5-13-2021

# The Phenomenon of Sexual Violence During Armed Conflicts in the Twenty-First Century: Entering the Era of Survivors as Agents of Peace

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May 13, 2021

Submitted to the Faculty of Ursinus College in fulfillment of the requirements for Honors in the Department of International Relations

## Abstract

Evidence suggests the twenty-first century has witnessed a surge in armed conflicts and ethnic wars targeting marginalized communities, subjecting innocent civilians to violence and destruction. Among the tactics aimed to disrupt family and social ties within the existing communities, some armed groups and government sponsored soldiers have subjected vulnerable individuals to wartime rape and conflict-related sexual violence including physical and mental abuse. While the international community attempts to intervene militarily and judicially to quell the sexual violence, institutions and individual actors fall short of providing justice and accountability to survivors and victims of conflict-related sexual violence, Through the case studies of the Darfur genocide, Yezidi sex-slaves in ISIS controlled territories, and the civil war in eastern provinces of the Democratic Republic of Congo, I explore the research question of how can the international community ensure justice, accountability, and support following armed conflicts enforcing ethnic genocide, persecution, and sexual violence, and what role can survivors play in mitigating the number of conflict-related sexual violence instances in the future? Through the lens of theoretical lenses such as post-colonial feminism, essentialism, constructivism, intersectional feminism, and the boomerang model, I assert that given variations in the motivations and type of conflict-related sexual violence and wartime rape across cases, it is especially important to consult and incorporate survivors from communities and societies directly affected by the violence in pressuring the international community in pursuing justice and designing effective policy responses to prevent further devastation from occurring in the future.

## Table of Contents

## Chapter 1. Introduction

In 2012, a 16-year-old girl named Amina Filali was found dead by her family. The Moroccan teenager had intentionally ingested poison after being married to her abusive rapist. Under the *Mudawana*[1], Morocco's family code, underaged girls were allowed to marry their rapists with the father's consent in order for the guilty men to avoid prison and for the families to maintain their honor through the image of their virtuous daughters. Although this may seem like isolated example, it reflects a global problem of overlooking the wellbeing of girls and women and downplaying the seriousness of sexual abuse and rape. This is especially the case during armed conflicts, where sexual abuse and tactical rape are common, though not ubiquitous. In a desperate effort to gain leverage, legitimacy, and power, many of the combatants in civil wars have systematically used sexual violence and rape as a tactic to destroy communities. In the eyes of the perpetrators, women and girls are seen as pawns in a larger struggle for power rather than actual human beings. Meanwhile, the governments and social institutions they depend on for protection all too often fail them.

Despite the international community's recognition that the systematic use of rape, sexual slavery and other forms of sexual violence during armed conflicts constitutes a crime against humanity, this type of sexual violence remains tragically common. In her empirical study of rape during civil war, political scientist Dara Kay Cohen found that "numerous" incidents or reports of "massive" rape occurred in 65% of civil conflicts between 1980 and 2012, which suggests there is a recent incline in conflicts experiencing sexual violence and tactical rape as methods of warfare (Cohen 2016, 209). This brutal strategy is an attempt to disrupt, dismantle, and destroy

[1] The Mudawana is the family code in Moroccan law. This has been rewritten numerous times, including a reform in 2012 which no longer sanctions marriage following rape, but social norms in rural regions far away from the capital continue to condone this practice.

the foundations that hold the affected society together. By targeting men, women and children, the armed groups wage both political and gender warfare, subjecting survivors to psychological, physical, and social suffering that continues long afterwards. Victims of sexual violence during armed conflicts face ostracization by their own ethnic, social, and religious communities. According to Dr. Denis Mukwege Mukengere, who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for this work with survivors of sexual violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, "the woman who gets raped is the one who is stigmatized and excluded for it" (Sexual Violence: A Tool of War 2). Ironically, this furthers the ultimate goal of using rape and sexual violence as a weapon of warfare since it cripples the targeted society and unravels the bond that once held the community together.

Through case studies of the Yezidi women held in Islamic State territories, victims of the Darfur genocide, and civilians caught in the fighting in the Democratic Republic of Congo, I explore how victims of sexual violence are ostracized from the rest of their society due to their experience of sexual trauma and abuse. While both men and women can be victims of sexual violence during armed conflict, this paper will focus on women and girls as the most common victims and explore how this kind of gender-based violence both reflects and reinforces discrimination against women and gender inequality. Women and girls are more often constrained by honor codes, virginity taboos, and other traditional practices that cause the victims of sexual violence to be rejected by their families and communities, leaving them with few resources to turn towards for help or justice. Thus, survivors have to bear trauma, abuse, and humiliation not only from their attackers but from their own communities as well.

However, despite this deliberate attempt to isolate victims of sexual abuse and rape, international institutions such as the United Nations Security Council began to acknowledge the

use of widespread rape as a weapon of war in response to armed conflicts in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Rwanda, where rape was used as part of systematic efforts at ethnic cleansing and genocide. The International Criminal Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda declared rape and sexual slavery to be crimes against humanity and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court stipulated that "rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilization, or 'any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity' [constitutes] a crime against humanity when it is committed in a widespread or systematic way" (Sexual Violence: A Tool of War: 2) While these efforts are commendable, they are not enough. International judicial institutions have made little progress in holding the perpetrators accountable for their crimes against humanity. Thus, some survivors have taken matters into their own hands, challenging the expectation that they must live in shame, secluded from everyone else. Defying traditional norms that put pressure on women not to report rape and sexual violence, some survivors have taken on the responsibility of spreading awareness of the prevalence of conflict-related sexual violence, filling in the gap where international policies have failed. Rather than give in to the pressure to remain silent, these survivors and advocate for prevention and protection from sexual violence. Instead of waiting for organizations to rescue them from their circumstances, these women and other survivors fight against the injustice by putting pressure on international actors and offering support and assistance to other survivors. Thus, the research question I will attempt to answer is how can the international community ensure justice, accountability, and support following armed conflicts enforcing ethnic genocide, persecution, and sexual violence, and what role can survivors play in mitigating the number of conflict-related sexual violence instances in the future?

# Chapter 2. Background and Definitions

## Wartime Rape Under National and International Law

Over the course of the last one hundred and fifty years or so, international norms and human rights documents regarding wartime sexual abuse and violence have evolved considerably. Rhonda Copelon, an international human rights lawyer who specialized in cases involving gender-based violence, emphasizes that international humanitarian and human rights law has come to formally recognize that rape and sexual violence are crimes against humanity when committed or tolerated by the state or other organized groups; she argues that this formal recognition is critical for protecting victims and holding perpetrators accountable. According to Copelon, the first modern codification of the laws of war began with the 1863 Lieber Code issued to Union forces during the U.S. civil war, which "prohibited rape and treated it as a capital offense" (Copelon 235). In contrast to the Lieber Code of conduct, the 1907 Hague Convention IV Respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land only addressed wartime rape implicitly and "referenced sexualized attacks on women by providing that 'Family honor and rights…must be respected,'" (Copelon 235). Similarly, the 1929 Geneva Convention only "addressed rape in terms of honor and gender-based propriety, not as acts of violence against women" (Copelon 235). By utilizing terms such as honor and respect, the issue of rape came to be isolated and evaluated by individual communities' traditions and cultures. The notion of "honor and gender-based propriety" extended into the Geneva Convention of 1929 for women prisoners, but still failed to acknowledge the violence and trauma imparted on the women during times of war (Copelon 235). The emphasis on protecting women from the shame of their traumatic experiences rather than prosecuting rape and sexual violence as crimes continued during the war tribunals established at the end of World War II. Although evidence of rape was submitted at the Nuremburg trials, meaning that it was included under the general category of "other inhumane

acts" against civilians (Copelon 235). Although there was more of a focus on prosecuting Japanese military and civilian leaders for rape and sexualized violence, the Tokyo War Crimes Tribunal ignored the system of militarized sexual slavery that Japan established in the countries it occupied. In fact, "U.S memos referred to the comfort stations as 'brothels'" in the widespread rapes of Nanking, completely disregarding the torture, humiliation, and abuse the women and girls witnessed at the hands of Japanese soldiers (Copelon 236).

For most of the second half of the twentieth century, international laws on war failed to explicitly consider rape and sexualized violence as such serious war crimes that they demanded international prosecution; instead, rape was generally regarded as an offense against family honor and morals (Copelon 236-237). The 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women "did not mention gender or sexualized violence" and human rights groups during this time failed to specifically include rape and sexualized violence as human rights violations. This led to contorted reasoning, as in the clause stating, "a woman prisoner could be a victim of torture if she were beaten, but not if she were raped" (Copelon 238). It was not until 1995 with the creation of the "Inter-American Commission on Human Rights "that the rape of women could be classified as a tool of political intimidation and gender discrimination, qualifying it as torture" (Copelon 238). At this time, many individuals and societies still objected to discussing rape and sexual assault in public, arguing that this "was a private matter" due to its sexual nature (Copelon 238). On the other hand, "human rights advocates argued…including privately inflicted violence against women would dilute the human rights framework" (Copelon 238).

The 1993 International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia [ICTY] in 1993 which "identified rape as conduct constituting crimes against humanity" but failed to "name

gender or sexual violence in respect to either war crimes or genocide" (Copelon 242). Although the tribunal acknowledged rape as impeding on human rights and individual welfare, the exclusion of sexual violence left many survivors without a proper sense of justice as violations, beatings, and other forms of abuse were left out. In 1994, the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) "retained rape as a crime against humanity and added rape, enforced prostitution, and any form of indecent assault as war crimes" (Copelon 242). While the recognition of rape and other forms of sexual violence as crimes against humanity was important, the language used to describe such crimes suggested that they were "outrages against personal dignity instead of the more forceful 'violence to life, health, and physical or mental well-being of persons" (Copelon 242-243). Therefore, although the tribunals marked a historic step in terms of justice and accountability, the language surrounding sexual violence and rape failed to emphasize the severity of such attacks or the lasting physical, emotional, and mental trauma that the survivors must endure.

In 1998, the Rome Statute established the International Criminal Court to oversee and hear trials including charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity. Under the Rome Statute, "sexualized violence…is identified as among the gravest violence" as sexual violence and rape "need not be mass or widespread" in order to be constituted as a crime against humanity (Copelon 249). In her book *Tactical Rape in War and Conflict*, Brenda Fitzpatrick also mentions that the Rome Statute includes rape and other forms of grave sexual violence in a comprehensive list of war crimes against humanity (Fitzpatrick 6). Despite the fact that the international community has finally taken a clear stance condemning sexual violence and rape during armed conflicts, this thesis will show that there are significant obstacles and variations to actually holding individuals accountable for such crimes and granting justice to survivors.

## Definitions of Sexual Violence and Abuse

Since this thesis covers armed conflicts and sexual violence, it is important to clarify the specific terms and language that will be used. According to Article 7(1)(g) of the Rome Statute, sexual violence is defined as "rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, forced sterilization/abortion, sexual mutilation, and sexual torture" (Rome Statute). Following Elisabeth Wood, rape is defined as "the coerced (under physical force or threat of physical force against the victim or a third person) penetration of the anus or vagina by the penis or another object, or of the mouth by the penis" (Wood 308). Brenda Fitzpatrick, who has worked to bring international attention to widespread tactical in war through her efforts in the field, defines tactical rape as "rape that is used as a tactic by state or non-state actors to attack individuals, groups, and communities deemed to be enemies in conflicts, which may be intra- or inter-state" (Fitzpatrick 5). As Fitzpatrick notes, the terms sexual exploitation and abuse are cited by various international organizations to indicate that sexual violence comes in different forms and instances. She cites a definition by the UN Secretary General of sexual abuse "as actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature, whether by force or under unequal or coercive conditions" and sexual exploitation "as any actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power or trust for sexual purposes including but not limited to profiting monetarily, socially or politically from the sexual exploitation of another" (Fitzpatrick 6). In addition, international law has also expanded throughout the years to include forced marriage as a distinct form of sexual violence, where members of armed groups in some conflicts have abducted women or young girls and kept them as "wives" for the purposes of sexual violence, domestic slavery, and sometimes forcing their captives to become pregnant (Clark 1-2).

Since cultural understandings of rape and sexual violence vary, this thesis will focus primarily on rape by armed combatants as well as sexual slavery and mutilation, which was used extensively against Yezidi and Congolese women and girls. Rape of noncombatants by members of armed groups is not the most common form of sexual violence in war-affected countries – studies indicate that intimate domestic violence is much more common (Hoeffler and Fearon 2015, v) – but rape by armed combatants is more likely to be public, widespread, and often takes the form of gang rape and physical abuse as well (Cohen 4-5, 8-10). Throughout this thesis, I will be using a combination of these definitions when analyzing the use of rape and sexual violence during the armed conflicts in Darfur, ISIS-controlled territories in Syria and Iraq, and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

While it is important to recognize that men and boys are also victims of sexual violence, women and girls are disproportionately targeted especially during conflicts and wars. As Fitzpatrick states, "the recognition that women are made particularly vulnerable because of their gender is of paramount importance. While women may be targeted because of their ethnicity or their political or social grouping, they are often targeted as a result of their gender having been used as part of rendering them more vulnerable" (Fitzpatrick 7). In doing so, waging campaigns of conflict-related sexual violence and widespread rape targets roughly half of the population, systematically subjecting women and girls to gender-based violence. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in General Recommendation No. 19 defines gender-based violence as "violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately. It includes acts that inflict physical, mental or sexual harm or suffering, threats of such acts, coercion and other deprivations of liberty" (UN Women). Although gender-based violence is a relatively broad

term, rape by armed combatants and sexual slavery have emerged as particular forms of sexualized violence and target women and girls as a group.

## Selection of Case Studies

This thesis focuses on sexual violence in Darfur, Sudan, ISIS territories in Iraq, and the Democratic Republic of Congo in order to draw greater awareness to the atrocities that have occurred in those regions as well as the efforts undertaken by survivors and advocates to work toward a world where sexual violence in armed conflict is no longer tolerated, individual perpetrators, leaders, and government officials who condone and participate in such violence are held accountable, and survivors are supported so that they can rebuild their lives and become integrated back into their relative societies. In August 2020, I started an internship at the Darfur Women Action Group where I began learning about the plight of the Darfuri people and the thousands of women and girls who experienced sexual violence at the hands of soldiers and militias. I quickly became passionate about advocating for justice on behalf of all the survivors but paid particular attention to how the international community reacted to the gender-based violence. Whenever I interviewed students for volunteer positions, they were not aware of the systematic use of rape and sexual violence during the conflict. Through my internship, I learned of the widespread use of sexual slavery by ISIS fighters as well as the work of a Yezidi survivor of such sexual violence, Nadia Murad, who has become an internationally recognized advocate for supporting survivors of conflict-related sexual violence. My interest grew as I began researching armed conflicts with high records of sexual violence, which then included the Democratic Republic of Congo. The Democratic Republic of Congo also demonstrates the importance of male allies, such as Congolese gynecologist Dennis Mukwege, who shared the 2018 Nobel Peace Prize with Nadia Murad for his medical treatment and advocacy on behalf of survivors of conflict-related sexual violence in his country and around the world.

All three of the case studies are rooted in armed conflicts that have included high rates of sexual violence, where extreme brutality has caused fistulas and miscarriages which reduced women's reproductive capacity and where rape by armed combatants has been used to impregnate women so as to produce children of the perpetrators' ethnicity based on patrilineal gender norms that presume that descent is traced through the father, thus disrupting future generations of the targeted ethnic minority (Wieringen 4-6). In addition, due to virginity taboos and the stigma of rape, conflict-related sexual violence often leads married women to be abandoned by their husbands and girls to be deemed ineligible for marriage within their communities. Survivors often face social isolation and exclusion as communities lose their identity through the loss of social and cultural bonds (Wieringen 6). The civil wars in Darfur and the Democratic Republic of Congo have been classified as cases where wartime rape and sexual violence have occurred on a "massive" scale and were used systematically as a means of intimidation, control, domination, and punishment (Cohen 2016, 64). On the other hand, thousands of women, particularly from ethnic and religious communities that the Islamic State considered to be infidels, were raped, sexually enslaved, murdered and subjected to other forms of sexual violence and mental and physical abuse (Iraq 2017 Human Rights Report, 20). In all three cases, both national governments and international bodies have been unwilling or unable to prosecute and convict perpetrators to the fullest extent of international law outlining crimes against humanity and war crimes. While the development of international law identifies rape and other forms of sexual violence as prosecutable crimes, this has not deterred continuing instances of sexual violence, nor has it led to effective international judicial intervention to hold perpetrators accountable in fair and unbiased trials. All three cases also involve military intervention, with UN peacekeeping missions in Darfur and the Democratic Republic of Congo

and a U.S.-led international coalition against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS). However, despite international military intervention, conflict-related sexual violence continues in Darfur and in the Democratic Republic of Congo; though the last part of the Islamic State's self-proclaimed caliphate was reclaimed in March 2019, ISIS has shifted underground continues to threaten civilians with its inevitable rise as a formidable insurgent group. Additionally, lack of updated data and reports on ISIS cannot accurately determine the number of Yezidi captives who remain in the grasps of ISIS fighters as sex slaves. As a result, all three of these cases demonstrate the vital role that survivors and transnational advocacy organizations play in pursuing justice and accountability, not only through continued pressure on the international community and individual governments to take action, but also through direct assistance, support, and empowering survivors of sexual violence in the targeted communities.[2]

While the topic of sexual violence is heavy and often triggering to talk about, it is necessary to discuss and research. Although there have always been instances of conflict-related sexual violence throughout history, this problem has come to be recognized globally as a problem for humanity rather than merely a "women's issue." Pankhurst attributes part of this

[2] Throughout this thesis, I define empowerment to explain the support of survivors, both men and women, and tools and training other advocates and organizations provide such as granting platforms for expressing survivors' concerns or their experiences. Proper justice and accountability are defined as fair and unbiased trials which are uninfluenced from corruption and abuse of power, with the ability to hear testimonies from witnesses and primary sources without the threat of them being harmed or attacked. Such proceedings have the possibility of prosecuting perpetrators of crimes to the fullest extent of international law. Additionally, the term international community encompasses all actors, governments, and populations that are outside the scope of the initial issue or conflict. Although this thesis is written from a Western viewpoint, I attempted to include non-Western institutions such as Kurds in Iraq, Rwanda, Uganda, and Sudan.

global awareness to the efforts by feminists to bring international women's rights to prominence (Pankhurst 2). Recently, the 'Me Too Movement' has encouraged more women to step forward and publicly confront their abusers. In many cases, the perpetrators have either been "cancelled" from pop culture or have been essentially excommunicated from society as they have lost jobs, housing, and their reputations. The findings of this thesis demonstrate that the best hope for confronting the horrors and trauma of wartime rape and sexual violence stems from the work of survivors demanding justice, accountability and support for affected individuals, specifically women and girls.

# Chapter 3. Literature Review

## Assumptions about Sexual Violence and Feminist Theories on Sexual Violence in War

As the international community and international documents recognized the need to prevent future conflict-related sexual violence, feminist scholars sought to understand the reasons and motivations for rape and sexual violence during armed conflicts, wars, and genocides. In this chapter, I offer a critique of key assumptions and stereotypes regarding sexual violence and then evaluate explanations of sexual violence in war more particularly. I outline seven mistaken assumptions: (1) perpetrators are always men and victims are usually women and children; (2) wartime rape and sexual violence occur in parts of the world that are "backwards" and have more brutal tendencies; (3) conflict-related sexual violence ends when the conflict ends; (4) sexual violence is committed by strangers and foreigners; (5) sexual violence is only an expression of lust; (6) men are biologically driven to be more aggressive than women; and (7) sexual violence occurs because "boys will be boys" and unleash their sexual frustrations onto women and girls. While some of these assumptions may overlap with one another, they reflect a common tendency to essentialize men and women and to treat women – especially non-western women – as objects of suffering who are in dire need of being saved by others. After critiquing these assumptions, the chapter goes on to examine various feminist theories and presents an argument for using a constructivist and postcolonial feminist lens to analyze the power dynamic that motivates much of the sexual violence that occurs during certain civil wars. Finally, the chapter ends with a discussion on transnational advocacy networks, arguing that such theories help illuminate the need to learn from and empower survivors. Table 1, presented at the end of the chapter, summarizes the main theoretical arguments examined throughout the chapter.

## Key Assumptions Regarding Sexual Violence

Even though there has been a large movement led by women to hold those accountable for their actions, gender-based violence in terms or sexual abuse and rape is still a massive problem for the world. In recent years, awareness of sexual assault on university campuses, gang rapes, gender based and domestic violence, and sexual violence during armed conflicts has increased; nonetheless, there are still many misconceptions about sexual violence and its survivors. It is critical to clear up these misconceptions in order to address conflict-related sexual violence more effectively. It must be noted that these key assumptions are broad in nature, but cover stigmas often portrayed in the media.

The first key assumption is that sexual violence only concerns women and girls. As Fitzpatrick states, countless individuals are quick to dub sexual abuse and rape "as just a women's issue" (Fitzpatrick 1). This assumption is harmful for multiple reasons. Firstly, men can also become victims of sexual violence and abuse. Pankhurst bluntly declares "men as well as women are targeted for violence because of their gender" and "it is normal in wartime for forces to target young men" or boys (Pankhurst 6). They are often overlooked as victims since men are usually "defined as the enemy" and take on the role as armed militants and soldiers during a conflict (Pankhurst 6). Additionally, studies of wartime rape often assume that perpetrators are men and do not specifically ask about the sex of perpetrators, even though increasing evidence suggests that women may be perpetrators of violence as well (Cohen 2016, 7-8). Additionally, sexual violence can mistakenly be seen as a women's issue due to the fact that there are "large numbers of women who give testimony as survivors" and men are not likely to report any type of abuse or rape to protect their reputation from the stigmatized shame (Pankhurst 6). When men are excluded from reports detailing instances of sexual violence, it reinforces the perception that

the problem is restricted to women who are naturally vulnerable to sexual violation and abuse. The exclusive focus on victims sidesteps the culpability of perpetrators and the complicity of patriarchal norms and bystanders. Sexual violence and rape are problems for the society as a whole and cannot be defined as a women's issue. Therefore, the responsibility of preventing, reconciling, and gaining justice falls on the entire society since both women and men are victims as well as perpetrators (Cohen 2016, 6-8).

The second key assumption characterizes sexual violence as an isolated dilemma for unstable or developing nations. In fact, as Pankhurst explains, sexual violence "is not just a cultural difference between the West and the rest of the world," meaning that every region has cases of sexual violence in terms of assault, abuse, exploitation, and rape. (Pankhurst 23). Even though this thesis focuses on case studies in the Middle East and sub-Saharan Africa, this does not indicate that only these regions struggle with gender-based violence and gender inequality. For instance, postcolonial feminists like Chandra Mohanty have warned against the tendency of Western feminist scholarship to group all women in developing nations into a single, collective other (Mohanty 1988). Similarly, Nicola Henry notes that the typical victim of conflict-related sexual violence is assumed to be "a truncated Third World woman who is sexually constrained, tradition-bound, incarcerated in the home, illiterate and poor" (Henry 47). While Pearl Karuhanga Atuhaire, a program specialist with UN Women, explains that "gender inequitable societies may be more likely to experience sexual violence" this does not imply that sexual violence in such societies is inevitable or that nations with higher gender equality indexes do not have cases of abuse (Atuhaire 3). Thus, I argue that developing and developed countries alike are vulnerable to the ideology of patriarchal power and toxic masculinity. Nonetheless, since poverty and conflict are closely related, low-income countries and regions are more likely to experience

political and economic instability so that conflict-related sexual violence is more likely to occur in such societies.

The third key assumption only considers instances of sexual violence and rape during the actual armed conflict itself. Atuhaire draws a distinction between conflict-related and conflict-associated sexual violence. Whereas conflict-related sexual violence is "committed by armed parties to the conflict, including insurgents, state militias, and regular military forces" "conflict-associated sexual violence may occur outside of wartime but is worsened by conflict" and most likely consists of "sexual exploitation and abuse, domestic sexual violence, and sexual violence against women in politics" (Atuhaire 2). Although Copelon alludes to conflict-associated sexual violence when referring to the "sexual activity between peacekeepers and local women," she fails to mention how this is connected to the conflict and implies these relationships appear due to "women who are often rendered desperate by the conflict" (Copelon 256). Throughout the entire chapter, Copelon mainly specifies sexual violence during conflicts, leaving out the actions or cases of abuse and exploitation prior to or following the period of instability. It is necessary to make this distinction between conflict-related and conflict-associated sexual violence when exploring cases of sexual abuse and rape. Following in Atuhaire's lead, I will pay attention to the timeline of events throughout the case studies and differentiate between conflict-related and conflict-associated violence.

The fourth key assumption is that victims do not know their perpetrators. Legal Scholar Tamara L. Thompkins provides concrete evidence to refute this; for example, she quotes a man who stated "'I know the man who raped my wife. He is from my wife's village…He raped her, then he burned our house. I worked with him at the rail company in Prijedor'" (Thompkins 867). Another woman reported "the first [man] who raped me was a Serbian doctor named Jodic…I

had known Jodic for ten years" (Thompkins 867). In both cases, the perpetrators were men who knew the victims and lived-in close proximity to them. These experiences reflect the tactical use of rape as a means of ethnic cleansing in regions where conflict pits neighbors against one another.

The fifth key assumption holds that rape and sexual violence are simply motivated by the perpetrator's sexual desire. Thompkins notes some representative comments, such as descriptions of rape encounters as "making love," with one rapist stating that "it was the first time he had ever made love to a woman with his boots on'' (Thompkins 873). Not only do such descriptions inexcusably romanticize rape, but they also reflect a "total indifference and incomprehension of the true nature of this sexual encounter" and an inability to see how the trauma of sexual violence (Thompkins 873). While some isolated instances of opportunistic rape may include a dynamic of lust and sexual desire, conflict-related sexual violence in the cases examined in this thesis reflects both strategic violence and widespread practice tolerated by leaders. In fact, studies have found that sexual desire is not a primary motivating reason for gang rape, one of the most prevalent forms of conflict-related sexual violence, which will be discussed in full detail later in this thesis (Cohen 2016, 11, 28).

The sixth key assumption is that men and women possess certain biological traits that shape their behavior. In the 1990s, prominent feminist theorist Nancy Chodorow discussed the interrelationship between psychoanalysis and biological differences of the sexes, suggesting that women are more subdued and caring due to their close relationships to their mothers through the shared sex, while boys are more aggressive and dominant as they were less nurtured by their mothers (Schneiderman 1990). Other theorists stress the role of cultural and societal factors rather than posting essential male and female traits. Thompkins asserts "from an early age, boys

are taught to be aggressive, while girls are encouraged to be passive and feminine" (Thompkins 854). While dominant social norms in many societies teach boys to be dominant and girls to be submissive, these are learned rather than innate behaviors. Women and men cannot be defined to such stereotypes as there will always be outliers who challenge the status quo. This thesis challenges the notion that women are not fit for leadership roles and shows how women survivors are pushing back against gender norms and stigma, and thus becoming furthering integrated into the international community as agents of peace.

The final key assumption points to male sexuality as an underlying cause of sexual violence, as reflected in the common yet equally dangerous saying "boys will be boys." As discussed, ideas about appropriate behavior for men and women are socially constructed rather than biologically determined. Norms governing appropriate male behavior often reflect men's privileged status in society, and hegemonic masculinity allows boys and men to enjoy privileges through their access to power, land, and domination over women and girls. As Dara Kay Cohen describes gang rape – a particularly common form of wartime rape – is used to enforce norms of masculinity, power, and strength and she cites psychological and sociological studies that have found that sexualized violence against women increases the social status of male perpetrators among their peers (Cohen 2016, 18, 27). At the same time, men who fail to conform to social expectations of masculinity face "punishment for non-compliance [and] typically, shame is used" (Pankhurst 10). While men face rewards for embodying hegemonic masculinity and sanctions if they do not, it does not follow that "men behave like this because their masculinity makes them behave like this" (Pankhurst 11). Thus, the use or threat of sexual violence may provide both an opportunity and a motivation to gain access to property; Pankhurst describes this as 'sexual looting,' and notes that it is particularly common where women's property rights are insecure

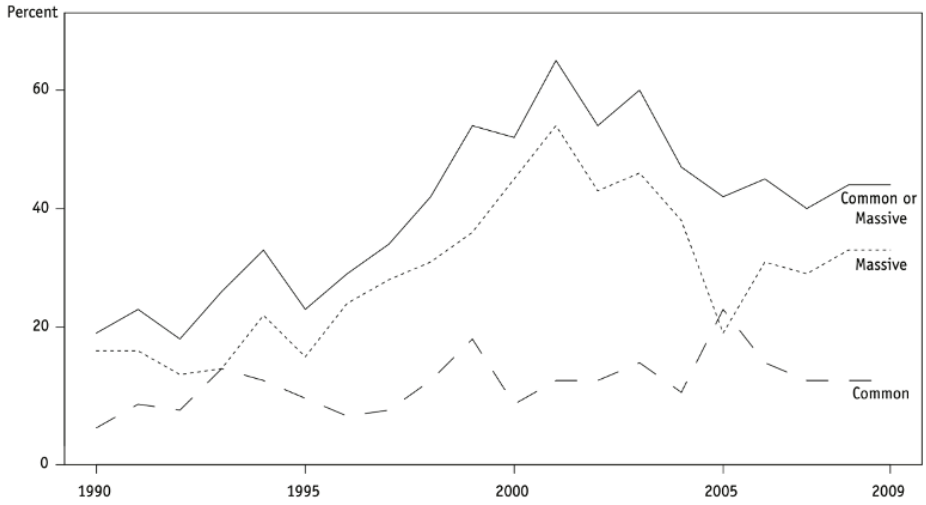
(Pankhurst 17). By using victim's bodies for their own benefit, the perpetrators have the ability to improve their own power, wealth, and social status. Regardless of societal expectations, there should not be any leeway for perpetrators to defend themselves and deflect their crimes on the basis of preserving their own masculinity and status.

## Constructivism vs Essentialism

Many of the assumptions discussed in the previous section reflect gender essentialism, which hold that "the ascriptive traits of feminine and masculine [reflect] primarily and innate, biologically grounded difference between the sexes" (Jones 408). This "leads to ideas that men are naturally aggressive, or that women are naturally nurturing" which can be harmful to society as "those ideas erase gender diversity" and classify women and men within same structured characteristics (Berlatsky 2013). Of course, this notion can be extended to understand why conflict-related sexual violence is prevalent during numerous armed conflicts in the twenty-first century. In accordance with this argument, Baaz and Stern analyze essentialism through armed conflicts stating "the [male] soldier's libido is understood as a formidable natural force, which ultimately demands sexual satisfaction" usually from women and girls (Baaz and Stern). Therefore, essentialists suggest that wartime rape and other forms of sexual violence during armed conflicts stem from biological drives of men and their aggressive nature. Furthering this argument, essentialists contend that "if men are not able to achieve sexual relief in the socially acceptable way (through consensual sex with wives, girlfriends, or prostitutes, then they will substitute sex by force for normal sex out of sheer necessity" (Baaz and Stern). Thus, the essentialist perspectives argue that the lawlessness that is often associated with war allows men to take advantage of the lack of normal social constraints and, fulfill their sexual desires and naturally aggressive instincts.

In contrast, feminist constructivists focus on gender as a social construct and "make no claims for the centrality of sex or gender beyond the role that constructed gender values and identities play in determining priorities and behavior" (Jones 409). Rather than focusing on biological determinism, constructivist scholars emphasize contingency and variability, rejecting "the whole idea of nature vs. nurture in relation to gender" since there are so many outliers and individuals that cannot be categorized within the theory of essentialism (Berlatsky 2013). Therefore, this thesis more accurately aligns with constructivism. Scholarly arguments have generally rejected essentialist accounts of male nature as an explanation for sexual violence and pointed to the lack of empirical evidence to support such arguments. For instance, Elisabeth Jean Wood recognizes a "relative absence of sexual violence on the part of many armed groups" (Wood 2009, 131). In some instances, rates of sexual violence by domestic partners, acquaintances or strangers are higher than rates of conflict-related sexual violence, whereas in other settings, rates of conflict-related sexual violence are greater (Wood 2014, 460). The lack of widespread conflict-related sexual violence across every armed conflict or period of instability indicates that "if some groups do not engage in sexual violence, then rape is not inevitable in war as is sometimes claimed" (Wood 131). Similarly, Dara Kay Cohen concludes "some armed groups commit massive wartime rape, whereas others never do" (Cohen 2016, 461). Since the first cases of mass rape were reported in 1991, reports suggest that the world has witnessed a general rise in conflict-related sexual violence and rape (Cohen 2016, 77). Figure 1 below depicts a spike in common and massive wartime rape in the early 2000s but continuing the trend of a higher percentage of conflicts characterized by widespread sexual violence over time. Even though this does not represent every individual conflict, "there is mounting evidence that [wartime rape] is increasing in some conflicts" (Cohen, Hoover Green,

Figure 1. Conflicts with Reported Wartime Rape




Source: (Cohen, Hoover Green, and Wood 2013, 9.

and Wood 2013, 9). While there are some questions about variation in levels of reported rape over time due to difficulties with measurement and uncertainty whether observed increases reflect an increase in underlying incidents or increased reporting, the fact of ongoing, widespread instances of wartime rape and conflict-related sexual violence are indisputable and point to the "desperate need of resources and international intervention" (Cohen 2016, 77). Thus, increased prevalence of wartime rape and conflict-related sexual violence can be attributed to gender norms and gender inequality across societies witnessing periods of instability (Wood 2018).

In order to explain variations across cases, scholars have pointed to the culture, institutions and ideology of armed organizations. Amelia Hoover Green forwards the concept of the "commander's dilemma" to refer to the difficulty that leaders of armed groups face in meeting "two potentially contradictory needs: commanders must both create large groups of

combatant who unhesitatingly employ violence and maintain some control over the violence that fighters wield" (Green 2016, 619-620). Thus, commanders both encourage violence and restraint depending on the outcomes they hope to achieve through the armed conflict. Building on this argument, Wood notes that some commanders may authorize rape as a strategy of war:

> as a form of sexual torture of political prisoners, the public rape of members of particular groups as they are 'cleansed' from an area, as a form of collective punishment (usually in the context of orders to terrorize civilians), or as a signal of the organization's resolve. In some settings, rape is an institutionalized form of compensation or reward, as when combatants are rewarded for exemplary service with civilians to victimize (or sex slaves, or wives in forced marriage) (Wood 2014, 472).

Variations across regions also reflect internal dynamics within armed organizations. The case of ISIS commanders rewarding loyal fighters with access to Yezidi women and girls via the slave market offers an example of a deliberately sanctioned policy of sexual slavery (MEMRI 2014). In other cases, commanders may tolerate rather than deliberately sanction wartime rape. Wood refers to this type of conflict-related rape and sexual violence is a "practice" that is not officially authorized by commanders but driven from below. As will be discussed in the case study on the Democratic Republic of Congo, weak control over soldiers who often went unpaid for their services led to a practice of rape as a means to redefine their masculinity and social status, as well as incentives for individuals abducted and forced to fight for insurgent groups (Wood 2014, 473-474).

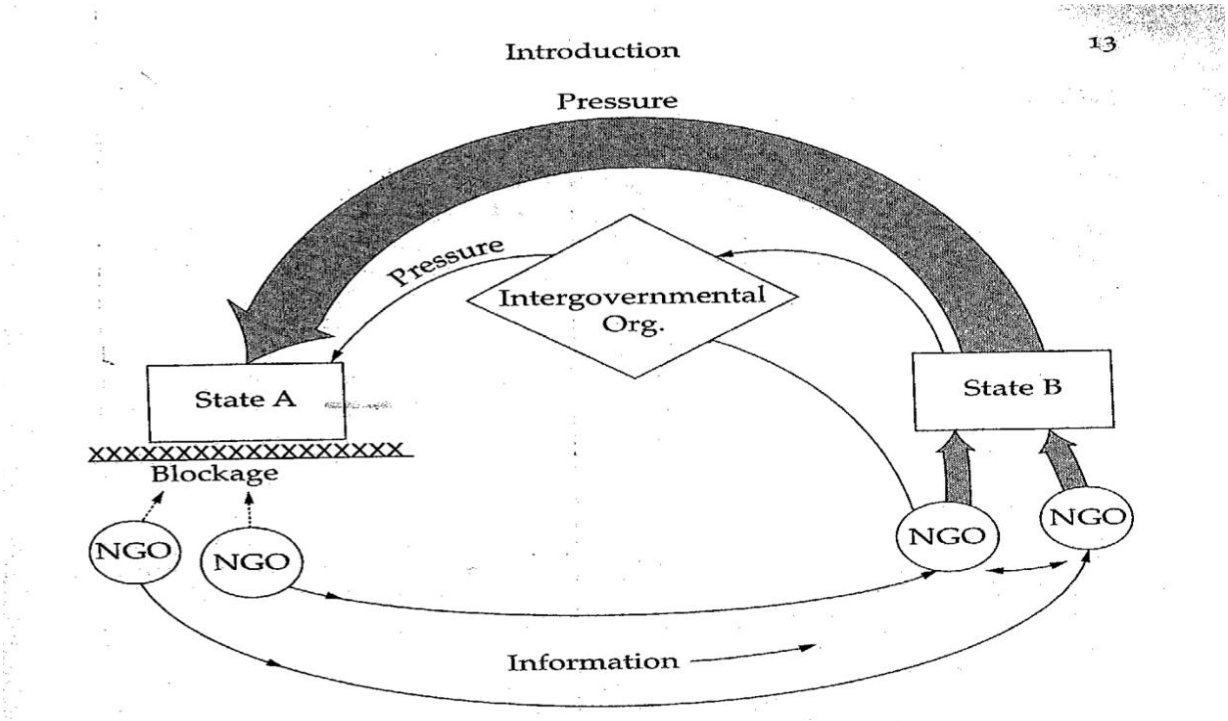
Various scholars have focused on the role that peacetime gender norms play in condoning sexual abuse, but they also emphasize the role of peer pressure and socialization among armed combatants. Cohen highlights combatant socialization as the primary motivation behind wartime rape in many countries, finding that such sexual violence is more likely to be committed by armed groups engaged in extreme forms of forced recruitment as this increases social cohesion

and serves to bond combatants together (Cohen 2016, 54). She cites evidence that wartime rape often takes the form of gang rape; according to some studies, 75% of reported cases of rape during war are gang rapes, whereas peacetime gang rape is estimated to account for 2%-27% of all cases (Cohen 2016, 19). Thus, this increased prevalence during armed conflict leads Cohen to argue that wartime gang rape serves different purposes including targeting specific communities and involves different types of perpetrators as well as victims (Cohen 2016, 19). Participation in gang rape serves as a demonstration of loyalty and commitment to other combatants, especially in armed groups made up of individuals from various regions with little social ties (Cohen 2016, 78-85). However, conflicts like the civil wars in Darfur and the Democratic Republic of Congo, where fighters were often kidnapped by insurgent groups or forcibly recruited by the state, often experience higher levels of sexual violence by both armed groups and state forces are reported (Cohen 2016, 78-85).

Given variations in the motivations and type of conflict-related sexual violence and wartime rape across cases, it is especially important to consult and incorporate survivors from communities and societies directly affected by the violence in pressuring the international community in pursuing justice and designing effective policy responses to prevent further devastation from occurring in the future. Combatting conflict-related sexual violence and tactical rape has posed a problem for the international community, not only in holding perpetrators as well as commanders accountable but also in reducing the risk of continued sexual violence. Even in cases where military and political leaders have authorized or encouraged rape and sexual slavery, it has been difficult to secure cooperation with international tribunals like the International Criminal Court and convict commanders guilty of giving the go ahead to their subordinates to enact such brutal and devastating tactics during. In cases where explicit sanctions

are lacking, it has been difficult to successfully prosecute the organization's leadership for their ties to such practices. Although the international community recognizes the doctrine of command liability – "for example, if a commander or leader knew or had reason to know that subordinates over whom he had effective control had engaged, or were soon to engage, in sexual crimes and failed to take all necessary and reasonable measures in his power to punish the subordinates or prevent the crime, he may be liable for those crimes under international law" – reluctance to challenge state

Figure 3. Boomerang Pattern




Source: Keck and Sikkink 1998,

sovereignty and autonomy have limited the judicial reach of international institutions. Additionally, lack of awareness of the severity of an ongoing conflict can contribute to the lack of action of the international community.

Aware of this phenomenon, Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink (1998) emphasize the growing role of transnational advocacy networks which form around a shared commitment to changing the behavior of states and international organizations in a particular area such as human rights, ending gender-based violence, and empowering young girls living in patriarchal societies. Keck and Sikkink argue that groups within transnational advocacy networks share information as well as values, and their "ability to generate information quickly and accurately, and deploy it effectively, is their most valuable currency" (Keck and Sikkink 10). The authors point that transnational advocacy networks tend to rise "when a government violates or refuses to recognize rights, individuals and domestic groups often have no recourse within domestic political or judicial arenas. They may seek international connections finally to express their concerns and even to protect their lives (Keck and Sikkink 12). In accordance with Figure 3, Keck and Sikkink explain when governments and actors involved in the issue refuse to cooperate, "domestic NGOs [then] bypass their state and directly search out international allies to try to bring pressure on their states from outside" in what authors describe as the "boomerang pattern" (Keck and Sikkink 12). Keck and Sikkink note that linkages between domestic NGOs and foreign allies are important for both sides, although tensions may arise as well. For example, northern groups may sensationalize the horrific brutality of conflict-related sexual violence in order to draw the world's attention, while less powerful actors in conflict-torn regions may object to references such as the Democratic Republic of Congo as the "rape capital of the world" (Masika Bihamba 2017).

Keck and Sikkink's research points to the importance of collaborative efforts by local, national, and international actors who push for progressive policy changes. Similarly, Mala Htun and S. Weldon Laurel (2012) find that policy measures to combat violence against women stem

from the autonomous mobilization of feminists in domestic and transnational contexts; they conclude that "women's autonomous organizing in civil society affects political change … Autonomous movements articulate the social perspectives of marginalized groups, transform social practice, and change public opinion" (Htun and Laurel 2012, 564). In addition, without the presence of feminist movements in domestic contexts, global norms on violence against women will not gain traction or change. Through an analysis of three case studies, this thesis will emphasize the role and potential of ongoing activism by transnational advocacy networks, especially through the engagement of survivors and local activists and allies. In all three cases, advocates have stepped up where states and international organizations have failed to act, shaming them for their complacency in the systematic destruction of innocent lives. Survivors and local allies act as valuable source of information for transnational advocacy networks who then work to pressure and shame institutions and entities into pursuing justice for those subjected to conflict-related sexual violence and rape, attempting to sear the injustice and violence into the conscience of the international community and preventing such brutal tactics from occurring in the future.

In addition to Keck and Sikkink's theory, Table 1 examines theoretical perspectives utilized throughout this thesis and their connection to the cases in Darfur, ISIS dominated territories, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Since essentialist feminism highlights the differences between men and women rooted in biological differences, men thus assert their dominance, aggressive nature, and hypermasculinity over women and girls during armed conflicts. Stemming from the argument that wartime rape and conflict-related sexual violence are often opportunistic crimes according to the commander's dilemma, the perpetrators thus take advantage of the instability and chaotic atmosphere, releasing their sexual frustration and

aggression on vulnerable individuals. In all three of the cases, the perpetrators are largely men on the offensive during the conflict and are either encouraged to rape as a method of destruction or payment for their services. Likewise, intersectional feminism assets that experiences and characteristics making up individuals or a population can lead to increasing risks and vulnerabilities. For instance, the Darfuri and Yezidi women and girls were at greater risk of being subjected to sexual violence due to their ethnicity and religious differences from the Sudanese government and ISIS fighters. On the other hand, rebel and armed groups backed by foreign states in the DRC targeted local Congolese women and girls in the eastern portion of the nation, establishing the intersectionality in question as the nationality of the targeted population.

As explained above, Keck and Sikkink's boomerang model emphasizes the work of advocacy groups such as Darfur Women Action Group, Nadia's Initiative, and Dr. Denis Mukwege Foundation and their connection to international institutions and individual states. Through their initiatives aimed at awareness building and educating the public, the transnational advocacy groups maintain the ability to pressure and shame the international community into paying greater attention to sexual violence as a tactic of warfare during armed conflicts and pursuing justice for affected communities. Similarly, constructivist feminism is challenging gender norms and stigmas surrounding rape and virginity taboos as a means to shame survivors and their loved ones. By challenging the gender norms which are socially constructed, transnational advocacy networks attempt to disrupt the restricting stigmas and redefine the way societies view traditional gender norms, hoping to build a more inclusive society. All three of the cases include such advocacy groups relying on survivors sharing their stories and experiences as a way to combat social stigmas, bringing an increasing awareness of conflict-related rape and sexual violence to the forefront of the international community. At the same time, the retelling of

the survivors' personal experiences promotes increasing awareness while advocating on their own behalf rather than someone disconnected from the conflict doing so. Falling under the post-colonialism feminism, by voicing their own concerns, survivors maintain the ability to drown out any pre-conceived notions of the region viewing the culture and practices as "backwards" or barbaric. For instance, Congolese survivors have been actively working to condemn the notion that the DRC is the rape capitol of the world, as such an infamous title seemingly normalizes the conflict-related sexual violence and connotates the widespread tactical rape with cultural practices within the rest of the nation. Throughout this thesis, I will apply the theoretical lenses outlines in Table 1 to make connections between the motives and instances of conflict-related sexual violence and rape juxtaposed with the actions undertaking by transnational advocacy groups and role of survivors as agents of peace.

Table 1. Theoretical Perspectives

| Theoretical Lens | Definition and Framework | Connection to Case Studies |
|---|---|---|
| Essentialist Feminism | Differences between men and women are rooted in biological differences. Sexual violence stems from the role of militarized masculinity in patriarchal societies. Patriarchy conceived as supremacy of men over women without consideration of other structures of power or possibility that men may be victims. | Men assert their dominant and aggressive nature over women and girls during armed conflicts, taking advantage of the instability to release their suppressed masculine tendency toward sexual aggression. |
| Intersectional Feminism | Holds that individuals' experiences are shaped by multiple sources of identity, including race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation and gender identity. | Some women are at greater risk of being victims of sexual violence based on ethnicity, religious belonging and other sources of difference. Men from powerful ethnic, religious or political groups may specifically subject individuals from other groups to sexual violence, using wartime rape as a strategic weapon. |
| Boomerang Model | Coined by Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink. Explains the dynamic of transnational advocacy actors with governments, states, and international institutions through the passing of information and awareness building. | Advocacy groups and organizations such as the Darfur Women Action Group, Nadia's Initiative, and Dr. Denis Mukwege Foundation act as a bridge between states and international institutions, building awareness for the issue of sexual violence during armed conflicts, often skipping over states depending on their role in the conflict/genocide. |
| Constructivist Feminism | Believes gender is a social construct and the distribution of power in a society is built upon structured gender norms and stereotypes. Promotes gender equality and rejects the notion of biological differences enhancing aggression in men but blames culture and society for promoting gender roles. | Survivors are currently working to redefine the way conflict-related sexual violence and rape is viewed within patriarchies and the international community. Challenging gender norms, stigmas of rape, and virginity taboos explores the normalization of gender roles and seeks to disrupt them and restructure society to be more inclusive. |
| Post-Colonialism Feminism | Framework which juxtaposes the development of Western and non-western states and gender roles in each society. Criticism includes Western nations' white savior complex and viewing differing cultures and practices as 'backwards.' | Advocacy groups and survivors share their stories to promote awareness and education for their plight and advocate on their own behalf. |

## Chapter 4. Darfur, Sudan: Darfuri Genocide Survivors Advocating for Justice

Sudan has a long and complicated history with regards to human rights and protecting individuals within its own borders, regardless of ethnicity, nationality, or gender. Under the former President Omar al-Bashir, Sudanese citizens witnessed great restrictions to their rights including freedom of speech, freedom of press, the right to opposition, and seizure and torture following unjust arrests. For 30 years, al-Bashir ruled over Sudan installing his close allies in his cabinet and the military, winning elections despite low voter turnouts and overall lack of confidence in the government. In date, al-Bashir launched a military campaign by government troops and Arab militias to attack ethnic indigenous tribes that dominated the Darfuri region in retaliation against rebel attacks on government facilities, but the troops also engaged in mass killing and systematic rape of innocent members of these tribes. By 2008, 2.5 million black Africans had been forcibly displaced from their homes and 300,000 people had died as a direct or indirect result of the government campaign (DWAG Timeline, 2020). Based on data collected by a multinational team of investigators, then U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell declared that "genocide has occurred in Darfur and may still be occurring" Totten and Markusen xiii). In 2007, the UN Security Council authorized a peacekeeping mission with the permission of the Sudanese government, the UN African Union Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) and committed 26,000 troops to the region to protect civilians. Despite these international actions, the persecution of innocent civilians, burning, looting, raping of women and girls, among other crimes against humanity progressed while al-Bashir remained in power until 2019.

As a perpetrator of mass slaughter and sanctioned of gender-based violence, Sudan has failed its citizens as government institutions have been unwilling or unable to protect them from the horrors of genocide. As a participant in genocide of the Darfuri people, Sudan is reluctant to

collaborate with efforts including justice, accountability, and providing support to survivors of conflict-related sexual violence and rape perpetrated by Sudanese troops and Janjaweed militias. Thus, this chapter focuses on the use of rape and other forms of sexual violence by government forces and their Janjaweed allies against Darfuri civilians, demonstrating that "when the primary purpose of an attack is to inflict maximum harm on the civilians and drive survivors into the desert and out of the territory, sex crimes are particularly rampant and vicious (Askin 141) Kelly Askin, who is a senior legal Officer for the Open Society Justice Initiative, accompanied investigative teams into the field in order to focus specifically on gender-based violence, cites multiple reports and documentation by international and local human rights organizations, journalists, and national and international agencies which recorded the severity and widespread tactic of rape and sexual violence during the Darfur genocide (Askin 142, 154). Askin insisted such reports of these crimes occurred with the full knowledge of the government, which is consistent with other NGOs and human rights organizations claims as well (Askin, 142, 154). This chapter will discuss the reluctance on the part of national and international actors to hold perpetrators accountable for crimes against humanity and analyze the important role that associations of survivors play in advocating for justice, accountability, and support for survivors following their traumatic experiences.

## Genocide and Gender-Based Violence

In 2001 to 2002, the government of Sudan launched a campaign waging violence and destruction against the tribes within Darfur. Under the instruction of the president Omar al-Bashir, the "government established militias from Arab tribes called Janjaweed" (DWAG Timeline, 2020). The militias often rode on horses, so they were able to carry out attacks at fast

rates and reduce the possibility of being caught. Within the borders of Darfur, the Janjaweed waged brutal assaults "against the indigenous African tribes [known as] The Fur, Massalet, and the Zagawa" (DWAG Timeline, 2020).). The black African tribes have historically been looked down upon by Arab descendants living in the Nile valley, and ethnic tensions which were intensified by competition for scarce resources during the severe drought which plagued the region in the 1980s. The ideology of "Arab supremacism" contributed to the genocide through the "calls for Arab dominance in all aspects of life," giving the government a platform for their plan to exterminate a non-Arab population (Totten 270). Totten points to Arab supremacism as a motive for the Sudanese government to launch its military campaign including "the isolation and disenfranchisement (and in not a few cases, demonization) of certain groups, including the black Africans of Darfur (Totten 270). Fully "intending to change the demography and future of the Darfur population," the Janjaweed became the 'hit-men' of the government, killing and attacking villages on behalf of the Sudanese government (DWAG Timeline, 2020). Despite the carnage, the government fervently denied its role in the genocide. For the majority of his regime, Omar al-Bashir refuted the massacres and sexual violence unfolding within his country, attempting to hide any evidence from the outside world of his crimes and cutting off ties with human rights organizations.

The Janjaweed, participating rebels, and the Sudanese government created a systematic campaign of destruction designed to traumatize, devastate, and completely dismantle all prior forms of life within Darfur, using ethnic cleansing to clear the land for Arab colonization (Collins 12). At the beginning of 2002, the Janjaweed began targeting supplies necessary for living. The militias started "poisoning… wells and destroying sources of food and water," thereby cutting communities off from their sources and either forcing them to relocate, starve, or

suffer from dehydration (DWAG Timeline, 2020). Men were killed and women were subjected to sexual violence and mass rapes. Within the Darfuri culture, women hold a particularly prominent role as the society operates as a matriarchy (DWAG, 2020). This drastically differs from the rest of Sudan's society which is a patriarchy that "treats [women] as less than second-class citizens" and upholds "discriminatory laws and legal provisions…which restrict women's ability" to participate in all forms of government and daily life activities (Totten 271). As a means to end the matriarchy and force Sudan's gender norms on surviving Darfur people, the Janjaweed and government troops targeted women and young girls, subjecting them to mass rapes, sexual violence, and psychological trauma following the attacks.

The government and Janjaweed militias were relentless in their campaign against women. They instantly killed men and boys but kept the women and girls alive to "rape as part of the spoils of war" (Totten 274). One woman recounted "they shot me in the back, forced me to the ground, and raped me repeatedly, until I was unconscious…I pretended to be dead until night came" (DWAG 2020). This type of attack was the norm in Darfur during the time, with the government soldiers and Janjaweed militias having little regard for the lives of the women they were preying on. In addition to the assaults, women were subject to "threats, physical abuse, and abduction for purposes of sexual slavery" (Totten 274). In more brutal instances, women and girls faced torture. In her work, Fitzpatrick interviewed numerous women who either witnessed the abuse or were survivors of the barbaric acts of violence. The accounts of gender-based violence included "gang rape, brutal acts such as cutting open pregnant women or raping women with objects like sticks" or sharp materials (Fitzpatrick 32). These actions suggest the mutilation and humiliation of the women and girls served as entertainment for the Janjaweed and soldiers under the campaign that deliberately devastated bodies. Additionally, Totten asserted the

“perpetrators often threatened to impregnate the female so that she would have a ‘Janjaweed’ or ‘Arab baby,’’ thus forcing the women to carry their rapists’ baby (Totten 274). By disrupting the pregnancies and impregnating women, the government attempted to insert itself into the future population of the Darfur people, putting their cultural legacies at risk.

The pattern of sexual assault in Darfur operated as a vicious cycle. Both government forces in tanks and Janjaweed riding on horses stormed villages burning, looting, and raping anyone in sight (DWAG 2020). After their homes were destroyed, the displaced men, women, and children moved to settlement or refugee camps, but they were still susceptible to attacks from government soldiers, Janjaweed, militias, and rebel groups (DWAG 2020). The forces attacked the camps, raping the women and girls all over again, injuring and killing countless others, and leaving the individuals with little defense (DWAG 2020). Recently, I spoke to a woman who worked at one of the internally displaced persons IDP camps in 2004 and looked after the vulnerable women. I was told that a large majority of women were raped and forced to perform sexual assaults in order to prevent their husbands and family members from being killed (Anonymous interview, 2021). Even facing the worst of humankind, the women protected their loved ones, trading the trauma of sexual assault for the wellbeing of their husbands, children, and close relatives.

The correlation between the attacks and gender-based violence were closely intertwined, especially as human rights organizations were expelled from Sudan’s borders. In 2014, a particular campaign of sexual violence shocked the world for its brutality. Around “221 women and girls were raped in Tabit over 36 hours beginning on October 30” (Fitzpatrick 32). Prior to this event, cases of sexual assault in Darfur were prevalent, but never at this magnitude and within such a short amount of time. Over the 36 hours, “attacks by Sudanese government forces

were carried out during three distinct military operations" (Fitzpatrick 32). Based on an interview with an eye-witness soldiers were "ordered" "to rape women because the women were rebel supporters" (Fitzpatrick 32-33). Portraying the women and girls as the enemy that had to be defeated allowed the soldiers to deny their victims' humanity. Using the justification of national security, government soldiers raped hundreds with the explicit sanctions of their superiors. However, according to Askin's research, a senior investigator of gender war crimes insists that government and military leaders at least tacitly approved of rape against Darfuri women and children, even if they did not officially sanction the sexual violence (Askin 142). In addition, even if most of the initial sexual violence was opportunistic or an extension of hatred towards the ethnic minority, commanders' tacit approval encouraged opportunistic rapes to "become more public, more frequent, and more violent, growing indistinguishable from and becoming part of the organized rapes committed at least in part to inflict widespread terror and harm on the targeted group" (Askin 142). Thus, this concept stems from commander's dilemma which was previously discussed in Chapter 4, attempting to determine the motive of sexual violence as sanctioned by commanders and leaders of soldiers and armed groups.

Aside from conflict-related assaults, women in Darfur also faced conflict-associated threats and gender-based violence. Families that resided in "mountains and desert areas" or refugee camps are vulnerable to attacks from rebel groups or outsiders living in close proximity (Totten 273). While these sheltered areas are sometimes invaded, they usually act as a safe haven for persecuted individuals. Travelling outside of the camps poses a significant threat, especially to women. Foraging for resources like firewood places women and girls at risk for being sexually assaulted and raped by rebel groups, militias, and people passing by the area (Totten 273-274). Organizations such as the UN High Commissioner for Refugees are

attempting to tackle this problem, researching alternative sources of energy to reduce the number of women travelling off the protected territories, decreasing the risk of sexual assault. A human rights advocate and journalist testified to the conditions of the refugee camps stating, “many more [people] who… were struggling to provide for their families after being uprooted from their homes and moved into camps, where they did not have access to basic needs-such as education, health assistance, and security” (Fatima Gazali, DWAG 2020). Without proper access to education many girls are left without necessary skills to find adequate jobs in the labor market. As a result, their parents marry them off at a young age to help alleviate the financial burden of raising their children. Child marriage increases the probability of sexual and physical abuse imparted on the wife by their older husbands and robs the girls of experiencing their childhoods.

In addition to the threat of attacks on the refugee camps, women and girls were also confronted with the threat of sexual abuse and exploitation by UN peacekeepers. In 2007, the UN reported that “UNAMID received information that one of its civilian staff has been arrested and charged with sexual offences involving a minor” (UNAMID 2017). The missions prohibit peacekeepers from engaging in sexual relations with locals. However, despite the fact that peacekeeper’ code of conduct and professional ethics proscribe such behavior, the peacekeepers have access to resources and money that place them in a very privileged position, and some have used this to coerce or pressure women and children for sexual favors and pleasure. In 2020, the Conduct in UN Field Missions reported two accusations of rape from a military personnel and civilian staff member stationed at UNAMID (UN Conduct 2021). In previous cases, sexual exploitation and sexual relations with minors were prevalent at the UNMAID mission in Darfur with few repercussions from the United Nations (UN Conduct 2021). Sexual exploitation and transactional relationships are often prevalent in camps and missions as the peacekeepers target

vulnerable women and children, tempting them with goods and resources they could exchange for sexual favors. By promising necessities, money, or goods to vulnerable individuals, the peacekeepers at UNAMID are certainly taking advantage of women and children who have been displaced from their homes and persecuted by their own government.

Regardless of international condemnation, the Sudanese government continued its assault on Darfur women's rights and attempt to wipe out a whole population. Throughout the genocide, the Janjaweed and government forces terrorized the bodies of women and children, resorting to torture. According to Totten, "some [perpetrators] mutilated their victims' genitals and breasts" and in many cases "women [were] beaten with sticks, whips, or axes" causing serve physical damage and scarring (Totten 275). Totten considers "the raping of Darfuri women" and female genital mutilation as "inexorably linked to the systematic destruction of their communities" (Totten 276). This deliberate tactic of war solidifies the patriarchal society within Sudan through the mutilation of the bodies by disfiguring the bodies of women and girls. The lacerations and scars would thus serve as permanent reminders of the trauma and sexual abuse the Darfuri women encountered following the genocide. Thus, the mutilation served as a tactic to create a lacking sense of security even if the survivors escaped to safety.

Although there was clear evidence that of sexual violence was a widely used tactic during the peak of the genocide, the number of women who reported the assaults most likely do not match up with the number of individuals the Janjaweed actually violated. Totten claims in 2006 "UN workers reported 2,500 rapes in Darfur" within that year alone, "but believe far more went reported" (Totten 276). In many instances the women are raped more than once or the "victims usually can't identify their aggressors, which makes prosecutions impossible" and skews the accuracy of the number of women who have experienced such trauma from being

counted and reported (Totten 276). Survivors of assault Darfur may also be hesitant to come forward about their attacks for fear of being retaliated against, shunned or looked down on by their community. Thus, the Darfuri survivors are much more likely to remain silent as not to become targets of the Sudanese government, Janjaweed militias, and to not recount their trauma even to organizations that want to aid and support them.

## Darfur Genocide and International Action

Following the Rwandan genocide, the international community once again vowed "never again" yet once again failed to take effective action. Unlike in Rwanda, the crisis in Darfur in 2003 was widely covered by global media and the international community acknowledged the atrocities, calling on the government of Sudan to stop the campaign of destruction against the people of Darfur. The United States, reminded of the failure in Rwanda, took the unprecedented step of declaring the violence a genocide according to the 1948 UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide. Eric A. Heinze, author of *The Rhetoric of Genocide in U.S. Foreign Policy*, notes that "the first official semantical leap was in July of 2004, when the U.S. Congress passed a concurrent, though nonbinding, resolution condemning the violence in Darfur as genocide" (Heinze 361). President Bush used the term genocide again when he condemned Omar al-Bashir for his tyrannical and destructive actions in Darfur in an address to the UN General Assembly (Heinze 361).

Political scientists Joseph Uscinski, Michael Rocca, Gabriel Sanchez and Marina Brenden argue that condemnation of genocide in Darfur generally garnered broad bipartisan support in Congress (Uscinski et. al. 490). The scholars argued that "Darfur legislation falls into an interesting 'sweet spot' for scholars of Congress and foreign policy for two reasons"

(Uscinski et. al. 490). The first reason was because "the tragedy attracted considerable media attention due to the efforts of a variety of groups and organizations" and celebrities like "George Clooney, Angelina Jolie, and Matt Damon" and therefore were pressured by the "elites" or influential individuals within American society (Uscinski et. al. 490). Second, "Congress may [have] been facing a moral imperative" and pressure from the international community to take action and to not allow Darfur to follow in the footsteps of Rwanda where the genocide and persecution of an ethnic minority was overlooked until it was too late (Uscinski et. al. 490). Whatever the reason may have been, the United States attempted to intervene in Darfur early on by declaring the conflict a genocide and rallying support, thus hoping to solidify its position as one of the world's leading forces in human rights.

Despite the strong rhetoric condemning genocide in Darfur, the U.S. government was reluctant to take any effective action. Uscinski et. al. note that limits to bipartisanship arose once Congress considered whether or not to send $100 million to the region in aid and support (494). Gerald Kaplan, who wrote the report on the Rwanda genocide for the Organizations of African Unity's International Panel of Eminent Personalities, offers a critique of America's initiatives, noting that then Secretary of State Colin Powell added in a statement before the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee: "Mr. Chairman, some seem to have been waiting for this determination of genocide to take action. In fact, however, no new action is dictated by this determination. we have been doing everything we can to get the Sudanese Government to act responsibly. so, let us not be preoccupied with this designation of genocide" (Kaplan 2006, 177). Kaplan also notes that the CIA brought the head of Sudanese intelligence, General Salah Abdallah Gosh, to Washington to discuss joint efforts in the war on terror, even though the general was cited as one of the leading Sudanese officials named by the International

Commission of Inquiry on Darfur (Kaplan 178). Such partnerships demonstrate the United States interests in the war on terror may have surpassed its concern for the genocide in Darfur.

The first serious investigation into Darfur was launched in 2004 by the "International Establishment of the Save Darfur Movement Commission of Inquiry" bypassing the United Nation's commitment to act swiftly (DWAG Timeline 2020). A year later, in 2005, the United Nations voted to "take action against the Sudanese government through sanctions and recommending the dispatchment of peacekeepers" establishing a mission in Sudan (DWAG Timeline 2020). In another vote, the "Security Council referred the case to the ICC which began its investigation shortly after" but without the cooperation of the Sudanese government and the president Omar al-Bashir (DWAG Timeline 2020). The Sudanese government began opposing the ICC's investigation, banning them and any other UN official from operating within its borders. Approximately two years after the genocide started, the United States and United Nations finally decided to take action against Sudan after hesitating while men, women, and children were murdered and displaced.

While the United States expressed its concern for the genocide in Darfur, its commitment to protect the civilians from succumbing to the destruction from the Janjaweed militias fell short. Following President Bush's declaration at the United Nations, Congress launched investigations within various committees to determine how the United States would intervene in the Darfur genocide. In the spring of 2004, "Samantha Power testified before the House International Relations Committee that it would require 10,000 troops to effectively stop the killing in Darfur (Heinze 367-368). Within a few months of this session, "Defense Department officials revealed that they had no plans to deploy U.S. forces to Darfur any time soon" or to send support in terms of "humanitarian relief" (Heinze 368). In 2005-2006 "the House of Representatives [proposed]

to provide funding and peacekeeping forces to quell the violence in Darfur" (Uscinski 489). Actions that directly affected the budget or dedicating troops "faced considerable opposition" overwhelmingly" (Uscinski 489). When it came to condemning the genocide and offering sympathies, the United States exceed all expectations. However, with massive troop commitments in Iraq and Afghanistan occupying its defense budget and minds of Americans, the United States would not commit to funding, aiding, or sending any support to Darfur. Even though the U.S. became an advocate for the people of Darfur, Heinze argues "the Bush administration's desire to avoid military involvement in Darfur" restricted the amount of aid the United was willing to dedicate to halt the genocide and protect the people (Heinze 367).

While the United States was willing to condemn genocide in Darfur but unwilling to actually take any unilateral action to intervene, international leadership for humanitarian intervention was thus absent. Within the Security Council, both China and Russia opposed intervention - China due to its interest in Sudan's oil and defense of national sovereignty while Russia opposed to using human rights as a rationalization for military intervention, fearing a normalization of such policies (Straus 194). In addition, European countries also displayed little support for forceful international action on Darfur, due in large part to backlash against the war in Iraq and American occupation without the support of the international community (Straus 194).

In 2007, a hybrid African Union-United Nations peacekeeping mission was established to replace the African Union Mission in Sudan (AMIS), which neither had the mandate nor the resources to stop the escalating violence in Darfur (Müller and Bashar 761). The new operation, titled UNAMID, was designed to oversee the implementation of the Darfur Peace Agreement signed between the government and rebel groups in 2006, provide humanitarian assistance,

protect the civilian population, and ensure the safe return of internally displaced persons and refugees residing in resettlement camps in Chad. Although UNAMID provided some humanitarian aid, it failed to protect civilians, especially due to the Sudanese government's power over the African Union (Spandler 93; Müller and Bashar 762). Although the peace agreement brought a decline in large-scale battles between government troops and rebel groups, the security situation still posed a threat to innocent Darfuris as Sudanese troops and Janjaweed militias continued to attack their villages and resettlement camps.

Government obstructionism of UNAMID activities increased after the International Criminal Court indicted President al-Bashir in 2008. Although the International Criminal Court's efforts to bring officials orchestrating the Darfur genocide to justice are commendable, without independent enforcement powers, it has not been able to force the Sudanese government to comply with its orders to extradite individuals accused of war crimes and crimes against humanity. Totten asserts "the UN Security Council initially referred the situation in Darfur to the ICC on March 31, 2005…[and] issued six arrest warrants for those allegedly in charge of planning, overseeing, and carrying out atrocities perpetrated in Darfur between 2003 and 2008" including the Sudanese minister for Humanitarian Affairs, Ahmaed Haroun, who was accused of recruiting, funding, and arming the Janjaweed militia, and Ali Kushyb, a senior Janjaweed commander who was charged with "fifty counts of crimes against humanity like deportation or forcible transfer of population" (Totten 281). In 2009, "the ICC issued an arrest warrant for Al-Bashir," denying his part in the persecution of the Darfuri people (DWAG Timeline 2020). In retaliation for the arrest warrant, "Al-Bashir expelled all humanitarian organizations from the region and escalated violence…using starvation as a tactic of genocide" (DWAG Timeline 2020). Since the ICC has no enforcement powers it was helpless to immediately arrest al-Bashir

for his part inciting violence, torture, and depravation of his own citizens. Although the arrest warrants are an important step toward accountability, they did not stop the regime's genocidal violence against the Darfuri people and may even have prompted the government to ramp up its campaign to wipe out the ethnic minority. In fact, al-Bashir was able to politicize the ICC indictments, criticizing the Court for its allegedly anti-African bias and convincing the African Union to oppose the Court's interventions on the continent, while the UN Security Council agreed to put ICC investigations on hold (Murithi 75; DWAG Timeline 2020).

In terms of rape and sexual assault, the international community failed to prosecute the perpetrators and bring justice to the women and girl survivors. Few of the UNAMID peacekeepers charged with sexual exploitation or abuse of civilians faced significant punishment. Totten notes that "the international community was largely negligent in addressing the assaults in effective ways including halting such actions…and providing medical attention to those who have suffered the assaults (Totten 280). Even though al-Bashir was overthrown in April 2019 following months of mass protests, it is unclear whether the interim government of Prime Minister Abadalla Hamdock will be able to deliver on its promise of peace or when the millions of Darfuri refugees in Chad and internally displaced persons will be able to return to their homes and start the process of rehabilitation and development (DWAG Timeline 2020).

In August 2020, Prime Minister Hamdock announced that Sudan was finally ready and willing to cooperate with the ICC, but yet has not turned over al-Bashir, who has been in jail since his overthrow. In October during what was dubbed as a "historic visit", Fatou Bensouda, the chief prosecutor for the ICC to discuss the trial of Omar al-Bashir, the Sudanese government insisted that he be tried in their own court system or "potentially in a hybrid court" (Al Jazeera 2020). Negotiations have continued, as both sides work to find a way to try al-Bashir and other

indicted figures in a fair and unbiased manner, even if the trials do not take place in the Hague and on Sudanese soil.

More generally, as Sudan's transitional government has improved relations with the United States and the international community, it remains unclear whether Sudan's removal from the U.S. list of state sponsors of terrorism and the continued cooperation with international financial institutions, especially the World Bank, will bring an end to violence in Darfur. In December 2020, the United Nations, under the unanimous vote from the Security Council and government of Sudan, withdrew the UNAMID peacekeeping mission from Darfur, and replaced it with the United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS) in Khartoum (DWAG 2020). Located in the capital, UNITAMS has no mandate or ability to protect the people of Darfur from the wrath of the Sudanese government and Janjaweed militias. Ever since the withdrawal of UNAMID, Darfur has been experiencing a wave of protests by individuals who counted on the peacekeeping mission for their safety and security. In addition to the protests, violence at refugee camps has soared. On January 16, the Janjaweed riders launched a ferocious attack on the Kerending camp for displaced individuals in El Geneina, West Darfur (DWAG 2020). Properties were looted and burned to the ground with 83 people killed during the initial attack extending to 129 from those that sustained critical injuries from which they could not recover from (DWAG 2020). Around 200 people were injured but could not seek adequate medical attention as there are roadblocks preventing medical personnel from entering into the region and those nearby are short on supplies and blood for transfusions (DWAG 2020). Dubbed as a massacre, the events in Kerending camp are a mere glimpse of the future that is in store for the Darfuri people without a peacekeeping mandate due to the negligence of the United Nations and the abandonment from the international community.

At first, it seemed as though the entire world rallied behind the persecuted men, women, and children in Darfur. Uttering the words "never again" and with the horrors of Rwanda still freshly painted in their minds, the United States, United Nations, and human rights organizations condemned the violence. However, as time dragged on and the genocide extended past a decade, the backing of the United Nations and United States weakened as new agendas and threats took precedence, the genocide of Darfur receded from the minds of the international community, even though the civilian population in Darfur continued to face violence, rape and murder-and continued to do so despite al-Bashir's overthrow. Throughout the eighteen years of genocide, the international community proved it lacked the political will to halt the destruction and trauma imparted on the Darfuri people. Thus, rather than waiting for the international community to "Save Darfur," survivors of the genocide and sexual abuse organized their own efforts creating transnational advocacy networks including survivors, local activists, and allies to advocate for increased support of affected individuals and pressure the international community into pursuing justice and accountability.

## Survivor Becomes Supporter: The Rise of Darfur Women Action Group

In 2009, a survivor named Niemat Ahmadi decided not enough action was being taken by the United Nations or the international community to put an end to the campaigns of displacement, murder, and rape. As an advocate living in Darfur during the start and peak of the genocide, Niemat Ahmadi frequently spoke out against the government's brutal tactics and need for accountability and justice (DWAG 2020). Under the Omar al-Bashir reign, the Sudanese government squelched any opposition, arrested, or caused the mysterious disappearances of journalists and other leading voices of the truth. As threats increased, Niemat Ahmadi decided to

flee Darfur and sought asylum in the United States, leaving behind her family and home, and founded the Darfur Women Action Group, a women-led international organization that could help to mediate and advocate on behalf of victims whose voices had previously been crushed.

Prior to seeking refuge in America, Ms. Ahmadi's resistance and outcry against the Sudanese government attracted other like-minded individuals and bound them together in a voice of opposition. During purges, she recounted how "the government arrested 50 of these men, including my eldest brother, and restricted any movement of gathering of male adults" (DWAG 2020. Recognizing this, some "women (including Niemat Ahmadi) took on the role of helping the people" despite the risk of being arrested or experiencing a worse fate (DWAG 2020). The initial women that joined together were then "able to mobilize women from many different parts of Darfur to the same and connected them in an organized manner to report the human rights abuses that were occurring on a daily basis" (DWAG 2020). On the Darfur Women Action Group Website, Ms. Ahmadi states "I in turn called upon my sisters in the diaspora to join me in our collective efforts…my past and present experiences and knowledge of the suffering and the power of women in my community has motivated me to start DWAG" (DWAG 2020). From the very start of her fight against hatred and injustice, Niemat Ahmadi, relying on her own experience, turned to the help of others who have suffered, knowing that if they joined together then they could enact change.

The Darfur Women Action Group, or DWAG, is an anti-atrocities and anti-genocide non-governmental organization based in Washington. D.C. Within the last year, DWAG expanded its efforts in Sudan securing an on-the-ground office space in the capitol of Khartoum, and now has greater access to breaking news in Darfur. As an anti-atrocities-based organization, Darfur Women Action Group focuses on a multitude of issues arising from Darfur and other current or

past genocides in the world. Since DWAG primarily consists of women, its efforts revolve around gender equality and fighting against gender-based violence. Due to the widespread tactical rape and sexual violence inflicted upon the Darfuri women and girls, DWAG is a strong advocate for survivors of sexual assault. In addition to women's empowerment, health, and safety, the international NGO highlights the importance of justice and demands accountability from individual governments, calling for perpetrators to be tried for their actions.

DWAG works to combat mass rape and sexual violence in Darfur and in the rest of the world by focusing on educational empowerment of young girls, increasing awareness of sexual violence, and raising funds to support rehabilitation for survivors. For example, DWAG hosted a Girl's Empowerment Week to commemorate the International Day of the Girl Child (DWAG 2020). The campaign consisted of educational resources, a DWAG fundraiser to raise money supporting at least one girl's education while living in a refugee camp, and a Facebook Live session with Niemat Ahmadi discussing her own experiences growing up in Darfur (DWAG 2020). Additionally, in December DWAG held a campaign titled "16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence" (DWAG 2020). Starting on the International Day Against Gender-Based Violence and ending on the International Day of Human Rights, the campaign consisted of different action items and educational resources individuals could take to increase their awareness about sexual violence and anti-genocide advocacy (DWAG 2020). At the end of the campaign, the organization held a fundraising virtual concert and silent auction with all proceeds going towards establishing a women's rehabilitation and empowerment center in Sudan, allowing survivors to seek therapy and build a network of trustworthy women (DWAG 2020). While these are among the largest of events held to combat gender-based violence and gender

inequalities within Sudan, DWAG continues to emphasize the importance of empowering women everywhere, allowing survivors to share their own stories as well.

As an anti-genocide and anti-atrocities organization, DWAG constantly urges the international community to become increasingly involved in demanding accountability and justice for genocides, conflicts, and crimes against humanity. During the "16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence" campaign, DWAG hosted a panel on accountability inviting prominent voices from the Genocide Watch and Amal Clooney, a popular advocate and human rights lawyer (DWAG 2020). The various panelists discussed how the international community needed to take greater actions against governments that perpetrated violence until their own citizens and praised DWAG for leading the fight against genocide and gender-based violence (DWAG 2020). Pushing for increased accountability and justice, DWAG looks to the ICC for unbiased trials of those who committed war crimes and crimes against humanity. Ms. Ahmadi realizes that the ICC has limited jurisdiction within the international community and cannot force Sudan to hand over Omar al-Bashir and other wanted criminals. Instead of accepting this, Niemat Ahmadi has instructed DWAG to urge others to demand Sudan hand over those responsible for the murder, displacement, and raped Darfuri citizens. Following the boomerang pattern outlined by Keck and Sikkink in chapter 3, DWAG thus acts 'middle-man,' bringing concerns of survivors and existing Darfuri communities to the forefront of the international community and collaborating with the ICC to ensure the best possible approach in pursuing justice.

Most recently, the Darfur Women Action Group has ramped up its efforts in demanding efforts and actions from the international community regarding increased violence within Darfur. The withdrawal of UNAMID created a greater opportunity for the Janjaweed to launch attacks

against refugee and displacement camps as vulnerable individuals found themselves without the protection of the United Nations. The massacre witnessed in El Genina "saddened the hearts" of DWAG and prompted a statement filled with demands to the United Nations and United Statements asking to reinstate a peacekeeping mandate, "send an investigation team to investigate crimes," "press the Sudanese government to disarm and hold its militias accountable," and urging the "US not to normalize relations with Sudan unless Sudan stops its forces from attacking civilians, holding criminals of past and present accountable" (DWAG 2020). In accordance with the Keck and Sikkink's theory on transnational advocacy groups, DWAG's popular method of sending letters, emails, or demands to representatives, diplomats, or leaders of countries urging them to take actions against any human rights violations highlights the boomerang pattern in which advocacy groups directly approach influential state and international leaders in the hopes of increasing their awareness on the genocide and garnering larger support for intervention and justice.

By calling on multiple institutions, the Darfur Women Action Group engages the international community, forcing them to bear witness to the atrocities occurring in Darfur. In most of their posts, DWAG always emphasizes that they cannot enact change without others and their collective voices (DWAG 2020). According to Keck and Sikkink, transnational advocacy networks experience limitations with their scope of influence since "they are not powerful in a traditional sense of the world, they must use the power of their information, ideas, strategies, to alter the information and value contexts" (Keck and Sikkink 16). Thus, transnational advocacy networks utilize any resources at their disposal including "bringing pressure, arm-twisting, encouraging sanctions and shaming" entities into acting (Keck and Sikkink 16). As a small NGO, DWAG recognizes the power collective voices have in pressuring the international

community and individual states to take action. Individual calls to actions and demands posted on social media, within the weekly newsletters, or policy statements allows DWAG to connect to communities that express the same concerns for Darfur and advocate alongside the organizations. As an NGO built on voluntary response and actions, DWAG has to consistently ask the public and their network to join their efforts and collaborate with them on projects to increase their legitimacy as an organization and outcry over human rights violations.

The Darfur Women Action Group does what most international organizations and governments failed to do: advocate on behalf of the Darfuri people. In doing so, DWAG demonstrates the importance of voices from the local population. This is especially important for women who might otherwise be silenced because of their experience of sexual violence. As Ms. Ahmadi commented, "I feel I owe it to my sisters and mothers to stand up and encourage other survivors to accept their responsibilities and undertake efforts that can contribute to the restoration of dignity and livelihood to our society" (DWAG 2020). Instead of allowing the perpetrators of violence to take away their voices DWAG "aims to utilize the power and strength of women and reinforce it with education and by sharing stories to maximize their effort in combating the genocide in Darfur" (DWAG 2020). Thus, DWAG provides a platform for survivors to voice their own experiences witnessing the destruction and sexual violence, amplifying the truth of the genocide to anyone who is willing to listen. By doing so, Ms. Ahmadi asserts that "women are not simply victims" but are crusaders against injustice and the very same individuals that dared to destroy their heritage and violate their bodies (DWAG 2020).

Through their unique mission of peace and justice, the Darfur Women Action Group mobilizes women survivors to become agents of advocacy and change. Despite the attempted eradication and sexual assault of their families, friends, the survivors are supplied with a

platform to voice their own experiences, condemning the Sudanese government for perpetrating such violence against innocent men, women, and children. Even though many of the women still experience trauma from the attacks, they are still vocal in their fight against the genocide. As the founder and president, Niemat Ahmadi leads those who have been personally affected by the attempted annihilation of a whole population against injustice, intolerance, and gender-based violence. Although it is a relatively small organization, DWAG has reached people across the globe and has spurred individuals to demand action from their own governments. Without the resilience of Niemat Ahmadi through the creation of the Darfur Women Action Group, many of these individuals would most likely never know a genocide in Darfur waged on. As the Darfur Women Action Group continues to expand its outreach, this network of women survivors and allies to keep pressure on the Sudanese government and international actors to provide justice for the people of Darfur.

# Chapter 5. Yezidis: Former Sabaya Supporting Initiatives for Justice and Rehabilitation

## Yezidism, Religion, and Society

Located throughout Iraq, Syria, and Turkey, the religious and ethnic population known as the Yezidis that has been persecuted time and time again. The Yezidis are ethnic Kurds, who also have a long history of marginalization and persecution, but whereas Kurds are predominantly Sunni Muslims, Yezidis practice an ancient monotheistic religion linked to Zoroastrianism. As a small minority in a region dominated by Sunni Muslims and Christians, the Yezidis often faced discrimination for their beliefs and various campaigns to decimate the population, including forced conversion and pressures to denounce their faith. As religious traditions and cultural customs need to be passed down to ensure new generations carry on with the heritage, tactics which interfere with the process put the future of Yezidis as a distinct community in jeopardy.

While Yezidism overlaps with Islam and Sufism, a mystical sect of Islam, the Yezidis' unique spiritual beliefs have been condemned by Muslims and followers of other religions as devil worship since Yezidis pray to the Peacock Angel (*Malak Tawus*) and believe that God (Khuda) is an aloof deity who left all responsibility for the earthly world to angels (Suvari 23). According to "The Yazidi-Religion, Culture, and Trauma" by Jan Ilhan Kizilhan, the Yezidis claim Khuda charged the Peacock Angel with "the protection of the Yezidis" (Kizilhan 334). Additionally, a Yezidi legend states that when Malak Tawus was thrown into hell by Khuda for defying wishes, the angel "extinguished fires of hell with his tears" and thus saved Yezidis from the perils of hell and secured their purity in the afterlife (Suvari 24). Even though Yezidis acknowledge the existence of an all-powerful God, Muslims see the Yezidis' reliance on the

angels for comfort as a threat to Allah's dominance, accusing the Yezidis as worshipping idols and a false religion.

Like most minorities that have been threatened with extinction, Yezidi society is an insulated, closed off community with a clear social and religious hierarchy, with sheikhs or tribal leaders at the top, followed by priests who are charged with continuing the oral history and religious traditions of the Yezidi faith. The rest of the community, the Murids, are expected to abide by restrictions, including a proscription against marrying outside of one's caste (Kizilhan 334-335). Under Yezidi society, "marrying a person from a different religious community" is prohibited as it would disrupt the order of the caste system (Kizilhan 336). In fact, any sexual relationship between a Yezidi and outsider is forbidden as it could lead to a pregnancy and dilute the lineages that have lasted for generations. Sexual relations outside of marriage and marriages outside the community "are considered to be shameful for the whole family, and in the past women and girls believed to have had relations with men of other faiths have been victims of so-called 'honor killings'" (Escape from Hell 2014). Thus, Yezidi society places extremely high importance on maintaining order through the caste system and ensuring their heritage remains pure from outsiders who would want to destroy their way of life.

## The Islamic State's Sabaya

In 2013, the world witnessed a new villain rise from Iraqi prisons clothed in black and quoting controversial verses from the Qur'an. Naming themselves as the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, the militant Sunni movement succeeded in establishing a caliphate in western Iraq and eastern Syria and claimed exclusive political and religious authority over the world's Muslims. Islamic State extremists destroyed everything and anyone who stood in their path to 'glory' before a U.S. backed coalition ousted Islamic State fighters from the last territory it controlled in

April 2017. While ISIS employed extreme violence against its opponents, persecuting minority groups and Shi'a Muslims, it singled out the Yezidi minority for particularly brutal treatment.

The Islamic State traces its origins to the aftermath of the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003. Detained in an Iraqi prison under U.S. occupation authorities, Abu Mas'ab Zarqawi became radicalized listening to his Muslim peers, slicing off his tattoos and committing himself to faith, or rather his version of Islam. Seething from American occupation, Zarqawi and his militant group joined forces with al-Qaeda, attacked Shi'a Muslims and U.S. forces in an attempt to unleash a sectarian civil war. Zarqawi's successor, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, renamed the organization as the Islamic State of Iraq and later, the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (Syria) or ISIS and recruited disgruntled former Ba'ath party members from Iraq and Sunni groups angered over their disenfranchisement by the Shi'a dominated government of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki (Laub 2016). The Islamic State also took advantage of the civil war in Syria that began with an uprising against President Bashar al-Assad in 2011 by myriad anti-government groups and youths advocating for increasingly democratic policies and values, including militant Sunnis who opposed rule by Alawaites, a Shi'a minority sect (Laub 2016).

The Islamic State quickly proved to be perhaps one of the most brutal organizations the world had ever known. According to Peter Bergen, a leading expert on al Qaeda and Islamist terrorism, "members of ISIS believe that they are the vanguard fighting a religious war, which Allah has determined will be won by the forces of true Islam" (Bergen 13). By selectively drawing on certain Qur'anic passages, the militants "see themselves as participating in a cosmic war between good and evil…which allows them to kill anyone they perceive to be standing in their way with no compunction" (Bergen 13). For Islamic State militants, restoration of an

Islamic caliphate was a divine mission, a religious jihad sanctioned by Allah, which justified violence against non-believers, or infidels.

As a militant religious organization, the Islamic State is determined to impose its own religious beliefs Islam on other Muslims as well as individuals belonging to other religions. Fawaz A. Gerges, a leading authority on jihadism and author of a leading study on ISIS, cites the Islamic State's edict that anyone "who refuses to submit to the will of the new caliphate faces either expulsion from the land or death" (Gerges 25). ISIS also deliberately sought to instill fear in its enemies by publicizing the gruesome details of its crimes rather than trying to hide or deny these. For instance, 21 Egyptian Coptic Christians were slowly beheaded on video for the world to see their defiance and unwillingness to convert to what the militants believe is true Islam. Journalists and American citizens captured by the Islamic State were tortured and beheaded on tape for their families to watch. When the extremists could not reach the 'infidels' out of their jurisdiction, they resorted to staging attacks, setting off explosives, and creating wide terror across the globe. What the Islamic State could not tolerate were individuals that did not abide by their ruling. Gerges asserts "the idea of the 'other' is alien to their [Islamic State's] messianic ideology" and those that did not fit into their idyllic caliphate were exterminated or forced to obey their governance (Gerges 27). Among the most persecuted by the Islamic State were the Yezidis.

The systematic attack launched on the Yezidis by Islamic State militants was a swift campaign aimed at completely crippling the ethnic and religious minority beyond rehabilitation. In June of 2014, Mosul fell to the Islamic State, ushering in a sense of overwhelming fear and leading Iraqi and Kurdish forces to flee, leaving the civilians behind unprotected. After conquering one of the largest cities in Iraq, the militants continued their advance and "attacked

and took the Sinjar district, one of the two major centers of the Yezidi population in Iraq" (Nicolaus and Yuce 198). According to Peter Nicolaus, a former UN official with the UN High Commissioner on Refugees, and Serkan Yuce, a human rights lawyer, following the capture of Sinjar "more than ninety-six percent of the populace" fled to what was thought of safety, putting distance between themselves and the terrorists (Nicolaus and Yuce 198). As Nadia Murad details in her memoir, about her Islamic State captivity, *The Last Girl*, thousands of Yezidis sought to escape from ISIS by fleeing to Mount Sinjar, but many died from starvation and dehydration, either on the mountain or on the way there (Murad 75). Those unable to make it to the mountain were captured by ISIS militants who killed the men and forced younger boys – those without arm hair – to convert to Islam. Some boys were forced to serve as slaves to the militants, while others "were forcibly drafted into ISIS fighting units" and brainwashed with Islamic State propaganda telling them they were fighting Allah's war against infidels (Nicolaus and Yuce 198; Murad 99-104).

Women and girls were also separated by age, with young women and girls, including married women with little children, subjected to a particularly devastating fate. The forced sexual enslavement of Yezidi women and girls was arguably the most dehumanizing and devastating pain inflicted on the ethnic minority. While rape and violence are not permitted against fellow Muslims, the Islamic State found a loop-hole in which they could control the bodies of the Yezidi women without fearing consequences from Allah in their eyes. Their calculated attack revolved around forcing the women and the girls into being their "sabaya" (Murad 122). In Arabic the word "sabaya (sabiyya is singular) means wife, but the Islamic State used the term to refer to "human spoils" or "the young women they would buy and sell as sex slaves" (Murad 122). Those who became sex slaves were forced into "a contract for rape that the

militants…called 'marriage,'" yet there was nothing that indicated an actual marriage and partnership would form following the signing of the contract (Murad 150). Thus, the word sabaya became a blanket term to describe the union of master and slave, who were tied to the Islamic State fighters through the rape and violation of their bodies.

The prohibition of rape was supposed to prevent the Islamic State from claiming the bodies of innocent women and girls. However, since the militants regarded Yezidis as infidels, they justified rape based on a narrow interpretation of a chapter from the Qur'an that "permits sexual relations between a master and his female slave outside of marriage" (Nicolaus and Yuce 202). ISIS officials interpreted this to mean that if they wanted to continue to reap the 'benefits' of subjecting abducted women and girls to sexual violence and slavery, Yezidis would need to be kept in enslavement indefinitely. In the eyes of the Islamic State, Yezidi girls "were no longer human beings" but became only sabaya (Murad 123). Nicolaus and Yuce added the Yezidis "became chattel" in which the girls were seen as pieces of property to the Islamic State fighters rather than individuals with feelings and rights (Nicolaus and Yuce 200). The justification for the sexual slavery revolved around stripping the humanity from the women and young girls, to the point where they were regarded as nothing but objects that could be passed around. As stated in a document issued by the Islamic State's "Office of Research and Religious Edicts":

> Unbelieving [women] who were captured and brought into the abode of Islam are permissible to us, after the imam distributes them [among us] … If she is a virgin, he [her master] can have intercourse with her immediately after taking possession of her. However, if she isn't, her uterus must be purified [first]… It is permissible to buy, sell, or give as a gift female captives and slaves, for they are merely property, which can be disposed of" (Escape from Hell 2014).

Depicted as sabaya, the Yezidi women and girls faced brutality in all forms from surrounding Islamic State fighters, including those who paid for them and kept them locked

away as their own personal sex slaves. The captive Yezidis were subjected to regular beatings and sexual assaults by individuals who "seemed to enjoy making people feel pain" (Murad 153). The "exaggerated, forceful" and deliberately malicious attacks to which the women were subjected came from all fronts including those who bought them, their friends, and other militants who wanted a chance to destroy the sabaya's resolve (Murad 166). During her own experience at the slave market, Nadia remembered how "the militants touched [them] anywhere they wanted, running their hands over [their] breasts and legs, as if they were animals" (Murad 137). The touch of the militants repulsed the women, but they could not fight back. The girls were often "raped on a daily basis," by the men who bought them for a small amount of money at the slave market (Nicolaus and Yuce 200). Nadia recounted "whenever he (Hajji Salman) had time, he raped me" and was not uncommon to be raped throughout the day in addition to every night (Murad 167). Sometimes, the owners of the sabaya allowed their peers to reap the benefits of the few American dollars they paid to control the bodies of the Yezidis. After trying to flee, Nadia was gang raped with by two other men as "three other guards" watched her punishment (Murad 175). While pregnant women and girls who had not yet started their menstruation were not allowed to be raped, they could still be forced into sexual acts, yet another loop-hole ISIS developed (Murad 140). In addition, some Yezidi women and girls were beaten, starved or emotionally abused by the 'true' wives of the Islamic State fighters and officials, who took out their jealousy on the sabaya (Murad 153-155; Nicolaus and Yuce 200). Many of these wives defected from Western nations and chose to join ISIS as wives who would bear children and future soldiers to the Islamic State. Murad argues these women were "female terrorists" for "taking starring roles" of physical and mental abuse and manipulation on innocent women and girls (Murad 154).

Prior to the slave market and being sold to sadistic terrorists, the women and girls left in the control of the Islamic State attempted to make themselves unworthy of physical attractiveness and rape. In order to make themselves displeasing "some of the girls rubbed ashes or dirt on their faces or messed up their hair" (Murad 129). Since this was a temporary solution, the grit was washed away once the Yezidis were made to shower. As the militants favored young girls with their virginity, there were instances when individuals "penetrated [themselves] with a bottle to no longer be a virgin when the militant" came for them (Murad 162). Other girls took drastic measures wishing for death rather than to be violated over and over such as those "who tried to light themselves on fire" or tried to commit suicide in the slave market "by cutting through their veins in their wrists" (Murad 129, 162). Regardless of the outcome, the Yezidi women and girls were desperate to find an escape from the impending physical abuse, sexual assault, and rape, resorting to temporary or permanent delays.

Aside from the apparent physical and sexual abuse, the Islamic State toyed with their Yezidi captives' mental state, feeding them false statements until the women and girls finally accepted and stopped resisting their captivity. Perhaps the most persistent tactic was providing disinformation about why the Yezidis became sabaya in the first place. According to the Islamic State, their raping, beating, and forced conversion of the Yezidis was to help them and have God forgive them for being infidels (Murad 147). However, the sexual enslavement was based on "money, power, and sex" and had little to nothing to do with religion as rape is not permitted in Islam (Murad 153). In addition to justifying the abuse, the terrorists intimidated the Yezidis into believing they could never escape or if they were returned home, no one would want them. Nadia Murad was often taunted by her first captor who often bragged "try to escape, it doesn't matter" as her picture would be circulated at every ISIS checkpoint and she would be returned within a

matter of minutes (Murad 161). After she was raped, the same captor exclaimed "there was no point in even trying to escape" since she was "no longer a virgin" and was thus ruined in the eyes of her family and her community (Murad 171-172). Without hope of escape or a return to normalcy, the women and girls began accepting the lies, assuming that no one from their previous lives would ever want them from their previous life.

For those who were lucky enough to escape, like Nadia Murad, the Yezidis returned to a community that shamed the girls and women for their time in Islamic State captivity. Although the Yezidi spiritual leader, Baba Sheikh, called on members of the community to support and care for the former captives, the lasting stigma led to negative social consequences as questions were raised about the girls' marriageability due to their loss of virginity ("Escape from Hell" 14). In 2017, "it was estimated that 3,048 Yezidis had escaped from ISIS" of whom "1,636 women and girls" returned had been subjected to rape or other forms of physical abuse as a sabaya (Greaser 2). Due to widespread media coverage, Amnesty International reported that most of the Yezidi men and women interviewed acknowledged systematic rape of captive women and children but insisted that "their own relatives were not subjected to such abuses. This may be reinforcing the stigma around rape and contributing to former captives believing that they cannot reveal the details of rape or other sexual violence for fear of bringing shame on their families and loved ones ("Escape from Hell" 14). While a large percentage of those that escaped home faced abuse, they were still greeted with harsh scrutiny from their loved ones that managed to survive. Due to the virginity taboo, many girls feared their "community and religious leaders wouldn't welcome [them] back" because they were no longer virgins and had sexual relations with men outside of the Yezidi community (Murad 161). The girls who were stripped of their virginity by force feared that "few men [would] want to marry" them after their forced sexual encounters

with the militants (Greaser 3). For those that dreamt of "returning to Yezidi society, marrying, having children, [and] being happy" once again, the returned individuals were instead met with hesitation from their neighbors, friends, and families on whether or not they should be greeted with open arms (Murad 161).

While the Yezidis struggled with their return, many of the women and girls had to cope with babies that were brought home from their time in captivity. Even though ISIS believes "the captor should wait for his slave to finish her menstrual cycle before having sex with her, to be certain that she is not pregnant," many fighters disregarded this rule and impregnated their sabaya against the recognized decree (Murad 147). Under the ICC ruling, forced pregnancies constitute sexual abuse and crimes against humanity for altering the genetic makeup of a given population. Since the Yezidi women are expected to marry within the faith to preserve Yezidi. In one instance, "a Yezidi man bragged that…he killed the baby [from an ISIS father] in revenge for the ISIS genocide against Yazidis" (Greaser 4). Another case involved the forced removal of babies without their mothers' consent or "knowledge of whether they were sold, killed, or put up for adoption in Syria (Greaser 4-5). Even though the babies were innocent and had no part in the campaign to exterminate the Yezidis, they still were considered to bear the blood and genes of monsters. As products of rape, the babies simultaneously served as a reminder of the women's defilement, disempowerment, and de-masculinization of their male kinsmen, who were unable to protect them (Ahram 58); therefore, people took their anger and sorrow out on the babies, ensuring that they would not have a chance to become incorporated into Yezidi culture.

In line with constructivist and intersectional feminisms, ISIS can be seen to use sexual violence to construct a distinctive form of hyper-masculine Islamic state, placing men and boys in leadership positions. As political scientist Ariel Ahram explains, though ISIS's brutal use of

rape and sexual violence seemed unusually "savage," it actually continued practices inherited from Saddam Hussein's regime and other Arab governments, which used sexualized violence to reinforce hyper-masculine domination over subordinate groups (Ahram 59). This is unsurprising as high-ranking members of Hussein's Ba'ath party joined ISIS when they captured territories in northern Iraq, becoming elite members of the terrorist organization. In addition, ISIS ideology stemmed from selective suras, or verses, from the Qur'an which, although out of context, argued for the obedience of wives to their husbands and fulfilling their marital duties. Contrary to an essentialist position, this does not imply that men – or Arab or Muslim men more specifically – are superior to women and girls and naturally predisposed to sexual violence:

> Rather, the modes of hyper-masculine statehood that have emerged in the Arab world provided a blueprint for instrumentalizing sexual violence as a tool of state-building. The repertoires of sexual violence are effective precisely because they capitalize on entrenched gender norms that emphasize shame as a mechanism of social control. It is for this reason that victims of sexual assault – females and males alike – are frequently so stigmatized that they cannot return to their home communities. The acts of sexual violence tear apart the basic structures of family life, while at the same time reinforcing the overarching neo-patriarchy of … control (Ahram 70).

The sexual violence explicitly authorized by ISIS leaders continuing throughout the ranks of the fighters therefore reflects the tactics used by other actors to enact ethno-sectarian domination and ensure the obedience of women and girls to their domination (Ahram 66).

## Rape, Genocide, and Surrounding Inaction

As the Western world cowered in fear over when the next attack from the Islamic State would occur, the Yezidis forced to become sabaya awaited when their saviors would arrive and rescue them from sexual servitude. In 2014, the rise of ISIS triggered Western countries within Europe and North America to go on the defense, rallying together in support and condemning all actions of the terrorist organization.

During the summer of 2014, as ISIS fighters captured Yezidi territories in northern Iraq and began their campaign of extermination. The Yezidis still held hope that they would be protected by the international community or "by the Kurds who had sworn to protect them" (Murad 57). In her memoir, Murad recounted how "the peshmerga had been so revered" and hellbent on defeating ISIS that the community "were so certain that they would come back and fulfill their duty" by saving the Yezidis (Murad 57). Despite their promise to protect the defenseless Yezidis, the peshmerga were unable to hold Yezidi dominated areas from the advancing Islamic State fighters. Francis O'Connor and Rosa Burc, specialists on minority autonomy in the Middle East, describe the lack of protection and support by the international community towards the Yezidis. The "Kurdish Regional Government peshmerga forces presented no military opposition before fleeing in disarray, leaving the local Yezidi population defenseless" (O'Connor and Burc 1). In some cases, neighboring "Arab Sunnis… led ISIS to the hideouts of their Yezidi blood-brothers, and actively participated in heinous crimes and human rights violations" (Nicolaus and Yuce 214). Due to the ethnic and religious differences between Yezidism and Sunni Muslims, it is not surprising that neighbors would turn on them as they were already looked down upon for their "other" status. The same "Arab Sunni neighbors who welcomed ISIS in" were much more likely to retaliate against the Yezidis, turn them into the Islamic State, or refuse to help even in the direst of situations" (Nicolaus and Yuce 214).

Although the Yezidis have been historically excluded from participating in Iraqi society, they counted on the protection from the existing military to counter Islamic State advances, shielding them from the horrors of the terrorist organization. Yet rather than helping Yezidis to escape from the advancing militants, some "Iraqis questioned the Yezidis' claim to Sinjar," the Yezidi dominated region in northern Iraq, arguing that if the Yezidis abandoned the region, they

would forfeit their claim (Murad 54). Instead of being supportive, the Iraqis' disdain for the Yezidis pressured them to stay in Sinjar despite the apparent risk of being captured by the Islamic State. At the same time, the Iraqi government was too caught up with defending the rest of the country to defend the Kurds and Yezidis, leaving both ethnic minorities to look after themselves.

In terms of support from the international community, the Yezidis believed that their positive relationship with Americans would motivate the superpower to come to their aid and rescue them from the Islamic State. Prior to the formation of ISIS, "Yezidis welcomed the Americans" during the U.S. occupation of Iraq (Murad 39). For a few years, the foreign soldiers frequented Yezidi dominated areas sharing in their hospitality and culture. However, over time "fighting had grown worse in the rest of the country and the Americans were stretched thin" and eventually left their stations in northern Iraq (Murad 44). Nadia Murad remembered how "some of [her] neighbors complained that the Americans had forgotten about [them], and they worried that without them, Yezidis would be unprotected" (Murad 44-45).

Seeking to fill the power vacuum that had been created after the withdrawal of U.S. troops in 2011, the Obama administration developed a strategy "centered around airstrikes and the military support of 'moderate' Islamic proxies in Syria and Shi'a- dominated government in Iraq" (Paasche and Gunter 9). While the airstrikes were relatively effective in taking out ISIS strongholds and leaders such as Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, they caused insurmountable damage on innocent villages and took countless lives. In fact, a *Washington Post* article reported that the "United States has conceded 1,398 civilian deaths in Iraq and Syria, though others say the actual number is much higher (Stevens, Ryan, and Salim 2020). During the peak of the airstrikes, Islamic State fighters sought to deter air strikes by using civilian hostages as human shields:

"fighters were forcing civilians out of their homes and using them as human shields against the bombs raining down from the sky" (Stevens, Ryan, and Salim 2020).

Outraged at the Islamic State's brutality and lack of humanity, the United States and other participating countries pledged to cripple the terrorist organization and those in ISIS captivity. Nonetheless, the United States was "reluctant to commit combat troops to actively engage against ISIS on the ground" after spending years on the Iraq and Afghanistan wars (Paasche and Gunter 9). Instead of sending in troops to protect and collect enslaved Yezidi women and girls, the United States decided to leave most of the fighting to Kurdish, Iraqi and Syrian allies. Given ISIS's "complete disregard for its fighters' own lives" and the willingness of its more fanatical members to become suicide bombers and, the United States and European countries preferred to wage a proxy war rather than putting their own soldiers at risk, backing groups with weapons and monetary aid. As a result, the coalition worked methodically yet slowly against the Islamic State, elongating the Yezidi's sexual enslavement and continuation of the genocide.

While the international community battled against the Islamic State, few individuals sympathetic towards the Yezidi's plight decided to intervene, risking their lives for complete strangers who suffered unimaginable amounts of trauma. As the international community was preoccupied with the two-front war, they were unable to tend to the Yezidis held captive my dangerous and ruthless militants. Knowing that they would not escape without help, Yezidis "were brought back by their families and friends through Muslim middlemen" who "pretended that they [were] buying Yezidi slaves for themselves" and thus "smuggled [them] out of ISIS control" (Nicolaus and Yuce, 207). In her daring escape, Nadia Murad sought refuge from a

family within Mosul that may have been ISIS sympathizers, but once they heard her story, decided to help her reach the safety of Kurdistan (Murad 210-211). The task of smuggling the sabaya out of ISIS territories "involved large amounts of money" sometimes totaling "up to 20,000 USD" (Nicolaus and Yuce, 207). For families that could not afford these rates, their lost women and girls may not have had a chance to escape until they managed to scrape enough funds together, only prolonging the sabaya's trauma.

According to Nicolaus and Yuce, "smuggling humans out of ISIS held territories proved to be far more lucrative than handling other such contraband" due to the excessive security measures at checkpoints to ensure no sabaya could escape from their masters and because those involved risked their lives. (Nicolaus and Yuce 208). It is important to note that "neither the Iraqi government nor the international community made any contributions to the process of rescuing Yezidis" (Nicolaus and Yuce 208). While ordinary citizens put their own safety aside to rescue young girls and women trapped in the grasps of the Islamic State, the international community stood idly by, too preoccupied with its own endeavors to contribute to the smuggling of sabaya.

Those Yezidi women and girls who managed to escape from sexual servitude faced an uncertain reception, including scorn from members of their own community for losing their honor by failing to maintain their virginity and engaging in sexual relations with outsiders from the community (Nicolaus and Yuce 209). Frustrated with their own de-masculinization, a few close male relatives of escaped sabaya carried out honor killings in an attempt to restore their family's honor (Nicolaus and Yuce 209). In an effort to help the community avoid feuds and reintegrate thousands of Yezidi women and girls rescued from slavery, Baba Sheikh, the supreme religious authority for the Yezidi community, "declared that Yezidi women and girls who escaped from captivity by ISIS should be accepted by the community regardless of

traditional, cultural, and religious restrictions" (Omarkhari 152). Religious figures also commented on the inclusion stating that they would "continue to be members of the Yezidi community of faith" as their conversion was forced and therefore did not reflect the will of the women and girls (Omarkhari 152). Although Baba Sheikh's historic decision to support the former sabaya allowed many to be accepted back into the community, only half of the more than 6,400 Yazidi women who were kidnapped have been rescued or escaped, while the fate of the rest remains unknown (Menmy 2020).

Aside from the thoughtful words from their community leaders, Yezidi survivors were in dire need of benefits and assistance to support their transition back into Yezidi society. Being raped, passed around, and beaten on a daily basis, Yezidi women and girls suffered from health complications as well as post-traumatic stress disorder and panic attacks from all of the trauma. Research from the Frankfurt Institute suggests "up to 50% of the population is suffering from different forms traumatic and post-traumatic stress disorders," triggering an epidemic of mental health among the Yezidis (O'Connor and Burc 2). Dr. Illhan Kizilhan, who specialized in therapeutic work with survivors of assault, expressed concern for the women and girls who experienced "nightmares…and often have fainting spells or flashbacks in which they re-experience rape and torture" and lacked access to proper treatment (Omarakhari 151). In an interview with an Iraqi diplomat at the embassy in 2019, I asked what the government of Iraq was doing to support Yezidis that escaped from ISIS. Instead of pointing to benefits, aid, or medial services that the Iraqi government was providing, the diplomat decried the awful way in which the Yezidis were being treated in their own communities. In other words, Iraq was not contributing to the rehabilitation of their own citizens and left the healing up to the local community or NGOs.

Accountability for crimes against the Yezidi community, including sexual slavery, has not been forthcoming. In their chapter, Nicolaus and Yuce argued how "the Yezidis are deeply disappointed by the manner in which the Iraqi Federal Government has…dealt with the issue of genocide" (Nicolaus and Yuce 217-218). Even though "Iraq has officially declared the persecution of the Yezidis in Sinjar to be an act of genocide" their actions to prosecute the terrorists suggest that the government is not entirely invested in seeking justice for the Yezidis (Nicolaus and Yuce 218). In terms of legal avenues, Iraq has not taken steps to gather testimony from the former sabaya and hold trials to bring individuals accused of crimes against humanity to justice. Iraqi domestic law has not been amended to incorporate grave violations of international law; as a result, "Iraq currently lacks legislative and judicial recourse specifically aimed at preventing and punishing genocide" and the "Iraqi High Tribunal (IHT)…is limited to acts that occurred between 17 July 1968 and 1 May 2003) (Nicolaus and Yuce 218, 219). Despite this limitation, Iraq maintains the ability to "extend the scope of the IHT" in order to "create another tribunal to confront the systematic destruction of the Yezidis" but has failed to do so (Nicolaus and Yuce 219). Nicolaus and Yuce attribute this lack of domestic justice to the "religious and political bias impacting the policy of the Federal Government, including the judicial branch" (Nicolaus and Yuce 219)). In addition, neither the Iraqi federal government nor the Kurdistan Regional Government has moved to provide reparations to victims of the conflict involving IS, as financial assistance for education and support services for Yezidi survivors remains inadequate (Amnesty International 2020). In other words, the Iraqi government does not want to get involved in the process of justice for the women and girls forced in sexual slavery.

International institutions offer another avenue for justice for the Yezidis. As the leading institution for international justice, the ICC would be more capable of handling the sensitive

cases from the Yezidi genocide. While “Iraq has not acceded to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, the Federal Government can still refer the situation” to the chief prosecutor; however, there has been no indication that Iraq will do so, in part because this could trigger legal action by Iraqi Sunnis who experienced atrocities by Iraqi Shi’a battling the Islamic State (Nicolaus and Yuce 219-220). In order to maintain a state of relative peace without increased international intervention and “worldwide publicity,” Iraq will most likely never collaborate with the ICC on the Yezidi genocide (Nicolaus and Yuce 220).

Aside from Iraq’s reluctance to support the Yezidi survivors’ right to justice, the international community has been struggling with prosecuting the Islamic State fighters held in custody in various nations around the world. Vera Mironova’s “The Challenge of Foreign Fighters Repatriating and Prosecuting ISIS Detainees” addresses the dilemma of how the international community should deal with individuals who defected to the Islamic State, leaving their countries and families behind. Nations such as “the U.K, the U.S. Ireland, and Australia are stripping the accused of their citizenship” so they cannot return to their homelands. Other countries such as Russia are repatriating former ISIS fighters who fear being exposed to “torture and death…in Russian prisons” which would be worse than death in Syria (Mironova 3-4). On the other hand, “France has refused to repatriate its citizens suspected of involvement with ISIS in Syria and Iraq, where they have been given death sentences” (Mironova 3). Mironova suggests that the return of foreign fighters has posed a great debate on the international community because countries are declaring their own autonomy regarding how the former ISIS militants will be brought to justice. In 2020, “the U.N. Security Council” held a session for the “resolution on foreign fighters” (Mironova 5). Among the discussion, “China opposed the use of language calling for ‘fair trials,’ deeming it a form of interference by the U.N. and foreign actors in its

justice system" (Mironova 5). By revoking their citizenship, the Western nations are essentially giving up their rights to bring the perpetrators to justice or in the least, hand them over to the ICC for a formal prosecution on the Yezidi genocide. Without universal cooperation from the countries whose citizens defected to ISIS, the former militants cannot fully answer for their crimes against humanity, inciting terror, and their participation in the raping of the sabaya, denying the Yezidi women and girls justice and closure for their prolonged suffering.

So long as governments and international institutions fall short in their obligations to ensure justice for the war crimes and genocide committed against the Yezidis and fail to provide adequate support to the former sabaya, those who have been traumatized will continue to suffer. Given inaction on the part of government actors and the international community, it has fallen to non-governmental organizations, individual actors, and transnational advocacy networks to help the survivors. For the most part, NGOs and individuals were the only ones willing to smuggle Yezidis out of ISIS-controlled territory. Despite official acknowledgement and condemnation of the Islamic State's practice of sexual slavery, the anti-ISIS coalition prioritized its military campaign and failed to dedicate resources toward rescuing captured Yezidis. Instead, individuals took on the responsibility with establishing smuggling networks to rescue the women and girls out of Islamic State territories, risking their own lives in the process. After the Islamic State was defeated, the international community ultimately forgot about the continued plight of the Yezidis, including survivors of rape who suffer major physical and mental health issues as well as captives who were never recovered or seen from again. As a result, it has been Yezidi survivors and their allies and advocates who have stepped forward to demand justice, accountability, and reparations.

## From Sabaya to Speakers: How Enslaved Yezidis Become the Masters of Peace and Justice

Dismayed and angered at the lack of protection, support, and sympathy for their trauma, Yezidi survivors have begun calling out officials and the international community for failing to shield them from the horrors of the Islamic State. With thousands of Yezidis captured as sex slaves, they prayed the international community would step in, stopping the inevitable rape and beatings. Of course, the international community, including Iraq and the United States, was too preoccupied battling the two-front war with the Islamic State to notice how the Yezidi women and girls were in dire need of being rescued from their sexual servitude. Although the United Nations recognized the danger ISIS posed for Yezidi women and girls, they failed to act on their premonition. Therefore, it was up to the survivors to bring their suffering to light, ensuring that the international community could no longer ignore all they had endured at the hands of the Islamic State fighters.

Following the escape of many enslaved Yezidis, some of the former sabaya chose to take up arms and to fight back against the Islamic State, showing the world that they could not be broken and defeated by power-hungry militants. The Yezidis who chose to share their stories to the world fought back both metaphorically with their voices and with weapons to finally destroy ISIS once and for all. For instance, women dominated PKK training camps are a mixture of "Kurdish and Yezidi women fighting ISIS" (BBC 2015). The Kurds have been backed by the United States led coalition for on the ground fighting against the militants, but a majority of the troops are men. Women led PKK forces arguably "have been more effective than the better equipped Iraqi and Syrian armies in combating" the Islamic State fighters (BBC 2015). According to a BBC News team embedded with a women specific unit, women are successful because of their dedication to learning "urban warfare and mountain fighting" so they can be on

the offensive regardless of where the fight takes them (BBC 2015). While the unit was originally developed for Kurdish women that wanted to crush the extremists, "hundreds of young Yezidis have joined" following the attack in Sinjar as a way to retaliate for the destructions of their homes, families, and values (BBC 2015). Survivors of the Yezidi genocide used their horrendous experiences as motivation to fight back against the Islamic State, swearing that as long as they are alive, no such sexual violence and torture will occur ever again.

In addition to women fighters, men proved indispensable in establishing smuggling systems throughout northern Iraq and Syria to locate enslaved Yezidis and determine a carefully planned strategy to bring them back to Kurdish dominated regions where they would be safe from the militants' reach. The majority of the smugglers were men as they were free to travel in territories, unlike women who needed a guardian to go outside of the houses. Often, the men who escorted the Yezidis out of captivity "pretended that [they] were husband and wife" so no one at the checkpoints would become suspicious and stop the 'couple' from leaving the territories (Murad 217). Those who led the smuggling operations, such as Nadia Murad's older brother Hezni, were ordinary citizens who could not bear to watch the horrors inflicted on the Yezidis and do nothing to help (Murad 212). For most of the men "smuggling became [a] full time-time – and unpaid – job" so while planning the smuggling took a great deal of time, it kept them from maintaining work that could support their families (Murad 220). Of course, travelling near ISIS territories and extracting the women and girls was a danger in itself, but was necessary in order for their wives, daughters, friends, and community members to return home safely and begin the healing process from their trauma.

While men played an important role in the smuggling networks, women survivors arguably can enact more change within the international community through their harrowing

stories and testimonies of the Islamic State's atrocities. Within the last couple of years, the world has witnessed a shift in the demeanor of Yezidis who were held captive as sabaya by Islamic State fighters. In the past, the virginity taboo silenced a large majority of young Yezidi women from opening up about their experiences. For instance, when she first reunited with her family, Nadia Murad never mentioned rape and "refused to admit that it had happened" (Murad 261). Due to the taunts of her captives and fear that she would forever be a social outcast in Yezidi society for "no longer [being] a virgin," Nadia omitted large amounts of the abuse to those who were willing to listen to her story (Murad 261). For many girls and women who experienced rape and sexual assault during their time in ISIS captivity, it was something they believed they could not talk about due to societal pressures. The importance of virginity played a crucial role in how the former sabaya could become back integrated into Yezidism. A few girls opted for "'re-virginization' surgery, repairing the hymen in the hope of erasing the memory and the stigma of the rape" while doctors promised the procedure would turn the girls back to normal" (Murad 296). Of course, this 'procedure' could not erase the suffering or shame they endured while in Islamic State territories.

Nadia Murad's journey to advocacy against gender-based violence proved the dire need for Yezidi survivors to rise as activists and ensure the protection of others in the future. According to her memoir, Murad did not plan to become involved with policy work and advocacy until she "was approached by activists" who were "collecting evidence of the genocide" to present to the world and its leaders (Murad 296). Frustrated that so few were willing to help and wanting to do something meaningful with her life, she decided to help bring awareness to the plight of the Yezidis by traveling to the United Kingdom to tell officials her

story (Murad 297). Unsurprisingly, Murad noted "how much that one trip… [changed her] life" setting her on a path of advocacy (Murad 297).

Within a year, Murad's advocacy soared to the attention of the international community, where she was recognized as a primary source attesting to the crimes against humanity committed by the Islamic State. She was first identified as a notable Yezidi survivor "in November 2015, a year and three months after ISIS came to Kocho" (Murad 299). Her appearance took place in Switzerland where she "spoke to a United Nations forum on minority issues" which happened to be "the first time [she] would tell [her] story in front of a large audience" (Murad 299). Despite her reservations about recounting the rape to an international body, Murad decided as "only one of hundreds of thousands of Yezidi victims" she could not withhold such crucial information, despite how challenging it may have been (Murad 299). During her speech, Murad "wanted to talk about everything" she experienced since "there was so much the world need to hear about what was happening to Yezidis" while the rest of the world continued on with their own lives as if it did not happen at all (Murad 299). Sharing her sexual assault is such an important breakthrough as it defied the stigma attached to sexual abuse and the virginity taboo within Yezidi society. By telling the audience of the countless rapes, Murad acknowledged the brutal tactic, speaking on behalf of the women and girls who were still too terrified and traumatized to talk about the sexual abuse.

Working together with transnational activists, Murad launched her own international foundation dedicated to supporting survivors of sexual violence. The foundation called "Nadia's Initiative" began in 2018 after she "earned the trust and recognition of government leaders, policy makers, activists, and advocates throughout the world" (Nadia's Initiative 2020). While the organization has a large number of connections and partnerships at its disposal, it "strongly

believes in making survivors, particularly women and children, an active voice in the peace-building process" and the organization is therefore built on a coalition of survivors (Nadia's Initiative 2020). In addition to partnering with survivors, Nadia's Initiative's team primarily consists of women activists and human rights lawyers, forming a women-led NGO and foundation that promotes the empowerment and rise of women everywhere.

Nadia's Initiative emphasizes the importance of rehabilitation and support of survivors of sexual violence and genocide. By "rebuilding communities in crisis" the organization "works to restore basic resources, services, and security in fragile regions" and decrease the number of displaced and stateless individuals who lost their homes during the Islamic State attacks (Nadia's Initiative 2020). In a commendable effort the team is currently "focusing [their] efforts on rebuilding Nadia Murad's ancestral homeland in Sinjar" which was a Yezidi dominated region and was mercilessly destroyed during the peak of ISIS (Nadia's Initiative 2020). In addition to reconstructing the buildings and homes in Sinjar, Nadia's Initiative is working to construct "an entirely new comprehensive Sinjar Hospital to cover all medical needs in the region," "building and staffing primary, intermediate, and secondary schools…to enable access to education for child returnees," and "providing comprehensive rehabilitation to farms and farming households" (Nadia's Initiative 2020). Therefore, Nadia's Initiative is already making great strides towards sustainable development and rehabilitation in Yezidi dominated regions, which the Iraqi government and international community failed to do in the past.

While Nadia's Initiative's comprehensive rehabilitation plan is well underway, perhaps the greatest stride in supporting the marginalized ethnic minority is their pursuit of justice and accountability for the survivors of sexual violence and loss of loved ones. In order "to end the use of women and girls as weapons of war and to ensure survivors' voices are heard," Nadia's

Initiative has collaborated with prominent international human rights lawyers such as Amal Clooney to put pressure on international agencies and bodies like the UN Security Council to push for judicial action to hold ISIS militants accountable for crimes committed against Yezidis. Nadia's Initiative demands the militants must be held accountable for their participation of "genocide, human trafficking, mass executions, sexual enslavement, recruitment of child soldiers, and forced displacement" (Nadia's Initiative 2020). Additionally, the team focuses on the safety of vulnerable individuals such as "Yezidi widows and their minor children" who could be susceptible to increased risks of sexual exploitation or abuse in refugee or resettlement camps (Nadia's Initiative 2020). Networks including governments and NGOs partner with the foundation to relocate these individuals and provide them with a safer alternative which decreases their risk of experiencing violence during the justice and rehabilitation process (Nadia's Initiative 2020).

Centered on the wellbeing of survivors, Nadia's Initiative seeks to empower women and young girls around the world, providing them with tools and support to become successful individuals. In addition to increasing the standard of living of Yezidis returning to Sinjar, Nadia's Initiative "works to provide reparations to survivors globally…[and] advocate for global gender equality through the promotion of legislation protecting and promoting women's rights (Nadia's Initiative 2020). According to the 2018-2020 Projects Overview the organization has supported "130,000 beneficiaries in 2020" through various projects including women empowerment (Nadia's Initiative 2020). For instance, in 2020 the organization launched a project aimed at "household support to female survivors and their families" arranging the dispersement of "household goods, cash, and psychological support" for "780 survivors" (Nadia's Initiative 2020).

Nadia Murad was awarded the 2018 Nobel Peace Prize together with Dr. Denis Mukwege of the Democratic Republic of Congo, whose activism will be discussed in the next chapter, "for their efforts to end the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war and armed conflict" (The Nobel Prize 2021). The Nobel Peace Prize committee recognized Murad's work developing the Murad Code, "global code of conduct for documenting conflict-related sexual violence…aimed at building and supporting a community of better practice for, with and concerning survivors of conflict-related sexual violence" (Murad Code 2020). While the Murad Code was already promoted by other activists working to combat conflict-related sexual violence, such as the Darfur Women Action Group, Murad's recognition by the Nobel Peace Prize committee gave her a larger platform to promote justice and advocate for prevention and support against sexual violence.

The Murad Code relies on the participation of survivors and their families to report isolated or repeated behaviors of sexual violence, therefore increasing the role women and children play in advocating for governmental and international accountability. According to the official site, the Murad Code focuses on "a survivor's charter" coupled with "core standards" to promote "safe, effective and survivor-centric investigation and documentation of conflict-related sexual violence" (Murad Code 2020). Due to increased pressure and threats against survivors, many are deterred from reporting their experiences to officials, fearing they will be retaliated against or nothing will be done to bring the perpetrators to justice. Since this a legitimate concern, the Murad Code provides an outlet for a safe and unbiased resource to report the sexual abuse without retaliation or facing scrutiny from their loved ones or community members. The drafted code is designed to grant survivors "dignity, privacy, health, safety, justice, remedies, and development" so they feel comfortable enough to recount their experiences and know that

someone is fighting on behalf of them (Murad Code 2020). The Murad Code states it strives "to enhance the effectiveness of such documentation efforts, thus improving the chances of better outcomes for survivors" such as achieving justice or retributions for their suffering (Murad Code 2020). Incorporating survivors' participation and testimonies into charting incidents of sexual violence and abuse provides a safe alternative for women and girls to report their experiences and rely on others to seek justice on their behalf.

In addition to Nadia Murad's presence in the international community, former sabaya such as Layla Taalo emerged as powerful witnesses to the atrocities committed by the Islamic State against the Yezidi population. During the Islamic State's invasion of Yezidi dominated regions in 2014, Layla Taalo was kidnapped and sold into sexual slavery as a sabiyya while her husband and brothers were taken hostage and never seen again (Layla Taalo Organization). Taalo spent three years in ISIS captivity being "sold as a slave, abused and tortured" (Layla Taalo Organization). Throughout her enslavement and captivity, Layla "managed to keep her two children with her and eventually escaped" (Layla Taalo Organization). Her commitment and dedication to keeping her children alongside her is commendable as the Islamic State attacked family units and attempted to separate mothers from their children when they reached a certain age and were seen fit for sexual acts.

Like Nadia Murad, Layla Taalo quickly rose as an essential voice condemning the genocide and sexual violence against innocent Yezidis. After escaping the wrath and cruelty of the Islamic State "Layla decided to take to the international stage and use her voice to stop violence against Kurdish Yezidi people" (Layla Taalo Organization). Taalo described her experiences in her memoir, *Layla and the Nights of Pain*, and spoke at international conferences, advocating on behalf of enslaved Yezidi women and fighting against sexual violence

everywhere. Taalo wrote her memoir together with her brother, “the first time that a Yezidi man has been brave enough to listen to and write down his sister’s story,” thereby breaking the taboo against men discussing sexual violence (Layla Taalo Organization).

Murad, Taalo, and other survivors hope for “one day bringing all the militants to justice…all the guards and slave owners, every man who pulled a trigger and pushed [her] brothers’ bodies into their mass grave” (Murad 142). They want to put the perpetrators “on trial before the entire world like the Nazi leaders after World War II” where they would answer to their crimes against humanity, war crimes, destruction and devastation of women’s’ bodies, and the murder of thousands (Murad 142). Among the top of the list would be the men who paid for her body and raped her without fearing any consequence or remorse for what they were doing to her. Nadia dreamed of bringing the militants to justice because “when [she] was with ISIS, [she] felt powerless” to defend her body and to usher the strength to fight against those who killed her family, friends, or neighbors (Murad 303). Acknowledging how lucky she was to escape sexual enslavement, Nadia stated she now doesn’t “take [her] freedom for granted” and does everything in her power to make a difference in the world (Murad 303). By carrying on with her strides towards justice and rehabilitation, Nadia “defies them [ISIS fighters] by not letting their crimes go unanswered” and demanding support for women survivors of sexual violence (Murad 303). Although she suffered unimaginable trauma, abuse, and loss, Nadia knew her place in the world was an advocate on behalf of women and children who were vulnerable to further abuse, threats, and scrutiny for sharing their own experiences of sexual assault.

The Islamic State’s genocide and campaign launched against Yezidis devastated communities and stripped away the innocence of women and young girls who were forced into sexual enslavement. Among the sabaya who were able to escape, Nadia Murad and Layla Taalo

emerged as a champions for survivors by revealing their own experiences in ISIS captivity and loss of their loved ones. Unlike many of the returnees, these brave survivors refused to remain silent, despite social pressures to maintain the virginity taboo. The women prove how indispensable survivors are for ensuring that support for Yezidi people continues so that they can recover from the crimes committed against them. Without their activism, international support would disappear, and displaced Yezidis would not have access to housing, food, jobs and counseling. Without their willingness to share their stories, risking rejection and ostracism, Yezidi religious leaders would not have issued an official statement allowing women who had been forced to convert to Islam to remain Yezidi and calling on all Yezidis to help the former captives to reintegrate into the community George 2015). Without survivors like Nadia Murad, perhaps the world would not know to the fullest extent the plight of the Yezidis and sexual slavery which devastated thousands of innocent women and girls.

The intersectionality of Yezidi women and girls as ethnic and religious minorities added to the risk of being captured and forced into sexual slavery in ISIS controlled territories. Despite the horrific treatment and trauma, the former sabaya endured at the hands of ISIS fighters and their jealous wives, the survivors of the sexual violence and physical abuse defied social stigmas surrounding rape and sexual violence, refusing to remain silent. By refusing essentialists arguments that war is inevitable, survivors such as Murad and Taalo blame gender norms and heighted masculinity sanctioned by the Islamic State fighters. In the hopes of challenging stigmas of rape and forced pregnancies in the Yezidi communities, survivors like Murad and Taalo have partnered with transnational advocacy networks to restructure language and beliefs surrounding conflict-related sexual violence and how survivors are perceived following their trauma. Keck and Sinnick's boomerang pattern are reflected within the work of Yezidi survivors

who share their experiences to foster awareness for the crimes against humanity perpetrated by the Islamic State and emphasize the plight of the Yezidi people. While there has been little judicial action taken by the international community to punish the ISIS fighters in their role of the Yezidi genocide, by placing pressure on institutions and actors, survivors shame the international community for their lack of effort in actively pursuing justice, accountability, and support for the women and children.

## Case Study: The Democratic Republic of Congo

The Democratic Republic of Congo has experienced terribly high rates of conflict-related sexual violence, especially in the eastern provinces that have been consumed by civil war since 1996. International NOGs, humanitarian agencies and academic researchers have drawn important attention to the devastating effects of rape on survivors, who are all too often rejected by their families and communities, leading to a double victimization. At the same time, however, sensationalist accounts of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) as "the worst place in the world to be a woman" (IRIN 2010), and "the rape capital of the world" (Wallstrom 2009) reinforce an image of Congolese women as primarily passive victims and/ or targets of violence (D'Errico et. al. 51-52). It is also important to note that such language denotes sexual violence with the culture and traditions of the DRC's society. Thus, this chapter emphasizes the need to acknowledge and address the traumatic impact of wartime rape and other conflict-related sexual violence, but it also highlights the vital role played by local survivors and activists. Their collaboration with international organizations and transnational advocacy networks needs to be emphasized, recognized, and supported by the international community.

## DRC's History of Instability and Struggle for Power

The Democratic Republic of Congo emerged as an independent state in 1960 following the end of Belgian rule, but independence brought unstable governments as power-hungry individuals vied for control and social conflicts spilled over time into internal fighting. Unrest spread quickly, as Congolese soldiers rebelled against the Belgian military forces who remained in the country and a wave of violence broke out against European settlers and property, while the resource-rich province of Katanga declared its own independence. In response, UN Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld convinced the UN Security Council to authorize a peacekeeping mission to help restore order (Bosco 83-86). The UN peacekeeping mission, which was required to remain neutral, found itself caught between competing political factions – both within Congo and in the Security Council. President Joseph Kasavubu struggled to assert his power over prime minister Patrice Lumumba, and the United States sided with Kasavubu while the Soviet Union backed Lumumba. Although the UN under Hammarskjöld was originally reluctant to get involved in the dispute over Katanga's status, the UN ultimately did send troops in late 1962 to help put down the secessionist movement.

Although UN Secretary General Hammarskjöld pushed for UN intervention in order to prevent a breakdown of order in the newly independent Republic of Congo, the UN mission did not lead to democracy, stability or competent governance. A tradition of political absolutism, which had been established under Leopold II and Belgian rule, continued after independence and extractive economic institutions enriched elites while keeping ordinary Congolese citizens desperately poor. The state that had little authority over much of the country, leaving Congolese citizens vulnerable to fighting by rival groups interested in taking control of extractive industries to enrich themselves off of the mineral rich land (Acemoglu and Robinson 87-91).

However, perhaps one of the most crucial turning points in Congo's history is the seizure of power by army chief Joseph Mobutu in 1965. Eager for power and dominance, Mobutu renamed himself Mobutu Sese Seko meaning an all-powerful warrior, and renamed the country Zaire forcing the river Congo [to] become the river Zaire in 1971. Mobutu remained as president for 32 years, and despite multiple riots, attacks, opposition protests and mutinies by unpaid soldiers, he was able to retain dictatorial power through electoral fraud and force. (BBC DRC Timeline).

While Mobutu succeeded in holding onto power for over 30 years, his government effectively lost control over events in the eastern part of the country following a massive inflow of refugees in the wake of the genocide in neighboring Rwanda in 1994. The region had already been plagued by interethnic conflict and disputes over land and wealth, but these conflicts exploded when some 700,000 Hutu refugees fled into the region in advance of the Tutsi-led Rwandan Patriotic Front, which reasserted control over Rwanda. The Hutus responsible for the genocidal campaign to exterminate Rwandan Tutsis fled across the border to escape retaliation, but they unleashed a brutal campaign of violence that pitted Congolese government soldiers as well as native Congolese, ethnic Tutsi, and ethnic Hutu militias against one another, with all of these forces committing large-scale attacks against the civilian population, including mass rape and systematic sexual violence (Wieringen 2).

Mobutu's grip weakened as he became ill, and the ripple effects of the genocide in Rwanda proved to be his downfall as Tutsi and other anti-Mobutu rebels, backed by Rwanda and Uganda and led by Laurent-Desire Kabila, captured the capital while Mobutu was abroad for medical treatment. Yet again, the country witnessed a change in power and government, as well

as another name change; Kabila renamed the country Democratic Republic of Congo and sought to establish the Kabila family dynasty as a new ruling entity.

Citizens of the Democratic Republic of Congo welcomed a year of peace, but this was quickly squashed in 1998, rebels backed by Rwanda and Uganda rose up against Kabila's leadership while Zimbabwe, Namibia, Sudan, Chad and Angola sent troops to support Kabila (BBC DRC Timeline). Soldiers from at least eight African countries allied themselves to some 25 local armed groups, fighting a proxy war alongside the poorly trained DRC army (Mohamed). An estimated 3.3 million people died, and mass rape was systematically used by all sides (Wieringen 2). In 2001, the "UN Security Council authorized a 5,500-strong UN force to monitor the [1999] ceasefire" but this failed to stop the violence (BBC DRC Timeline). In 2001, President Kabila was shot by a bodyguard, and his son, Joseph Kabila replaced him as the new president (BBC DRC Timeline). At the same time, the UN worried "the warring parties [were] deliberately prolonging conflict to plunder gold, diamonds, timber, and coltan" in the east to make a considerable profit from the land the rebels captured during the initial uprising (BBC DRC Timeline). The UN increased its presence, increasing the size of its peacekeeping mission and working to organize elections, yet violence in the eastern region continued, with another two million conflict-related deaths between 2003-2006 (Wieringen 2).

In fact, in 2006, the ICC issued the first arrest warrant for Thomas Lubanga, a warlord who was accused of forcing children into active combat or work in the dangerous mines (BBC DRC Timeline). This was the first time the ICC issued a warrant for an individual in the DRC who would face trial at The Hague for their crimes against humanity and role in prolonging the suffering of innocent individuals. Despite various attempts to negotiate peace, government forces

and rebel groups were hesitant to back down from their claims of power, land, and wealth from the nutrient-rich country, resulting in decades of instability.

Aside from the civil war, the DRC struggled with corrupted leaders pursuing power and unwilling to step aside for the good of the country. In 2006, the DRC adopted a new constitution and national flag to represent the transitional government created in 2003 which incorporated "leaders of main former rebel groups" who became vice-presidents (BBC DRC Timeline). Despite the initial appearance of a new, inclusive government, Joseph Kabila consolidated power in his own hands by delaying scheduled elections and then fixing the results in order to extend his time in office (Mohamed, *Al Jazeera*). Additionally, Kabila used the same extractive economic institutions that Mobutu had developed to hoard the country's mineral wealth for himself and a narrow elite while the rest of the country experienced continued economic decline and mounting poverty, making the DRC "one of the poorest countries on the African continent…[where] at least 63% of the country's more than 80 million people live on less than two dollars a day," (Mohamed). Poverty-stricken communities could be introduced unsafe forms of labor such as mining in dangerous conditions or living near conflict zones, endangering the fates of women and children in particular.

After years of violence and repression, Kabila finally agreed to leave office after his second term, as constitutionally mandated, but it nonetheless took two more years until the country actually experienced a transition to democratic government. Kabila left his successor with a bleeding and frustrated nation, relying on the next administration to pick up the pieces of unfulfilled human rights and bring the society back together. In 2018, the "main opposition for Democracy and Social Progress" nominated Felix Tshisekedi to become the next president after the 2016 elections were delayed for two years (BBC DRC Timeline). Securing the presidency,

Felix Tshisekedi inherited a war-torn nation which a year prior to the elections, was dubbed as "a mega-crisis the conflict having forced 1.7 million people to flee their homes during the year" and rated as the "worst-affected by conflict displacement in the world" (BBC DRC Timeline). In addition to the fighting, displacement, and gender-based violence occurring throughout the DRC, President Tshisekedi also had to navigate an "Ebola outbreak in the east" and "the presence of more than sixteen thousand UN peacekeepers" within its border which became a controversial matter as they often sexually exploited and abused women and young girls living in displacement camps (DRC Recent Events, *Council on Foreign Relations*).

Kabila's failure to protect Congolese citizens against poverty and threats of violence, including widespread rape and sexual violence, was both a failure of leadership and a reflection of the profound weakness of state institutions. Similarly, the renewed UN peacekeeping mission known as the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission (MONUSCO), established in 2010 with a mandate to protect citizens "under imminent threat of physical violence," also proved unable to stop the violence; indeed, as discussed below, some of the UN peacekeepers sworn to protect Congolese citizens sexually abused and exploited them instead (UN Peacekeeping, MONUSCO). As a result, President Tshisekedi and his administration inherited a nation with ongoing conflicts and an epidemic of sexual violence which has affected hundreds of thousands.

## The Epidemic of Tactical Rape and Sexual Assault in the DRC

Citizens within eastern regions of the DRC have been terrorized for decades, as violence spilled across the border following the 1994 genocide in Rwanda and defenseless civilians have been subjected to sexual violence, rape, mass rapes including gang rape, sexual embarrassment,

torture, and female-genital mutilation. While the DRC's government claims the war is over, the conflict-related sexual violence continues, subjecting more women and girls to rape, torture, and sexual abuse.

South African scholars Innocent A. Daudu and Lukong S. Shulika state "in African cultural settings, acts of sexual violence such as rape are considered a taboo [and] they are unacceptable and forbidden" (Daudu and Shulika 53). In an article for the American Bar Association Anna Stolley Persky describes a "culture of violence" in which perpetrators of violence disrupt the previous society by incorporating methods of violence and sexual abuse (Persky 59). Persky argues "a pathology like this spread in places where you have a demise of the rule of law and a collapse of the education system," allowing for rebel groups and ethnic fighting to create the conditions for a culture of violence where defenseless civilians became targets and "the perpetrators carried out their attacks with impunity" (Persky 59). Without effective government institutions to maintain order and punish violations, the systematic attack on innocent civilians has continued.

Citing research by an international team of global health researchers who systematically reviewed the scientific literature on wartime rape in eastern DRC, Wieringen summarizes their conclusion that the rapes "do not appear to be isolated acts of armed fighters but rather stem from a strategy of war. The planners and perpetrators of this practice eventually aim to change the demography of the region" (Wieringen 3). Armed fighters used rape and other forms of sexual violence to break down communities and dominate populations in what could be characterized as "sexual terrorism" (Brown 27). Within a region that was already poor, wartime rape has intensified "the widespread effects of poverty on the population" by creating fear within women that if they continued their work or traveled to "markets to trade their goods," they would

be vulnerable to rape and sexual assault (Brown 28). As a result, the DRC has witnessed an increase in rates of poverty as women have dissociated themselves from society in order to ensure they will not fall victim to the sexual violence, therefore changing the existing demographics of society.

According to a study conducted by International Alert, an international human rights advocacy organization, based on interviews with victims and some members of the armed forces involved in the conflict, different types of rape were employed that embarrassed, degraded, humiliated, and tortured victims in horrific and traumatizing ways.-Through the study conducted by International Alert, the interviewers determined the most frequent cases of rape included "individual rape, gang rape, rape in which victims are forced to rape each other, and rape involving objects being inserted into the victims' genitals" (Brown 27-28). According to International Alert's study, slightly over twenty percent of those interviewed had experienced individual rape, i.e., rape by one perpetrator (Brown 28). In many instances, women and girls are raped as they were on their way "to the fields to cultivate, to the forest to make charcoal" or going out into public near conflict zones (Brown 28). Thus, by travelling during dangerous times, women and girls were at an increased risk for being subjected to individual rape and other forms of sexual abuse. Members of all armed groups, rebel groups, the police force and opportunistic criminals all took advantage of the prevailing instability and committed acts of sexual violence knowing there would be few consequences (Fitzpatrick 36).

In addition to individual rape, gang rape became a normalized tactic. According to the International Alert study, "gang rape, which 79% of the women interviewed had been subject to, occurs when a woman is raped by at least two men, simultaneously or one after the other" (Brown 28). For instance, one woman testified how her children "were all beaten to death with

wooden clubs in front of her" and then she was raped by four soldiers and told her "they can do whatever they want with to" her now that she was under their control (Human Rights Watch DRC). In another case, the attackers "publicly raped 15 women" and "whipped them until there was not more skin on their buttocks" (Pratt and Werchick 9). By gang raping women and subjecting to horrors, the perpetrators further scar the innocent Congolese citizens, intending to permanently traumatize them so they never forget their experiences. Another woman testified that "there were 11 soldiers, five of them raped [her] and five others raped [her] mother" (Human Rights Watch DRC).

Among the more gruesome and grotesque forms of sexual violence is the forced rape between individuals. In her chapter, Fitzpatrick states "there have been many instances of mass rapes…and forcing victims to have sex with family members" (Fitzpatrick 37). Adding onto this notion, Brown recognizes how "the perpetrators would force family members to have incestuous sexual relations with one another" (Brown 28). Usually, "sons were forced to rape their mothers, fathers their daughters, and sometimes brothers and sisters were forced to commit sexual acts" (Brown 28). Given an ultimatum between death and raping one another, the individuals usually chose the latter to stay together and keep their family members alive. Of course, targeting family units further cripples the society and becomes "direct sexual attack on males" as well since they are forced into degrading and traumatizing sexual acts (Fitzpatrick 38).

Perhaps the most damaging and destructive to the women's bodies was the raping of individuals with objects. One of the most common forms of rape in the DRC is the penetration of females' genitals with foreign objects "such as bananas, rifle barrels, pestles covered in chili pepper, bottles, and sticks" (Brown 28). Most of the time, the objects were either sharp or large enough to cause immense pain to the women and girls. Brown also asserts that gang rape and

rape by objects were paired together as "some victims of gang rape have said that in between rapes, the attackers would 'clean' the woman by inserting the end of a rifle that had been wrapped by a soaked cloth into the woman's vagina" (Brown 28). In one particular instance, the Human Rights Watch interviewed a woman who was raped by "fighters from the Nduma Defense of Congo (NDC) or Mai Mai Sheka" in July 2010 (Human Rights Watch DRC). In her report, the woman testified "when the sixth [man] wanted to rape me, he said he needed to clean me off, he took his jacket and forced it into my genitals…imagine the size of a hand and the jacket that he forced into my genitals and the pain that I endured" (Human Rights Watch DRC). Unfortunately, this brutal tactic is quite common throughout the conflict zones in the east of the DRC, and many women have similar stories where the soldiers justified the insertion of objects to benefit the women and clean them of their wounds.

Aside from the tactics of rape, the soldiers, police forces, and armed groups or rebels often have resorted to pure forms of torture including maiming, disfiguring, and brutally killing innocent women and girls. According to the International Action study "around 70% of rape survivors who partook in the study said they had been tortured during the rape, especially when they attempted to fight back" (Brown 28). Threats of mutilation and disfigurement were often carried out when individuals defied their orders. For instance, during one of the mass rapes in Shalio, DRC in April 2009 a woman managed to escape sexual servitude but did not return unscathed as "her attackers had cut chunks from her breasts and stomach" prompting emergency medical attention (Human Rights Watch DRC). Some women "were beaten, had their genitals mutilated, or burned, or were wounded by machetes" (Brown 28). Occasionally, "chemicals…[were] doused after the rape to burn and scar, to ensure ruination" leaving permanent reminders for all the trauma they endured and disfiguring their faces and bodies

(Fitzpatrick 28). While a percentage of the women escaped from the conflict zones, others were not as fortunate as "attackers killed the women by firing shots into their vaginas" or they died after struggling with the fatal injuries for hours or days (Brown 28). On top of the rape, women and girls were subjected to sexual violence in the form of torture, dismembering parts of their bodies and physically altering their appearance so they would constantly be reminded of their traumatic experiences.

Babies and children also were not spared from the violence as they were main targets for abuse and subjected to what only can be called as torture. Children were forced to watch their mothers raped in front of them as it would most likely traumatize them for their rest of their lives and remind them of how they were helpless to save their loved ones from such horrific treatment. Mothers were also helpless to save their children but were raped in an attempt to spare their sons or daughters from witnessing the same fate or worse. Recounting her story "a 32-year-old woman who was visiting Musenge" stated "when the attackers came to her [the younger sister," they said they were going to suspend the baby on a spear to show that they came to work, not play, when my sister begged them not to, they badly beat the baby boy, taking him by his legs and slamming him into the ground…her baby boy is now paralyzed" (Human Rights Watch DRC). Although the attackers did not make good on their threat, injuring the baby emphasized just how merciless the rebel groups were in their quest to dominate over the region. The prevalence of physical torture of children emphasized the intention of soldiers, police officers, armed groups, and others to show no mercy to anyone who crossed their paths, fully crippling the future generation of the populations.

In addition to children and women, men also faced traumatic abuse at the hands of the attackers, both in terms of physical and mental damage. Women were often "tied up and

brutalized in front of their husbands" who were made to watch as their wives suffered through the violence and rape (Fitzpatrick 28). While women and girls were the main target for rape, men and boys have been forced into or subjected to sexual violence as well. Since "rape itself is infused with gendered power dynamics," sexual violence against men and boys can be an extremely powerful means of humiliating and emasculating the enemy (Brown 27). In 2012, the UN Population Fund disclosed "that there were 15,654 reported cases of sexual violence – a 52 percent increase from 2011, of these, 98 percent were perpetrated against females" (Fitzpatrick 37). According to the UN's figures about 313 of those who reported against the soldiers and armed individuals were males, which is a significantly high proportion compared to other conflicts whereas men and boys are much more reluctant to come forward with their experiences. Strengthening this argument, Fitzpatrick adds "men and boys [will often] suffer in silence because of the shame and stigma associated with this crime" and the fear that they will be regarded as weak and ruined (Fitzpatrick 38). The danger of excluding men and boys from sexual violence analysis diminishes their experiences and only solidifies the toxic gender norms which depict men as the main aggressors and unable to be sexually violated. Additionally, Baaz and Stern emphasize "while women and girls are stigmatized and victimized, men are either silenced or figure in a position of power (as perpetrators or as rejecting 'their' raped woman) and remain in most reporting untouched and unsullied by the victimhood, stigma and shame of sexual violence (Baaz and Stern 2014).

Although conflict related sexual violence is rampant throughout the Democratic Republic of Congo, recent reports of sexual violence perpetrated by peacekeepers in the nation has drastically emphasized the problem the DRC faces regarding the well-being of vulnerable women and girls within its borders. In 2018, PBS Frontline reporters Ramita Navai and Sam

Collyns published a breaking news story uncovering thousands of unreported cases of sexual abuse and exploitation in regions dominated by peacekeepers (Navai and Collyns). In the documentary *UN Sex Abuse Scandal*, the team travelled to the DRC and Central African Republic where the majority of allegations emerged from and to "look for previously unidentified victims and witness how the trauma has changed their lives" (Miller 2018). Navai and her team were shocked and horrified after interviewing "so many and women and children who [said] they were sexually abused or exploited by UN peacekeepers" in the DRC but have yet to see any justice for the crimes against them (Miller 2018). Out of the "2,000 young women and children" who have made allegations against peacekeepers to the UN, "only 53 uniformed peacekeepers and one civilian have been sent to jail" (Miller 2018).

As of January 2021, about 12,500 UN personnel were deployed to the Democratic Republic of Congo and as part of MONUSCO (UN Peacekeeping, MONUSCO). Despite the outcry over abuses by UN peacekeepers have continued. In 2020 alone, the UN reported 20 allegations against civilians, police officers, and military officials at the mission against mainly adults but minors or children as well (Conduct in UN Field Missions, MONUSCO). Although rape is one of the leading causes of abuse at MONUSCO, sexual transaction and exploitative relationships are included among the data provided on the UN Standards of Conduct website (UN Fields Missions, MONUSCO). According to Carolyn Strainic, an employee at the US Mission to the UN General Assembly Fifth Committee, sexual transaction and exploitation are common methods of sexual abuse in the DRC due to the power dynamic over locals who are likely to be "economically destitute and have little protection" by the state and foreign entities

(Strainic 2020).[3] Therefore, when offered money or necessities such as food by peacekeepers in exchange for sex, women and girls living in displaced camps are likely to agree as they are desperate due to their situation and are less educated about the dangers of sexual exploitation.

The lack of effective punishment of wartime rape and sexual abuse creates a culture of impunity, with perpetrators free to engage in further acts of sexual aggression. Given the prevailing stigma against victims of sexual violence, survivors are more likely to be shamed for being assaulted and raped, rejected by their families and excluded from society; as Brown describes, "many [victims] are ostracized by their community, forced to leave their homes and families with an unbearable burden of shame on their backs" (Brown 31). Even though the women and girls are not to blame for the trauma they endured, their families and communities often place the burden of scrutiny onto them, as the women are constant reminders of the chaos and pain the surviving members endured. In one particular case of an "army mass rape in Minova area, November 2012" a woman was gang raped in front of her husband and her children (Human Rights Watch DRC). In her testimony to the Human Rights Watch she stated how her "husband has since abandoned" her because "he saw how they raped" her and could not stand the constant reminder of the violence and violation of his wife (Human Rights Watch DRC). Like other survivors of sexual violence and rape "victims [in the DRC] are often abandoned by their spouse or are unable to be considered for marriage" as they are considered to be tainted after forced into sexual relations with a man who is not their spouse or sanctioned by society (Brown 31). As a result of this virginity taboo and stigma, survivors are often left not only emotionally traumatized but financially devastated. Women and young girls who approached the Frontline crew in the DRC reported how "they had already been ostracized [and] they had nothing to lose"

[3] Carolyn Strainic's interview does not reflect her position at the UN General Assembly Fifth Committee or her employment by the United States Mission. Her reflections are based on her own opinion and not influenced by policies or political platforms.

by speaking to outsiders about their mental and physical conditions (Miller). In addition, those who engaged with the Frontline workers expressed how they "didn't know how to report their cases or where to turn" in terms of assistance and healing mechanisms such as therapy (Miller 2018). Without the support of their community members, loved ones, and friends, women and girls who encountered unbearable suffering at the hands of armed groups, police, and soldiers, the survivors of sexual violence in the DRC were left alone without the necessary tools to effectively start the healing process.

The sexual violence, tactical rape, and torture rampant throughout the Democratic Republic of Congo has proved to disrupt the existing society by targeting women's bodies and leading to their ostracism from society. The DRC has experienced decades of internal fighting, conflicts, and vying for power by various armed groups and forces who attack anyone in their path. This culture of violence continues a vicious cycle of destruction and trauma as women's and girls' bodies become the battleground of the internal fighting by men asserting their dominance over the population as they introduce sexual violence and tactical rape as a weapon of warfare. As a result, thousands of women and girls have been subjected to horrific torture and sexual violence often to the point where their bodies are mutilated. Without solving the root of the fighting and continuing the culture of impunity, the perpetrators of sexual violence are not held accountable for their actions, and continue to degrade, humiliate, and violate innocent Congolese citizens. Although peacekeepers deployed within the country were supposed to protect the innocent men, women, and children from threats and attacks, they only added to the culture of violence and sexual assault. Therefore, the survivors in the DRC had little support to turn to as their communities shunned them and the effort by the international community to

mediate and mitigate the threat instead continued the cycle of sexual violence, contributing to the feeling of hopelessness many of the women and girls experienced following the attacks.

## Failure of National and International Military and Judicial Intervention

Although there were numerous routes taken by the international community to mitigate the violence, torture, and sexual abuse in the DRC, the efforts arguably were not enough to end the conflicts and protect the innocent Congolese people. Given support for various militia groups by neighboring countries, the armed forces of the Democratic Republic of Congo could not bring the violence to an end and even contributed to the systematic sexual abuse of civilians, who remained. Thus, vulnerable to the sexual violence, mass slaughters, and torture from all sides.

Although the leaders of the DRC, such as Joseph Kabila, were aware of the atrocities occurring in the east, the government made little to no attempts towards putting an end to the sexual violence and torture. Because of the shame associated with rape, many victims are reluctant to come forward, especially when the chances are extremely low that perpetrators will actually be convicted. The Congolese legal system is underfunded and corrupt, making it difficult to conduct proper trials and investigations; magistrates and prosecutors are paid very little and "supplement their salaries with corruption in the form of obligatory costs for complainants and bribes from perpetrators" (Wieringen 7-8). International agencies and human rights organizations reported only a limited number of convictions while "the vast majority of perpetrators remain unpunished" (Human Rights Watch, quoted in Wieringen 7). Wieringen concludes that "the persecution of dozens or hundreds out of the tens of thousands of perpetrators roaming free in the DRC is undoubtedly too limited to provide the deterrence-effect that optimists advocate and … In fact, deterrence seems to have been more efficient the other

way around in the DRC: rape victims often receive threats from their armed assailants and decide not to seek legal assistance in fear of retaliation, causing massive underreporting (Wieringen 7). Despite being completely aware of the sexual violence and rape epidemic within the country, government officials have been unable and unwilling to address this epidemic. Instead of supporting survivors, officials have sought to distance themselves from the problem, as reflected in a comment by an official of the DRC government who said, "rape was a women's issue that women needed to deal with on their own" (Fitzpatrick 38). Even though Congolese authorities have carried out some arrests and prosecutions for rape, "the vast majority of perpetrators remain unpunished"; moreover, given "poor security in prisons, and corruption among judicial and prison staff, many of those arrested for rape have escaped from prison and some have returned to threaten the victims who denounced them" (Human Rights Watch DRC).

The United Nations has attempted to extinguish the violence, in eastern DRC for over twenty years, beginning with the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC). MONUC was originally created in February 2000 to oversee a ceasefire agreement among countries of Angola, the DRC, Namibia, Uganda, Rwanda and Zimbabwe, to bring an end to the hostilities within the territory of the DRC. Although MONUC was authorized to act under a Chapter VII mandate which allowed peacekeepers to use force to protect civilians, the number of troops deployed was insufficient to fulfill this mandate; for almost a decade, MONUC operated in the DRC under the resolutions passed by the Security Council but proved unable to stop the fighting or defend innocent civilians. In 2007-2008, for example, MONUC had grown to over 17,000 troops, "the world's most expensive peacekeeping mission" that "also had the most robust Chapter VII mandate of its kind even, including the protection of civilians as the top priority and the permission to use serious military force to

advance that goal" but armed conflict and widespread violence continued, leading to the displacement of 500,000 people in North Kivu (Wieringen 8). In 2009, over 22,000 MONUC troops were deployed to the DRC but "the average of reported rapes increased to forty-two per day, which motivated the UN Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict to call the DRC 'the rape capital of the world' (Wieringen 8).

As fighting and violence intensified, the UN Security replaced MONUC with MONUSCO which was "authorized to use all necessary means to carry out its mandate relating, among other things, to the protection of civilians, humanitarian personnel and human rights defenders under imminent threat of physical violence and to support the government of the DRC in its stabilization and peace consolidation efforts" (UN Peacekeeping MONUSCO). Three years later, the Security Council extended the mandate to include the Intervention Brigade, which "designed to break the persistent cycles of violence" as it "was announced as the first-ever United Nations offensive combat force" (Cammaert 1,2). As one of the largest UN peacekeeping efforts, "the cost of deployment" of MONUSCO and the Intervention Brigade "was estimated at around $100 million" including the deployment of peacekeepers, observers, and humanitarian workers (Cammaert 5). Despite the large deployment and resources contributed to the Intervention Brigade, Cammaert asserts there are still "shortcomings [in the mission] that have led to failures in preventing attacks" from the armed groups (Cammaert 8). In fact, during the initial installation of the Intervention Brigade, UN troops failed to prevent attacks, including an attack on Goma, the capital of North Kivu, which fell to M23 rebels while armed peacekeepers stood by (Cammaert 7-8; Wieringen 9). Given the vast territory affected by the violence, MONUSCO was obliged by the Security Council to cooperate with the Congolese army, despite the fact that members of the Congolese armed forces were found to be guilty of a large share of

local human rights abuses (Amnesty International report, cited by Wieringen 9). According to UN reports registering wartime rapes committed between 2013-2015, almost half of the registered rapes were perpetrated by government forces, of which is consistent with Figure 2 in Chapter 3 and the prevalence of government forces as perpetrators of sexual violence (OHCHR, cited in Wieringen 9). Thus, MONUSCO and the Intervention Brigade are limited in terms to what extent they can actually protect the innocent population from the violence and sexual abuse, *evoking "the image that the UN stabilization mission in the DRC has merely taken sides in a struggle between rapists" (Wieringen 9).*

As noted previously, UN peacekeepers in the DRC have also been accused of sexual violations, with the majority of the cases are perpetrated by military or civilian workers who rape and elicit sex for resources or money from women and children living in the region (UN Conduct). However, even though these incidents were reported to authorities, the UN has failed to deliver justice for the victims. For the most part, the UN Sexual Exploitation and Abuse database describes most cases as pending or indicates that "UN payments suspended," egregiously minimal consequences for violating the standards of conduct sexually abusing vulnerable citizens under their protection (UN Conduct). Because-peacekeeping troops deployed in UN operations "remain under the exclusive jurisdiction of their national government, investigations and subsequent disciplinary action rest with the troop-contributing country," the United Nations lacks independent authority to punish UN forces responsible for sexual exploitation and rape of vulnerable individuals and abused women and girls fail to see any justice as the cycle of vulnerability and sexual violence continues (UN Conduct).

While "Resolution 1820 calls for UN bodies and member states to prevent such violence, supply assistance to victims, remove amnesty for perpetrators, and to build infrastructure to

mitigate and address sexual violence in conflict," it has moved in more recent years to reduce the number of UN peacekeepers, despite the fact that sexual violence continues to be used as a weapon of war (Atuhaire 5). Carolyn Strainic predicts since the onslaught of the COVID-19 pandemic, conflict-associated sexual violence most likely skyrocketed, yet the GA 5th committee suspects victims are hesitant to report as they are quarantined to their community and may fear repercussions for coming forward (Strainic 2020). Therefore, little action is taken to gain justice and many of the cases are left pending without the cooperation of host states.

Much like the ineffective action taken by the United Nations, the United States has been particularly vocal in its condemnation of the conflicts unfurling in the DRC, but its actions are arguably half-hearted with little commitment to support victims of attacks and survivors of sexual violence. Kerry F. Crawford who has documented increasing recognition of conflict-related sexual violence as a security concern on the agendas of powerful states and the United Nations Security Council, notes that in the late 1990s "the US government began to acknowledge and document sexual violence in the DRC" as the violence and number of conflicts throughout the east increased (Crawford 63). The consistency of "speaking about sexual violence in the language of security" for national or international interests aligns with the United States' justification for the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, citing the oppression and gender-based violence as a reason to intervene (Crawford 64). Crawford states "the weapon of war frame for sexual violence in the DRC emerged outside the United States, but it was quickly adopted by embedded advocates in Congress and the State Department" (Crawford 65). Of course, this reaction in Congress would not have been possible if activists and NGOs had not pushed their representatives into caring about the innocent women and girls in Darfur (Crawford 65). Skeptics of the United States' intentions in terms of policies and their involvement within the international

community worried it would become another case of power politics with activists "appealing to states' interests in the Great Lakes region" above all else (Crawford 63). Thus, the individuals and activists became wary of America's response to the conflict in the DRC, believing policymakers were more worried about their stakes in the region rather than innocents being subjected to horrific acts of sexual violence and physical abuse.

Crawford suggests the United States was well informed about the ongoing sexual violence in the DRC from the early 1990s but failed to address concerns of the women and girls' wellbeing until later. Crawford analyzes State Department country reports on human rights and points to a growing recognition of conflict-related sexual violence in the DRC. While "the country report cites isolated incidents of rape, sexual abuse, and violence against women beginning in 1990… [the term] sexual violence did not appear in the country report on the DRC until 2002," approximately eight years after the conflict began (Crawford 67, 70). It must be noted that "before 2003 the US government did not make public political references to wartime sexual violence in the DRC outside the context of the country report" (Crawford 70). During this time, the United States considered itself to be a fierce advocate for those subjected to oppression and sexual violence but did not openly condemn the acts until nine years from the start of the unrest and instability. Crawford argues this shift in America's rhetoric "correlates positively with the number of documents and speeches referencing and condemning wartime sexual violence in the DRC, but only after 2003" (Crawford 70). The date is important to note as this was also the beginning of America's crusade against Saddam Hussein's oppressive regime and supposed desire to free women from the Taliban's hold. Even though the United States had enough knowledge about the situation in the DRC to publicly condemn conflict-related sexual violence

and press for preventive action, the country held off for a significant number of years, waiting for the right opportunity to maximize the country's political interests in the region.

Despite America's insistence on caring about the wellbeing of women and children in other nations, its delayed actions, rhetoric, and solutions suggests the victims of sexual violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo were not an ultimate priority for the superpower. Since World War II, the United States has prided itself as being a leader in human rights and condemning unjust treatment of innocent civilians and corrupt governments. However, America effectively 'dropped the ball' regarding taking action to protect women and girls in the DRC. Although the State Department tracked the civil war in the DRC, "US government documents and speeches did not include discussion of rape or other forms of sexual violence in the DRC until a decade later" (Crawford 73). By then, thousands of women and girls were already subjected to sexual violence, mass rapes, and physical abuse. In one of the first set of initiatives, House Resolution 239 of 2003 "applied the weapon of war frame to the situation in the DRC for the first time in US congressional deliberations" (Crawford 73). Around the same time, House Resolution 4818 "called for $5 million in programmatic funding for the DRC, Uganda, Burundi, and Liberia to address sexual and gender-based violence" (Crawford 73). However, the $5 million in aid to the DRC is much too little to effectively address the systematic sexual violence and widespread rape, especially given the judicial corruption within the magistrates and prevalence of the culture of impunity.

Occupied with the start of two occupations in Iraq and Afghanistan, the United States was unwilling to directly intervene and put an end to the sexual violence in the DRC. Crawford stated how "US officials have expressed an unwillingness to launch any major US military engagement for humanitarian intervention in the Great Lakes region, preferring instead to

support UN-led efforts to stabilize the region" (Crawford 69). The hypocrisy of the situation must be noted as the United States justified its intervention in Iraq and Afghanistan partly on the basis of freeing women and girls from oppressive regimes yet was unwilling to take the same action in the DRC. It can be inferred that the United States did not have sufficient economic or strategic interests in the DRC to warrant intervention of any sort. Whatever the reason may be, the United States thus operated through the United Nations utilizing its position in the UN Security Council to push for peacekeeping resolutions, even though UN intervention proved unable to curb widespread sexual violence and may even have been counterproductive insofar as the Congolese army with which the UN mission cooperates is just as guilty of employing wartime rape as the militias it fights against, as discussed above (Crawford 75; Wieringen 9).

In addition to the UN route, the United States explored economic options forcing the DRC to take action or suffer economically. In one instance, the United States enacted "Executive Order 13413 which froze assets of several key perpetrators in the DRC…citing the horrific scale of sexual violence as part of the rationale for the asset freeze" (Crawford 75-76). Sanctions and freezing of assets are a controversial tactic in the area of international relations. While economic sanctions and freezing may be effective in urging the cooperation of foreign entities or to adopt different and less harmful practices, they also have the potential of creating increased hardships on vulnerable populations. Brown reiterates the economic standing of the DRC by stating how "the widespread effects of poverty on the population have created a culture of desperation" (Brown 28). It is important to note that there is not enough sufficient evidence in the DRC which proves that such sanctions are effective in dissuading perpetrators from sexually abusing women and children and ending the cycle of violence within the eastern provinces.

In addition to the lack of effective action by the United States to halt the surging cases of sexual violence in the DRC, the African Union has been criticized for its lack of initiatives and efforts to support victims of abuse and rape. According to South African scholars Chinedu Thomas Ekwealor and Khondlo Mtshali, the African Union must bear part of the responsibility for its acknowledgment of the DRC conflict and widespread sexual violence but reluctance to intervene. Under the AU Protocol, the institution is supposed to be concerned with "the promotion of peace, security, and stability of Africa" (Ekwealor and Mtshali 30). Therefore, knowing about the continuous conflict but failing to act as a mediator supporting peace would violate the terms of the Protocol. Evidence suggests the AU knew of "the role of neighboring countries such as Rwanda and Uganda in the DRC conflict" and how "both countries continued to support the M23 rebels" who are one of the largest perpetrators of sexual violence (Ekwealor and Mtshali 31). The two countries "were accused of providing the M23 rebels with weapons, ammunition, intelligence and political advice, as well as deploying army troops to fight alongside" the rebels (Ekwealor and Mtshali 31). Despite the clear evidence of ties and interference, "the AU did not sanction either of the member nations" although the organization has the authority to take such actions (Ekwealor and Mtshali 31). Therefore, the African Union did not use the fullest extent of its power to sanction perpetrators of violence, rape, and torture.

National and international efforts to end the conflict-related sexual violence and punish perpetrators of these crimes have been woefully inadequate. Although the United States and the United Nations attempted to intervene and mitigate the amount of violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo, their efforts have not been aggressive enough to put an end to armed conflict. Even though MONUSCO and the Intervention Brigade are innovative solutions and redefine modern day peacekeeping missions, UN peacekeepers have not guaranteed the safety of

civilians living within conflict zones. Those who live near the peacekeepers are further vulnerable to sexual exploitation and abuse from peacekeepers looking to take advantage of displaced women and children, thereby exerting their power and dominance over the Congolese citizens. The United States and the African Union have condemned wartime rape in the DRC but have not committed sufficient resources or forces to actually curb the epidemic of sexual violence or to help the survivors of such violence in any significant way. Despite numerous reports from NGOs, advocacy groups, and first responders, the international community failed to protect vulnerable women and girls from future attacks and mass rapes, either acting a decade too late or not garnering enough resources to support victims of sexual violence.

## Advocacy and Activism: Inspiring Silent Survivors to Join Forces

Given that the Congolese government and international actors have proven unwilling or unable to protect current and potential survivors of wartime rape and sexual violence, it is important look towards survivors, local advocates, and allies to halt the endemic of sexual violence in the region. Therefore, in order to seek justice, accountability, and support for a crime they had no control over, survivors and their local advocates must take the lead. In order to ensure that survivors obtain the justice they undoubtedly deserve, local allies and advocates have been working with transnational advocacy networks to create a platform for the traumatized individuals to share their stories without facing repercussions or threats for coming forward. Additionally, foundations, local NGOs, and medical personnel have been teaming up with survivors providing medical care and services, hoping to heal their physical and psychological scars at the same time. As primary sources witnessing the trauma and damage of the aftermath of

sexual violence and torture, the activists and medical personnel urge the survivors to report the crimes, becoming powerful through the testimonies of observing the war crimes and rampant sexual violence in the DRC.

Among the fiercest of advocates fighting against the systematic use of rape and sexual violence in the DRC is Dr. Denis Mukwege. In 2018, Dr. Denis Mukwege shared the Nobel Peace Prize Laureate with Nadia Murad for their work advocating against gender-based violence, tactical rape, and sexual violence during armed conflicts (Nobel Peace Prize Laureates). Prior to the nomination, Dr. Mukwege was revered as "a world-renowned gynecologist" who became "a world-leading expert on how to treat the wounds of sexual violence" (Nobel Peace Prize Laureates). Aside from providing regular services to Congolese women, Dr. Mukwege treated survivors of sexual assault, eventually becoming a fierce advocate against gender-based violence based on the horrific wounds he witnessed. In 1999, Dr. Mukwege "founded Panzi Hospital to safeguard women's lives and ensure that their children [would] have the chance to thrive" after being treated with adequate medical care" (Panzi Foundation). Although the hospital was created to deliver babies safely, "the first patient who arrived at Panzi Hospital was not a delivering mother but was a rape victim who had been shot in her genitals" (Panzi Foundation). Shortly after the ambulance transported "an eighteen-month-old baby bleeding profusely, she had been raped, leaving her bladder, genitals, and rectum severely injured" (Panzi Foundation). As the number of cases of rape and sexual violence increased, doctors and medical staff had to becomes experts in treating conflict-related gynecological trauma, providing reconstructive surgery so that women and girls could regain control over their bodies (Panzi Foundation). What originally began as a safe haven for expecting mothers transformed into a life-saving institution for women,

girls, and even babies who experienced the brutal reality that is the epidemic of rape within the DRC.

Based on their expertise on sexual violence and rape trauma, Dr. Denis Mukwege and his staff became important witnesses to the atrocities. In 2008, Dr, Mukwege was invited to the "Subcommittee on Human Rights and the Law of the Senate Committee on the Judiciary" which held a hearing on rape as a weapon of war (Crawford 76). Through his graphic testimony to the U.S. Congress, Dr. Mukwege convinced senators that the use of rape as a weapon of war was "at its worst" in the DRC and convinced them of the need to respond, inspiring "US leadership on UN Security Council Resolution 1820 two months later" (Crawford 77). Without the efforts of Dr. Mukwege at the hearing, the US may not have been persuaded to take any action at all.

In addition, Dr. Mukwege denounced the mass rapes of women and girls in the DRC before the United Nations and called for international action to stop the epidemic of sexual violence. Like other prominent advocates before him, Dr. Mukwege sought to shame the institution for its failure to stop the atrocities and continuing the cycle of impunity enjoyed by those responsible for the crimes against humanity. In an interview for the *Journal of International Affairs*, Dr. Mukwege discussed his frustration at the situation stating, "the international community is indifferent, and the government is incapable of bringing perpetrators to justice" especially since "law enforcement does not help to prosecute rapists" (Mukwege 205). Recognizing the impact sexual violence has on the entire population, specifically survivors, Dr. Mukwege expressed how he has been "the direct and sad witness of this brutal reality" through his work at Panzi Hospital and treating women with horrendous wounds across the DRC (Mukwege 206). Instead of keeping his sorrow for his patients and the situation to himself, Dr. Mukwege took the initiative to build awareness for the tactical rape by advocating for justice and

support to the international community. In particular, in the interview Dr. Mukwege highlighted the importance of the International Criminal Court in prosecuting perpetrators of sexual violence and "international crimes committed in the Congo between 1993 and 2003" (Mukwege 207). Since there has still been little progress within the ICC to punish individuals and officials for the atrocities in the DRC, Dr. Mukwege's urgency to include such institutions in the healing and justice process proves there is not enough being done to support the survivors of sexual violence.

As an advocate of peace and justice, Dr. Mukwege encourages the integration of survivors into the peace building process, often speaking for those who have been silenced and creating a platform for bold survivors who want to break down the gender norms and stigma of rape throughout the world. In his speech accepting the Nobel Peace Prize on December 10, 2018, Dr. Mukwege criticized the international community for allowing the massacres and obvious atrocities to continue "for more than two decades in plain sight of the international community" (Nobel Peace Prize Laureates). Throughout his humble speech, Dr. Mukwege portrays the DRC as an egregious stain on the world's human rights record stating how "the people of [his] country desperately need peace" but will not achieve this goal with the combined effort of the international community and witnesses who can testify in the justice process (Nobel Peace Prize Laureates). To further his plea, Dr. Mukwege included an anecdote about one of the survivors he worked with. Sharing Sarah's story, Dr. Mukwege informed the audience how she "was taken to the forest as a hostage, tied to a tree, and was gang-raped every day until she lost consciousness" (Nobel Peace Prize Laureates). Despite the trauma, Dr. Mukwege commented on how "the desire to continue to live sparkled in Sarah's eyes" and has since "committed herself to helping people who have survived a history like hers" (Nobel Peace Prize Laureates). Sarah's resilience

emphasizes the power and strength survivors possess and the need to help others within a similar position.

In 2016, the Dr. Denis Mukwege Foundation was created with the goal of supporting survivors of sexual violence, changing attitudes and stigmas surrounding virginity and rape, and advocating for justice and accountability. While the Panzi Foundation is based in the DRC and focuses on survivors within the country, "the Mukwege Foundation engages with international stakeholders to press for an end to wartime sexual violence globally" (Mukwege Foundation). According to the website, SEMA depends upon "innovative advocacy and activism of these networks [which] builds pressure to change attitudes within their own communities, and to change policies and laws which impact survivors' lives" (Mukwege Foundation). Within the DRC, the Mukwege Foundation established "Le Mouvemente des Survivant es de Viols en Violences Sexuelles" in 2017 which "now has more than 3,000 members from the provinces most affected by conflict-related sexual violence" (Mukwege Foundation). This is quite significant as the stigma of rape and virginity taboos often shame survivors into remaining silent, but the creation of a survivors' movement allows the women and girls to support one another through their shared experiences and trauma. While one side of the Mukwege Foundation focuses on advocacy work such as pressuring institutions to prosecute perpetrators of sexual violence, the collaboration with the Panzi Foundation expands the organization into the realm of medical services such as holistic care and offering services such as "the treatment of severe gynecological injuries, group counseling and other forms of therapy, legal assistance, socio-economic assistance to survivors such as literary training, and organizing training and knowledge exchanges" (Mukwege Foundation). Rather than forcing survivors of sexual violence to fend for themselves, the Mukwege Foundation creates an opportunity for survivors to come together and

support one another while receiving medical and psychological care, allowing the women and girls to start the healing process.

Other NGOs are similarly working towards empowering sexual abuse survivors in the DRC. In particular, Women's Initiatives for Gender Justice offers unique programs bolstering local, national, and international efforts to support survivors of rape and gender-based violence (Women's Initiatives for Gender Justice). The NGO has been working in eastern DRC since 2006 and partners with "local women's rights advocates and organizations to design and implement grassroots programmes advocating for peace, accountability for sexual and gender-based crimes," (Women's Initiatives for Gender Justice). Similar to the Mukwege Foundation, WI includes a multitude of programs including "documenting conflict-related SGBCs for the purpose of supporting and advocating for prosecutions for these crimes before the ICC and domestic courts, and a Transit House Project supporting over 800 SGBV victims/survivors to access medical and psychosocial support" (Women's Initiative for Gender Justice). In addition to programs constructed for survivors, WI also conducts monitoring and seminars such as the "Gender Training Seminar for the ICC Investigation Team for the DRC" in 2005 and hosting "a forum to highlight gender issues for children in conflict situations especially girl soldiers" (Women's Initiative for Gender Justice). Even though Women's Initiative does not have survivors at the head of its foundation, the integrating of women and girls from the DRC strengthens the organization's legitimacy while simultaneously raising awareness and support for women and girls who have been affected by tactical rape and sexual violence.

The American Bar Association has also worked to increase awareness in the United about sexual violence in the DRC and has launched the "Rule of Law Initiative," which it describes as the ABA constructed "a series of programs aimed at creating support services for survivors of

rape…and bringing perpetrators to justice" (Persky 59). One of the main goals of ABA is to help strengthen the rule of law in the DRC "as the most effective way of combating poverty, corruption, and ending disregard for human rights," (Persky 59). Since the justice process relies on primary accounts of atrocities and testimonies from survivors who may be hesitant to come forward fearing retaliation, ABA partners with local judges, lawyers, administrators and legislators, in addition to medical professionals and social service providers (Persky 59). In the span of 2008 to 2011, ABA claims the Rule of Law Initiative "provided legal counseling to 5,818 survivors and initiated more than 5,100 cases against alleged rapists" (Persky 59). From those cases about 424 ended in convictions; though this figure is low, it is nonetheless significant since without the help of a third party, there would most likely be no convictions at all (Persky 59). Thus, this initiative has contributed to tremendous progress in terms of providing a fair and just trial for those charges with crimes against humanity, war crimes, and wartime rape. Although ABA Rule of Law Initiative is located within the United States, the organization's ability to reach survivors in the DRC emphasizes how any NGO can play a role in eradicating sexual violence during armed conflicts and proving support and opportunities to women and girls who have little opportunities to pursue justice otherwise. This phenomenon follows Keck and Sikkink's boomerang model referenced in Chapter 3 as a transnational advocacy network providing services to survivors while simultaneously encouraging actors in the international community to take action against the systematic sexual violence and wartime rape in the eastern provinces.

The situation in the Democratic Republic of Congo has reached unprecedented levels of sexual violence, tactical rape, and physical abuse scarring women and girls' bodies while simultaneously dismantling the society. Without protection and support, women and girls would

be left on their own, marginalized from society for experiencing trauma that was beyond their control. As a result, individuals in solidarity have risen to the occasion becoming a bridge between justice and advocating on behalf of women and girls who are threatened and attacked by armed groups, soldiers, and police officers within the east. Prominent individuals as such Nobel Peace Prize winner Dr. Denis Mukwege are crusaders for women, girls, and babies who sustained horrific injuries after being raped and abused by perpetrators of violence. Through the Panzi Hospital, Panzi Foundation, and Mukwege Foundation, Dr. Mukwege and his medical staff have brought the epidemic of systematic sexual abuse of the DRC to the forefront of the international community, testifying to the atrocities occurring within the region. Like the work of Darfur Women Action Group, Dr. Mukwege shares stories and experiences of willing survivors to ensure the epidemic never fades from the memory of the international community, thus continuing awareness for the issue. Other efforts include Women's Initiative and American Bar Association providing services and legal aid to survivors who were cast aside by Congolese society and their families who feed into the stigma of rape. The inclusion of local partners and allies ensures survivors they have access to necessary resources, avenues of empowerment, and assurance of a fair and unbiased trial free of retaliation and corruption. The efforts of such organizations are commendable as they are creating a safe space and environment for survivors to begin the healing process and in turn become advocates on their own time.

As in the case of the Yezidis whose reintegration into their communities was championed by top religious authorities, local efforts to reintegrate and rehabilitate survivors into their communities are critical for preventing one of the genocidal functions of wartime rape (Wieringen 11). Language such as deeming the Democratic Republic of Congo as the rape capital of the world feeds into the trap of equating the culture and societal values with barbaric

practices. According to post-colonial feminism, the infamous title promotes the white savior complex of powerful Western nations and the need to speak for victims of sexual violence. However, as Dr. Denis Mukwege urges, survivors in the DRC maintain the capability to advocate on behalf of themselves while fighting stigmas of rape and sexual violence in their communities through the help of transnational advocacy networks and allies. In addition, local social awareness programs have been launched to reduce stigmatization and abandonment after rape and "local mediation between victim and family has in many cases been successful in securing reacceptance … Victims themselves have been extremely positive about community educational programs and marriage counseling that have fostered the acceptance of rape survivors" (Wieringen 11). Through such initiatives aimed at restructuring communities and individuals' perceptions of survivors, transnational advocacy networks work to reshape the role women and girls play in the affected societies.

## Conclusion: Why the International Community Should Recognize Survivors as Agents of Peace

While systematic rape and widespread sexual violence do not occur in all armed conflicts, they occur in many. In the cases studied here, women's and girls' bodies are systematically targeted as a means to tear apart families and community ties and thereby destroy particular ethnic and religious groups. Even though the international community has made strides in acknowledging wartime rape and conflict-related sexual violence as crimes against humanity, governments and international organizations have proven unwilling or unable to effectively intervene to prevent such sexual violence from continuing. In order to help rape survivors and prevent potential rapes, it is imperative to fight against the stigma of rape and loss of virginity and put blame where it belongs- on the perpetrators who are responsible for conflict-related sexual violence. Survivors of sexual violence, along with local and international allies, are best placed to lead the way.

International law defines conflict-related sexual violence and wartime rape as crimes against humanity. Although these crimes have been officially recognized, the case studies in this thesis show that the military and political leaders who authorize or tolerate the systematic or even genocidal use of wartime rape are almost never convicted. Conflict-related sexual violence and wartime rape have the potential to affect the next generation through forced pregnancies, torture of expecting mothers, and brutalizing genitalia to the point of permanent damage. Although this has been recognized as a crime against humanity, existing laws have not been enforced. While the international community may prefer to forget about these crimes, survivors of wartime rape and sexual violence have mobilized to prevent this from happening, insisting

that these crimes must never be tolerated and must always be punished in order to end the cycle of impunity.

In addition, survivors and their local community allies can play a valuable role in challenging virginity taboos and stigmas of rape and sexual violence which ostracize survivors from their families, friends, and community after experiencing such heinous trauma and abuse. Virginity taboos are dangerous for holding women and girls to a different standard than men while punishing them for something that is beyond their control. Instead of punishing the survivors of rape and sexual assault with silence and isolation, societies should hold those accountable for their crimes against the women and girls. The double standard is quite evident as the stigma of sexual violence only blames females for their loss of virginity, while perpetrators enjoy impunity. In all three of the case studies, survivors faced rejection and exclusion after bearing such trauma. As a matriarchy, it is quite surprising Darfuri society would scorn women and girls who were violated, however, external pressures from the rest of Sudan and the virginity taboo creates a huge impact on the treatment of survivors. Yezidi survivors of sexual slavery and Congolese victims of wartime rape also risked abandonment by of their loved ones. This cycle of exclusion and isolation is frankly toxic as it puts the blame onto the survivors and further intensifies their trauma as they are left without the support from their loved ones. Even if survivors are accepted back into their communities, they often lack proper resources to deal with the physical and emotional trauma of their experiences. Women and girls in secluded areas, who tend to be the most abused and least protected, face frequent difficulties accessing medical care; Wieringen reports that “an estimated 50% of victims do not have the ability to reach the available health centers due to financial, physical and psychological constraints” (Wieringen10-11). Young girls who become pregnant with their rapists’ babies become vulnerable to difficult

pregnancies and fistulas as abortion services are rare, if not illegal, and reconstructive surgeries are both expensive and not widely available (Wieringen 11).

Fighting against these stigmas and taboos, networks of survivors and local activists are working to challenge the status quo and reintegrate survivors into their proper place within their communities. The case of Yezidis, in particular, serves as a potential model for moving forward and reintegrating survivors back into society. Prominent religious authorities and community leaders have advocated on behalf of survivors and urged their communities to embrace the girls and women with open arms. Perhaps one of the most important lessons these leaders preach is that the rape and sexual violence is not the survivors' fault. In addition, networks of survivors and community supporters have advocated for compensation for survivors and assistance in rebuilding their lives through land, housing and education as well as increased support for medical and emotional needs.

As perhaps one of the highest institutions for international justice, the ICC holds the power to punish those responsible for crimes against humanity and war crimes; however, it lacks the authority and jurisdiction to make nations comply with the trials. For instance, Sudan has been reluctant to proceed with the hearings of top officials or hand over Omar al-Bashir to ICC custody. Instead, the government has been insistent upon hosting the trials within its own judicial system, which will most likely be corrupt and biased as supporters of al-Bashir are still prominent within the Sudanese government. On the other hand, Iraq has been reluctant to collaborate with the ICC fearing that bringing justice to Yezidi survivors will spark controversy within its Shiite population who will demand justice for themselves. Whatever the reason be, the ICC cannot overstep nations' autonomy and wishes. Thus, the international community experiences limitations in how far it can pursue justice for survivors of sexual violence.

Therefore, without the backing of the host nations, the ICC most likely cannot proceed to pursue justice for survivors of genocide, war crimes, and sexual violence. However, through the work of transnational advocacy networks, as supported by Keck and Sikkink's boomerang pattern, the international community is able to support survivors through validation of their trauma and wounds, advocating for countries and individuals to step up and provide justice and accountability survivors wholly deserve.

Of course, justice is perhaps the greatest step towards normalcy and accountability and is necessary for survivors to start their healing process. However, states and their governments hesitation to comply with the ICC robs survivors of seeing their attackers answer for their crimes. Nadia Murad, Niemat Ahmadi, and Denis Mukwege have been particularly vocal in their quest for justice and accountability for the genocidal use of sexual violence by the Islamic State, in Darfur and in the DRC. These survivors and activists criticize their governments for failing to make justice a priority and dodging any effort to partner with the ICC. Niemat Ahmadi diligently collaborates with the Honorable Fatou Bensoda, the first female ICC Prosecutor, urging the institution to further pressure the Sudanese government and Prime Minister Hamdock into cooperating with the hearings. Advocates such as Dr. Mukwege shame the international community for not doing enough in terms of solidifying justice for survivors of sexual violence, widespread rape, and physical abuse. By taking this type of route, advocates become an extension of existing efforts from sectors within the international community already pushing for justice and completing trials of guilty parties as Keck and Sikkink argue, the work of transnational advocacy networks is indispensable as they have the ability to bring awareness of affected areas and concerns the forefront of the international community, pressuring actors to comply and shame them into taking action. Individual actors, such as survivors, are essential to

the role of transnational advocates through their ability to testify to the crimes against humanity and unrelenting pressuring of international institutions to pursue justice on behalf of victims and survivors of conflict-related sexual violence and wartime rape.

Advocacy work remains crucial in the fight for justice and putting an end to horrific tactics involving sexual violence and rape within armed conflicts and regional instability. As indicated by the case studies, sexual violence and tactical rape affects everyone within the community, especially women and girls who experience the trauma firsthand. Since these tactics aim at destroying the ties within the existing society, this issue must be applied to everyone, not simply just the women. The notion that sexual violence is 'just a women's issue' is simply false. The case studies of the Darfuri genocide, Yezidi genocide, and DRC conflicts clearly emphasize how men and boys can become targeted as well, although it is much less likely to be reported due to social repercussions. Men and boys also have the ability to rise to advocacy and spread awareness throughout the international community. Dr. Denis Mukwege stands as a perfect example of the role men can play in ending sexual violence while supporting women survivors. His testimony provides clear evidence of such atrocities occurring in the region, no matter how much governments try to hide or mitigate the issue. Efforts by Yezidi men like Nadia Murad's brother to smuggle Yezidi women and girls out of ISIS captivity again highlight how important it is for men to stand up for what is morally right.

In their quest for justice, advocates risk their lives through defying social norms and opposing oppressive regimes and powerful groups within their respective nations. Each case study demonstrated the danger advocates and survivors are constantly under for refusing to stay silent while the same atrocities continue to occur to other innocent men, women, and children. Going against the al-Bashir regime, Niemat Ahmadi dared to speak out against the great injustice

with a network of women and men who understood the telltale signs of genocide and the intention of wiping out the Darfuri people. This same administration was known for unlawful arrests, forced disappearances, and torture of opposition groups, yet, despite the risk Niemat Ahmadi and others persisted on. Additionally, Nadia Murad, her brother, and Nasser, the man who smuggled her out of Mosul, endangered themselves by disobeying ISIS authority and claims to Yezidis' bodies. By publicly speaking out about her experiences, Nadia Murad possibly put a target on her own back as ISIS still maintained a significant amount of power when she rose as an internationally recognized advocate building awareness for the plight of the Yezidis in captivity. Nadia Murad's brother and Nasser jeopardized their own lives, and their families' lives by attempting to smuggle women and girls out of Mosul and other ISIS dominated regions. If they were caught, as Nasser's family was, they would have been sentenced to a cruel death by ISIS fighters. On the other hand, woman and girls in the DRC who report the rape automatically put their own safety at risk. In many instances, armed groups told the women that if they told anybody what happened they would come back and kill them brutally. Defying the very real threat, many survivors were bold and brave enough to report the sexual violence to authorities and leaders within the community. Despite threats from armed groups, oppressive regimes, and social pressures to remain silent, the advocates and survivors refused to halt their efforts, ultimately risking their lives for the safety of others.

The international community must recognize the important role that survivors of genocide and sexual violence can play in advocating for justice, accountability, and peace. As reiterated throughout the three case studies, survivors offer powerful evidence against atrocities committed by governments, armed groups, and terrorist organizations. Their experiences are legitimate testimonies to the degree of violence perpetrated against innocent men, women, and

children living in conflict zones. Through sharing the trauma of the sexual violence and physical abuse inflicted upon them, survivors are witnesses to some of the worst crimes against humanity and become a symbol of resilience. While a majority of survivors are reluctant to share their stories with the rest of the world, a select few are defying the social pressure and refuse to remain silent while their friends, family, and community members continue to be persecuted and violated. Survivors such as Niemat Ahmadi, Layla Taalo, and Nadia Murad are just a few examples of individuals who will not bend to the will of oppressive and abusive regimes and instead use their voice for justice and peace. Through their outspokenness, the women testify to the human rights violations including genocide, mass murder, sexual violence, sexual slavery, and disruption of societies as a means to punish innocent civilians. By shedding light on their own trauma, Ahmadi, Taalo, and Murad counter the lies and propaganda put out by regimes and groups that authorize or condone such violence. Therefore, survivors must be further integrated into efforts made by the international community as they experienced the atrocities firsthand and have the ability to become witnesses in the pursuit of justice for victims and survivors.

Survivors of sexual violence and tactical rape should be integrated into the international community as agents of peace, furthering women's leadership across the globe. As Keck and Sikkink argue, transnational advocacy networks are one of the most effective methods of applying pressure on the international community to intervene on behalf of a social issue or human rights violation such as conflict-related sexual violence. The integration of survivors into such advocacy organizations and networks emphasizes their ability to lend a powerful voice to the cause. For instance, Nadia Murad's drive for her relentless pursual for justice and accountability for the trauma she and other innocent Yezidis endured brought her design of the Murad Code and Nadia's Initiative to the forefront of the international community, gaining her

international recognition for her work towards supporting survivors of conflict-related sexual violence. This would not have been possible if Murad had not joined an advocacy organization based in Germany. Although this is just one instance, women's roles in social movements have proven to be influential and effective in garnering the attention of individual governments, institutions, and the international community. Even though she is not directly related to the issue of sexual violence, Malala Yousafzai is another example of a survivor who has defied social stigmas and pressures to remain silent following an assassination attempt by Taliban soldiers. After surviving a gunshot wound to the head, Yousafzai launched her career in advocacy becoming the 2014 Nobel Peace Prize winner. She is now one of the most influential advocates in fighting for girls' education which may be restricted due to war and armed conflict around the world. As women leaders in social movements, Murad and Yousafzai both prove how partnering with transnational advocacy networks and speaking out against human rights violations remain as effective tools in fighting against injustice everywhere.

Through their experiences and resilience, survivors of sexual violence are the bridge between the failures of the international community to end conflicts and bring perpetrators of atrocities to justice, effectively showing the world that survivors are not broken due to the traumatic experiences they encountered. Survivors of sexual violence who are willing to share their stories despite threats of repercussions, targeting of themselves or their loves ones, and further isolation from their communities are bold and brave as they defy the status quo of remaining silent. Their efforts remain crucial for the peacebuilding, especially when collaborating with the international community and institutions such as Darfur Women Action Group's partnership with Amal Clooney's work and the ICC's prosecution of Sudanese war criminals. Yet, despite some prominent examples, such as the Nobel Peace Prize awarded to

Nadia Murad and Dr. Mukwege for their endeavors in supporting survivors of sexual violence, even more needs to be done or incorporate the views and recommendations of such activists. The multi-step healing process focuses on the past, present, and future allowing survivors to move forward together with support of others with similar experiences. Such attention to detail and careful analysis of what survivors need to begin healing may not have been possible if survivors and primary sources themselves had not designed such programs which focused on the health and safety of women and girls who experienced unimaginable pain and trauma.

With the state of current events and the world facing another wave of feminism with the onslaught of the #MeToo movement and women's marches sweeping throughout various nations, it is only fitting that the international community creates space for survivors in the peacebuilding process. Survivors undeniably deserve a voice in the transition to peace, especially after bearing witness to horrific atrocities, being constantly reminded with all that their community members endured, and violated sexually, physically, and emotionally. The international community cannot change attitudes towards rape and end sexual violence during armed conflicts alone. Instead, institutions such as the United Nations are in need of an ally: survivors who can speak the truth of human rights violations and have the power to move audiences with stories of violence and resilience. Incorporation of survivors into the peacebuilding and decision-making process regarding justice, accountability, and support for women and girls is essential as they are the only ones who truly understand the suffering and trauma of being sexual violated and physically abused. Delegates and officials who are leading the distribution of resources and fight to eradicate gender-based violence can sympathize with the survivors, but they do not know what support survivors actually need. Integration of

survivors into the policymaking process reinforces the idea that women and girls are powerful forces to be recognized and are not pawns for squabbles of power.

By collaborating with survivors and their transnational advocacy networks, the international community has the capacity to reach individuals they unintentionally abandoned to power hungry and cruel individuals and armed groups. Thus, the international community would have the potential to reconcile with women and girls who counted on it to save them from rape and abuse but failed to do so. Thus, survivors would symbolize a bridge between affected and grieving communities and populations with the rest of the world, advocating on behalf of the lost and silenced. The current trend with the rise of advocates like Niemat Ahmadi, Layla Taalo, Niemat Ahmadi, Dr. Denis Mukwege and countless others brave enough to step into the spotlight of the international community emphasizes how the globe is in the midst of a new era where survivors become agents of peace and justice rather than marginalized individuals. We must continue to support survivors' efforts and further integration into the international community as advocates for their courage and resilience. Unlike toxic and misogynistic fairy tales, women and girls vulnerable to sexual violence and tactical rape cannot wait for a gallant knight in shining armor to save them. The world has proven to be much too preoccupied with domestic affairs and other conflicts to intervene and put an end to sexual abuse, especially if the public is not aware the atrocities are occurring in the first place. By taking matters into their own hands and advocating for themselves and other vulnerable individuals, survivors could change the future through the establishment programs like the Murad Code, Panzi Hospital and Foundation, and women empowering women centers. Thus, survivors have the opportunity to combat essentialist views that wartime rape and conflict-related violence are inevitable. They also have the ability to show that women and girls in violent, poor areas for not have to rely on foreign efforts to save

them but can act for themselves, challenging the representation of women, especially in formerly colonizes, non-western societies, as weak and helpless. Survivors and their allies have the ability to resist injustice, violence, and impunity by serving as agents of peace.

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