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# Transformations of Identity:

# The Political Psychology of War Rape

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# Presentation outline

- 1. Historical overview of the study of sexual violence in war*
- 2. Political psychological approaches to the conceptualization of sexual violence as a weapon of war*
- 3. Moving towards an understanding of victims and perpetrators*

# Rape and War – a complex relationship

Scene from the movie *Grbavica* by Jasmila Zbanic (2007)



*This is supposed to be her son. She gave birth to him that afternoon at the Karolinska Hospital in Stockholm. But to her this is simply a nameless little being who after nine months has come out of her body. Nothing connects them anymore. S. feels relieved at the thought. She is free. Her entire past has spilled out of her body with this child. She feels so light as if she could get up this very moment and walk away.*

Slavenka Drakulić (1999) *S. A Novel about the Balkans*. Penguin Books (p. 1)

# Sexual violence and war in a historical context

What do we know about sexual violence in war?

It is an **under-reported phenomenon**:  
"the more obscene the crime the less visible it is" (Sells, 1996:11)

It happens in most wars

In most cases the **perpetrators are not convicted**

It **happens for different political reasons** in different wars

It has **not been acknowledged as being politically significant** until the wars of the 1990s.

Status of knowledge:

**Documentation from several conflicts** (WWII, Bangladesh, Vietnam, the Americas, Africa, Asia)

**Diverse and incomparable** documentation

Sexual violence in war was **not necessarily a hidden phenomenon** but it was understudied and it was not the focus of political analyses.

# Turning events in the 1990s:

(Re)newed attention to:

Korean "Comfort Women"  
during WWII

Rapes against German women  
in Berlin at the end of WWII

Sexual Violence during the  
Bosnian war (1992 – 1995)

Sexual violence during the  
Rwandan genocide (1994)

Leading to change by:

New and increased **attention**

New and increased  
**documentation**

New **conceptualization**

New **preparedness** for dealing  
with the phenomenon

# International criminal prosecution

## International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY)

The ICTY was the first war crimes court established by the United Nations, and the first international war crimes tribunal to be set up since the Nuremberg and Tokyo tribunals after World War II.

The tribunal is temporary, ad hoc, and has limited jurisdiction—covering the entire territories of the former Yugoslavia, including Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, and Macedonia.

The overall aim of the tribunal is to hold major perpetrators accountable for the most serious crimes, although low- and mid-level perpetrators have also been prosecuted

## International Criminal Court (ICC)

*Sexual violence definitions:*

Rape

Sexual Slavery

Enforced Prostitution

Forced pregnancy

Enforced Sterilization

- (1) Crimes Against Humanity, Art 7 (1) (g)
- (2) War Crimes, Art 8 (2) (b) (xii), (e), (vi)
- (3) Genocide, Art 6

# Since 2000: International Attention in the UN

## United Nations Security Council Resolutions

- 1325 (2000)
- 1820 (2008)
- 1888 (2009)
- 1889 (2008)
- 1960 (2010)
- 2122 (2013)

*Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG) (Mrs. Zainab Hawa Bangura of Sierra Leone)*



# How can psychology help us understand peace and conflict issues and sexual violence in particular?

- “Why War?” correspondence between Albert Einstein and Sigmund Freud in 1932
- Freud’s answer:
- *Conflicts of interest between man and man are resolved, in principle, by the recourse to violence. It is the same in the animal kingdom, from which man cannot claim exclusion; nevertheless, [...] the superiority of one strong man can be overborne by an alliance of many weaklings, [in] that l'union fait la force. Brute force is overcome by union. (Freud, 1932/2003)*

# How to study and understand sexual violence in war based on Freud's answer?

- **The correspondence shows that:**
  - *in the struggle to both understand violence conflict and find peaceful solutions, psychological knowledge is central;*
  - *that we need to look at individuals as well as structures, and*
  - *that understandings of peace and conflict are based on abstract notions of “man”, i.e. a politically significant male.*

In attempting to understand the political psychology of sexual violence in war one must see how notions of gender and the politics of war interact by asking:

1. *what does war do to gender relations, and;*
2. *what do gender relations do to war?*

*...and assess this impact on individual, group and social levels*

What does war do to gender relations?

Wars **polarize gender relations**. Men are called off to fight and women remain at home. Women and children constitute the majority of the world's refugee population.

Wars **create new opportunities** for women. Men are away and women become bread-winners at home.

Post-war life often represents a **backlash** for many women.

What do gender relations do to war?

Women often **symbolize the future of her** ethnic/religious/political belonging.

**Femininity becomes associated with peace** and future prospects of peace.

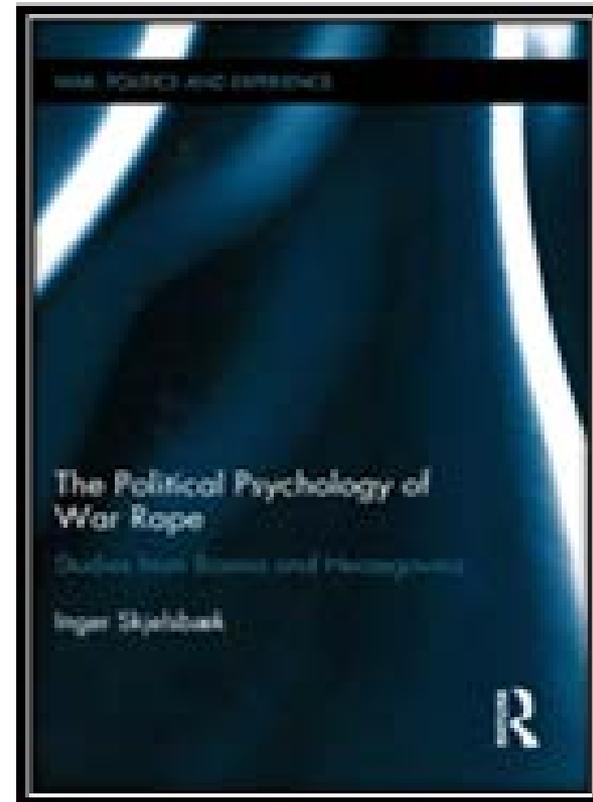
**Masculinity becomes militarized.**

# Overview of the book and studies

## Table of Contents:

1. Introduction
2. Designing a Study of the Aftermath of the War Rapes in Bosnia
3. Victim and Survivor: Narrated Social Identities of Women who Experienced Rape during the War
4. What Do We Know about War Rapes before the 1990s?
5. The Turning Points in the 1990s which Created a New Understanding of War Rape
6. The First Generation of Systematic Documentation of Sexual Violence in War 1990–1998: Naming the Unnamable and Understanding the Incomprehensible
7. Therapeutic Work with Victims of Sexual Violence War and Post-War
8. Traditions and Transitions: Perceptions of 'Good Womanhood' among Twenty Bosnian Focus Group Participants
9. Beyond Bosnia: International Efforts to Move from Accounting to Accountability
10. The Political Psychology of War Rape

## The Political Psychology of War Rape: Studies from Bosnia and Herzegovina



# Background for my own research on sexual violence in war

## Motivation for the studies

*In the mid 1990s there were **few studies of women's experiences in war** and even fewer that focused on sexual violence specifically. The Bosnian war changed this.*

***Increasing focus on the psychological effects of sexual violence** but very decontextualized knowledge which did not integrate the political context of war.*

***New studies on gender in war and on gender within social constructionist theory***

## Challenges

### Getting funding

*Concern that interviews would retraumatize victims*

### Collecting empirical data

*Who to talk to in which ways?*

*How to react and respond to painful descriptions?*

### Using Interpreters

*How to translate and behave in the interview situation?*

### Mode of analysis

*How to understand individual experiences from a political psychological vantage point?*

# Overarching research approach

## Overarching research questions

- How are social constructions of masculinity and femininity linked to war rape, and what power relations emerge as a result?
- How are social constructions of masculinity and femininity linked to sociopolitical changes in prewar, wartime, and postwar Bosnia, and what understandings of war rapes, and the individual war-rape experience, emerge as a result?

## Overarching Methodology

- Different qualitative methods:
  - Interviews with local health workers, war-traumatized women, local focus groups
  - Field visits to psychosocial centers, collective centers and relevant NGOs
  - Literature studies
- Studies of different sub-themes:
  - Contextualizing sexual violence in war and situating the Bosnian experience through an overview of war-rape before the 1990s; the first generation of documentation; and a view of the impact the Bosnian experience have had on the international level.
  - Study of the social construction of identity for war-rape victims
  - Studies of how therapeutic work with war rape victims was narrated by local health workers
  - Perceptions of “good womanhood” by Bosnian focus groups

# Overarching results:

## Empirical conclusions

- War-rape sufferers have power to redefine their social identities in the post-conflict sociopolitical space;
- their ability to do so, however, depends on the material, social, and political context in which they find themselves in the post-conflict setting, as well as the ways in which their 'supporting cast' plays its part, and;
- positioning oneself mainly as a victim as opposed to a survivor (or the other way around) has different impacts on intrapersonal, interpersonal, and societal relations.

## Policy implications

- Male war-rape against female and male members of opposing warring groups does achieve its political objective of destroying the existing social fabric, but by doing so war rape has an unintended potentially positive side-effect in that *it creates new spaces for the social construction of gender.*
- An increased focus on the sociopolitical nature of war rapes and notions of femininity and masculinity can counteract the stigmatization of rape victims, because it *lifts the individual experience out of the individual sphere of private suffering.*

# Themes that are not covered in the literature

- Children born of war
- Reproductive health
- Sexual violence against men
- Methods to combat stigmatization
- Ways in which political discourses leading up to conflict are gendered
- Perpetrators of sexual violence

# Why focus on the perpetrators?

Different emphasis in different Security Council Resolutions:

- *UNSCR 1820*:
  - Military disciplinary measures (Action point 3)
  - Criminal prosecution (Action point 4)
  - Prevention measures (Action point 15)
- *UNSCR 1888*:
  - Appointment of SRSG to ensure coherent and strategic leadership (Action point 4)
  - Clearer identification of perpetrators (Action point 7)
- *UNSCR 1960*:
  - Listing parties to armed conflict that are credibly suspected of committing or being responsible for acts of rape or other forms of sexual violence (Action point 3)

It is possible to study the perpetrators in ways that were not possible only a few years ago:

- *More international pressure*
- *More documentation*
- *Criminal prosecution*

# How to study the perpetrators?

- Distinction between sexual violence perpetrators in **war and peace** – need for context dependent theories
  - *Soldiers learn different kinds of behavior which are seen as permissible in times of war but not in times of peace.*
  - *Part of the training that soldiers undergo in regular armies is geared toward learning what actions are permissible under international law given particular sets of circumstances. In other words, soldiers are trained to recognize and analyze in which settings certain forms of violence is legitimized.*
  - *Likewise, a perpetrator of sexual violence in war may not be a rapist with a history of offenses involving sexual violence prior to the war, and that violence may have no bearing on behavior after the war.*
  - *However, it is possible to regard sexual violence in war as part of a repertoire of actions that appear permissible because the circumstances of war are extraordinary and because it elicits no consequences, punishment, or condemnation from the military leadership.*

# How to study the perpetrators?

- Important to study the **military structures** which make perpetrator behavior permissible/acceptable, etc.
  - *Which military structures seem to be most engaged in sexual violence crimes and in which ways?*
  - *Who, within the military hierarchies are committing these acts?*
  - *What is the role and response from the military leadership?*

# How to study the perpetrators?

- Need to see sexual violence as part of a war **repertoire of violence**
  - *in the “new wars”—where the frontlines are blurred, identities are the battleground, and the distinction between military and civilian is unclear—it is likely that the propensity for extreme violence in all its forms increases just because the opportunity for such violence is present.*
  - *“social construction of cruelty—buttressed by professional socialization, group identification, and binding factors of the group—envelops perpetrators in a social context that encourages and rewards extraordinary evil. It reminds us that the normal reaction to an abnormal situation is abnormal behavior; indeed, normal behavior would be an abnormal reaction to an abnormal situation. We must borrow the perspective of the perpetrators and view their evil not as the work of “lunatics” but as actions with a clear and justified purpose—so defined by a context of cruelty”. (James Waller 2007, p. 271)*
  - *Study by Maria Eriksson Baaz and Maria Stern (2009) in the DRC: difference between “evil rapes” and “lust rapes”.*
  - *We need to understand the myriad of power relations which make up the context in which sexual violence occurs (Baaz & Stern, 2009:514)*

# International Criminal Prosecution: Foca case: Sexual enslavement and rape as crimes against humanity



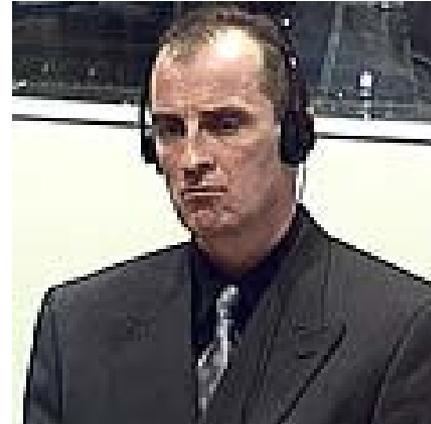
## **Foca**

Site of systematic war-rape crimes



## **Kunarac, Dragoljub**

Sentenced to 28 years imprisonment



## **Kovač, Radomir**

Sentenced to 20 years imprisonment



## **Vuković, Zoran**

Sentenced to 12 years imprisonment

# Overview of the 9 sentenced principal perpetrators

Name of the Accused	Acts of sexual violence
<b>Miroslav Bralo</b>	He brutally raped and tortured a Bosnian Muslim woman, Witness “A”, and imprisoned her for approximately two months to be further violated at the whim of her captors.
<b>Hazim Delić</b>	He violently raped two female detainees during interrogations inside the Čelebići prison camp. One of the rapes was conducted in the presence of other guards.
<b>Radomir Kovač</b>	He raped two victims along with other soldiers. He raped another two victims along with other soldiers during a period in which they were kept in his apartment. He assisted other soldiers in the rape of three victims.
<b>Drgaoljub Kunarac</b>	He raped three victims at his headquarters in Foča. He and two other soldiers raped and threatened to kill a witness and also threatened to kill her son. He also aided and abetted the gang-rape of four victims by several of his soldiers.
<b>Esad Landžo</b>	He placed a burning fuse cord against the genitals of a male detainee.
<b>Mlado Radić</b>	He raped one detainee and attempted to rape another. He participated in sexual intimidation, harassment and assaults against three other detainees in Omarska.
<b>Milan Simić</b>	Together with other men, he personally beat four detainees at the Bosanski Šamac primary school. He also kicked the men in their genitals and, during the beatings, fired gunshots over their heads. One victim was forced to pull down his pants, and one of the men threatened to cut off the victim’s penis.
<b>Zoran Vuković</b>	Along with another soldier, he took a victim from the Partizan Sports Hall, Foča, to a nearby apartment and raped her, knowing that she was only 15 years old.
<b>Dragan Zelenović</b>	He raped, participated in the gang-rape of, and tortured a number of the Muslim women and girls held in classrooms at Foča High School, which was used as a short-term detention facility. He and three other men gang-raped one woman held at the Partizan Sports Hall, a detention facility in Foča. He and two other perpetrators raped four female detainees from the premises known as Karaman’s house.

# International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY)

- Study of Sentencing Judgments in the ICTY
  - *The ICTY was established in 1993, while the Bosnian War was still raging, as an attempt to ensure that major perpetrators of all crimes committed during the wars in the former Yugoslavia would be held responsible for their actions.*
  - *Since the start of the Tribunal's activities, 78 individuals – or 48% of the 161 accused – have had charges of sexual violence included in their indictments.*
  - *So far, 28 individuals have been convicted of crimes of sexual violence in the ICTY, of these;*
    - 15 were found guilty for sexual violence crimes under command responsibility (they did not commit the acts themselves, should have intervened)
    - 4 were found guilty for having ordered others to commit sexual violence acts (ordered others)
    - 9 were found guilty for having committed acts of sexual violence themselves (principal perpetrators)

# Overview of crimes by the 9 principal perpetrators

- The nine convicted perpetrators examined were found guilty of crimes of sexual violence against;
  - 32 identified women
  - 5 identified men
  - In addition, one of the individuals was convicted of raping and sexually assaulting an unidentified number of women and girls in a classroom in Foča.

*For these and other crimes, the perpetrators received prison sentences ranging from 5 years (Milan Simić) to 28 years (Dragoljub Kunarac).*

*Three of the men in the group pleaded guilty to crimes of sexual violence (Miroslav Bralo, Milan Simić and Dragan Zelenović,)*



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