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The Weaponization of Rape: Military Culture, Tactical Warfare, and Legal Justice

War has long been accompanied by the use of sexual violence as a means of terrorizing and punishing enemy populations; in the words of Kelly Dawn Askin, “Almost since the existence of humankind, there has been war, and where there is war, there is always sexual assault” (1). To conceptualize how soldiers are convinced to participate in large-scale campaigns of rape and other forms of sexual violence, understanding the intricacies and dynamics of military culture is of the utmost importance. Scholars have identified masculinity, as defined by the standards and expectations of male-dominated military culture, as one of the most important factors that explains why some militaries engage in rape during wartime. Because military environments encourage displays of strength, aggression, bravery, and violence in their soldiers, these factors become prevalent in the military’s construction of masculinity. This militaristic hypermasculinity is then “characterized by competitiveness, physical strength, heavy alcohol use, violence, risk-taking, and the denigration and sexual objectification of women... In addition, masculinist military culture inscribes gender differences as natural and positions masculinity both in opposition to and superior to femininity” (Weitz 165). According to Rose Weitz, these characteristics are hallmarks of rape-prone social contexts and are heightened during deployment (165). Due to these characterizations being ubiquitous to military culture and the fact that military culture normalizes male dominance and aggression, Allison Reid-Cunningham argues

that soldiers can easily become a product of this environment in which violence and virility are prized above all else (280).

MILITARY-CONSTRUCTED MASCULINITY: What makes a man?

While the militaristic conception of masculinity places major emphasis on stereotypically “masculine” qualities like aggression, strength, and dominance, it is also crucial to note that this notion of masculinity relies heavily on militaristic conceptions of femininity—the hypermasculinity that is ubiquitous to military environments is not only defined by traits traditionally associated with masculinity and strength, but is also defined by its utter *rejection* of femininity and traditionally “feminine” qualities. In short, masculinity is defined equally by what a man should be—masculine and dominant—and what a man should not be—caring, effeminate, submissive, etc.

The way in which femininity is conceptualized (and ultimately demonized) in many military cultures is a key component to this construction of hypermasculinity. Military training, as perceived by civilians, usually conjures images of archetypically cruel drill sergeants barking orders at young men, and, notably, using insulting language to break these young soldiers down in order to build them back up into quintessentially masculine men. One of the key aspects of this insulting language is the frequent comparison of male soldiers to women, most noticeably through the use of feminine nicknames and derogatory language used against women. In her study of rape by military personnel, Duke University Law Professor Madeline Morris quotes journalist Randy Shilts on the particular definition of manhood taught in the military:

The lessons on manhood [in the military]...focus less on creating what the Army wanted than what the Army did not want. This is why calling recruits...sissies, pussies, and girls

had been a time-honored stratagem for drill instructors throughout armed forces. The context was clear: There was not much worse you could call a man. (717)

According to existing literature concerning the use of this vulgar and disempowering language, referring to males as females is a “typical method of ostracization, particularly in basic training...when they [soldiers] perform poorly” (Morris 717). This effectively makes femininity synonymous with failed masculinity.

Thus, the military conception of hypermasculinity as both oppositional and superior to femininity combines with soldiers’ fears of acting feminine and failing to be masculine enough in their militaristic roles to create a sense of potentially toxic masculinity. As described by historian George Mosse in his study of masculine stereotypes in Western culture, the explicit distinction between the sexes “was all-important in the construction of modern masculinity,” which defines itself “against a countertype but also in connection with the differences between sexes” (9). This feminine villainization, along with strong notions of toxic masculinity like violence and aggression, is thus internalized by young men who join the ranks and find themselves inundated with standards of hypermasculinity and anti-femininity—a clear indicator of a rape-conducive environment. When men immersed in a military culture fail to see women as equals, and rather, place women beneath them and demonize factors inherent to femininity, the status of women in the eyes of military participants is disparaged, which may translate to rape propensity, or at least an increased willingness to exercise dominance over women.

This is where the age of combatants is also important to consider—young, impressionable men who join the ranks are likely to absorb these notions of masculinity and find themselves participating in a rape-conducive environment. Participation in the degradation of women—whether it be through wartime rape, engagement with prostitution, or the degradation of female military personnel—is often engrained into military culture and used as a sort of

reward system for soldiers. Militaristic power structures and reliance on hierarchy can make it difficult for young men to refuse to participate in these acts (Morris 712). According to Morris, “Within traditional military culture women are cast largely as the sexual adversary or target, while men are cast largely as promiscuous sexual hunters,” and impressionable soldiers who are unable to extricate themselves from a rape-conducive culture can, and often do, internalize this idea of sexual predation as part of the military’s conception of masculinity (710).

In these soldiers’ eyes, raping women and thus displaying their male dominance and aggression is a manner of proving their masculinity, and acts like raping civilian women or engaging with activities like prostitution can serve as a rite of passage for young soldiers. Reid-Cunningham claims that the act of rape itself can validate the militaristic conception of masculinity, and it functions “as a ritualized validation of a soldier’s male status and identity” (284). This linkage between the assertion of a young combatant’s masculinity and the sexual domination and degradation of women comes about largely as a result of the pressure men feel in a militaristic setting surrounded by other men.

Although efforts in recent decades to incorporate women into military spaces have succeeded in many militaries, women are still not the majority in military environments—even the involvement of a growing percentage of women is not enough to change the fact that militaries are still largely male-dominated spaces. Weitz argues that the typical characteristics of military hypermasculinity, including aggression, competitiveness, and the denigration of women, “are further reinforced by the military’s emphasis on male bonding and by the relative absence of outside monitoring” (165). In this sense, combatants ensconced in a military environment are internalizing and developing these characteristics to not only fortify their own senses of masculinity, but also to bond with fellow soldiers—in other words, soldiers’ individually-

developed and performed masculinities are just as much for each other as they are for themselves.

HIERARCHY AND POWER: Social pressure and age dynamics

In terms of how a combatant group dynamic translates to the widespread use of sexual violence including rape, Reid-Cunningham speaks to the idea of peer pressure from fellow males in a militaristic or combat setting:

Social pressure may function to spur on men's hyper-masculinized acts of sexual violence in an attempt to prove their manhood or to obtain the group's esteem. Analysis on gang rapes provides further corroboration of the role of peer pressure and social norms of masculinity in the etiology of rape. The main purpose of gang rape appears to be proving one's masculinity to the group through the display of sexual violence. (284)

In this context, the age and status of young men participating in a military organization is once again important to consider; the innate hierarchy associated with many military settings can encourage participation in sexual violence. With older, more experienced men at the top of the proverbial ladder, and younger, impressionable men at the bottom who are subject to the orders and norms of their superiors, higher-ups have the ability to enforce strong social and militaristic norms onto younger participants, and they can reinforce or encourage certain behaviors as they see fit (Reid-Cunningham 284). Conversely, this point also speaks to the idea that military organizations can *discourage* certain behaviors as they see fit, which may explain why not all militaries engage in deliberate sexual violence. This system of hierarchy works to ensure that the goals and preferred patterns of violence of commanders are carried out by combatants, presenting an opportunity for those in charge to either encourage or discourage specific behaviors, particularly rape.

By attaching and submitting themselves to older participants (namely men) within the military hierarchy, young soldiers become vulnerable to the precedents and examples set for them by older members. If the higher-ups encourage the sexual objectification of civilian women (e.g., engaging with prostitutes, denigrating and villainizing entire groups/races of “enemy” women, etc.), their subordinates will see this behavior as normal, maybe even encouraged. Reid-Cunningham maintains that the attachment of a male to peers or superiors that encourage these forms of violence, objectification, and abuse is “a predictive factor for males who abuse women sexually, physically, and psychologically” (284). Because most—if not all—of the men involved in a military setting have been exposed to the same violent, anti-feminine construction of hypermasculinity, this contributes heavily to their decision to rape or forcibly dominate civilian women, especially during conflict when tensions are high and aspects of hypermasculinity are heightened (Reid-Cunningham 284).

Peer pressure is a major factor in how young adults and adults within a military culture choose to behave. After all, the decision of a soldier to rape a civilian woman (whether it be by his own accord or as the fulfillment of a command) is just that—a conscious decision. The culture in which military participants are instructed (and ultimately indoctrinated) plays a major role in shaping the views and decision-making abilities of individuals, especially when it comes to views on women; sexual violence committed by combatants can easily become normalized and be labeled as an inevitability when it is committed frequently in an environment that emphasizes female inferiority. Hierarchical peer pressure within the military, constructions of hypermasculinity that emphasize female subordination, and the culture of war that exposes young men to systems of female oppression like prostitution and systematic rape all combine to explain why

military personnel may be so comfortable or willing to perpetrate sexual violence against women during wartime.

**BIOLOGICAL JUSTIFICATIONS:
Boys will be boys?**

The willingness to rape and commit sexual violence has also fallen victim to a narrative of rationalization—wartime rape is too-often seen as an inevitable symptom of war, while male aggression and sexual desires are labeled as primal instincts and uncontrollable parts of the masculinity. Scholars like anthropologist Matthew Gutmann have argued that this notion of aggression as innate to masculinity is harmful, specifically in the context of sexual violence and propensity for rape. When rape-propensity is written off as some innate urge that is unleashed during combat, perpetrators are given an implicit free-pass. Ascribing the qualities of animals to soldiers also effectively removes any means of accountability for those soldiers who choose to commit war crimes like rape and sexual assault against civilians; this view of men as having an innate animality with no control over sexual or violent urges—and to have them awakened and heightened during combat—provides a weak justification for wartime atrocities in which perpetrators hold little responsibility for their actions (Gutmann, 2021).

As previously discussed, Weitz maintains that aspects of military hypermasculinity, including competitiveness, physical strength, violence, and the denigration and objectification of women—all of which are hallmarks of rape-prone social contexts—become even more prevalent during deployment and combat (165). Combat zones fraught with danger and death are obviously stressful to the physical and mental wellbeing of combatants, and, finding themselves in a fragile, overwhelmed state, they may resort to violence as a means of satiating these innate urges that

comprise hypermasculinity—one avenue through which that immediate gratification can be achieved is rape. The “pressure cooker” theory prevalent in wartime rape scholarship “suggests that war rapists are the victims of irresistible biological imperatives and that the chaos of wartime milieu encourages men to vent their urges to terrible effect” (Gottschall 130). This theory is controversial and obviously relies heavily on normalizing and justifying inborn male hypersexuality, but as Jonathan Gottschall notes, typical feminist criticism posed in opposition to the pressure cooker theory has similar flaws. In his words:

The classic feminist orientation is to extend the so-called power hypothesis of rape into the wartime milieu. That is, rape in war, like rape in peace, is identified not as a crime of sexual passion but as a crime motivated by the desire of a man to exert dominance over a woman... However, the feminist theory of wartime rape is also a pressure cooker theory; in this case, however, the pressure that builds is not libidinal in nature but misogynistic. (130)

Pressure cooker theories rely predominantly on the notion that rape perpetrators are subject to irresistible urges that must be sexually (and forcefully) sated. These theories still characterize combatants (and men in general) as bombs of hypermasculinity detonated in combat. The particular feminist explanation outlined above ultimately still endows men this nature of animality and the ability to unleash these urges for power when placed in combat. The idea of a misogynistic pressure cooker driven by gender power dynamics shares the problematic assumption at the crux of the issue: men (particularly male combatants in the context of wartime rape) have no control over themselves nor their urges, and there is little accountability for those who do lose control.

Gutmann criticizes characterizations of male biology as being inherently animalistic and fraught with rape propensity, but he observes that this fundamentally flawed rationalization for wartime rape remains common nonetheless. He notes that in cases of mass rape committed against Bosnian Muslim women during the early 1990s, the “men in that war were said to have a ‘predisposition’ for rape that came from their inborn male sexuality,” a justification relying on this

flawed “pressure cooker” theory of innate animality and uncontrollable urges for sexual gratification through violence (189). He instead maintains that rape as committed by soldiers is an attempt not only to prove virility, but also to prove a soldier’s ability to conquer any and all territory of the deemed opponent. Considering women are largely viewed as property or territory when it comes to not only military masculinity, but also to the demonization of all those associated with the “enemy” in war, women are targeted as enemy territory and punished accordingly. Gutmann asserts that wartime rape is an opportunity for men to control and punish women, which once again relies on military-constructed components crucial to masculinity, including dominance over women and the reinforcement of binary gender distinctions (189).

**RAPE PROPENSITY:
How can soldiers willingly commit violence?**

This nuanced conception of hypermasculinity as constructed by the military, however, cannot possibly be the sole explanation for why wartime rape occurs. Recent scholarship suggests that rape propensity in combat may additionally be determined by factors of socialization, hierarchy, and internal discipline mechanisms, all key components to building combatants who are willing to engage in violence. While scholars would agree that forcing men to overcome their natural aversion to killing is a common practice in the context of molding recruits into successful soldiers, is there a similar, innate aversion to raping within men? Elizabeth Wood would maintain that, yes, in a way, raping and killing fall under a much broader umbrella of permissible—and sometimes encouraged—violence within military hierarchical structures. In her words:

First, recruits must be taught to overcome an initial aversion to killing. To forge combatants who are willing to fight, if not on behalf of the organization in the abstract then in defense of their brothers in arms, organizations must reshape combatant preferences to allow the wielding of violence. Most armed organizations do so initially through the induction of

combatants into the organization through formal institutions such as boot camp and informal ones such as initiation rituals. In many State militaries, the powerful experiences of endless drilling, dehumanization and degradation at the hands of the drill sergeant and then ‘rebirth’ as organization members through initiation rituals mold recruits into combatants whose loyalties to the organization may be experienced as stronger than those to family. (Wood 467)

Wood also distinguishes a second factor that has the potential to sway a combatant’s propensity for violence: the undisputed fact that war can profoundly impact the disposition of a soldier and his willingness to act violently. War can create a sense of moral disengagement for combatants, and desensitization to constant violence can lead to a willingness to engage in such violence. According to Wood, the uncertainty of combat, the constant exposure to—and even the wielding of—horrific violence that desensitizes combatants, and “the displacement of responsibility not only onto the organization but also onto the enemy, who ‘deserve what they get’ (blame attribution), are all powerful wartime processes of moral disengagement that tend to widen the repertoire (possibly including sexual violence), targeting and/or level of violence” (467).

A key component of Wood’s argument concerns the indoctrination of combatants and existence of strong disciplinary institutions to ensure that soldiers’ behavior will align with their commanders’ preferences, namely the commanders’ preferred patterns of violence. Military institutions must then “indoctrinate recruits so strongly that they internalize the commander’s preferred pattern of violence (and perhaps even the commander’s reasons for that choice),” creating ideal combatants who are willing to implement leaders’ choices without question (Wood 468). But not all combatants can measure up to this ideal, and there is certainly an information gap between what is happening on the ground and what the commanders who are delegating orders are able to observe. In these cases, Wood claims, strong institutional discipline is a strategy used to keep soldiers in line with their commanders’ orders. If combatants stray too far from their

commanders' preferences—refusing to commit certain violence according to personal reasons, for example—a commander can lose significant control of the situation at hand. Though the strength of disciplinary institutions varies among militaries, militaries with strong disciplinary mechanisms have a better chance of overcoming this “commander’s dilemma” and ensuring that their commanders’ preferences are carried out by combatants on the ground. Thus, an operation’s success relies on soldiers obeying commands, whether for fear of punishment or out of loyalty to the organization/cause. “Strong disciplinary institutions,” as Wood calls them, are necessary to keep combatants aligned with commanders’ preferences, notably when it comes to preferred patterns of violence (468).

Wood’s ultimate claim when it comes to commander-ordered violence is that there is a clear correlation between the strength of indoctrination, intelligence, and disciplinary mechanisms within an organization and the likelihood of combatants aligning their preferences for violence with those of their commanders. Wood maintains that, so long as these mechanisms are sufficiently strong, “combatants will follow orders despite their own individual preferences. So in both these cases”—successful total indoctrination versus the use of strong disciplinary measures to achieve preferences—“if the leadership chooses to promote rape of civilians, for example, combatants will rape with high frequency against the chosen target, and if the leadership chooses to prohibit rape, combatants will not rape (except in isolated instances). In short, if the organization’s internal institutions are strong, it is possible to conclude that if sexual violence occurs, it is ordered, except for isolated incidents” (468).

**RAPE VARIATION:
Differences in motivation and willingness**

As previously discussed, hypermasculinity, hierarchy, and internal disciplinary measures are all seemingly ubiquitous to a military environment, and it is possible to conclude that the combination of these forces is a driving factor behind heightened rape-propensity during conflict. But this is where the similarities and generalizations largely end when it comes to the cross-examination of various instances of wartime rape and sexual violence. As scholars such as Dara Cohen have noted, there is massive variation in the use of rape by armed combatants, and, consequently, the motivations and justifications for its perpetration vary. Though mass rape during wartime is commonly conflated with military strategy, Cohen points out that there is little evidence to support the claim that rape is always employed as a mode of tactical warfare strategy (20). Widespread rape may not be employed tactically or commanded specifically, and certainly not every case of wartime rape or massive-scale rapes involves a deliberate purpose for sexual violence; Cohen claims that, besides notable exceptions like those of Bosnia and Rwanda, “rape is rarely directed by commanders,” and oftentimes is perpetrated not as explicit strategy, but for various motivations (20). Because of the wide variation across wartime rapes—whether the crime is commanded or not, the number of perpetrators involved, etc.—distinctions must be made about the motivations or degree of premeditation surrounding rape as committed by combatants.

Strategic rapes and opportunistic rapes are distinguished by their motivations. Elisabeth Wood explains the distinction between the two, stating that “strategic rape” is employed as deliberate strategy in order to achieve an organization’s objectives and is sometimes ordered by commanders, while “opportunistic rape” is perpetrated by individuals for personal reasons other than the organization’s objectives” (470). In addition to the traditional, binary categorizations of wartime rape as either strategic or opportunistic, Wood argues for a third category—that of rape as practice. Rape as practice is distinct from rapes committed strategically or opportunistically.

The key difference that separates Wood's "practice" categorization from its counterparts is that it helps explain some of the larger systems at play within military and conflict environments: social hierarchy, hypermasculinity, and loyalty mechanisms. Combatants who rape as practice are neither explicitly nor implicitly ordered to do so, and thus have varying motivations for raping besides personal reasons; most importantly, the actions of these combatants are tolerated by commanders (Wood 471). Not only do these three factors of military environments help to explain the motivations for rape as practice when it occurs, but they also serve to reinforce a lack of accountability for combatants—and their implicated commanders—who rape. By never explicitly ordering rape and turning a blind-eye to their combatants' behavior, commanders have the opportunity to escape culpability for the crimes their combatants commit, seeing as these rapes are arguably of the combatants' own volitions and not ordered as strategy.

Rape as practice also distinguishes itself from opportunistic rape in the sense that it is motivated less by individual reasoning and more by social interactions (Wood 471). Given that the rules that govern social dynamics within military environments typically emphasize group cohesion and loyalty to the organization, in addition to the recurrent themes of hypermasculinity and female subjugation that already exist in a male-dominated environment, social pressure to rape can be quite a significant factor in promoting cohesion. Additionally, consider the fact that a rape that occurs as practice is not subject to internal disciplinary measures to the same degree that, for example, an opportunistic rape would be, making the risks much lower for perpetrators should they be caught. The collective tolerance of rape as practice and the force of social pressure within military units ultimately combine to create a virtually accountability-free way for combatants to punish their enemy while forging stronger bonds with fellow soldiers. Wood argues that while strategic institutionalized rape is generally rare, and opportunistic rape is usually punished or

addressed by the chain of command, the more common (and largely overlooked) pattern of sexual violence perpetration by combatants is a “strategy authorized not by explicit orders but by ‘total war’ or other permissive rhetoric” (471).

**STRATEGIC RAPE:
Bosnia-Herzegovina and the deliberate use of tactical rape**

Though rape as practice may be more prevalent in wartime than ordered rape, conceptualizing rape as a weapon of war, and in some cases as an instrument of genocide, requires an understanding of how rape is strategically employed. While it is rarer for ordered rape to occur as part of intentional military strategy, it does still happen, and examining cases in which rape has functioned as a deliberately-employed method of achieving military objectives is crucial to accurately characterizing rape as a weapon of war, as well as identifying the various motivations for such a command. Conceptualizing rape as a weapon of war also presents the opportunity to hold military and political leaders accountable for their failure to take responsibility for commands to rape, shattering the possibility of the plausible deniability endowed to opportunistic rapes and rapes as practice. In the words of Dorothy Thomas and Regan Ralph:

Rape has long been mischaracterized and dismissed by military and political leaders—in other words, those in a position to stop it—as a private crime, a sexual act, the ignoble conduct of the occasional soldier, or, worse still, it has been accepted precisely because it is so commonplace... In April 1993, Radovan Karadzic, leader of the Bosnian Serbs, denied any knowledge of widespread rape in Serb-controlled Bosnia: “We know of some eighteen cases of rape altogether, but this was not organized but done by psychopaths.” Karadzic dismissed claims of mass rapes as the propaganda of “Muslim mullahs.” (84)

Karadzic’s defense relied heavily on the concept of opportunistic rape, claiming a cluster of one-off instances of psychotic behavior—his excuse for mass rapes ultimately shifted the blame from himself to these so-called “psychopath” soldiers, when in fact, the use of rape by Serb forces was objectively deliberate. Once Bosnia declared its independence from the former Yugoslavia in 1992,

Serb forces intentionally employed rape as a strategy of forcing non-Serb populations in Bosnia into flight, and here, rape clearly functioned as a method of tactical warfare (Snyder et al. 189; Thomas & Ralph 85).

Contextualizing Bosnia's horrific genocide is essential to the conceptualization of rape as a weapon of war as it presents various examples of mass rape committed strategically, all for the broader purposes of ethnic cleansing. The Serbs' military advantage over the newly independent Bosnia, coupled with their desire to drive non-Serbs from the region in order to establish a Greater Serbia, largely targeted Bosnian Muslims, and women especially were left particularly vulnerable (Snyder 189). Serb forces would drive out non-Serb populations "by first shelling towns, then segregating men from women and taking the men to detention centers," leaving women to either "fend for themselves in towns controlled by enemy forces" or be taken to holding centers where they were frequently raped and assaulted (Thomas & Ralph 85). This once again reinforces the gendered aspect of war and civilian targeting and reflects militarized conceptions of masculinity—while men are viewed as individuals with endowed agency who present threats and must be neutralized (whether through execution or forced labor), women are seen as useful kept alive only for the sake of their bodies and the purposes of torturing the enemy, sexual gratification, and punishment. As noted by Thomas and Ralph, "the fact that it is predominantly *men* raping *women* reveals that rape in war, like all rape, reflects a gender-based motivation, namely, the assertion by men of their power over women," and this is true of the atrocities committed by Serb forces against Muslim women (88).

Snyder et al. note that Serbs targeting Muslim women constituted the "vast majority" of perpetrators during the Bosnian conflict (189). Their purported goals of ethnic cleansing were motivated by nationalism and contempt bred for any and all who didn't ethnically identify as Serbs,

so why target women specifically for the purposes of genocide? If women constitute an estimated half of the population an organization is intent on wiping out, why keep them alive for the purposes of rape and torture? This is where it becomes important to understand that rape as a strategy can be committed for much broader purposes; raping can directly contribute to an overarching goal of genocide by taking an avenue of psychological and physical torture rather than simply massacre. Not all rapes happen in the same manners or for the same intended purposes, and victims and perpetrators alike differ in their experiences with wartime rape. Rape as a weapon is more than just a single violent act; it functions in different strategic capacities for different reasons.

**PURITY AND SHAME:
The various functions of strategic rape**

Strategic mass rape does function in war as a means of achieving ethnic cleansing—the Serb use of rape was a tactic clearly intended to drive non-Serbs into flight and subjugate and/or punish “enemy” women. But the other manners in which strategic rape function also have the capacity to physically change the genetic makeup of a specific community or ethnic group, namely through the use of rape to forcibly impregnate women. Thomas and Regan discuss the horrific accounts of Bosnian Muslim women coming forward to share their experiences being raped by Serb forces, with victims recounting how perpetrators’ primary aim was often “making a baby” and intentionally humiliating women (87). Forcibly impregnating a woman through strategic rape creates a cascading effect of fallout in various political, social, and cultural capacities. While forcible impregnation through martial rape serves a clear purpose in furthering genocide and genetic imperialism (surviving rape victims then being forced to either carry an unwanted pregnancy that dilutes their own ethnic identity, or dying either from the physical trauma inflicted

by rape/frequent raping or self-inflicted injury like suicide), it also upholds the conception of strategic rape as serving a distinctly gendered, sex-specific purpose that seeks to torture, intimidate, and punish women and the very structure of their families and communities (Thomas & Ralph 87). This conception once again relies on how masculinity is constructed in military environments, and emphasizes how hypermasculinity is built upon a foundation of willingness to forcibly subjugate women through aggression and violence.

Goals of genetic imperialism, according to Claudia Card, can obviously be partially achieved through martial rape, and this constitutes just one of the many ways in which genocide and sexual violence intersect (7). In Card's words,

There is more than one way to commit genocide. One way is mass murder, killing individual members of a national, political, or cultural group. Another is to destroy a group's identity by decimating cultural and social bonds. Martial rape does both. Many women and girls are killed when rapists are finished with them. If survivors become pregnant or are known to be rape survivors, cultural, political, and national unity may be thrown into chaos. These have been among the apparently intended purposes of the mass rapes of women in Bosnia-Herzegovina, of Rwandan women by Hutu soldiers, [etc.]. (8)

The combination of extermination through murder and forced impregnation was a primary tactic used in pursuit of the Serbs' aims of invasion and ultimate genocide in Bosnia. The nuances of gender relations, however, are significant in how strategic rape can further terrorize a population and forcibly subjugate them. Shame and humiliation are seemingly ubiquitous to instances of rape, and it is evident that inflicting this shame on women is another primary goal of genocidal forces.

Survivors of rape, even those who have not been forcibly impregnated, are still unfairly subject to modern narratives of purity and female victimhood. The Serb perpetrators' rapes accomplished more than just physically and psychologically traumatizing individuals—their rapes carried consequences for the community at large, be it political, national, or cultural. Rape is, according to Thomas and Regan, “a profound offense against individual and community honor,”

and this is true of many surviving rape victims who have been ostracized and even shunned for the violence to which they have been subjected (89). Communities may view victims as being touched and tainted by enemy forces and now inextricably linked to the oppressor, whether or not these victims become pregnant. Women who have been devirginized, assaulted, or impregnated can be labeled “impure” according to various standards of contemporary attitudes towards sex and purity. Snyder et al. assert that rape “as a moral attack against women is especially devastating within southeastern European cultures, where female chastity is central to family and community honor” (190). By destroying the fabric of gender and sex relations within a population through martial rape, perpetrators can thus effect chaos and moral upheaval to terrorize and ultimately destroy the social bonds of a particular population. As noted by Snyder et al.,

In this regard, the mass war rapes can be understood as an element of communication—the symbolic humiliation of the male opponent. By dishonoring a woman’s body, which symbolizes her lineage, a man can symbolically dishonor the whole lineage. On a larger scale within the context of war, the concept of lineage extends to the entire ethnic group or culture. Thus, sexual violence against women became a tool of genocide for destroying the enemy’s honor, lineage, and *nation*. (190)

In the case of Bosnia and other genocides involving mass rape, rape serves a strategic function not only to achieve genetic imperialism through forcible impregnation, but also to foist shame and humiliation onto communities as well as victims, disrupting the unity of a population whose stability is already at great risk.

Shame is not only a mechanism of instigating community upheaval, but also a factor that keeps many female victims quiet about their assaults, and consequently decreases the accountability perpetrators and commanders face. Women who are raped face social consequences for being raped, including the shame and dishonor that accompany being sexually assaulted. In fearing for their reputations, their health, and their community bonds, women who have been raped may not come forward to report their rapes for fear of risking social upheaval, familial dishonor,

and ostracism. Thomas and Regan observe that, “By virtue of being a rape victim, a woman becomes the perceived agent of her community’s shame. In a bizarre twist, she changes from a victim into a guilty party, responsible for bringing dishonor upon her family or community. As a result, women victims, whether for fear of being seen this way, or because they see themselves this way, are extremely reluctant to report rape” (90).

Rape is not only a tool used to effect genocidal goals, but also a mechanism of foisting shame and cultural/social/familial dishonor upon a community on a major scale. The pregnancies that result from rape, whether the baby is kept or not (though many women under Serb domination who were forcibly impregnated were imprisoned until abortion methods would be too late to be effective), can evidently result in major negative impacts for the social and cultural makeup of an entire group, breeding contempt for victims. Pregnancies also fractionalize groups by creating an entirely distinct generation of individuals born from rape and thus associated with the opponent or oppressor, plunging a community further into chaos and ensuring that the impacts of mass rape are felt for generations to come. Strategic commands for mass rape and widespread sexual violence as a part of total war against the Bosnian Muslim population were willingly carried out by combatants in Bosnia-Herzegovina in order to systematically terrorize and eliminate; though scholarship suggests that ordered rape is significantly less common than rape as practice or opportunistic rape in combat, it nonetheless remains an ultimately real and pressing issue. At its core, ordered rape relies on key pillars of hypermasculinity as constructed by the military, including hierarchical dynamics, peer pressure, violence, and a focus on dominating and punishing women. Studying deliberate, ordered mass rape is essential to understanding how social and gender dynamics in military cultures mold combatants into participants who are willing to carry out horrific orders for various reasons, including misogynistic or ethnic motivations.

GENOCIDAL RAPE: Rwanda's genocide and the sexual violence targeting women

During the same decade of the events of Bosnia's genocide and the deliberate use of rape by Serb forces to engender political goals, the African nation of Rwanda faced its own genocide: the deliberate extermination of the minority Tutsi populations by the Hutu majority. During the Hutus' ethnically motivated massacre in 1994, between 800,000 and one million individuals were murdered, and it is estimated that between 250,000 and 500,000 women were raped (UN, Mullins 3). The use of rape by Hutu forces against Tutsi women was orchestrated and overwhelmingly deliberate. In the words of Christopher Mullins, the violence experienced by rape victims in Rwanda "was not simply a 'pressure-cooker' release," but rather, "a core tool of the genocide itself. These events were neither spontaneous nor scattered, but systematic. They served to keep Tutsi populations in terror and served as a constant reminder of the totally debased state which Tutsis now occupied" (21). But how were Hutu soldiers able to commit such atrocities so willingly, so broadly, and with so much passion?

Ethnic tensions, like those in the Bosnian genocide during the same period, were significant motivators in the genocide against Tutsis in Rwanda, but what distinguishes the Hutu forces' willingness to rape from their Serb counterparts is that aspects of their ethnic tensions were inherently *sexualized*. Because the Tutsi population was historically considered a somewhat aristocratic minority, the Hutus, albeit a much larger, dominant population, "were enraged over their lower status and resented the supposed Tutsi beauty and arrogance," and sought retribution. Tutsi women especially were targeted not only because of their ethnicity, but also their sex; the typical narrative cited by Hutu men surrounding Tutsi women entailed Tutsi women being

arrogant “sexual deviants” who would attempt to seduce and steal Hutu men from their respective community (Mullins 6). According to Donatilla Mukamana and Petra Brysiewicz, the genocide relied in part on the mythical stories surrounding Tutsi women, that they were “sexually sweeter than Hutu women” (381). Rapes motivated by these myths and stereotypes were “a form of revenge against those women they would not have had access to in the past and thus it was also an act of revenge toward the entire community” (Mukamana & Brysiewicz 381). This attitude was largely held by Hutu forces, who internalized their hatred of Tutsi women (whether for ethnic reasons or for specifically sexual reasons related to ethnicity) and exacted genocide through not only mass slaughter, but also mass rape.

As in the case of Bosnia, inspiring widespread fear and shame was a prevalent function of strategic rape in Rwanda as well. Mass rape spells out chaos for the social bonds of a community, as was evidenced in the Serbs’ motivations for widespread sexual violence; denigration and identity spoilage, as noted by Mullins, are key motivations to commit genocidal rape, as they build on the strong patriarchal structures already in place in many societies and ensure that raped women are no longer fit for society or marriage (6). The same goes for forced impregnation as a part of the endured rape, as it functions as an even more permanent mark of ostracism and “contamination” by enemy forces—it is also worth noting once again that forced impregnation is an inherently gendered attack that likely reflects vital aspects of military hypermasculinity, including violence against women and the forcible subjugation of women. According to Mullins, rape and forced impregnation serve three major functions:

First, [forced impregnation] provides a long-lasting reminder of the humiliation and derogation of the people as whole...Second, as the children and their mothers are often outcasts from their kin groups because of the assaults themselves, this enhances the social disorganization of villages and cities...Thirdly, in societies where lineage membership is determined via patrilineal parentage, the children in question are members of the father’s and not the mother’s ethnic group. In effect, this can change the symbolic ethnic group

membership of a community and further work towards the elimination of a population....(6)

The inherently gendered attacks on Tutsi women by Hutu forces achieved genocidal motivations by weaponizing shame against a minority community, as well as creating a distinct sect of “mixed” or multiethnic children that would emphasize disunity and ethnic/cultural disintegration within the targeted community, ensuring that shame from rape follows victims and community members for generations after their attacks.

MOTIVES AND COMMANDS: Humiliation, revenge, and legal justice

Terrorizing the Tutsi population through shame did not stop at archetypal instances of rape and forced impregnation, however. Hutu forces were creative in their means of genocidal torture, and shame is a crucial tactic used to keep victims quiet and perpetrators unaccountable. The circumstances of some instances of rape in Rwanda were intended to attack the cultural morals of Tutsi women and inflict irreparable psychological damage onto them; there are countless sickening accounts of women being raped in front of family members, gang-rapes, adult women being raped by children, forced devirginization, and sexual organ mutilation. The deliberate spreading of HIV was also used as a tool to subjugate and inflict terror upon Tutsi women, and the contagious nature of the virus virtually guaranteed that victimized women would remain segregated and “othered” in their communities (Mukamana & Brysiewicz 382). Social isolation is a major consequence of genocidal rape that, should victims survive their attacks (which many did not due to the extreme violence exhibited by Hutu forces), has the ability to easily tear the social and familial fabric of a community.

Desires to humiliate, to exact revenge, and to inflict physical trauma, psychological damage, and even death onto Tutsi women could be considered the major functions of genocidal rape as utilized by Hutu forces in Rwanda. Combatants' willingness to commit mass rape was evidently tied to their notions of ethnic and gendered superiority, the perceived sexual status of Tutsi women, and a desire to not only punish the enemy but also to prove virility and dominance. What distinguishes the Hutus' rapes from those of passion-driven opportunistic rapes and widely practiced, unacknowledged rapes is the fact that many combatants received explicit orders to rape from their commanders; many local leaders and commanders were not turning a blind-eye to their combatants' sexual violence nor were they discouraging it—in fact, many leaders bluntly ordered crusades of rape and sexual torture.

Notions and myths about Tutsi women's sexual appeal and promiscuity were among the many significant factors driving orders for rape. The prosecutions of individuals who sanctioned sexual violence following the genocide at international tribunals reveal not only the Hutus' motivations to rape, but also *how* these orders were given, received, and committed. The former mayor of Taba, Jean-Paul Akayesu, was the first individual convicted by an international court for genocide, as well as for rape as a crime against humanity in 1998, over four years after the violence occurred (ICD). Akayesu's trial presented multiple examples of his orders for rape and sexual violence. In one instance, he told his assembled men to make certain that they slept with certain women whom they humiliated, and in others, he "would demand men under his control commit rape, saying, '[y]ou can never tell me now you do not know what Tutsi women taste like'" (Mullins 13). Akayesu's case was the first in which rape was defined by an international court as an international crime, as well as the first recognition of mass rape as a means of enacting genocide (USHMM).

Instances of commanders ordering rape were not rare in the Rwandan genocide. In addition to Akayesu, other notable leaders and military officials deliberately sanctioned weaponized rape. Scores of women have come forward in the years following the genocide to share their experiences and testify against their rapists, and though their stories have resulted in the prosecution of notable perpetrators, many raped women are still confined to quiet victimhood and lost hope for justice as a result of the shame and humiliation that follows rape. Wartime rape has an undoubtedly massive impact on the lives and communities of victims post-conflict, but strategic rape especially has major negative consequences that live on and continue to destroy individuals, sometimes even entire communities, including forced pregnancy, scores of assaulted women being deemed impure and thus unable to be married or live freely, and sociocultural fractionalization.

DISCUSSION

Rape functions in several distinct strategic capacities, making it a powerful weapon of war and terror. Specifically, when it comes to achieving goals of genocide or ethnic cleansing, rape is a significant tool in effecting the extermination of an ethnic group. As illustrated in the genocides of Bosnia-Herzegovina and Rwanda in the 1990s, strategic rape that is ordered from top-tier authorities and carried out by combatants was utilized as a mode of tactical warfare that inspired widespread terror, dehumanized and humiliated the perceived enemy, and ultimately forcibly changed the genetic makeup of ethnic minority groups. Forced impregnation, the intentional transfer of sexually transmitted diseases, and genital mutilation are all functions of rape that are inherently sexual in nature. Their use in a tactical setting distinguishes these rapes from rapes driven by lust or purportedly uncontrollable sexual urges because, though the crimes

are innately sexual, they are largely motivated by attitudes of dominance and a desire to punish the enemy. These motivations, along with attitudes of competitiveness, violence, and female subordination, combine to create key pillars of military-constructed hypermasculinity.

Militaries themselves are not the issue when it comes to possible avenues of eradicating wartime rape. Rather, the way in which many male-dominated militaries indoctrinate and mold their recruits in order to force their alignment with the organization's preferences and goals is both a dangerous and imminent matter. Wartime rape is an issue of leadership. In training soldiers to harness traits of hypermasculinity like violence and male dominance, militaries instruct and consequently construct loyal combatants who are willing to carry out ordered atrocities, even if those orders are to rape and commit widespread sexual violence. The age and impressionability of combatants, as well as their indoctrinated passion for the organization's cause, combine to create combatants who are loyal to the hierarchical systems at play in military contexts. If strong leaders command soldiers to rape, soldiers will rape. This is an inherently systemic issue that concerns deeply-ingrained patriarchal views and an emphasis on using violence and terror to punish the enemy, factors that appear seemingly ubiquitous to the hypermasculinity prescribed by military environments and hierarchy.

There are vast variations across instances of wartime rape, including strategic rape. Individual and group motivations for raping, willingness to commit ordered rape, and perpetrators and victims alike vary widely—it is worth noting that not all wartime or strategic rape victims are women, nor are all perpetrators male. The inherently gendered nature of war, however, coupled with the patriarchal standards and social dynamics within many societies, has the capacity to normalize or in some ways mandate male-on-female violence. Certain sexual crimes within mass rape, as evidenced in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Rwanda, were inherently

gendered, the most notable being forced pregnancy. Military-constructed hypermasculinity positions itself as opposite and superior to femininity, and this becomes increasingly apparent when civilian women are attacked specifically because of their gender (Weitz 165).

Excuses for wartime rape, though often weak, nonetheless persist as common understandings of why soldiers commit sexual violence. The idea that combatants are unleashed and give in to their violent urges within a 'pressure cooker' environment, as well as the notion that all men have a predisposition for rape born from an innate animality, are not adequate explanations for why wartime rape occurs, nor can these theories justify the actions and conscious decisions of perpetrators. Although rape used as a weapon of war is not as common as its randomly or opportunistically practiced counterparts, it does still exist and present a threat to the safety of all women involved or associated with war. Rape goes beyond an isolated act of humiliation and violence—strategic rape can engender genocide, psychologically damage entire populations, and subjugate targeted groups. Instead of justifying rape as an inevitable side-effect of war and allowing perpetrators to remain unaccountable, prosecuting rape as a crime against humanity and a factor of genocide can set a precedent for justice. Though strategic rapes are often intended to shame victims into silence, those victims who do step forward to share their stories can engender justice not only in the international legal sphere, but also in their personal lives. Until those who command and perpetrate rape are held unequivocally accountable for their crimes, wartime rape may continue to terrorize generations of women and communities whilst still being viewed as an unfixable symptom of war.

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