

Not a trophy woman

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Throughout history and up until today, minorities are known to be the first victims of armed conflict. In particular, human trafficking is considered to be inevitable during wars where women are highly targeted for sexual purposes. In fact, abducted women are being dreaded physically and emotionally by continuous and daily vicious rape introducing the tragic phenomenon called sexual slavery. Hence, this paper will tackle forced prostitution during armed conflict: how it affected women, the reasons behind it, what was done so far and what can be done in the future to solve this issue.

Records of sexual slavery were silent during World War II due to the fact that it was happening in all countries and it was hard for one to make allegations against another. Moreover, in 1940s sexual harassments were not discussed openly and little to no women's movement was taking place. Therefore, sexual slavery was considered inevitable during these times [1]. However, after the war ended and as soon as people started talking about the committed crimes, the most highlighted one was the forced prostitution perpetrated onto Asian women –also known as comfort women back then– by the Japanese army. These women were raped by sixty to seventy men a day and yet their story went silent for around 50 years! Moreover, as of 1971, over 400,000 Bengali women were enslaved by Pakistani army for nine months [2]. Fast-forwarding to 2014, more than 200 school girls were abducted in Nigeria by Boko Haram regime and were married to combatants [3]. Furthermore, the Islamic State (IS, also known as Daesh)

abducted hundreds (or maybe thousands) of Yazidi children and women from the Sinjar region in Iraq. They were separated according to their marital status: Old women were killed, married women without children and unmarried women (including under-aged girls) were transported across the Syrian-Iraqi borders and held in different sites. They were then divided into three categories: 1) some were sold in slave markets (also known as *souk sabaya*¹ by the IS), 2) some were given as a 'gift' to the IS combatants, and 3) the rest were held in 'rest houses' under the threat of being killed for refusing sex [4]. In addition, unmarried women were highly targeted since they carry a 'value' due to their virginity status. Some women managed to escape and agreed to be interviewed by the Amnesty International team to tell their story. According to them, they first used to lie about their marital status, however, they were threatened of being 'examined' by a doctor and being punished in case they were lying. Therefore, they used to admit to their lies because "if we had known that they were going to kill us we would have continued to lie but we were afraid that we would be raped as punishment so we admitted that we were not married" [5]. In addition, in order to keep the sex trade ongoing, the IS combatants coerced these women on taking birth controls before enslaving and raping them and in case they got pregnant, they were forced to have an abortion. In fact, these women used to know that they were about to be sold when they were forced to go to the hospital to get their urine sample tested in order to make sure that they were not pregnant [6].

There are many reasons as to why sexual slavery was-still being in some communities-common during wars. First, it was seen as a mollification for the armed

¹ Souk Sabaya: The slaves market identified by the IS at Al Shaddi, Raqqa and Tadmur in Syria

forces. For example, as the name implies, the previously mentioned comfort women were seen as a source of soothing the temper of the fighters and stabilizing their psychology. Second, forced prostitution was considered as a 'reward' for the military forces. Third, enslaving these women was seen as a way to destroy the 'pride' of the enemies' community. Yet these leave us with many questions: Where did all this sexual frustration come from? Since when horrendous enslavement and coercion are a form of 'comfort'? How is the sexual history of a woman perceived as honor?

Moreover, it is important to mention that these consequences of wars exist during peacetime, however, they are exacerbated during conflict and are aggravated due to the impunity system. Therefore, many initiatives were done in order to end sexual violence such as the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Laws² [7]. Moreover, the International Criminal Court (ICC) identified sexual enslavement during wars as a humanitarian crime. Not to forget the Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict which was a collaboration between the United Kingdom and Angelina Jolie [8]. However, these latter failed in delivering effective and concrete results since up until today many conflict zones are witnessing sexual slavery. Therefore, in order to end sexual molesting, not only is it important to issue international laws but also ensuring that effective measures are taken to execute judicial mechanisms during conflict is key. This can be done by encouraging organizations (such as UN) to fearlessly report any sexual crime and prosecute the molesters. Moreover, international parties must join forces in dealing with sexual slavery as a threat to the international security imposed by

² Geneva Conventions: These failed to characterize sexual harassment as a crime against humanity and integrity of the body, but rather they identified it as an attack of 'honor'/dignity.

extremist communities. In addition, the borders must be well monitored in order to prevent any human trafficking across them. And lastly, NGOs that fight for women's liberty and rights must be empowered and strengthened in order to break the stigma and educate the public that sexual violence must not be tolerated in any way whatsoever.

At last, women have always worn the brunt of conflicts both directly and indirectly. However, it is time to turn the tables; all women must be set free and molesters must be imprisoned. This can only be achieved if international communities put the time, efforts and funds in order to effectively fight against sexual slavery. A woman's body is not a prize to materialize!

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