

## Sexual Violence: A Campaign Against the Bosniaks

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Devising a military strategy is a process that invites much creativity. In fact, oftentimes, I have found myself bewildered at the degree of brilliance and deception laced in these strategies, as was the case when I learned about Britain's assembly of the Magic Gang in 1941 which, among other projects, was able to construct illusions in order to attack the Germans in Egypt (Monticup). However, not all strategies of such brilliance and deception have left me in the same kind of awe, as was the case when I read Tatjana Takševa's 2015 article, *Genocidal Rape, Enforced Impregnation and the Discourse of Serbian National Identity*, which delved into the analysis of systematic rape and enforced impregnation as "ideologically-motivated processes combined to revive, inflame and militarize long-standing Serbian stereotypes about Muslims and the supposed threat they represent." In my opinion, such a strategy with manifold intentions—to destabilize the social and ethnic group of raped mothers and their children and to construct paternal lineages that would enlarge the ethnic group of the aggressors—is of ingenious design but alarming foundations.

During the 1992-1995 Bosnian War, Serb forces captured and imprisoned between 25,000 and 40,000 women in rape camps, permitting their release only after confirming the *impossibility* of safe abortion upon pregnancy. The rapes and enforced impregnations that occurred in these camps were a way to assert, control, define, the criteria of membership in one group (from the perspective of the Serbs), as well as destabilize the criteria of membership in another group (from the perspective of the Bosniaks). At this point, I find it necessary to question how and why a biological marker of identity—a person's (more specifically, a *woman's*) ethnic background—has been attributed such (*socially constructed*) significance. For the Serbs embarking on their nationalist revival, this was simultaneously (1) an ironic act of vengeance (for the Serbian women *and* men who were subjected to acts of sexual violence by Albanian nationalists in Kosovo in the 1980s) and (2) a nationalist masculinist project reflecting patriarchal values of male control and sexual entitlement. Reflecting on the first purpose, it is interesting to learn that, at the time, the nationalist interpretation of sexual violence to the Serbian women and men who were raped in the 1980s was one that focused less on the *experience* of victims and more on the challenge to Serbian masculine pride. For, on the one hand, the rape of a male created the perception of a questionable gender hierarchy in the eyes of the patriarchal discourse, and, on the other hand, the rape of a Serbian woman reigned a sense of humiliation over both her husband (if she were married) and her community. In any case, this interpretation found its roots in masculine honor and the need to restore it. Reflecting on the second purpose, to rape and impregnate a Bosniak woman, in the eyes of the Serbs, was to rape the ethnic purity of the group she was *assumed* to identify with. And so, a woman's body became a battlefield to reinvigorate and reproduce the Serbian nationalist patriarchal narrative.

The ingeniousness of this military strategy lies in the fact that Serbian forces managed to *perpetually* taint the identity of the Bosniak group, even 25 years later, as rape survivors continued to share their stories (Turton). At this point, I contemplate whether it is the Serbian grouping on the basis of biological markers perceived through the patriarchal lens that drove the suggestion and, in turn, execution of sexual violence as a military tactic in the first place. In other words, is the Serbian

group, as one that has assembled on the basis of an ethnic background and an advocacy for the patriarchal narrative, able to view Bosniak women as tools of warfare because it views its own women as tools of warfare? It seems evident that it is the responsibility of the woman to strengthen or dismantle the basis of a grouping, imposed on her by the nationalist masculinist narrative. Thus, the even deeper issue becomes the perpetuation of this narrative that has surfaced long before this specific crime against humanity. However, dismantling such a narrative that has found and evolved its manifestations in all aspects of life is not a simple task. Hence, I will leave it at that.

Moreover, for the Serbs, the systematic rape and enforced impregnation of Bosniak women simply entailed a decrease in the number of Muslim children born and an increase of the Serbian birth-rate. However, for the Bosniak women-turned-mothers, rape entailed shame and humiliation, trauma, and a responsibility to bear and care for a child in a society that was not going to support its existence. Of course, it is important to be reminded that the weaponization of women's bodies is not a tactic used only in *active* warfare. Here, we can recall the pressures exerted on the Palestinian women on a more regular basis to bear more children in support of the national struggle (Yuval-Davis).

Thus far, I have attempted to explore the patriarchal and nationalist foundation of these rapes. However, I would like to end this paper by taking a slight turn and briefly exploring my opinion that the freedom of fertility is an illusion, too, in other arenas, such as capitalist societies. To state it explicitly, in my opinion, capitalist societies that have passed prenatal policies as a means of eventually enlarging a population's workforce have created the illusion of freedom to reproduce as well. Money as a means to live a fruitful and productive life in this capitalist society is being used as a tool to encourage the reproduction of a life that will, too, chase money as a means to live a fruitful and productive life in this capitalist society. For example, in 1996, the Japanese government offered a reward of 5,000 yen (\$38) a month for each child under school age and twice as much for third children with the purpose of encouraging Japan's birthrate (which had been the lowest Japan had ever seen) (Yuval-Davis). According to the government, a continuation of a population decline would lead to "labour shortages, sluggish economic growth and higher tax burdens to support social services for the elderly." Of course, we have seen this rhetoric at stages after 1996, such as Germany's willingness to intake Syrian refugees in order to revitalize her labor force. All in all, offering money as an incentive to encourage birth is, to put it bluntly, a form of bribery that may be able to sit well with the people because a life outside of the developed capitalist system may be harder than the one inside it.

Concluding this paper is a harder task than I thought. I have reached a state of anger and frustration at the world mankind has built: one that is able to find much benefit in exploiting the female body and its capacities. What I can say is that, in the case of the Bosniak women, whether her reproductive capacity was sought for as a vehicle for either vengeance or the execution of the nationalist masculinist project, her voice was unheard (if she was not already voiceless). In the case of women worldwide, the fight for the freedom to rule over our own bodies is one that has made considerable progress in many parts of the world but cannot be put aside just yet. Our bodies will always remain our own, at all stages of our lives (despite what any law may have to say), and this is the message that must be understood loud and clear.

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