



Rape as a Weapon of War

1. Introduction

For centuries, rape has been used as a deliberate policy and planned strategy; as a *weapon of war*. Due to its frequent occurrence, and to a culture of impunity, rape is regarded as a normal by-product of African conflicts. War-time rape is often described as inevitable collateral damage or the spoils of war. A study conducted by the American Journal of Public Health in 2011 revealed that 1 152 women are raped in the Democratic Republic of the Congo every day – a rate equal to 48 per hour; which is significantly higher than the previous United Nations estimate of 16 000 per year¹. “The UN has called the country the centre of rape as a weapon of war. Commentators have also described Congo as the worst place on Earth to be a woman”².

Somalia is also considered one of the worst places to be a woman. Its own minister for women’s development and family welfare has called the nation a ‘living hell’ for women and girls³. In Somalia rape is committed *en masse* and perpetrators easily wriggle themselves free from any form of justice.

Rape victims are often too scared to report sexual violence because they fear being blamed for their rape; victims, not perpetrators, are usually rejected and risk being beaten to death by their families and communities. Women who complain also risk their rapist/s taking revenge⁴.

In Darfur in the Sudan, rape has also become a way of life for millions of women; girls as young as four face rape daily. The epidemic proportions of rape have been worsened by government officials who refuse to acknowledge that it occurs, and who threaten to expel relief workers who speak out against gender-based violence⁵. The situation in these places, and elsewhere on our continent, is inhuman and appalling; the purpose of this paper is to consider why rape is so widely used in African armed conflicts and how it is constructed as a weapon of war.

¹Jo Adetunji (2011). Forty-eight women raped every hour in Congo, study finds. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/may/12/48-women-raped-hour-congo>

²*Ibid.*

³Taylor Hom. (2011). ‘Living hell’: Somalia’s hidden rape epidemic. <http://www.worldpolicy.org/blog/2011/10/26/living-hell-somalias-hidden-rape-epidemic>

⁴Catherine Weibel. (2007). Displaced women tell tales of rape and fear in Somalia. <http://www.unhcr.org/4702a5794.html>

⁵Nic Robertson. (2008). Rape as a way of life for Darfur’s women. <http://edition.cnn.com/2008/WORLD/africa/06/19/darfur.rape/>

2. Definition

The Oxford Dictionary describes rape as the act of forcing a women or man to have sexual intercourse against their will⁶. However, war-time rape can include single and multiple instances of rape, gang-rape, forced prostitution, forced impregnation and sexual slavery⁷. Gay McDougal, a UN representative on human rights issues, adds that rape is perpetrated by combatants who wish to destroy their enemies; it is used as a weapon against civilian women who are members of an opposing or enemy group⁸. Women are not only brutally raped, but maimed, and may have foreign objects lodged in the vaginal area, including corn cobs, tree branches and broken glass bottles. Furthermore, African societies are often characterized by a culture of patriarchy, where rape is regarded with great disdain, and victims are often cast aside. Talk of sex, virginity, sexuality and sexual abuse is considered taboo, and in such communities raped women are regarded as being defiled, dirty, damaged, traitors and promiscuous. Rape victims' suffering is thus compounded when they are rejected by family members and communities who are not socially equipped to help them deal with their trauma. Countless women and girls are forced into prostitution and drug smuggling to support themselves financially; professions in which they are likely to be raped again.

3. The primary victims of war-time rape

Claudia Card argues that women are primarily the targets of rape during armed conflicts, due to the broad practice and tolerance of gender-based violence in most societies⁹. Although men and boys may fall prey to rape, women and girls, from infancy to old age, are the more common targets of rape during war and conflict¹⁰. This is particularly the case in patriarchal societies because women are ranked low socially and are often subjected to practices such as childhood marriage, virginity testing, female genital mutilation, polygamy and spousal inheritance. These common cultural practices spread sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV/AIDS, as well as sexually transmitted infections which frequently result in fatality. Rape victims who fall pregnant may choose to have abortions, and in innumerable instances this has resulted in illness, infection, sterilization, scarring or death, due to the use of non-sterile surgical instruments and a lack of medical resources. Rape victims sometimes commit suicide when they are not able to come to terms with the trauma of their rape or consequent pregnancy.

Additionally, the children born from war-time rapes are also victims, in that they are rejected by the families and societies they are born into. They serve as constant reminders of the 'dishonour' brought to their nation and mothers¹¹. These children are at great risk of abandonment, abuse and poverty. Furthermore, children born as a result of war-time rape are encumbered with the

⁶ The Concise Oxford Dictionary (9th Edition).

⁷ Clifford, C. (2008). *Rape as a weapon of war and its long-term effects on victims and society*. <http://ts-si.org/files/BMJCliffordPaper.pdf>

⁸ McDougal, G. (1998). *Contemporary forms of slavery: systematic rape, sexual slavery and slavery-like practices during armed conflict*. Geneva, Switzerland: UN Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities. <http://www.unhcr.ch/Huridocda/Huridoca.nsf/0/3d25270b5fa3ea998025665f0032f220?Opendocument>

⁹ Card, C. (1996). Rape as a weapon of war. *Hypatia*, 11(4), 5-18.

¹⁰ Farwell, N. (2004). War rape: new conceptualizations and responses. *Affilia*, 19, 389-403.

¹¹ Rimmer, S. H. (2006). Orphans or veterans?: Justice for children born of war in East Timor. *Texas International Law Journal*, 42, 323-344.

knowledge of their traumatic conception and their mother's pain. This burden may manifest itself in feelings of hate, guilt or self-loathing, and in acts of violence and a myriad of other psychological issues.

4. Rape as a weapon of war

Firstly, rape is constructed as a weapon by means of the symbolism attached to the bodies of men and women respectively. Jan Pettman says that women are often described as the physical reproducers of a nation, the 'mothers' of a nation; women are regarded as the signifiers of difference¹². They are expected to have children with men of their nationality and to pass their language and tradition to their children, thus preserving their culture and heritage. Rape symbolizes the inability of a particular nation's men to protect their 'motherland', or 'nation'¹³.

Secondly, in patriarchal societies male-centric beliefs regarding procreation, chastity and honour are intrinsic to the functioning of society. These beliefs result in protectionist values which claim that women are the property of men and in need of their protection. As a result, the raping of women signifies the dishonouring, infiltration and defilement of a nation. War-time rape may also be interpreted as the perpetrator or enemy stealing the wealth or property of a particular ethnic group or nation¹⁴. Moreover, war-time rape represents the domestication of one group of men by another. The national or ethnic identity of the perpetrator (rapist) is masculinised when raping the women of another nation or ethnic group; while the national or ethnic identity of the victim is feminized when she/he is raped by their enemy¹⁵.

The following are some of the specific reasons why rape is so widely used:

4.1. Genetic imperialism, ethnic cleansing and genocide

Rape is used with the intention of genetic imperialism and to realign the loyalties of future generations¹⁶. According to Card rape can "undermine national, political and cultural solidarity, changing the next generation's identity, confusing the loyalties of victimized survivors". The 'enemy' uses rape to plant its 'seed' in a particular nation or ethnic group. Once women have been impregnated, the bloodline of that particular nation has been defiled (or cleansed). Future generations are usually rejected and may hence choose to align themselves with the 'enemy'. It can be said that women are thus used as incubators by the 'enemy' to reproduce their male genes¹⁷.

Rape is also used as a tool of genocide. Many women and girls are killed after they have been raped, leading to mass murder. A combination of mass murder and forced impregnation is used to wreak

¹² Pettman, J. (2005). Gender issues. In *"The globalization of world politics: an introduction to international relations"*. New York: Oxford University Press.

¹³ Pettman, J. (1996). *Worlding women: a feminist international politics*. New York: Routledge.

¹⁴ Diken, B. & Lausten, C.B. (2005). Becoming object: rape as a weapon of war. *Body & Society*, 11(1), 111-128.

¹⁵ Farwell (2004).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Sulzman, T. A. (1998). Rape camps as a means of ethnic cleansing: religious, cultural, and ethical responses to rape victims in former Yugoslavia. *Human Rights Quarterly*, 20(2), 348-378.

havoc within a nation or ethnic group. Genocide's main objective is to cripple the social-political processes of a nation by attacking its cultural identity¹⁸. War-time rape and genetic imperialism are very effective ways of achieving this. One of the most obvious examples is the Rwandan genocide, in which the Hutu tribe attempted to exterminate the Tutsi tribe. Hutu men brutally killed Tutsi men to show their ethnic superiority over them, but they also raped and killed countless Tutsi women, cutting out their sexual organs and putting them on sticks placed where everyone could see, as a sign of their masculinity and superiority¹⁹.

4.2. The creation of a brotherhood of perpetrators

The late Colonel Muammar Gaddafi's troops were accused of raping hundreds of women. Gaddafi was under investigation for, amongst numerous crimes against humanity, inciting his troops to use rape as a weapon to instil fear and curb dissent amongst citizens²⁰. He allegedly gave his forces Viagra to enhance their sex drive and thus their ability to rape. In March 2011, Eman al-Obaidi pleaded for help at a Tripoli hotel after being repeatedly raped by Gaddafi loyalists²¹. She showed her bruised and lacerated body to the reporters present, acknowledging that she would most probably be punished for complaining. A waitress at the hotel tried to stab al-Obaidi, calling her a traitor for speaking out against her rapists. State security agents at the hotel attacked the journalists present, to prevent them from releasing the story, and forced the woman into a car.

In this instance it was clear that rape was an effective tool for instilling fear. However, it does more than that. Rape splinters family relationships and alliances, but it also creates a sense of solidarity amongst perpetrators²². Rape is used for a strategic purpose by those in positions of power and it has become a political institution; as is seen in the case of Gaddafi. Those who actually perpetrate the rape may be ignorant as to why they are doing it, but those in command have a particular purpose for using rape. Due to the fact that rape is a violation of the international rules of war, soldiers and other perpetrators may not be given direct instructions to rape civilian women; yet, they may be encouraged to do so by those in command, who may offer them higher ranking positions, financial rewards and protection. There have also been cases in which soldiers have been forced to rape civilian women in order to prove their manhood and their loyalty to their commanders²³. Soldiers who refuse to rape face the threat of being raped by their fellow combatants, or of seeing their family members being raped or killed in front of them.

¹⁸ Nordstrom, C. (1991). Women and war: observations from afield. *Quarterly Report on Women and the Military*, 9.

¹⁹ "Voices from Rwanda: Rape and Mutilation During Genocide". http://clg.portalxm.com/library/keytext.cfm?keytext_id=134

²⁰ 'Libya: Gaddafi investigated over use of rape as weapon'. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13705854>

²¹ Macintyre, D. (2011). Woman accuses Gaddafi's men of rape. <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/africa/woman-accuses-gaddafis-men-of-rape-2254175.html>

²² Farwell (2004).

²³ Clifford (2008).

4.3. Economic development and financial gain

Sarah Meger has found that economic development and globalization are also factors contributing to the increased use of rape as a weapon of war²⁴. The global shift in focus to trade and economic development has resulted in many developing countries lagging behind, particularly African countries. Developed countries demand scarce resources that are found in developing countries, and local entrepreneurs, having become aware of this demand, resort to whatever means are necessary to trade in the international economy. International actors are often so keen on obtaining scarce resources that they are willing to procure them from whichever domestic actors may be able to provide them. This desperation for trade (on the part of both international and domestic actors) has resulted in the emergence of a process called 'shadow globalization' that is characterized by illegal networks and economies which actors can exploit for personal gain. Various national or ethnic groups within developing countries often go to war for the sake of staking their claim to scarce resources, and to secure the power to trade these resources for personal financial gain. Thus it is seen that African countries which are rich in minerals and scarce resources are often plagued by civil war, warlordism, violence and instability; this is also known as the 'resource curse'. Meger believes that there is a distinct relationship between sexual violence and the economic objectives of rebel groups which use violence and force to gain control over, and extract the resources of, various communities; they rape in order to secure financial gains.

5. The international use of rape as a weapon

Africa is not the only place where rape has been used as a weapon. "From the systematic rape of women in Bosnia, to an estimated 200,000 women raped during the battle for Bangladeshi independence in 1971, to Japanese rapes during the 1937 occupation of Nanking - the past century offers too many examples"²⁵. In the Bosnian war (1992-1995), rape was used for a kind of ethnic cleansing: the majority of the women who were raped were Muslim and Croatian, and they were impregnated in order to give birth to 'Serbian' babies. Rape camps were set up in which women were detained and repeatedly raped until it could be confirmed that they were pregnant. Once pregnant, these women were watched carefully to prevent them from aborting their 'Serbian' babies. Serbian soldiers would rape women in the streets and in front of their families, to represent the disgrace and humiliation of their nation. These rapes were extremely brutal and women were often impaled with broken glass bottles and guns.

The same approach was used by state-backed Pakistani forces during the fight for Bangladesh's independence in 1971; troops impregnated women with 'Punjabi' babies in order to weaken the cultural integrity of opposing groups. Another example is that of the Kosovo War (1996-1999), during which rape was used to extort money from Albanian families, as well as being a means of ethnic cleansing. In some countries, such as Colombia, rape is used to instil fear in various towns and villages, giving perpetrators control over economic resources. During the period from 1997 to 2005, when paramilitary groups tried to expand their control throughout the country, hundreds of

²⁴ Meger, S. (2011). Rape in contemporary warfare: the role of globalization in wartime sexual violence. *African Conflict & Peacebuilding Review*, 1(1), 100-132.

²⁵ Smith-Spark, L. "How did rape become a weapon of war". <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/4078677.stm>

women became victims of rape, sexual torture and mutilation²⁶. The stories of thousands of other women who endured sexual violence during Colombia's 40 year conflict remain untold as a result of their fear of right-wing paramilitaries and leftist guerrilla groups.

During both World Wars, women were seen as 'comfort women', whom soldiers were free to 'use' for sexual pleasure while they were away from their wives and families. Nazi soldiers, for example, used rape on a massive scale and branded women with the words 'whores for Hitler's troops'²⁷. More recently, rape has been used as a weapon in Burma. When soldiers from the Burmese Army came into conflict with the Kachin Liberation Army in May 2012, they captured a Kachin woman and raped her repeatedly for three days. The woman was held hostage in a church and a Kachin man was captured and forced to watch the horrific ordeal. Burma has a military-dominated Supreme Court, and the cases of victims who accuse soldiers of rape and abduction are not taken very seriously. "The law does not protect citizens; instead it defends the vicious soldiers who commit gang rape"²⁸. Thus a culture of impunity provides for the continued use of rape as a weapon by soldiers, allowing them to target ethnic women and destroy towns and villages. During the war in Iraq, rape was perpetrated not only against women, but against men; US soldiers raped male prisoners to represent their feminization. Prisoners at the Abu Ghraib were also forced to rape each other and women were forced to expose their bodies to soldiers²⁹. The number of women who were raped during the Iraq war remains unknown. "Sexual assault is heavily stigmatized in the Middle East, and victims are often afraid to talk about it to anyone"³⁰. Women also fear retaliation by their rapists and do not trust the police.

Thus it can be seen that rape has been used as a weapon all around the world. Despite the different contexts of the various conflicts, women face similar challenges: poor access to legal resources, low ranking social positions, patriarchal traditions, economic exploitation and sexual abuse. These conditions are the daily reality for millions of women around the world, but particularly those in Africa.

6. Analysis

6.1. Masculinity

Professor Jane Parpart, speaking at a seminar at the University of the Western Cape, discussed the central role masculinity plays in the use of rape as a weapon³¹. She explained that gender relates to both men and women. It communicates the power-relationships between the two sexes, and these

²⁶ Brodzinsky, S. "In Colombia, rape now being prosecuted as weapon of war". *The Christian Science Monitor*, 11 May 2009.

²⁷ Murthy, L. (2012). Bangladesh: rape as a weapon of war in 1971. <http://www.siawi.org/article3411.html>

²⁸ Linn, Z. (2012). Burma Army still using rape as a weapon of war. <http://asiancorrespondent.com/82976/burma-army-does-not-stop-using-rape-as-a-weapon-of-war>

²⁹ Glaister, D and Borger, J. (2004). 1,800 new pictures add to US disgust. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2004/may/13/iraq.usa>

³⁰ Anna Badkhen. (2008). Rape's vast toll in Iraq war remains largely ignored. *The Christian Science Monitor*. <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Middle-East/2008/1124/p07s01-wome.html>

³¹ Professor Jane Parpart's presentation was based on a paper she recently co-wrote with Professor Lisa Thompson, entitled "Engendering (In)Security and Conflict in African IR". 10 May 2012.

relationships are greatly affected by culture, religion, class, education, and the like. Men and masculinity are synonymous with power and influence, while women and all things feminine are regarded as weak. For example, a male soldier who portrays feminine characteristics will not be given much respect in the army. African conflicts are fought mostly by young men who do not have any other means of securing an income. They join the army or rebel groups to prove themselves as 'real men'. They rape to establish their 'manhood' and display their dominance over women and the men to whom these women 'belong'. Furthermore, women often adopt masculine qualities in order to be taken seriously in their profession. Masculine traits in women result in them being labeled as 'failed women' or 'not proper women'; which leads to practices such as 'corrective rape'. These beliefs about gender frequently frustrate attempts to prohibit the use of rape during times of peace and armed conflicts³². In many African countries, tradition dictates that women should be subordinate to men; women have low social status. Thus men feel entitled to sex, and even argue that women who are raped have 'asked for it' or enjoy it.

6.2. Male dominance

Rape serves as a cross-cultural language of male domination³³. There are numerous symbolic meanings attached to the bodies of women. Phrases such as 'the motherland' are often used by ethnic or national groups to describe their territory, as previously mentioned. This is because women are seen as the mothers and physical reproducers of a nation. In many ethnic and faith groups, for example, a woman is expected to marry and have children with a man of that group, and to teach her children its values and traditions. Thus, strategic rape destroys the social structure and taints the ethnic stock of the nation or ethnic group which is attacked³⁴.

Rape renders women 'unfit' for marriage and motherhood in patriarchal societies. In these societies, the virginity of unmarried women and the fidelity of married women are considered to contribute to the wealth of men. In some cultures, the more wives a man has the wealthier he is deemed to be. It is quite significant, then, that the word rape is derived from the Latin word *rapere* which means to steal, seize or carry away without permission to do so³⁵. By raping civilian women, the enemy is perceived as stealing the wealth of the men of that nation or ethnic group. The theft of wealth is meant to bring dishonour and humiliation to men; thus, the rape of a nation's women by enemy soldiers represents the ultimate humiliation and a stamp of total conquest. Rape is also meant to represent the impotence of the men of a particular nation and their inability to prove their manhood in protecting their women or nation³⁶. By raping civilian women, the enemy displays its dominance over that particular nation, and this dominance may then be used for further ends such as exploitation, expulsion, dispersion and murder. It can therefore be deduced that the social

³² Puechguirbal, N. (2003). Women and war in the Democratic Republic of Congo. *Signs*, 28(4), 1271-1281. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/368319>

³³ Card (1996).

³⁴ Diken, B. & Lausten, C.B. (2005). Becoming object: rape as a weapon of war. *Body & Society*, 11(1), 111-128.

³⁵ Macnamara, D. (2002). *History of sexual violence*. <http://www.interactivetheatre.org/resc/history.html>

³⁶ Sulzman, T. A. (1998). Rape camps as a means of ethnic cleansing: religious, cultural, and ethical responses to rape victims in former Yugoslavia. *Human Rights Quarterly*, 20(2), 348-378.

meaning of rape is domination of one group of males by another group, using the bodies of women as their medium of communication³⁷.

6.3. Poor policy responses

Women in African conflicts are ill-equipped to protect themselves from war-time rape, marital rape, spousal inheritance, female genital mutilation and domestic abuse. Despite UN Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security in Africa (a policy framework addressing women's issues regionally and internationally), women still face discrimination and violence on a daily basis. The implementation of Resolution 1325 relies heavily upon states' commitment; and all too often a lack of commitment is seen. The African Union (AU) and Southern African Development Community (SADC) have also performed poorly in protecting African women. This poor performance may be attributed to a culture of patriarchy in African countries, with these institutions and various governments not taking rape seriously. It has also been suggested that these institutions do not want to reaffirm colonial stereotypes that African men are sexually wild or hypercharged³⁸. The problem is hence ignored or dealt with very lightly, so that no person or group of persons is offended.

It must be acknowledged, however, that some African states, and some economic and political institutions, are implementing programs to increase gender parity; these include affirmative action programs, gender quotas and gender mainstreaming³⁹. Rwanda for example, has enacted legislation which stipulates that women should occupy 30% of all posts in decision-making bodies. The AU has also expressed its intention to mainstream gender perspectives into all aspects of its work⁴⁰. Nevertheless, patriarchal gender stereotypes are still pervasive, despite these efforts, and oppressive laws which prohibit women from inheriting land, for example, still persist in many African countries. Gender equality will also not be attained while governments, such as the ZANU-PF government in Zimbabwe, persist in their use of violence against women. The youth core of ZANU (the Green Bombers) has been urged to rape 'insubordinate' women who dare to support the opposition⁴¹. State support for, and use of, violence against women reinforces cynicism about states' commitment to ensuring gender equality and women's empowerment in Africa. It is particularly alarming that the AU leaves the punishment of rape perpetrators, in the instance of war-time rape, to states' individual criminal procedures.

Affirmative action, gender quotas, and gender mainstreaming are important for the inclusion of women in decision-making structures, but it is not sufficient to transform discriminatory, patriarchal practices and perceptions. In any case, treaties and protocols relating to rape do not carry much weight with rebel troops or soldiers; they are often not even aware of these.

³⁷ Diken & Lausten (2005).

³⁸ Parpart (2012).

³⁹ Fakier, Y (ed.). (2006). Women and peacebuilding in Africa. *Seminar Report hosted by the Centre for Conflict Resolution and the United Nations Development Fund for Women*, 27-28 October 2005.

⁴⁰ Byanyima, W. (2008). Africa and gender equality: priorities of the AU. In *The "African Union and its institutions"*. Cape Town: Fanele-Jacana. Centre for conflict resolution.

⁴¹ Parpart (2012).

6.4. The exclusion of women from peace-building processes

It is important to note that, in extreme circumstances such as war and national conflicts, the dictates of tradition may be suspended temporarily, resulting in women being required to serve as combatants, peacekeepers or heads of households. However, when these women ask for genuine equality with their male counterparts, they are told to wait until peace has been attained; “not now, later”⁴². Further exacerbating the problem is the fact that women are usually excluded from peace negotiations; they are regarded as symbols, rather than active participants in political struggles⁴³. Women are usually stereotyped as vulnerable victims rather than valuable contributors despite the roles they play during conflicts. In instances where women have actively organized themselves and sought to participate in peace processes, they have been subjected to violent attacks, and accused of interfering in the realm of men and jeopardizing security. Congolese women not being included in the 1999 peace negotiations and drafting of a new constitution, and Algerian women not being allowed (by means of legislation) to socially and politically participate in their government, serve as testament to women’s exclusion. If women are not included at the beginning stages of the peace process, it later becomes nearly impossible to insert them⁴⁴. The promotion of women’s rights should not be left for post-conflict negotiations, as by then patriarchal norms have returned. The emphasis that the international community places on human rights may result in patriarchal norms and traditions not being immediately noticed during negotiations for peace; however, they are reinforced during the peace process.

7. Rape in South Africa

Although South Africa is not a war-torn country, the occurrence of rape is alarmingly high, and by way of comparison it is worthwhile to consider an overview of the chronic incidence of rape in our country. In 2009 the Medical Research Council (MRC) published a report which found that three out of four men admitted to rape, and nearly half of these admitted to raping more than once⁴⁵. The study found that 73% of the men who participated in the study had performed their first rape before the age of 20 and nearly one in ten admitted doing so before the age of 10. More recent statistics show that a woman is raped every 26 seconds in South Africa; during the period of 2010 to March 2011, more than 60 000 cases of sexual assault were reported⁴⁶. South Africans were recently shocked by the gang-rape of a 17 year old mentally impaired girl from Soweto. The perpetrators captured the incident on a cell phone camera and the video clip went viral within hours. Eight suspects were arrested and charged with kidnapping and raping the girl; seven of them, between the ages of 14 and 20, were seen on the video and the other was a 37-year-old man with whom the girl was eventually found. The girl’s mother revealed that this is not the first time she has been raped; she was raped in 2009 and 2010. Four of the minors accused of raping

⁴² Enloe (2000).

⁴³ Cynthia Enloe. (2000). *Bananas, beaches and bases: making feminist sense of international politics*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

⁴⁴ Fakier (2006).

⁴⁵ Medical Research Council. (2009). Understanding men’s health and use of violence: interface of rape and HIV in South Africa. http://www.mrc.ac.za/gender/violence_hiv.pdf

⁴⁶ Mabuse, N. (2012). Shocking rape video goes viral. http://articles.cnn.com/2012-04-18/africa/world_africa_south-africa-rape-video_1_station-reports-south-africans-teenage-girl?s=PM:AFRICA

the girl were released on bail of R500; which brings into question the seriousness with which rape offenses are regarded in South Africa.

Women, children and lesbians are the primary victims of rape in South Africa. Women often face sexual abuse from their husbands, male relatives or partners; which on numerous occasions have resulted in severe injury and death. Research by Amnesty International revealed that about one woman is killed by her husband or boyfriend every six hours in South Africa⁴⁷. The risk of rape is compounded by the prevalence of HIV/AIDS in our society, not to mention the risk of unwanted pregnancies. Countless women have contracted HIV/AIDS as a result of rape; the threat of HIV/AIDS affects not only the rape victim but her family and her unborn child. A wide-spread myth stating that if an HIV positive man has sex with a virgin he will be cured, has resulted in children and infants increasingly becoming targets of rape. This myth exists in other African countries too, such as Zambia, Zimbabwe and Nigeria. However, "South Africa has some of the highest incidences of child and baby rape in the world. Many children are brutalized so often that they are desensitized to the abuse being a crime"⁴⁸. A recent report by the Department of Basic Education revealed that the number of girls getting pregnant has increased sharply in the past few years. "In Grade 3 alone, about 109 pupils fell pregnant in 2009- as against only 17 in the same grade in 2008. In Grade 4, the number increased to 107 from 69 in 2008, and in Grade 5, 297 girls fell pregnant in 2009. The highest concentration of pregnant pupils was in high schools, from Grade 7 to Grade 9. In 2009, a total of 45 276 became pregnant"⁴⁹. Professor Kobus Maree from the University of Pretoria suggested that a large number of these girls became pregnant as the result of sexual abuse and rape. He added that very few of these rapists were punished for their crimes, leaving them free to roam the streets in search of additional victims. A child as young as Grade 3 becoming pregnant as a result of rape shows how dismally our society and government has failed to protect children.

Lesbians are also frequently targeted for rape. 'Corrective rape' is perpetrated to convert gay women to heterosexuality or teach them a lesson for rejecting men. The practice of 'corrective rape' made international headlines in 2008 when Eudy Simelane, a former South African soccer player was gang-raped, beaten and stabbed 25 times in the face, chest and legs in KwaThema township. She died from the injuries she sustained during the attack, and her naked body was dumped in a nearby stream. In June 2011, Noxolo Nkosana was brutally attacked near her home in Crossroads, Cape Town. As she walked home with her girlfriend that evening, a group of local men started screaming insults at her, threatening that they would teach her a lesson for being gay. They grabbed her and stabbed her in her back repeatedly. According to *Luleki Sizwe*, an activist group which helps women who have been raped, more than 10 lesbians are raped or gang raped in Cape Town per week⁵⁰. Nkosana feared that she would suffer the same fate as gay activist, Noxolo Nogwaza. Nogwaza was raped and killed in the same township as Simelane. She was targeted while leaving a local pub on the 24th April 2011; her attackers stabbed her with

⁴⁷ Kimani, M. (2007). Taking on violence against women in Africa. <http://www.un.org/en/africarenewal/vol21no2/212-violence-aganist-women.html>

⁴⁸ Perry, A. (2007). Oprah scandal rocks South Africa. <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1680715,00.html?xid=feed-yahoo-full-world>

⁴⁹ Chauke, A. (31 May 2012). "Pregnant in Grade 3". The Times.

⁵⁰ Fihlani, P. (2011). South Africa's lesbians fear corrective rape. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13908662>

shards of glass, raped her, and disfigured her face and head with a rock⁵¹. 'Corrective rape' is particularly prevalent in poor communities, where rigid patriarchal beliefs dictate the role of men and women in society. Corrective rape is intended to teach women their place and show them what it means to be an African woman.

8. Conclusion

No religion condones the use of rape. Each human being has been made in the image of God and has the right to life and dignity. Human life is sacred and the dignity of all people should be the moral vision society works towards. God has given life, and no person has the right to take the life of another, or harm the life of another. The Catholic Church teaches that "the role of the government and other institutions is to protect human life and human dignity and promote the common good"⁵². In the person of the poor and vulnerable, Christians are to serve God; as Jesus said "whatever you do unto the least of these you have done unto me"⁵³. Moreover, basic morality dictates that rape is wrong and criminal; nowhere in the world is rape considered as an acceptable practice. It goes against all that is considered good and proper. This is what makes the rape, particularly the rape of children, disturbing; children are meant to be loved and protected, not sexually exploited. Unfortunately, men often regard violence against women and children as discipline and a male privilege. It is more socially acceptable for a man to abuse a woman, than for a woman to act violently towards a man; a sexually or physically abused man is regarded as weak and 'not a proper man'. This kind of thinking directly underpins the use of rape as a weapon of war. These stereotypes and social norms need to be questioned. Furthermore, men need to interrogate the relationship between masculinity and violence, be willing to participate in an open debate about gender, and be willing to give up their power, for real gender equality to transpire⁵⁴. This is the only way that attitudes and practices that are harmful toward women, such as rape, will be corrected.

Men in positions of power need to consider how they relate to women and the message that this relationship sends. It has been suggested that men like President Zuma send the message that men are entitled to sex; that one man is equal to four women⁵⁵. Leaders set the example that citizens and youths will follow, and thus should be mindful of the gender message they are conveying. Also, adherence to UN and AU resolutions remains dependent on the commitment of member states. No obligation is placed on these states to adhere to these policy frameworks; hence it is seen that rape continues to be used as a weapon in countries like Burma and the DRC. Political leaders need to display the political will to implement resolutions and protocols which are intended to protect

⁵¹ "Brutal murder of lesbian activist condemned". <http://mg.co.za/article/2011-05-03-brutal-murder-of-lesbian-activist-condemned>

⁵² "Key principles of Catholic Social Teaching". www.osjspm.org

⁵³ Matthew 25:45

⁵⁴ Ratele, K. (2004). The male fear of democracy. Gender Education and Training Network: Network News. http://www.getnet.org.za/Network_news_july2004.pdf

⁵⁵ Hawes, A. (2012). Rape in South Africa: Still all too common. <http://www.theroot.com/views/rape-south-africa-still-all-too-common>

women. This requires leaders to embrace a respect for human rights and human dignity; to regard it more highly than their own economic gain or perceived masculinity.

And finally, women must be included in decision-making processes and policy development, particularly those which have direct bearing on the standards of living they enjoy. When discriminatory attitudes are relinquished, and women are given fair and equal opportunity to participate in the economic, political and social spheres of life, true equality will be attained. The onus is on state leaders, men and women in positions of power, and even civilian men, to revisit their commitment to human dignity and human life. A renewed commitment to human dignity will contribute immensely to endeavours to prohibit of the use of rape as a weapon of war.

Veleska Langeveldt

Research Intern

Veleska Langeveldt completed a six-month internship during January to June 2012 at the CPLO as part of her studies towards a Master's degree in Political Science at the University of the Western Cape.

This Occasional Paper, or parts thereof, may be reproduced with acknowledgement.
For further information, please contact the CPLO Office Administrator.