. Once the revolutionaries were armed, [the enemy] could easily justify the massacres of those he already called 'terrorists'".**¹²

Indeed, rape in the Syrian civil war caused extreme revenge, even body mutilation and cannibalism - - another form of violating human bodies. Covering the Syrian civil war, the **TIME** Magazine reported the following justification for the televised **eating** [!] of a **Syrian soldier's lungs and liver** by an anti-President Assad rebel:

[H]e [the rebel] claims to have found a video in the dead soldier's cell phone showing "a woman and her two daughters, fully naked, and he [the dead soldier] was humiliating them and sticking a stick here and there".¹³

Conclusion

What are the explanations to these shocking phenomena and amazing numbers of victims that experienced sexual violence during armed conflicts? In what ways the future of ethnic and national communities is affected by the sexual harassment and rape of their women and men? What has **genocide** to do with rape and war, notwithstanding the fact that the majority of raped women had not been killed although they had been being sexually harassed? And what is the contribution of the recent Middle East turmoil and civil wars (during the so poorly defined "Arab Spring") to the phenomenon of rape and war? Our work attempts to answer these and other questions that have to do with the growing phenomenon of rape in war and the growing global attention given to it.

¹² Professor Burhan Ghalioun, quoted in Annick Cojean, "Syria's Silent War Crime: Systematic Mass Rape. Evidence is piling up that the Damascus regime has used rape - of daughters in front of fathers, wives in front of husbands - as a targeted weapon", **Worldcrunch**, 11 MARCH 2014 (Emphases added), available at: <http://www.worldcrunch.com/syria-crisis/syria-039-s-silent-war-crime-systematic-mass-rape/human-rights-prison-torture-assad-free-syrian-army/c13s15245/#.U4WE0vk0WFw> (accessed: 25 SEPT 2016). Burhan Ghalioun was born in Syria (1945) and is a professor of sociology at the Universite de Paris III, the Sorbonne.

¹³ Aryn Baker, "The YouTube War", **TIME** Magazine, 27 May 2013, pp. 16 – 17.