

**The strategic use of sexual violence as a weapon of war in genocide and in ethnic/religious conflicts and a case study on the use of sexual slavery by ISIL within the context of the most recent Yazidi genocide in Iraq.**

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## **Acknowledgment**

I wrote this thesis as a commemoration of the victims and survivors of the often overlooked crime which is wartime sexual violence. I was inspired to write it because of activists like Nadia Murad who is one of the loudest voices of the ongoing campaign to bring ISIL to justice for the crimes perpetrated against the Yazidis. I want to thank my supervisor Jamila for helping me structure my ideas, thoughts and emotions into writing. Finally, I want to thank my parents for their continuous support and encouragement.

## **Introduction**

Rape has accompanied wars of religion, wars of revolution, it has served as a weapon of terror, as a show of victory and as a weapon of revenge. It used to be thought of as an inevitable event given the chaotic and violent environment of war and its victims and survivors as collateral damage. However, as Brownmiller says ‘‘Rape is more than a symptom of war or evidence of its violent excess. Rape in war is a familiar act with a familiar excuse’’ (Brownmiller 1993, 32).

Sexual violence remains the most pervasive form of human rights violations in war settings. The discourse regarding use of sexual violence as a strategic weapon of war has changed, however, despite the increase in attention paid to wartime sexual violence over the last decade, ‘‘wartime rape is nonetheless rendered an inconsequential and non-urgent atrocity, and raped bodies are marginalized and rendered invisible in the war, peace, and security discourse’’ (Oku 2011, 8).

There is still a lot of stigma about being the victim of and/or surviving sexual violence and feminist scholarship has long been concerned with the victimization of women, denial of their agency (Kelly 1996) and the perception of sexual violence as a too female crime to be concerned with on a society level (MacKinnon 2006). This has led to low levels of interest and lack of adequate resources dedicated to gathering accurate quantitative data. The taboo of being a sexual violence survivor also means that many women do not report the crime which leads to statistics being distorted.

There are plenty of reasons survivors of sexual violence do not come forward. There is the obvious ‘‘fear of stigmatization or reprisals, but they may also face material barriers when seeking help: geographical distance from adequate medical infrastructure and the impact of conflict on health care, cost of transportation, absence of qualified personnel due to poor security conditions in the area, and so on’’ (Bernard, Durham 2014, 430). There is also difficulty in data collection, and also cases of ‘‘overreporting in which civilians falsely claim they were raped to

receive aid from humanitarian agencies'' (Oku 2011, 4) because the allocation of aid is often restricted to sexual violence and not gender based violence.

My choice of topic is based largely on the case study in chapter 3. I have been following developments of the Yazidi genocide since the beginning. The Yazidi genocide presents a unique combination: it is the most recent UN recognized attempt at genocide of members of the world's oldest religion as well as the 74<sup>th</sup> attempt at their genocide. Also, despite plentiful evidence, there have been few consequences for the crimes committed by ISIL as the world seems to have forgotten about them already. August 4<sup>th</sup> of this year marked the four year anniversary of the attack on Sinjar. Bringing ISIL to justice presents a unique challenge because Iraqi government has been executing ISIL fighters or alleged fighters without fair trial sometimes irrespective of their nationality or knowledge of their exact role in the campaign. I also found women like Nadia Murad speaking out about the Yazidi genocide and giving testimony of what women have endured a very powerful example of women's agency against the mainstream portrayal of Yazidi women as helpless devastated victims. I also chose the topic based on my interest in working to end the impunity which still prevails with in regards to wartime sexual violence. Furthermore, I believe that analysing sexual violence and power dynamics within the context of war/genocide, one of the most violent environments where gender roles are reinforced, is at the heart of feminist studies.

My aim is to analyse most of the leading theories of wartime sexual violence e.g. feminist theory of rape, biosocial theory and strategic rape theory that try to explain the motives for using sexual violence as a weapon of war or as a way to achieve genocide. My main focus is the exploration of the use of sexual slavery as a means to both physical and cultural genocide of the Yazidi community in Iraq. I also aim to explore what are the cultural functions and the impact on community dynamics of using sexual violence as a weapon of war/genocide. Lastly, I aim to show how different theories of use of sexual violence can be applied to specific cases by showcasing a few short case studies. My intention is to contribute to the field of wartime sexual violence and genocidal rape by creating a new theoretical framework which combines different theories of rape and which can explain the use of sexual violence as a strategy in genocide or ethnic/religious conflict contexts.

Therefore, my main research question is: Why is sexual violence used as a weapon of war by rebels, terrorist groups and soldiers alike and why is it used in ethnic and/or religious conflicts? My sub research questions are: What is the function of sexual violence in achieving genocide and/or loss of group's cultural identity? Can any theory alone explain the incidence of wartime sexual violence? How does women's role as culture preserves/carriers affect perpetrators' choice of using sexual violence? Why did the recognition of wartime sexual violence as war crime not mark a shift away from victim blaming?

My main case study research question is: Why did ISIL use sexual slavery as one of its main strategies to achieve its goal (annihilation of the Yazidi population in Iraq)? My case study sub research questions are: What was the purpose of kidnapping women and girls and either 'gifting' them to loyal ISIL fighters or selling them as sex slaves? Why did ISIL make no attempt to hide sexual enslavement of Yazidi women? Which theory among theories on wartime sexual violence best depicts ISIL's use of sexual slavery as a means to a cultural as well as physical genocide?

I chose to focus on sexual violence perpetrated against women and girls exclusively, leaving out male victims/survivors because the majority of the theories on sexual violence I analyse would not apply to men. Also, the vast majority of victims of wartime sexual violence are female. This focus on female rape survivors gives me the space needed to bring up a set of problems unique to rape of women and girls, such as reproductive control through forced pregnancy. I will refer to living women who have been raped as survivors, while to those who died as victims. I also opted for a binary approach to gender because existing literature and data available on the topic of wartime sexual violence presuppose gender binarism with women being the main subjects of research. Women in this thesis therefore means persons assigned female at birth.

The thesis is structured in the following way:

In chapter 1, I analyse six different theories of rape, some of which I extend to understanding the use of wartime sexual violence, others are already set in a war milieu. I dive into the history of criminalizing wartime sexual violence and discuss why stigma surrounding survivors of sexual violence remains today. I also discuss the cultural functions of sexual violence in a war context. Finally, I examine two short case studies using the theories which I analysed before. First one is

the justification of use of rape by soldiers in the case of Democratic Republic of Congo. I use militarized masculinity rape theory to analyse their justification and explain the function of rape in armies. In my second case study, I examine the use of rape as a weapon of ethnic cleansing against the Nuba people, an indigenous ethnic minority in Sudan using the theory of strategic rape.

In chapter 2, I define the concept of sexual slavery and genocide and make the link between the two issues. I analyse pollution theory of rape. I discuss why sexual slavery can be more impactful than femicide and examine the in/visibility of sexual violence. I also discuss the link between gang rape and militarized masculinity. I also apply theories from the first chapter to three short case studies. The first case study deals with the use of sexual slavery during the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina (1992-1995) analysed using pollution theory. The second case study examines the use of sexual enslavement by the Japanese Imperial Army during WW2 using strategic theory of rape. In the third case, I examine sexual slavery as a weapon of war in the inter-ethnic conflict in CAR using strategic theory of rape as well. However, rape as a strategic weapon of war served different purposes in the second and third case study. Finally, I propose a new theoretical framework that combines different theories of sexual violence.

In chapter 3, I analyse the case of sexual slavery as a weapon of genocide, used by ISIL against Yazidis living in Iraq. I first introduce the history of attempted genocides against the Yazidis and describe what Yazidism is. Then I describe the attack on Sinjar in 2014 and the liberation of the city in 2015. I then go on to analyse the motives for the attack and explain using the new theoretical framework, that I proposed at the end of chapter 2, why ISIL used sexual slavery as a weapon of genocide. Then I discuss what is problematic about ranking and comparing of crimes committed against the Yazidis. I also examine the role of women as seen by ISIL by moving past the dichotomy of wife/sex slave. Finally, I examine the reclaiming of agency by Yazidi survivors and the changing narrative of Yazidi women and discuss the campaign to bring ISIL to justice and the challenges associated with that.

## Methodology

For my methodology, I have done a close reading of existing literature on the topic of rape, wartime sexual violence and genocidal rape followed by a careful critical analysis of those texts. I have analysed theories written by some of the leading voices regarding wartime sexual violence such as Seifert, Brownmiller, Baaz, Gottschall and MacKinnon. I chose to use secondary qualitative data i.e. interview excerpts as well as case studies to show the validity, or not, of the theories I analysed. I relied on previously conducted interviews by journalists and researchers published in academic articles and reports from NGOs, especially Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch whose reports I have previously used while conducting research and they are two legitimate organizations that I have a lot of trust in. I also used the most recent available report from Yazda, which is a multinational organization established in August 2014 by members of the Yazidi diaspora in the US and Europe as an immediate response to the genocidal attack by brutal ISIL attacks on Yazidis and other desperate ethno-religious minorities in Iraq and Syria. Yazda's work in Iraq happens within Duhok Governorate, located within the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, and Nineveh Governorate, which is under the jurisdiction of the Federal Government of Iraq.

Throughout the thesis, I reference Makiko Oku's PhD dissertation *Shades of life and death: biopolitics and liminality of sexual and gender-based violence in armed conflict* which inspired me to examine the impact of sexual violence on the life of survivors and community from a completely new perspective by considering their unique situation which is incomparable to any other. I have also extensively relied on Reid- Cunningham's article *Rape as a Weapon of Genocide*. Furthermore, I used articles from online newspapers and websites as sources for factual events and dates.

Regarding the choice of literature in chapter 1, I chose articles and books focused on the use of rape as a weapon of war in order to analyse different theories of wartime rape. I chose the two cases studies based on their fit with the theories that I analyse as well as the ethnic/religious component. For the first case study, I used Baaz's ground breaking research on militarized masculinity theory of rape in DRC as well as Enloe's book *Manoeuvres: The International*

*Politics of Militarizing Women's Lives*. For the second case study in the context of ethnic cleansing in Sudan, I used a report written by the Nobel Women's Initiative in collaboration with the International campaign to stop rape and gender violence in conflict.

For chapter 2, I chose literature by some of the leading voices on sexual slavery, sex trafficking and its use to achieve a genocide, including Barry and MacKinnon who was involved in bringing about a legal case after the war in Bosnia. I also used Seifert's article *War and rape: A preliminary Analysis* and UN treaties. For the case study of sexual slavery as a weapon of genocide in Bosnia Herzegovina, I used Reid-Cunningham's article on genocidal rape. For the case study on the use of sexual slavery by the Japanese army, I relied on Argibay's article *Sexual Slavery and the Comfort Women of World War II* and for the case study in the context of CAR, I used reports by Human Rights Watch. I chose the cases studies based on their relevance to the topic for the purpose of exemplifying the theories I analyse. The Japanese case study does not include sexual slavery as a weapon of genocide but as a weapon of war but it is a very interesting example of using sexual slavery strategically.

My choice of methodology was due to ethical concerns which I believe are central to feminist research practices. Obtaining primary data should not come at a cost of forcing an interviewee to relive their trauma and to perhaps give them hope in order to get data from a primary source. A study in *Women's Studies International Forum*, for which the authors conducted 90 interviews with Yazidi women about their interactions with the international media, found that "85 percent of the women reported that journalists engaged in unethical practices while reporting on victims of ISIL, often pressuring women to speak, or failing to adequately protect their privacy" (Foster, Minwalla 2018). Also, I did not have the resources to interview convicted perpetrators of wartime sexual violence.

Therefore, in chapter 3, I mainly relied on a 2017 report by Yazda, a 2016 UN Human right council document on the crimes committed by ISIL against the Yazidis, a 2014 report by Amnesty International featuring survivors' testimonies. I also used a 2018 report by Nadia's Initiative, an organization aimed at increasing advocacy for women and minorities and assisting to stabilize and redevelop communities founded by Nadia Murad, a young Yazidi woman who advocates on behalf of her community and survivors of genocide. Finally, I used a couple of online newspaper articles and opinion pieces.

# **Chapter 1- Use of sexual violence as a weapon of war in ethnic/religious conflicts**

## **Introduction**

“Sexual violence and rape are powerful social weapons that have been used by government agents and other social movements in the perpetration of genocide and territorial war. The sexual nature of the violence increases its impact because of the cultural and social context in which the rape occurs” (Reid-Cunningham 2008, 280). I will work with this definition of wartime sexual violence: “sexual and gender-based violent acts, targeting individuals or groups based on their gender and/or sex, where the violence is sexual or directed at sexual organs that results, or is likely to result in, physical, psychological, and emotional pain” (Oku 2011, 39) and takes place within the context of war. I am using the term “war” to mean also the intranational or intra-state ethnic, religious, and other intercommunal nature of armed conflict, and not exclusively international or inter-state warfare.

I will focus overwhelmingly on rape because it is the most documented type of sexual violence and it is also implied in the case of sexual slavery because a person in the condition of slavery cannot freely give their consent. Rape is also a particular invasive type of sexual violence: a penetrative sexual assault. Penetration may occur using an object or a human body part, and it is not limited to vaginal copulation (anal and oral penetration may also be categorized as rape). Academics tend to use the word sexual and gender violence interchangeably, but I will use the term sexual violence, not because it is of sexual nature but because it is directed at women’s sexual organs.

## History of criminalizing wartime sexual violence

Wartime sexual violence and its many different forms<sup>1</sup> is not a new phenomenon. Tracing the history of wartime sexual violence, “historical and anthropological evidence suggests that rape in the context of war is an ancient human practice, and that this practice has stubbornly prevailed across a a stunningly diverse concatenation of societies and historical epochs” (Gottschall 2004). There is a lot of confusion regarding the exact date since rape has been considered a war crime. The international community and NGOs congratulated themselves when in 2008, the UN Security Council adopted resolution 1820, which states “rape and other forms of sexual violence can constitute war crimes, crimes against humanity, or a constitutive act with respect to genocide” (UNSC 2008). Despite the passing of resolution 1820, as of today, there has not been a single successful conviction for sexual and/ or gender-based crimes<sup>2</sup> by the ICC. However, wartime sexual violence has been prosecuted during a trial of former mayor, Jean-Paul Akayesu at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda a decade earlier in 1998. He was convicted of nine counts of genocide and crimes against humanity and the judgment was also the first to conclude that “rape and sexual assault constituted acts of genocide insofar as they were committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a targeted group” (UN 2014).

Patricia Sellers, a prominent international criminal attorney and special adviser for prosecution strategies to the prosecutor of the International Criminal Court makes claims in an interview that "The recognition that some acts were not to be tolerated or viewed as acceptable conduct in times of war has been around for centuries. Rape itself, during international war, has been illegal for centuries—from as far back as the 1470s, when ‘a trial for Peter von Hagenbach, a mercenary soldier, convicted him of war crimes for raping and killing innocent civilians’” (Paterson 2016). The existence of laws of war was there well before they were codified by international treaties such as the Hague Conventions (1899, 1907) in international customary law. ‘Rape has existed as a crime against humanity from the late 1940s in legal documents drafted right after

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<sup>1</sup> Rape, gang rape, sexual slavery, forced incest, amputation or mutilation of women’s bodies, forced marriage, sex trafficking, intentional spreading of HIV

<sup>2</sup> The Appeals Chamber of the International Criminal Court acquitted Jean-Pierre Bemba Gombo of two counts of crimes against humanity (murder and rape) and three counts of war crimes (murder, rape and pillaging) on June 8<sup>th</sup> 2018.

Nuremburg and the Tokyo trials. Rape was considered a war crime in the 1948 International Military Tribunal for the far East (IMTFE)<sup>3</sup>. However, “international sexual assault crimes have only been slowly enforced in the last 60 years” (Paterson 2016).

### **The prevailing stigma of sexual violence**

The recognition of wartime sexual violence as a crime against humanity did not mark a shift away from victim blaming despite it having consequences for the whole society. Women and girls are still held responsible to a large extent for what happens to them during war. As MacKinnon explains: “what is done to women is either too specific to women to be seen as human or too generic to human beings to be seen as about women. Atrocities committed against women are either too female to fit the concept of human or too human to fit the idea of female. “Human” and “female” are mutually exclusive by definition; one cannot be a woman and a human being at the same time” (MacKinnon 2006, 181). I think what Mackinnon means by that is that human, unless specifically defined, has never included women to the full extent, which explains the existence of the separate women’s rights framework. Xabier Aranburu also observed that “there is absence of empathy towards rape and its victims at the ICC” (Oku 2011, 9). The court has not always been willing to investigate wartime rape due to “a lack of awareness and sensitivity to rape from senior male officers, second, for the sense of embarrassment in dealing with issues pertaining to gender, sexuality, and women’s bodies, and third, for the absence of established methodology to adjudicate rape crimes” (ibid.). Sexual violence has always been perceived as a private matter that should either not be brought up or be resolved within the family or by a community leader. Until the creation of the Women, Peace and Security agenda in 2000, it was never considered as a national security issue or an issue to be dealt with at an international criminal court even though women’s bodies have been used as physical as well as cultural battlefields.

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<sup>3</sup> The 1948 IMTFE judgement on the Rape of Nanking found approximately 20,000 cases of rape occurred within the city during the first month of the occupation.

## **Analysis of different theories of rape**

There are many different theories that attempt to explain the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war, I will analyse six of them. Most of the attempts to explain the use of sexual violence have been very one sided and did not consider the different functions of sexual violence in different contexts. The intersection of gender, ethnicity and/or religion are often overlooked or dismissed as complicating the issue of wartime sexual violence. However, the targeting of women from opposing ethnic/religious groups cannot be understood if those identity markers are left out and therefore needs to be examined using an intersectional approach to the analysis of different theories of rape keeping in mind relevant identity markers.

Historically, studies that examined wartime rape and other forms of SGBV focused exclusively on biology and male sexual desire as motives for such violence which made sexual violence seem as inevitable and natural given the violent environment of war. Therefore, the first theory I analyse is the biological determinism theory. ‘‘A biological determinist theory generates the expectation that virtually everywhere we find hostile soldiers, in the midst of civilians identified with the enemy, there will be high rates of rape’’ (Gottschall 2004, 133). Gottschall claims that ‘‘this theory enjoys high theory data fit. A biological determinism theory of wartime rape also accounts well for the demographic characteristics of its victims’’ young reproductive aged women (ibid.). However, the theory does not account for the fact that in many conflicts, soldiers do not rape. It does not account well for variation from conflict to conflict.

The feminist critique of biological determinism theory has been that it blames men's biology and their innate aggressive masculinity on their desire to rape and considers rape to be a sexual act performed in an aggressive manner. By blaming their biology, something they cannot change, the theory takes away men's accountability, takes away the attention from the real victims and portrays them as collateral damage of war and falsely reduces men to victims of their own biology. Brownmiller says that ‘‘rape is biological only in the sense that an "accident of biology" (male size and strength and the nature of human sex organs) gave males the "structural capacity" to rape and females the "structural vulnerability" to be raped’’ (Brownmiller 1975, 13-15). Otherwise, men's biology has nothing to do with their choice to rape.

Another criticism of the biological determinism theory comes from Seifert who says that rape does not take place because the rapist finds a woman sexually attractive because ‘‘The rapist’s sexuality is not at the center of his act; it is placed instrumentally at the service of the violent act’’ (Seifert 1994, 56). Rape is not a sexual act. It is a demonstration of power. ‘‘For the perpetrator the victim is a proxy for ‘‘woman’’ pure and simple, not a real person’’ (ibid.). In societies with a relatively high degree of gender equality or in a society where new freedoms for women were introduced, that are not sanctioned by society, ‘‘Rape regulates unequal power relationships between the sexes or when this order becomes fragile-to restore it’’ (Seifert 1994, 57).

The biological determinism theory is disproved in the case of Bangladesh where during the Bangladesh Liberation War in 1971, between 200 000 and 400 000 Bengali women were tortured and raped by Pakistani military and as Brownmiller writes: ‘‘Rape in Bangladesh had hardly been restricted to beauty. Girls of eight and grandmothers of seventy-five had been sexually assaulted’’ (Brownmiller 1993, 83). But according to the biological determinism theory, only attractive young women would have been targeted. Despite the Bangladeshi government declaring survivors and victims of mass sexual violence war heroines, women and girls were ostracized by their families and communities.

Since majority of explanations omitted scrutiny of male sexuality, male libido was seen as an uncontrollable ‘‘pressure cooker’’ (Oku 2011) which is the theory that I analyse next. The pressure cooker theory claims that ‘‘wartime rape is a result of the sexual desires of men, resulting from their biological make up’’ (Baaz, Stern 2013, 17). The pressure cooker theory also suggests that it is the chaos of the wartime milieu that encourages men to vent their urges on women. Furthermore, it claims that during peacetime, those urges are restrained by culture. Culture in this context means the accepted and shared values, beliefs and attitudes of a society. However, national culture and identity become even more reinforced during wartime so it is not due to the lack of restraint from culture that men are committing rape. The culture is usually the main reason men are able to rape without consequences because it justifies their behaviour

and/or blames the women for being raped. What might be restrained are social norms and women's purity and honour lie at the heart of all of them.

The third theory I analyse is biosocial theory of rape which combines biological as well as sociocultural reasons. It is built on the idea that "men are genetically wired to rape, and their sexual drive and desire to act on it is the main motivation for rape. Furthermore, during armed conflict, their libido intensifies, and there is no way to stop SGBV" (Oku 2011, 64). The anthropologist Roland Littlewood claimed that wartime rape is in some sense natural to men. "Given its cross-cultural and cross-historical prevalence, and given the age ranges of its primary victims, biosocial theorists conclude that a prominent motive for wartime rape is the simple sexual desire of individual fighters" (Gottschaal 2004). Anthropologist Craig Palmer and biologist Randy Thornhill argue that rape is a reproductive strategy for men because rape circumvents women's ability to choose their mate, or in other words consent (Palmer, Thornhill 2000). Their explanation could be read as men, for the greater good, possibly survival of the human species but also for selfish reasons such as passing on their genes to the next generation, rape because they have no other option if they want to reproduce. Just like biological determinism theory, this theory makes them seem like victims of biology as well as society. Also, it is the kind of reasoning that is found on incel<sup>4</sup> forums.

"The variability of wartime rape across conflicts and the fact that many soldiers with the option to rape apparently choose not to decisively rules out the view of wartime rape as a blind genetic drive that is, and ever will be, expressed when men meet to fight and kill. This variation is best explained as a result of sociocultural influences" (Gottschall 2004). In order not to align themselves with biological determinism completely, which has over the years become a disputed outdated theory, Palmer and Thornhill include the influence of sociocultural factors when explaining wartime rape. However, as Oku cleverly points out " This theory fails to explain why and how they broke their "gene power" to not rape, if in fact it is the male DNA that is

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<sup>4</sup> "short for "involuntarily celibate," a term originally coined in 1993 by a queer woman searching for a way to describe her sense of loneliness, and to connect with others who felt the same. The phrase has since been co-opted by an online community of men who are, in the simplest terms, angry that they can't convince women to have sex with them... often, plot violence against women, including advocating for state-sanctioned rape.." (Dancyger, Samotin 2018).

commanding them to commit sexual violence” (Oku 2011, 65). Since Palmer and Thornhill suggest that men are victims of both their biology as well as society, they take away reasoning, responsibility and any kind of agency.

The fourth theory which I analyse is feminist theory of wartime rape which ‘extends the power hypothesis of rape into the wartime milieu’ (Gottschaal 2004). Since rape is one of the most addressed issues by feminist theorists, I chose to analyse Seifert and Brownmiller’s writing. They both consider rape to be a crime motivated by the desire of a man to exert dominance over women which also translates into the context of war. ‘‘Since men in patriarchal societies are conditioned to distrust, despise, and dominate women’’ (Gottschaal 2004), warrior rapists ‘‘vent their contempt for women’’ (Brownmiller 1975, 32) and at the same time perpetuate and enforce patriarchal gender arrangements from which all men benefit. ‘‘Since rape is seen as the result of specific types of socialization practices particular to specific types of societies, feminist rape theory generates the expectation that rape in the context of war (and peace) should only prevail in a limited subset of societies’’ (Gottschaal 2004). ‘‘Specifically, rape in war is expected to occur largely in Western and staunchly patriarchal societies and in societies that are somehow distant from or out of harmony with nature’’ (Siefert 1996, 36). Rape should also occur more in societies where traditional power structures have been challenged and power has been redistributed both legally and socially. Societies with few rapes are predicted to be those in which male supremacy is completely assured (most Muslim societies) or where women enjoy respect and an honoured status in the culture (certain tribal societies). However, it is hard to judge the true incidence of rape in societies that do not recognize rape as a crime perpetrated against the victim and view it rather as a crime perpetrated by the victim against public morale or a family’s honour, which is the case of Muslim countries.

Ruth Seifert claims regarding the function of rape that ‘‘Rape is not an aggressive expression of sexuality, but a sexual expression of aggression. In the perpetrator's psyche, it does not fulfil sexual functions, but is a manifestation of anger, violence and domination of a woman. The purpose is to degrade, humiliate and subjugate her’’ (Seifert 1996). The perception of rape from the side of the victim is that she ‘‘does not feel she is exposed to a sexual act but an extreme and humiliating form of violence directed against herself and her body’’ (ibid.). The form of violence is gender based and is meant to exert power over women and assert dominance. If rape was about

sexuality, then in a war zone where there are willing women or prostitutes, men would not rape. However, in many contexts, men simply prefer to rape and “it has nothing to do with sexuality but rather reflects the exercise of sexual gender specific violence” (Seifert 1994, 58). Men rape because they choose to while sending a message to the losing side that they have won. *To the victor go the spoils* can be interpreted as the winning side having “the right to exert violence against women . . . during campaigns of conquest or in the immediate post-war period” (ibid.) which is obviously false.

The next theory I will analyse is militarized masculinity rape theory which gives an insight into the perpetrators’ perspective and their justification for rape. Enloe says that there are three main forms of militarized rape: recreational rape which was the case in DRC that I am going to analyse, national security rape and systematic mass rape (Enloe 2000). “...these forms of rape are... the product of relationships between people, institutions, and discourses, and the result of specific decisions” (Enloe 2000, 127). “Militarized sexualized violence must be seen in light of globalized discourses defining militarized masculinity and heterosexuality” (Baaz 2009). Men in the military are subjected to pressures to conform to the ideal soldier who is a heterosexual, aggressive, emotionless brave man to be feared that can protect his country’s women and thereby protect his and other men’s honour. The military also instils ideas about sexuality and race which are then played out on the battlefield. Brownmiller also says that the all-male hierarchal aggressive environment of the military “confirms for men what they long suspect, that women are peripheral, irrelevant to the world that counts, passive spectators to the action in the center ring” (Brownmiller 1993, 32). This kind of socialization leads to men thinking that women have no agency, no role to play in upholding peace and security in their country which then leads to crimes committed against women and girls being treated as collateral damage and only secondary in importance to crimes like killings and executions.

The leading theory of wartime rape has for some time been the strategic rape theory which is about the use of rape as a tactic which is executed by soldiers in the service of larger strategic objectives. “While supporters of this position do not always claim that military planners explicitly instruct soldiers to rape, the implication is clear: Wartime rape is a coherent, coordinated, logical, and brutally effective means of prosecuting warfare” (Brownmiller 1975). Strategic rape theory is sometimes referred to as "genocidal rape", rape designed, whether with full consciousness or not, to annihilate a people and a culture. I believe Catherine MacKinnon summarize well the essence of genocidal rape: “this is not rape out of control. It is rape under control. It is also rape unto death, rape as massacre, rape to kill and to make the victims wish they were dead. It is rape as an instrument of forced exile, rape to make you leave your home and never want to go back. It is rape to be seen and heard and watched and told to others; rape as spectacle. It is rape to drive a wedge through a community, to shatter a society, to destroy a people” (MacKinnon 2006, 187). “The fulfilment of causing harm to or eradicating a certain racial, ethnic, and religious group relies on the notions of gender, sexuality, and reproduction” (Oku 2011, 10) Even though the intersection of gender, sex, race, religion and ethnicity might complicate the understanding of wartime rape but it is essential to understand how these identity markers are mobilized in specific contexts.

Gottschall argues that a physical and/or cultural genocide might be the unintended consequence, not the motive for rape in some cases. However, it is hard to imagine that the impact of rape would not be taken into account when devising the most effective military strategy. Also, “because of the lack of attention and prosecutability, rape is used as a chosen tactic by armed groups, taking advantage of the invisibility for such crimes and the culture of impunity.” (Oku 2011, 12). I would argue that the underlying strategy of using sexual violence as a weapon of war is that by raping women, community bonds break down and people become demoralized. “Rape spreads debilitating fear and at the same time diminishes resistance of the civilian population, restricting freedom of movement and economic activity and ultimately forcing the civilian population into submission” (Oku 2011, 55). If rape is used on such a mass scale that it results in a genocide, it is difficult to believe that it was not the intended outcome.

## **Cultural functions of sexual violence**

As Seifert rightfully points out, war crimes against women have cultural functions; they inflict harm on the culture and collective identity of the whole group. Since, “War crimes against women have a symbolic meaning”, they need to be “analysed within the symbolic contexts of the nation and the gender system” (Seifert 1996). Globally, women’s bodies are the symbolic sites upon which societies inscribe their values (Benhabib 2006). Killing women would already have an impact on men’s role as protectors but at least their violated bodies would not be around to remind everyone of what had happened. By committing acts of sexual violence against women, they are bringing dishonour not only to the women, but they are in masculinity terms, emasculating the men related to them and/or soldiers tasked with protecting the nation. Sexual violence is definitely a form of male communication which “is especially salient in cultures that consider women to be the property or the social responsibility of their husbands or fathers” (Reid-Cunningham 2008, 282). The underlying logic is that women’ bodies have always been perceived as men’s property that can be damaged by other men and once claimed by other men, they lose their value. This kind of logic is inherent to all societies that value women’s virginity above anything else, even above their bodily autonomy and dignity. “When a woman’s inner space is violently invaded, it affects her in the same way torture does. It results in physical pain, loss of dignity, an attack on her identity, and a loss of self-determination over her own body” (Seifert 1994, 55). “Civilian women are the material that war is waged with” (Reid-Cunningham 2008, 282). Some academics have argued that men rape during war and genocide because the “acquisition of the female body means a piece of territory conquered in symbolic terms: forced sexual penetration (especially when combined with ejaculation and insemination) represents conquest of the woman by the rapist and, by symbolic extension, dominance of the raping culture over the raped culture” (Reid-Cunningham 2008, 292).

Sexual violence against women has the power to destroy a nation's culture. Women are those who hold the families and the community together in times of war and often time during peace time as well. “Their physical and emotional destruction aims at destroying social and cultural stability. Moreover, the psychological effects mass rapes have on the community concerned may lead to the devaluation and dissolution of the entire group. Societies derive their specific form, their self-image and their definition of reality from cultural cohesion, its destruction is of

outstanding importance” (Seifert 1996, 39). Societies cannot survive without culture and even though culture can be restored even after it has been brought on the brink of destruction, it is unlikely that it will ever be the same. The cultural aspect of sexual violence is a part of all theories, some of which I apply to the case of DRC and Sudan below.

### **Militarized masculinity rape theory in the context of DRC**

Since 1997, there has been an intense armed conflict in the DRC which was supposed to end with the signing of a peace treaty in 2003. Not even the general elections, which were held in 2006, led to stability and general insecurity increased in the East during 2007. Massive amounts of sexual violence were committed by both government forces and members of the rebel groups against civilians. “A June 2011 study in the *American Journal of Public Health* found that 400,000 women aged 15-49 were raped in the DRC over a 12-month period in 2006 and 2007” which is 26 times more than the numbers the UN had released (Walker 2011). The root cause of mass rape in the DRC is attributed to the pursuit to obtain highly profitable mineral resources, such as coltan, gold, diamonds, and copper. The sales of these “conflict minerals” help finance armed groups and subsequently keep the rape campaigns going (Oku 2011, 4) perpetuating a vicious circle. Maria Erikson Baaz conducted a study to “explore the ways soldiers in the Congo speak about the massive amount of rape committed by the armed forces in the recent war in the DRC” (Baaz 2009, 495). The study features this explanation of the different types of rape by a male lieutenant:

“Rape (...) there are different types of rape. They are all forbidden. There is the rape when a soldier is away, when he has not seen his women for a while and has needs and no money. This is the lust/need rape [viol ya posa]. But there are also the bad rapes, as a result of the spirit of war (...) to humiliate the dignity of people. This is an evil rape” (ibid.).

Baaz notes that “The soldiers distinguish between rapes that are somehow more “ok,” morally defensible, ethically palatable and socially acceptable (and therewith, arguably not really rapes in their eyes), and those that are “evil,” and not acceptable—but still “understandable” (Baaz

2009). However, the distinction between different types of rape are blurry. It seems that what constitutes an evil rape from a defensible rape seems to be whose honour is directly targeted. If it is the woman's, it seems acceptable. If it is a strategic attack to hurt a man's honour, it is evil. In the hypermasculine heterosexual environment of the army, "Sexual crime is justified because rape is understood as a means to acquire masculine qualities" (Oku 2011, 68). This rationale is stated by the soldiers who link the act of rape as a way to "inhabit certain idealized notions of heterosexual manhood" (Baaz 2009, 497) which soldiers are expected to embody.

Enloe asserts that the fusion between being masculine and raping women is fabricated. Unfortunately, sexual violence is an especially efficient method of developing and sustaining cohesion in armies, therefore it can often be encouraged. Even though soldiering is presented as a naturally manly activity, socialization of rape "requires explicit and artificial construction, sometimes backed by coercion" (Enloe 2000, 55). Sexual violence is used to display one's masculinity and virility. "Militarization of ethnic nationalism often depends on persuading individual men that their own manhood will be fully validated only if they perform as soldiers" (ibid.). Finally, misogynistic discourses that are very present in rape culture "become particularly toxic and pervasive when intermeshed with other power relations making up the climate of masculine violence inherent to militarization and armed conflict" (Baaz 2009, 499).

### **Strategic rape as a weapon of war against Nuba people in Sudan**

The Nuba Mountains is an area located in South Kordofan, Sudan. The area is home to a group of indigenous ethnic groups known collectively as the Nuba peoples. Nuba women have known strategic rape as a weapon of war since at least 1987. From 1987 to 2002, rape and other forms of sexual violence were used by the Sudanese government as a weapon of terror and genocide to eliminate the Nuba identity (Nobel Women's Initiative 2013). The Sudanese army targeted civilians, using rape to terrorize the population and cleanse them from the area, a strategy very similar to the one used in Darfur. The military also committed sexual assaults against fleeing civilians and abducted hundreds of women and girls who remain unaccounted for (idem).

“Sexual violence is perpetrated against women during ethnic conflict because women keep the civilian population functioning through their roles as mothers, wives, and caretakers” (Reid-Cunningham 2008, 292). “The humiliation of a culture through the systematic violation of women is the primary goal of mass rape during ethnic conflict” (ibid.). However, in this case, rape and other forms of sexual violence were used as a weapon of terror indiscriminately. Mass rape is a strategy devised to “bring about destruction and death, to impede in-group births, to undermine family structures, and to severely traumatize the target population” (Reid-Cunningham 2008, 293). Rape causes not only serious bodily harm and PTSD, but it often affects the reproductive capabilities of survivors and therefore the ability of the community to reproduce.

Both women and children of all ages have been subjected to rape, gang rape, genital mutilation and other cruel sexual acts. Those crimes have often been accompanied with other crimes such as kidnapping, killings and brutal military assaults on unarmed civilians. The goal was cultural as well as physical genocide. The evidence lies in the gender segregation and forced marriage imposed on the Nuba during the war as well as the division of men and women into separate camps to keep them from marrying and having children. Furthermore, “Arab tribesmen were encouraged to forcibly marry Nuba women to eliminate Nuba identity” (Nobel Women’s Initiative 2013).

## **Chapter 2: Use of sexual slavery as a weapon of war in a genocide context**

### **Defining sexual slavery and genocide and the link between them**

“For many women, rape is not a one-time event; rather sexual violence and exploitation are, for at least some period of time, routine conditions of their lives”. Barry defines sexual slavery as any situation in which: “women or girls cannot change the immediate conditions of their existence; where regardless of how they got into those conditions they cannot get out; and where they are subject to sexual violence and exploitation” (Barry 1984, 40). Sexual slavery can be present in different forms or can develop over time from capture to forced marriage and/or sex trafficking to forced impregnation. Sexual slavery implies the incidence of rape because the person is held against their will and their ability to give consent has been taken away.

“Rape is a forced sexual penetration that can cause death, lead to serious bodily and mental harm, bring about the physical destruction of the group, and impede births. Thus, rape can be considered an act of genocide” (Reid-Cunningham 2008, 280) which the article 2 of the 1948 Convention on the prevention and punishment of the crime of genocide defines as: “any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: a) killing members of the group; b) causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; d) imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; e) forcibly transferring children of the group to another group”(UN 1948).

### **Genocidal sexual slavery**

As Sarah Clark Miller notes, rape and therefore sexual slavery is an extremely effective genocidal strategy, since it “corrupts women's roles as caretakers of relationships, conveyors of cultural practices, and sustainers of meaning ... In these ways, genocidal rapists twist the way in

which women are pivotal to the life of a community, rendering them pivotal to its destruction” (Miller 2009, 513-514). This is by no means an unexpected outcome. The stigma attached to sexual violence is present in most cultures and survivors are often ostracized for having been raped. “A woman’s sexual virtue is highly valued by the community as a marker of the purity and prestige of her family” (Reid-Cunningham 2008, 290). “Mass rape during genocide draws upon existing gender dynamics and cultural factors to increase the damaging effects of the assault. The act of rape robs the husband of his control over his wife’s sexuality during the rape, but it also robs him of the ability to sexually enjoy his wife afterward, because she may be injured, traumatized, or pregnant. In this way, the male is emasculated (and therefore dehumanized, rendered powerless) by being denied sole access to his woman “ (Reid-Cunningham 2008, 291-2). Until women’s bodies are seen as more than sacred grounds so to say, they will be used as a means to genocide.

### **Why sexual slavery is more impactful than femicide**

Femicide is the killing of women and girls solely because they are female, usually by men related to them. A question that comes to mind is: if the goal is genocide, why are women and girls as child bearers simply not killed to prevent the birth of future generations? “The fundamental reason for the use of rape and sexual violence in armed conflict is to purposefully keep the victims alive with utmost devastation possible and leave them severely traumatized and deranged in a death-like, zombie-like condition.” (Oku 2011, 14). In contemporary warfare, Achille Mbembe contends that “weapons are deployed in the interest of maximum destruction of persons and the creation of *death-worlds*, new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of *living dead*” (ibid.). A population that is barely living and where social bonds have been broken cannot rise from the state of living dead nor reproduce for years if not decades depending on the level of trauma and the willingness of the community at large to accept babies born as a result of rape and recognize survivors as those against whom a crime was committed.

### **The in/visibility of wartime sexual violence**

On one hand, sexual violence is often referred to as an invisible crime because it does not leave behind dead bodies, unless women die as a result of the injuries they suffered. There are some forms of sexual violence, such as sexual slavery and forced impregnation that are highly visible and that visibility is purposeful. “The perpetrators of genocidal rape use their knowledge of the social consequences of sexual assault to maximize damage to the target population. Rapes are conducted in such a way that they are difficult for survivors to conceal—for example, publicly, in broad daylight. Women who become visibly pregnant after rape have no chance to hide what happened to them, and this is one of the intentions of forced pregnancy: to compel the woman to suffer the stigma her community deems appropriate for a rape survivor” (Reid-Cunningham 2008, 291). “The consequences of this stigma against rape survivors effectively render a generation of women unlikely to bear children within their own community” (ibid.). The question remains, if sexual violence happens on a mass scale, family members are forced to witness it or it is a publicly declared strategy, how can we claim it is invisible? The taboo associated with being a survivor of sexual violence decreases the likelihood of accurate statistics and also there is an unofficial hierarchy of crimes. Those who have died are remembered as martyrs and heroes whereas survivors are blamed for not resisting which in case of a situation where one is outnumbered, such as gang rape, is futile.

### **Gang rape and militarized masculinity**

Gang rape can be a one-time event or an occurring event in the case of sexual enslavement. If gang rape happens in front of male family members, it is to communicate to the enemy men that they have no power in that situation which emasculates them before the enemy and his wife. The shame associated with being unable to defend one’s women is also part of the strategy to achieve a genocide. It humiliates the other side because it failed to protect the social reproducers of their community. It breaks down gender stereotypes about men being strong and challenges

assumptions about power dynamics within the community which rely on everyone living up to traditional gender roles.

Gang rape, more so in the context of sexual slavery, serves as a mutual demonstration of masculinity. Gang rapes are likely more common in case of sexual enslavement because women have no one to defend them and they are unable to leave. "Gang rapes are often distinguished by a ritualized procedure...the order of the rape is determined by the status of the men within the group" (Seifert 1994, 56). "Analysis of gang rapes provides further corroboration of the role of peer pressure and social norms of masculinity in the ethology of rape. The main purpose of gang rape appears to be proving one's masculinity to the group through the display of sexual violence" (Reid-Cunningham 2008, 284). The other aim is to forcefully impregnate women from the other side with enemy's babies which is exactly what happened in Bosnia-Herzegovina which I discuss below.

### **Pollution theory and sexual slavery in Bosnia-Herzegovina (1992-1995)**

Pollution theory of rape can be easily applied to the use of sexual slavery as a form of genocide. If the aim is to "pollute" another ethnic group, sexual slavery which restricts the freedom of movement, allows for more opportunity to rape and therefore forcefully impregnate women from the target ethnic/religious group. "The intention of forced pregnancy is "to alienate women's reproductive as well as productive rights [through] rape to impregnate, making women bear children for the 'enemy' community" and making them unfit or unable to bear children of their own ethnicity" (Reid-Cunningham 2008, 286). Those children will be a reminder of what the group's tragic history is and will likely be abandoned/ostracized along with the women who bore them. This conquest of women's bodies becomes "generalized to the whole population as survivors, witnesses, families, and communities internalize rape as an assault on their collective consciousness" (Reid-Cunningham 2008).

Strategic mass rape and sexual slavery was used as a weapon of war in Bosnia-Herzegovina between 1992 and 1996. Forced pregnancy was a central strategy of the Serb forces during the

genocide in Bosnia-Herzegovina (1992–1995), with detention camps established for the purpose of sexually assaulting women. Bosnian women frequently reported Serbians “triumphantly jeering after reaching orgasm that the woman was now carrying ‘Serb seed’ and would produce a ‘Serb baby’. Buses filled with women in late stages of pregnancy were sent back over enemy lines as proof of conquest of both territory and women’s bodies. ”These forcibly impregnated women were living symbols of the conquest: beaten and raped, barely alive, their abdomens swollen with so-called Serb babies, they stumbled home only to be discarded, shunned, or killed” (Reid-Cunningham 2008, 286-7). The aim was to leave the population on the brink of destruction, a community of not completely dead but barely living.

“Children born of rape are seen by the mother’s community as soiling the group’s bloodlines, while the perpetrators may consider the woman and the child to have been “ethnically cleansed” through the assault” (Reid-Cunningham 2008, 280). Women’s bodies serve as a means of communication between the two sides and their children as a reminder of what had happened. As a result, communities often reject babies born of rape. “Sometimes communities will re-accept a raped woman if she aborts, abandons, or destroys her baby. An estimated 5,000 infants were abandoned or killed in the aftermath of genocidal rape in the Balkans” (Reid-Cunningham 2008, 286). If abandoning or killing babies born of rape is the only way for the women to be accepted again in the community, it can lead to a further decline in population which has already been decreased making physical genocide more likely.

### **Sexual enslavement by the Japanese Imperial army during WW2**

“Slavery is the status or condition of a person over whom any or all of the powers attaching to the right of ownership are exercised” (Convention to Suppress the Slave Trade and Slavery, Sept. 25, 1926, 60 U.N.T.S. 253). “Sexual autonomy is a power attaching to the right of ownership of a person, and controlling another person's sexuality is, therefore, a form of slavery” (Argibay 2003, 375). Slavery, as one of the most profound violations the human right to freedom and dignity, was one of the first crimes to be made illegal under international law. “The Japanese “comfort system” combined these forms of control. In addition to restricting its victims' freedom of movement, it forced them to perform sexual labor” (ibid.). Even though

there seems to be a very romanticized portrayal of the environment in which comfort women were forced to live and work, their "work" was bonded and consisted of sexual exploitation.

In 1937, the Japanese military invaded and destroyed the city of Nanking, an incident which became known as "The Rape of Nanking" and led to an international condemnation. To save the image of the Imperial army, the network of 'comfort stations' which existed since 1932 was expanded (Argibay 2003, 376). "The Japanese military created the first such stations near some barracks in continental China. As licensed prostitution existed at that time in Japan, it is possible that those first comfort stations employed licensed prostitutes. After the Rape of Nanking, however, military regulation of comfort stations changed them into facilities for sexual slavery" (ibid.). Women and girls were forced into sexual slavery by the Imperial Japanese Army in occupied territories for four main reasons. First, the image of the Imperial army needed to be restored and another Rape of Nanking prevented. Second, prevention of an anti-Japanese sentiment that could lead to rising resistance among local residents in the occupied territories. Third, the government hoped that soldiers would be less likely to contract STDs in a controlled environment where women had to be tested and/or were virgins. And lastly, the Japanese were paranoid about the infiltration of foreign spies whereas "many of the comfort women had been trafficked from distant countries, did not know the local language, could not leave the facilities and were abused if they did not comply with their captors' orders. Therefore, they could not communicate any military secrets confided to them" (Argibay 2003, 377).

Therefore, sexual slavery was a strategic method of war to keep soldiers who raped women in newly conquered territories and prevent resistance. The government knew what they were doing went far beyond licensed prostitution because they hid the women and threatened them. "Survivors who gave testimony before The Women's International War Crimes Tribunal 2000 for the Trial of Japanese Military Sexual Slavery stated that they were enslaved through abduction in the Philippines, Malaysia, East Timor, Korea, China, Taiwan and Indonesia" (Argibay 2003, 378). Some women were lured into comfort stations under a false pretence of a job overseas, some were kidnapped for being allegedly part of the resistance or supported it at least, girls and women in villages were told to report for work and if they refused, the "Japanese army

threatened to destroy the village, kill the elders and children and commit other violent measures” (ibid.). “In Java, the Japanese army used civilian internment camps as the source of young women and girls for the comfort stations “(ibid.).

Even licensed prostitutes, who were brought to the comfort stations, were deprived control over their sexuality, dehumanized and objectified, and became sexual slaves. The Southeast Asia Translation and Interrogation Center (SEATIC) Psychological Warfare Interrogation Bulletin No. 26 reported that “the Japanese manager of a comfort station in Burma, who operated under military authority, purchased the Korean women from their families for 300 to 1000 yen each "depending on the girls' characters, appearance, and ages," and that once bought the women became his sole property” (idem). Comfort stations turned sex trafficking rings became the only way to make sure soldiers did not seek to satisfy their “urges” elsewhere. There does not seem to have been willingness to issue an order not to rape civilians and put an accountability mechanism in place. “The Japanese military employed any form of force or violence to obtain the increasing number of women needed to "comfort" soldiers” (Argibay 2003, 379). Iris Chang's well-known study of the rape of Nanking which revealed “the high level of militarization in Japanese education and culture at that time, the brutality of military training, and the new attitude toward the Chinese, previously admired but now looked down upon” (Barstow, 2000, 47) backs up the cultural pathology theory of rape which examines the country’s history to identify the factors which might have caused the behaviour and can be extended to explain the practice of sexual slavery put in place by the Japanese army. She also describes the deeply ingrained contempt for women within Japanese military culture” (Argibay 2003, 379) which can be explained by men having to prove themselves as soldiers and wanting to assume dominance over women of foreign ethnic origin.

### **Sexual slavery as a strategic weapon of war in a sectarian conflict**

“War rape intimidates the enemy. It demoralises the enemy. It makes women pregnant, and thereby furthers the cause of genocide. It tampers with the identity

of the next generation. It breaks up families. It disperses entire populations. It drives a wedge between family members. It extends the oppressor's dominance in a very physical/visual representation into future generations'' (Scholz 2005).

The two main armed groups, the Seleka and the anti-balaka have used rape and sexual slavery as a tactic of war across the Central African Republic for nearly 5 years (Human Rights Watch 2017c). HRW 2017 report 'They Said We Are Their Slaves,' Sexual Violence by Armed Groups in the Central African Republic' documents 305 cases of rape and sexual slavery carried out against 296 women and girls by members of armed groups between early 2013 and mid-2017 (idem). The anti-balaka, a largely Christian and animist militia, associated all Muslims with the Seleka and carried out large-scale assaults on Muslim civilians in Bangui and western parts of CAR. Perpetrators often directed attacks at women and girls due to their presumed religious affiliation. Women and girls were held as sexual slaves for up to 18 months, often subjected to repeated gang rape. Many were forced to marry enemy fighters and engage in domestic slavery. 'In some cases of sexual slavery—wherein fighters committed sexual violence and exerted ownership over victims—women or girls experienced multiple rapes over a period of days, weeks, or months'' (idem).

A testimony describing sexual slavery by a survivor from the 2017 report:

“Each day, four [anti-balaka] came to have sex with me in the morning. Then five men at 3 p.m. and again at 7 p.m. In the morning four men, in the afternoon and evening, the commander plus four men.... They said, ‘You look like a Christian girl. You sell your sex to Muslims. Today you will see’’ (idem).

And survivors of sexual violence describe the aftermath as follows:

“I was traumatized because on the street people would say, ‘There she is, the woman who was raped by the Seleka.’ At the house, my husband said, ‘You

accepted that the Seleka raped you. Why did you not cry out? Take your things and leave'' (idem.).

The sectarian war was fought on women's bodies and it was a strategic way of spreading terror among communities and symbolically demarcating conquered territory. The Seleka fighters knew that raping anti-balaka women would weaken community bonds because the women would be the ones blamed, their children rejected, and both would be ostracised and vice versa. 'Impunity has also aggravated the current conflict. Both the Seleka and anti-balaka clearly feel they will pay no price for committing atrocities, and they have made targeting civilians a central part of their military operations. The lack of justice led further to reprisal attacks by one group against the other, intensifying the violence and widening the sectarian divide '' (Human Rights Watch 2017d).

### **A proposal of a new theoretical framework**

It is generally agreed that none of the existing theories of rape can individually explain the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war in a genocide context or in ethnic/religious conflicts. I believe a new theoretical framework, applicable in those contexts, that combines different theories of rape since a lot of them are intertwined and interdependent, is in order. Also, without a combination of different theories that are concerned with different actors and power dynamics, the targeting of women would be analysed using only one or two identity markers (gender and ethnicity) when in fact there are often many more at play.

I propose a theoretical framework that combines strategic rape theory, feminist theory of rape, rape as a means of male communication and militarized masculinity rape theory to explain why sexual violence is an efficient way of achieving genocide and why it is used in ethnic/sectarian conflicts. Starting with feminist theory of rape, which explains why women of all ages are targeted in a sexual way, feminist theory explains the hatred and sexual violence directed at women by men as a demonstration of power, both physical and social. In a wartime milieu, that

violence and hatred is even more intensified as ethnic/religious and gender identities are mobilized.

This demonstration and ability to exert power over women is an integral part of the next theory, rape as a means of male communication. What is important in every context is the preservation of women's bodily integrity (purity/virginity) and therefore men's honour. Sexually assaulting women is a way for the winning side to demarcate their new 'territory' and to humiliate the men on the losing side. Women's bodies do not really belong to them. They serve as an indicator of power imbalance and as a reminder of defeat. Militarized masculinity rape theory completes the explanation why soldiers rape in war setting.

Sexual violence within armies serves as a way to inhabit true manhood and prove one's virility to fellow soldiers. Some soldiers are coerced into sexual violence but the aggressive hyper masculine environment of the army that is full of toxic masculinity makes it easier for rape to seem as a right of passage and as acceptable behaviour when one is far away from home. This theory more than any other theory explains individual soldier's explanation for rape.

Finally, for sexual violence to be an effective genocidal strategy, it needs to be aware of existing gender roles and power dynamics within communities upon which its success relies. If victim blaming was not part of the local culture, community bonds would be far harder to break. The intention of sexual violence within a genocide context is often to terrorize and traumatize members of the community, apart from affecting the ethnic/religious make up by forceful impregnation, and it is often cheaper and more devastating due to the nature of the attack.

## **Chapter 3- Case study: Sexual enslavement of Yazidi women and girls in Iraq within the context of the most recent Yazidi genocide**

### **Yazidism and the history of genocides against the Yazidis**

The Yazidis are among the world's most marginalized communities. The majority of them are ethnically Kurdish and are religiously distinct from Iraq's predominantly Sunni Kurdish population. "Iraq is considered the homeland of the Yazidi community, as Yazidism's holiest sites are located in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Between 700,000 to 750,000 Yazidis lived in Iraq in 2005. By 2014, this had decreased by 200,000 and then by a further 90,000 between 2014 and 2017" (Yazda 2017, 27). "During Saddam Hussein's rule, efforts were made to strip the Yazidi minority of their true identity, as Yazidis were formally designated as Arabs and Yazidism was considered as a sect of Sunni Islam. These policies were contrary to the views of the Yazidi community, and to historical, social, and linguistic facts" (ibid.). Their faith remains considered illegitimate by the majority of the Iraqi population. The Yazidis are also in a grey area regarding where to seek protection as a religious minority.

Historically, the Yazidis have suffered persecution on a large scale, having faced 74 genocidal campaigns against them throughout history (Ahmado 2018). Their persecution was based largely on the false idea that they are infidels and devil worshippers. Yazidism is an ancient faith of at least 6000 years with "a rich oral tradition that integrates some Islamic beliefs with elements of Zoroastrianism, the ancient Persian religion, and Mithraism, a mystery religion originating in the Eastern Mediterranean" (Asher-Schapiro 2014). The existence of their faith has been threatened multiple times and in order to survive it has had to adopt aspects of rival religions like Islam or Christianity. Though Yazidis pray toward the sun, and worship seven angels, they are monotheistic, and there is little to distinguish their God from the Muslim or the Christian one.

### **The 2014 attack on Sinjar by ISIL and the 2015 liberation**

The Sinjar region is inhabited by about 600 000 Yazidis and is flat and desert like. For centuries, the 4,800-foot-high Mount Sinjar has served as a refuge for Yazidis fleeing possible genocide.

ISIL came into the town of Sinjar on August 3<sup>rd</sup> 2014, with the intention of wiping out Yazidis, both culturally and physically in Iraq. Approximately 12,000 Yazidis were killed or abducted by ISIL, although reported figures vary, when it seized control of the Sinjar district. “IS destroyed Yazidi religious sites in the territories it occupied. Yazidi homes and properties were destroyed or looted, severely hampering the prospects of surviving Yazidis returning to their homeland swiftly after liberation” (Yazda 2017). The goal was to erase any sign of Yazidi presence in Sinjar. If the Yazidis left northern Iraq, Yazidism would mostly likely become extinct. Their struggle has for thousands of years been existential. What made Yazidi escape more difficult was roads out of Sinjar being full of military trucks carrying Iraqi Kurdish peshmerga fighters who were ordered by Kurdish regional government to retreat rather than fight ISIL. Around 50 000 Yazidis managed to escape to Mount Sinjar (Ahmado 2018). “After the peshmerga withdrew, Turkish Kurdish guerrilla fighters, many of them women, arrived and led several thousands of Yazidis around the mountain, through part of Syria, and into safety in Iraqi Kurdistan” (Arraf 2018).

The Yazidis who did not get away were essentially presented with two choices, convert or die. During what came to be known as the Sinjar massacre, ISIL killed men, disabled people, the elderly and took young boys to brainwashing camps to train them to become future jihadists. More than 6500 women and children were taken into captivity. In the months that followed, young women and girls were repeatedly raped, tortured and sold. In August 2016, Yazda reported that 2648 have managed to escape but more than 3500 remained in captivity (Yazda 2016). The atrocities committed against the Yazidis became recognized by the UN Security Council as genocide only in 2017<sup>5</sup>, following a 2016 UN Human Rights Council report titled “They came to destroy: ISIS crimes against the Yazidis” that stated: “ISIL has sought to destroy the Yazidis through killings; sexual slavery, enslavement, torture and inhuman and degrading treatment and forcible transfer causing serious bodily and mental harm; the infliction of conditions of life that bring about a slow death; the imposition of measures to prevent Yazidi children from being born, including forced conversion of adults, the separation of Yazidi men and women, and mental trauma; and the transfer of Yazidi children from their own families and

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<sup>5</sup> Security Council resolution 2379 (2017) [on establishment of an Investigative Team to Support Domestic Efforts to Hold the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant Accountable for Its Actions in Iraq]

placing them with ISIL fighters, thereby cutting them off from beliefs and practices of their own religious community, and erasing their identity as Yazidis’’ (UNHRC 2016).

The Liberation of Sinjar happened on November 13<sup>th</sup> 2015 but Yazidis were slow to return from Mount Sinjar, because it was some of their Muslim neighbours who aided ISIL in their capture. Two mass graves were found following the liberation, one containing women’s remains and the other one men’s. The 2015 November Sinjar offensive was a combination of operations of Kurdish Peshmerga, Kurdistan Workers’ Party , and People's Protection Units forces backed by USA air strikes to recapture the city of Sinjar from ISIL. It resulted in a decisive victory for the Kurdish forces, who expelled the militants from Sinjar and ‘ ’ severed vital supply routes used by Islamic State to move fighters, weapons and oil and other illicit commodities that provide funding’’ (Coles 2015) to ISIL’s operations.

### **Motives for targeting the Yazidis**

Even though the majority of ISIL’s victims are Muslims, ISIL has also targeted Christians but it seems to have reserved the most brutal treatment for the Yazidis. The Yazidis have survived over 70 attempts at genocides, so it is clear that as a population and culture, they are quite resistant. Most experts agree that ISIL’s main motive for attacking the Yazidis was religious persecution using forced conversion to Sunni Islam and destruction of Yazidi holy sites which they justified with their own interpretation of Islam. ISIL’s Research and Fatwa Department had declared that ‘ ’unlike Christians or Shia Muslims, Yazidis were a pagan minority‘ ’ (Krajeski 2018). The main goals of ISIL’s attack which started with the Sinjar massacre on August 4<sup>th</sup> seem to have been: cultural genocide, forced conversion to ISIL’s version of Islam, human trafficking and physical genocide. In the next section, I will explain how they planned to achieve those goals because they were interconnected, and all relied on the consequences of trespassing on the integrity of women’s bodies and deeply entrenched notions about honour and marriage held by the Yazidis.

## **Theorizing ISIL's use of sexual slavery as a weapon of genocide**

In order to understand the use of sexual slavery by ISIL as a way of achieving Yazidi genocide, I am applying the new theoretical framework with the aim of putting all the different parts of the rationale together to see how ISIL planned to bring about the end of the Yazidis both physically and culturally.

Yazda stated in their 2017 report that ISIL first "systematically divided Yazidis into different groups. Young women and girls, some as young as 9 years of age, were forcibly converted and transferred to and between various holding sites in Iraq and Syria to be used as *sabaya* (sex slaves) or forced wives by IS fighters, a practice that was officially endorsed and regulated by IS leadership" (Yazda 2017). Cultural knowledge as well as gender stereotypes that ISIL held about the Yazidis and Yazidi women especially were the root causes of the use of sexual slavery by which ISIL showed that it held and could exert complete power over the Yazidis. The women's bodies served as a means to demonstrate that power. ISIL fighters did not rape and sell Yazidi women just out of hatred for them as women belonging to a religious minority but because it considered them to be "unclean sex slaves" (Yazda 2017). To communicate further defeat to Yazidi men, fighters routinely kidnaped women and children and gave them as gifts of appreciation to the faithful ISIL soldiers or sold them in modern slavery markets in ISIL-controlled territories. The message to Yazidi men was clear: they have lost control over women's bodies, an essential component of manhood and they failed as men since they could not prevent ISIL fighters from taking women and girls away to be sold.

ISIL counted on the cultural impact of rape to work in their favour to make sure that future generations would not be born. The Yazidis are known for being divided strictly into castes who cannot marry each other, they do not accept outsiders and they risk ostracization if they marry outside of their sect so by raping and forcefully impregnating Yazidi women and killing or converting the men, pure Yazidi children could not be born in the future because the ethnic makeup would have been tampered with. The goal was to break apart remaining members of the Yazidi community by having women give birth to children of the enemy. This strategy is mainly applicable when we are talking about ethnic/religious minorities such as the Yazidis.

Sex trafficking/sexual slavery was used to raise funds but mainly to humiliate and traumatize the Yazidis. As Rey Chow asserts, “it is not always necessary to go to the extreme of extermination in order to accomplish the task of control and subjugation” (Chow 2002). Not everyone has to be killed for the society to be left in a death like state. “This production of the liminal living dead is a favoured strategy in contemporary biopolitical wars, challenging the norm of death centric discourse of war and peace” (Oku 2011, 17). Sexual violence is an “economical weapon of war for the perpetrators, cheaper than AK-47s or grenades or scud missiles” (Oku 2011) which is what makes it strategic. “Using one’s body as a weapon is inexpensive and the damage is devastating without spending money (Oku 2011, 56). ISIL might have used ‘guns and knives to threaten women, but the actual weapon was the body of the perpetrators (Oku 2011, 56) who used sexual violence to prove to themselves and each other to be worthy of being soldiers of the caliphate. It was also used to demonstrate to the commanders that they were committed to the cause if they went as far as an attempt at cultural and physical genocide.

Furthermore, it is quite certain that ISIL employed sexual slavery because it is a highly effective method to achieve genocide. Also, one of its declared goals was the extinction of the Yazidis. By separating men from women, and also killing men who refused to convert or were too slow to convert, they planned to affect the future ethnic make-up of the population. Since Yazidis do not accept converts from other sects or clans, by killing and/or forcibly converting men to Sunni Islam and brainwashing children to reject their cultural heritage, Yazidism would die out.

### **The ranking of crimes against the Yazidis**

The Yazidi genocide has become synonymous with sexual slavery partially due to the Nadia Murad, a Yazidi survivor and an activist who has testified on the plight of the Yazidis and her own story of surviving sexual slavery in front of the UN Security Council. With the majority of the focus on sexual violence, Dr Katherine E Brown, lecturer in Islamic Studies at the University of Birmingham, believes that there is a risk of oversexualizing Yazidi women and taking away their ethnic identity and distracting from the genocide. She claims that the term sex slave

“reduces the trauma that these women have gone through,” and that “It oversexualises what they are going through” (Barnett 2016). However, following Seifert’s reasoning that rape is a pseudosexual or even anti-sexual act since the aim of the act is to exert power over the woman not to satisfy sexual urge (Seifert 1994, 56), we do not risk oversexualizing Yazidi women because the act of sexual slavery was not sexual in nature.

“The women have had all their human rights removed, and the rape is a big part of that. They have been removed from their communities and their communities have effectively been destroyed. Whole ethnic groups are being eradicated” (Barnett 2016). The real risk is if a gender lense is not applied to the analysis and Yazidi women are thought of exclusively as members of a religious minority community, it places sexual violence in second place after killings. Without a gender analysis, we cannot explain why Yazidi women were targeted the way they were. Also, the crime of execution and sexual slavery are impossible to put in order because they are incomparable. Those who were killed are no longer alive but women who survived sexual slavery have witnessed horrors, have been sold, married off multiple times and raped and/or tortured. It is impossible to say whether bearing testimony to the genocide of one’s community and sometimes entire family is better than dying.

### **Beyond the dichotomy of sex slave/wife**

While Sunni women faced mainly gender policing, due to ISIL’s portrayal of them as obedient wife material, Yazidi women were forced into sexual slavery if they did not convert fast enough to ISIL’s version of Islam. What is interesting is that ISIL did not perceive women only using the dichotomy of sex slave/wife. Even though ISIL frequently shared their hatred for women and stated that their role was purely to serve and marry ISIL fighters, they recruited charismatic women to widen their supporter base using social media and women groups and targeted young Muslim women living in Western countries who feel marginalized or lack a sense of purpose to join their campaign to establish a caliphate. What is worrying is that ISIL was able to conjure up an idea of an exciting life convincingly enough that they were willing to abandon their lives and head off to Syria by themselves.

Even though ISIL does not respect nor value women's lives, they understood the role of women as cultural carriers and just how important the bodily integrity of women was for the Yazidi community. They also understood the lack of freedom and future that many Muslim girls living in a seemingly liberal Western world felt and used it to recruit them. Where ISIL went wrong was thinking that Yazidi women could not rebuild their lives and with their male family members gone, they would not be able to restore the community. This assumption was a big mistake because after mourning came a wave of testimony and women made their voices heard.

### **The reclaiming of agency by Yazidi women**

The role and position of Yazidi women in their communities has changed significantly after the genocide but they are still being portrayed as victims first. That is not to say that women did not suffer horrible acts of violence but despite the existence of inspiring stories of women working together to survive while they were in capture, female victimization has definitely overshadowed women's agency in the global narrative of the Yazidi genocide. Fortunately, survivors like Nadia Murad, who are relentlessly speaking out, are changing that narrative. There are examples of women making fire and then covering their faces with ash to appear less attractive to their captors hoping to avoid being raped or sold. Accounts such as these are so common that journalist Cathy Otten titled her book about Yazidi women, 'With Ash on their Faces.' It is clear that their Yazidi identity was important to them as "Otten recounts an extraordinary story of a woman who combined breast milk with ash and used the mixture to tattoo her own name so she could be identified in death" (Marczak 2018). Older women protected younger girls from being sold or taken away and faced harsh punishments for those actions. They made friends with the wives of their captors some of whom felt sorry for them and helped them escape. Those who survived years of capture and those who remain in capture should be treated as war heroines because of the terrible ordeal they have been through and because of the restoration of their community that lies ahead in which women play a huge part.

## **The current situation and the challenge to bring ISIL to justice**

In April of this year, 400,000 Yazidis remained displaced throughout the provinces of northern Iraq (Ahmado 2018). Hundreds of women and children remain in IS's captivity in Syria. Many more have died in air strikes or by committing suicide. ISIL has sought to defend its actions toward Yazidis through its online propaganda magazine Dabiq. One article from the magazine's October 2014 issue claimed that "enslaving the families of the [non-believers] and taking their women as concubines was a firmly established aspect of sharia. However, the vast majority of Muslim clerics disagree with and condemn their actions (Goodstein 2016). "The IS has not tried to hide or deny its crimes. On the contrary, more than any other group, it has gone to great efforts to publicize gruesome details of the atrocities perpetrated by its members against captured soldiers and civilians alike." (Amnesty International 2014, 11). Unlike army commanders and war lords who usually deny any responsibility ISIL has "used its reputation as a brutal and ruthless actor to instil fear in its enemies and anyone else in its path"(ibid.)."

With the documented display of brutality, the assuming of responsibility for their crimes, and having employed all five prohibited acts detailed in the 1948 Genocide Convention (UN 2017), why has ISIL not been brought to justice in front of the ICC? Since the majority of ISIL fighters are nationals of Syria and Iraq and neither of those countries are parties to the Rome statute of the ICC, the ICC does not have jurisdiction in this matter. Furthermore, Iraq does not have legislation to try war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide. Current trials and prosecutions of ISIL fighters, irrespective of their nationality have been conducted solely under Iraq's counter-terrorism law and the proceedings have been characterized by human rights violations, including extrajudicial killings, torture and a lack of due process for the accused. Fastly resolved trials rather than careful examinations of evidence seems to be the priority of the Iraqi as well as the KRG judiciaries. ISIL fighters or alleged fighters are being primarily and often exclusively charged for their membership in ISIL, "with no distinction made for the severity of the charges brought against suspects and no effort to prioritize the prosecution of the worst offenses" (Human Rights Watch 2017a). In an ideal world, Syria and Iraq would both become parties to the Rome Statute so that ISIL commanders could stand trial at the ICC. Another option could be the establishment of a special court in the region to prosecute all ISIL fighters.

## Conclusion

In this thesis, I have attempted to analyse different theories of rape, extend those that needed to be extended to the wartime/genocide context and apply them to case studies as objectively as I could. I have also tried to combine theories, which I found to be valid, into a new theoretical framework.

Reflecting on my position as a researcher, I believe my research was affected more by my academic background which shapes my values, than by my ascribed characteristics such as my sex or ethnicity which was mainly due to the fact that I did not carry out field research, a choice that I stand by. I think that by coming from a feminist academic background and relying mostly on literature written by feminist scholars, I was more inclined to disregard or scrutinize theories like biological determinism which highlights biology and ignores socialization which is essential to feminist theory of rape. Aside from my feminist background, I also come from a human rights law background where agency and accountability are crucial and being a victim of one's biology is not recognized.

I knew from the beginning of my degree that this was the topic I was going to write about. From the very beginning, I felt personally (emotionally) invested in the Yazidi genocide, not just due to the sexual slavery component but also because I have been following the developments of the Yazidi campaign to bring ISIL to justice step by step since 2014 while remaining an outsider, a spectator of sorts. Even though I am an outsider to the Yazidi culture, military culture and the different examples I analysed throughout my thesis, as a woman, even a white European one, I am an insider and have daily lived experience of rape culture which might take on different forms in different contexts, however, values like purity, virginity, honour and modesty that are forced upon women shape my life experience just as they shape those living in CAR or Sinjar. I might experience a lower degree of rape culture and would not be ostracized by my community like survivors in armed conflicts but we would both be told that in some way I was our fault. I have found it very easy to empathize with survivors of sexual violence especially with Nadia Murad who is my age but had her life forever changed by ISIL.

I have two types of recommendations for further research. The first one is about the new theoretical framework I proposed at the end of chapter two and the second one is about what could have made my arguments in the Yazidi genocide case stronger. My recommendation for further research is to try to apply the new theoretical framework to different case studies to test the validity of the framework. I think that for too long, academics have been arguing over whose theory is better; which one can explain it all and have recently favoured strategic theory of rape, but in reality, the four theories I present are intertwined. And although feminist theory is necessary, it is not enough to explain the whole picture, especially in ethnic/ religious contexts or genocides.

My recommendation for further research into the Yazidi case study is to conduct more field research in order to understand why ISIL targeted Yazidis specifically as a religious minority when the majority of their victims have been Muslims. I suggest conducting interviews with (former) ISIL fighters to confirm our theories regarding the use of sexual slavery as a means to genocide. It would be interesting to find out what were the different motives and aims of ISIL as a group and those of individual fighters. Their self-declared motives for their crimes as well as their goals would be an extremely valuable source of information. An example of interviews could be the interviews such as those that Baaz conducted in the DRC.

It would also be useful to analyse ISIL's former online propaganda magazine *Dabiq* which was used for recruitment and radicalisation, but has been taken down in 2015, as it could enlighten us about ISIL's convictions and motives as well as what feelings they were able to tap into in order to recruit the number of fighters that they did. It could also give us an idea why women were so willing to abandon their lives and join ISIL despite the public display of violence that ISIL directed at women from religious minorities.

Finally, I think there needs to be a more intersectional approach to discussing wartime sexual violence that is not additive but takes into account relevant identity markers and their interaction in specific contexts. As Davis says: "intersectionality provides a conceptual framework for acknowledging the complexities of identity, as well as how the interplay of identities affects one's life. Through an intersectional analysis, violations against women will be better understood and their needs better served" (Davis 2009) which is what policy makers, feminist academics and humanitarian workers should aim for.

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