

Wartime Sexual Violence: A Psychological Approach

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Abstract

Every war causes an extreme destruction parching pain and big traumas inflicted by sexual violence as well. In fact sexual violence seems to be an inseparable part of wars, civil wars, pogroms and every kind of armed conflict insofar as they involve the civilian population. Almost every armed conflict portrays women and children on target and conflicting parties never hesitate to sexually abuse women and children of the enemy side. From this, it can be understood that sexual violence is a part of the struggle for hegemony and exemplifies the principle the winner takes all, including sexual immunity of the enemy.

In the history of war, sexual abuse of women was a significant part of plunder during wartime, and rape was legitimated as a right of the winner. Wartime sexual violence has been accepted as booty for the victorious. The captive men were assaulted sexually as well, to reassert the victory, to degrade enemy's honor, and to guaranty enemy's obedience. This phenomenon cannot be explained with reference only to the conflicting parties' sexual desire. One must also take into account that it is a way to establish hegemony over the enemy, a kind of appropriation of enemy's body, and also a total revenge for the war. It is not easy to account for instances of wartime sexual violence if its basis in power relations is excluded. This paper aims to link the psychological basis of wartime sexual violence to asymmetrical power relations associated with conflicts. We are going to lay the emphasis on rape as a form of revenge, and women/children's bodies as war loot in clarifying this basis of wartime sexual violence. This will be a kind of review of psychological theories (e.g. Brownmiller) on rape and violence, and a historical review of wartime violence. A syncretic approach will be adopted to explain historical events, using a physiological perspective.

Keywords: wartime sexual violence, wartime rapes, power and rape, psychological analyze of rape, rape as revenge, physiological approach to wartime sexual violence