

# **DRAFT: DO NOT CITE WITHOUT AUTHOR'S PERMISSION**

## **War Babies and the Politics of Identity<sup>1</sup>**

Patricia Weitsman

Assumptions regarding identity, biology, paternity, and genetics underpin policies of rape during warfare. These assumptions are discernible in the discourse surrounding rape and debates regarding the fate of the children who are the consequence of the assaults. For example, the mass rape in Bosnia by Serbian troops was actually encouraged by the Serbian government and military. This was viewed as a means of ensuring that Bosnian Muslim women would bear Serbian rather than Bosnian Muslim babies. This stands in contrast to Nazi policies during WWII that prohibited military personnel from raping Jewish women, as the act would not only defile the rapist, but any ensuing pregnancy would perpetuate the “inferior” race. In other words, there are dramatic differences in the way identity is constructed. As a result, there are profound differences in the way the children conceived during wartime are perceived. The rape of French women by German invading soldiers in the First World War prompted national debate regarding the legalization of abortion, so as to prevent the birth of “children of the barbarian.” In contrast, children born of rape in Bosnia were not allowed to be adopted overseas, as they were viewed as a central means of repopulating the country.<sup>2</sup>

In this paper, I argue that children born of rape during wartime, a subset of what the authors in this volume call “war babies,” raise important issues about the way we conceptualize identity. They also inform us about the way those ideas about identity are disseminated via institutional structures including warring communities, the transnational scholarly community and media, and post-conflict governments. I begin with a discussion of the assumptions that underpin the construction of national, ethnic and religious identity. I then analyze how these assumptions affect the context in which political actors engage, make sense of and respond to mass rape campaigns. I examine the ways in which media portrayals of women in war create a permissive environment for egregious acts of sexual violence to take place. I then link those processes and representations to the post conflict response of governments to the children born of rape during wartime. I conclude by arguing that the state, society, and media all play an important part in generating the assumptions about biology, ethnicity, genetics, and gender that construct a permissive environment for sexual violence during war and the perceptions of the children who are born as a consequence.

### **The Construction of Identity**

---

<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank J. Samuel Barkin, David Hoffmann, and George Shambaugh for their comments on various versions of this paper. R. Charli Carpenter provided innumerable and invaluable edits, insights, and insertions for which I am deeply grateful.

<sup>2</sup> Carol J. Williams, “Bosnia’s orphans of rape: Innocent legacy of hatred,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 24, 1993. This was true in Kosovo as well. See “Americans offer to adopt war child born of rape: A home must be sought in Kosovo first,” *The Ottawa Citizen*, May 11, 2000.

Beliefs about the derivatives of identity are variable, and are driven by social and historical forces. These beliefs matter, despite the fact that they are socially constructed. The ramifications are manifold. The tendency of groups and individuals to set themselves apart in regard to certain social categories affects their behavior in ways that validate and perpetuate their identities.<sup>3</sup> Not only do these identities generate social conflict between groups, but they give rise to national identities: nation states evolve as a consequence. Very sophisticated, complex, and nuanced laws develop around these identities, particularly in regard to citizenship and nationality, i.e., who belongs and who does not. These laws and institutional structures support and perpetuate socially constructed concepts of national identity.<sup>4</sup>

The representations of these identities reveal assumptions about gender, ethnicity, and race that are deeply rooted in society. The discourse that surrounds the issues of rape during wartime, “ethnic cleansing,” “racial hygiene,” “genocidal babies,” all perpetuate myths about identity—that it is genetically determined, that it derives from the father, that it derives from the mother, that some blood is purer than other blood, and so forth. These discursive practices frequently culminate in pervasive discrimination against specific social groups, outrageous acts of violence against women, and the neglect of children who are born of rape during wartime.

The media, popular discourse, norms and customs, institutional and governmental practices, are all purveyors of these myths about identity. The narratives that are used to convey information help communicate what society is to take as the most important aspects of an identity. In many of the narratives described below, for example, being a woman is intertwined with the central questions of political passivity and ethnic belonging.

During wartime, questions of identity become outlined in even sharper relief. Persecuted groups, or any social group confronting external hostility, will have a heightened sense of self identity. Drawing together as a group, becoming more cohesive, will validate its identity.<sup>5</sup> The source of cohesion and disintegration in any societal group derives from sentiment, and the best way to manipulate and construct sentiment is discourse.<sup>6</sup> As we seek to identify others through who we are not, our enemies, our “others,” our ethnicities, races, citizenships, religions, all become tools of exclusion. This is certainly true in the case of the children of “mixed heritage” who result from rape during wartime.<sup>7</sup> The children born of rape in Bosnia are called “a generation of children

---

<sup>3</sup> James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, “Violence and the social construction of ethnic identity,” *International Organization*, vol. 54, no. 4, (autumn 2000): 855; Sarup, *Identity, culture and the postmodern world*, p. 7, 47.

<sup>4</sup> Sarup, *Identity, culture and the postmodern world*, p. 182. See also Benedict Anderson, *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*, (London: Verso, 1983).

<sup>5</sup> Madan Sarup, *Identity, culture and the postmodern world*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996), p. 3. See also Lewis A. Coser, *Functions of social conflict* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, Ltd., 1968).

<sup>6</sup> Bruce Lincoln, *Discourse and the construction of society*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 10-11.

<sup>7</sup> See R. Charli Carpenter, “Surfacing children: Limitations of genocidal rape discourse, *Human Rights Quarterly*, vol. 22, 2000: 428-477 for an excellent and insightful analysis of the myriad ways these children are marginalized.

of hate.”<sup>8</sup> In Kosovo, they are known as the “children of shame.”<sup>9</sup> In Rwanda, they are called, “children of bad memories,”<sup>10</sup> “children of hate,” “unwanted children.”<sup>11</sup> The children born of U.S. fathers to women in Vietnam during the war were known “children of the dust.”<sup>12</sup> In Darfur, children born to ethnic Africans in the aftermath of the large scale rapes by government forces in Sudan are called “janjaweed” by their mothers, or “devils on horseback.”<sup>13</sup> These are just some examples, all of which reveal a disturbing stigma attached to these children, even though they themselves are obviously not the ones who have the bad memories, or the ones who hate. Yet their identity becomes constructed in a way that is inextricably linked to their rapist fathers, even though it is others who raise them.<sup>14</sup> In contrast, the babies born in Britain during WWI to unwed mothers by departing soldiers led to a call for reform in “bastardy laws.” These children were considered the result of “self or race preservation” and were not to be condemned. These babies were considered “unborn children...left to us in trust by our soldiers.”<sup>15</sup>

Part of the challenge posed by children born of rape during wartime is that they entail elements of both self and other. The inability for those around them to disentangle them from the circumstances of their conception manifests itself in their uncertain status as well. Identity revolves necessarily around difference, and is understandable only through contrast. War babies become a prism for these differences—while technically a combination of the self identity as well as “the other,” the way they are perceived does not always reflect that reality. Instead, these children are often viewed purely as “the other,” despite their birth mothers’ identities, and despite the fact that they are usually raised by members of their mothers’ ethnic groups.

The sections below identify the construction and reproduction of these identities in three sites around the war babies problematique: the rape campaigns themselves, the depictions of mass rape in scholarly literature and the media, and state efforts to respond to babies brought to term in the aftermath.

### **The Role of State Apparatuses**

The role of the state or state officials in shaping ideas regarding identity is paramount. The links between genetics, culture, gender, and identity are embodied in policy prescriptions that drive behavior and shape outcomes. These norms and ideas are

---

<sup>8</sup> Louise Branson, “A generation of children of hate: The unwanted children conceived in the rapes of some 20,000 women may be the most lasting scar left by Yugoslavia’s bitter civil war,” *The Toronto Star*, January 29, 1993. She describes one mother who calls her child a Chetnik baby.

<sup>9</sup> “Rape victims’ babies pay the price of war,” *The Observer*, April 16, 2000.

<sup>10</sup> James C. McKinley, Jr., “Legacy of Rwanda violence: The thousands born of rape,” *New York Times*, September 25, 1996.

<sup>11</sup> Human Rights Watch, “Shattered lives: Sexual violence during the Rwandan genocide and its aftermath,” Human Rights Watch, September 1996, p. 3.

<sup>12</sup> Robert S. McKelvey, *The dust of life: America’s children abandoned in Vietnam*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999).

<sup>13</sup> Lydia Polgreen, “Darfur’s Babies of Rape are on Trial from Birth,” *New York Times*, 2/11/05.

<sup>14</sup> See R. Charli Carpenter, “Surfacing children: Limitations of genocidal rape discourse,” *Human Rights Quarterly*, vol. 22, 2000, p. 430, 453-457.

<sup>15</sup> Grayzel, *Women’s identities at war*, p. 96. See also Susan R. Grayzel, “The mothers of our soldiers’ children: Motherhood, immortality, and the war baby scandal, 1914-1918, in Claudia Nelson and Sumner Holmes, eds., *Maternal Instincts: Visions of Motherhood and Sexuality in Britain, 1875-1925*, (London: Macmillan, 1997), p. 122-140.

pervasive, and hard to change once embedded in the culture in question. These images are manifest in the treatment of the children conceived in wartime as well.

The state plays an important role in creating and sustaining particular views of identity. Official policy in regard to the rapes and the children who result from the assaults are very telling in reference to social beliefs about identity, both its construction and propagation.<sup>16</sup> For example, in the cases where rape and forced impregnation and maternity were encouraged by authorities in order to “ethnically cleanse” a territory, the link between paternity and identity is held above all others. This appears to have been the case for the rapes perpetrated by the Serbs in Bosnia. Accounts by rape victims and rapists indicate that these were violations not only sanctioned by Serbian officials, but ordered by them. According to a Deutsche Press-Agentur account on July 2, 1996, soldiers, police, and paramilitaries who systematically raped women and girls in Bosnia said that they “had been instructed to make chetnik babies.”<sup>17</sup> Another interview in the *Toronto Star* found that

95 out of 105 young women held at a rape camp at Kalinovik, south of Sarajevo, say they were gang-raped by the members of the ‘White Eagles’ militia with the specific purpose of making them pregnant....One woman held prisoner in the camp for two months has described how bearded Serb gunmen shouted, ‘You are going to have our children-you are going to have our little Chetniks.’....She said women who were expecting babies were left unmolested ‘because they could not be made pregnant.’<sup>18</sup>

These reports were confirmed by other sources as well; women and girls were raped repeatedly until pregnant then left alone. One man who raped “‘10 girls in their 20s and killed six of them’” said he was “forced to rape the women under orders from his commanders.”<sup>19</sup> Another Serbian rapist told his victim ‘I must [rape you]. If I do not they will hurt me. Because they have ordered me to.’<sup>20</sup> According to Roy Gutman, prize winning journalist for *Newsday* magazine, Bosnian Muslim rape victims were told by that

---

<sup>16</sup> The state also plays an important role in the perception of the rape survivors. While in many countries, such as Rwanda and Bosnia the women are frequently ostracized by their families, in other instances, the countries in question try to compensate in some fashion. In 1943-1944, Moroccan soldiers of the French army given license to rape. The Italian government offered rape victims pension, although there I have not uncovered any information about offspring. See Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars*, (NY: Basic Books, 1977, p. 134; Catherine N. Niarchos, “Women, War, and Rape: Challenges Facing the International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia,” *Human Rights Quarterly*, vol. 17, no. 4 (1995), p. 666. Thousands of Bengali women were raped by West Pakistani soldiers; some of the women held in military brothels. These women were subsequently rejected by their spouses and families, but government tried to restore their positions by calling them “national ‘heroines.’” Niarchos, “Women, War, and Rape, p. 667; Brownmiller, *Against Our Will*, p.61-62. One Peruvian woman who sought to identify the soldiers who raped her, and the father of her child was ridiculed to such an extent by the army commander about her gestating pregnancy that she gave up. Human Rights Watch, *The Human Rights Watch Global Report on Women’s Human Rights*, (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1995), p. 88.

<sup>17</sup> “Mass rape in Bosnia took place on orders from above,” Deutsche Press-Agentur, July 2, 1996.

<sup>18</sup> Robert Fisk, “Rape victims say Serb troops ‘wanted babies,’” *The Toronto Star*, February 8, 1993.

<sup>19</sup> Louise Branson, “A generation of children of hate: The unwanted children conceived in the rapes of some 20,000 women may be the most lasting scar left by Yugoslavia’s bitter civil war,” *The Toronto Star*, January 29, 1993.

<sup>20</sup> George Rodrigue, “Women: The targets of terror; Serbs accused of systematically raping Muslims in Bosnia,” *The Gazette* (Montreal), November 23, 1992.

their captors wanted ‘plant the seeds of Serbs in Bosnia.’<sup>21</sup> Similarly, widescale rape occurred at the Croat Camp Dretelj for Serbs and Moslems. Women were told that they would not be released until they gave birth to an “ustaša” (Croatian fascist).<sup>22</sup>

In contrast, the rise of National Socialism in Germany was accompanied by “scientific” concern regarding “racial hygiene.” Ultimately, racial hygienists advocated sterilization in order to ensure that the “genetically diseased” would not reproduce.<sup>23</sup> While this eugenicist movement was not limited to Germany,<sup>24</sup> it had the farthest reaching implications there. By September of 1935, marriage and sexual relationships between Jews and Germans were prohibited.<sup>25</sup> The reproductive role women play was paramount in Nazi Germany, but only those women who were deemed racially desirable.<sup>26</sup> In fact, these women were given awards for producing many children, were prohibited from curbing their fertility (considered “racial treason” and prosecuted in the same way someone “contributing to the racial degeneration of the German people through intermarriage with members of the Jewish blood community.”<sup>27</sup>), prevented from joining certain professions, and were only given job security in official postings after the age of 35. All of these measures would ensure healthy breeding stock of women.<sup>28</sup> By contrast, coerced abortions on women producing undesirable offspring ensured that only the genetically correct would perpetuate the next generation.<sup>29</sup> The point here is that “‘Jewishness’ could never be bred out of a population unless there was strict segregation.”<sup>30</sup> While Nazi views of women were problematic, they saw identity as genetically determined by both mother and father.

While rape was unquestionably a weapon of the war in Rwanda, forced impregnation or maternity was not always the intended goal as it was in the former Yugoslavia. As one Tutsi survivor reported, the Interahamwe repeatedly yelled to her and the other women in her group, “Kill them, you have to kill them. They will make Tutsi babies.”<sup>31</sup> Tutsi women were the specific target of the Hutu militia groups violence.

---

<sup>21</sup> Roy Gutman, *A Witness to Genocide*, (NY: Macmillan, 1993), p. 76.

<sup>22</sup> Vesna Nikolić-Ristanović, ed., *Women, violence and war: Wartime victimization of refugees in the Balkans*, (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2000), p. 61.

<sup>23</sup> Robert Proctor, *Racial hygiene: Medicine under the Nazis*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), p. 95-97; Paul Weindling, *Health, race and German politics between national unification and Nazism, 1870-1945*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

<sup>24</sup> Indiana passed sterilization laws in 1907; by the late 1920s, 27 other American states had them as well. See Proctor, *Racial hygiene: Medicine under the Nazis*, p. 97-98.

<sup>25</sup> Proctor, *Racial hygiene: Medicine under the Nazis*, p. 103.

<sup>26</sup> The Lebensborn project was the Nazis child rearing program in which thousands of children were taken from their parent or parents and raised by state approved couples. See Proctor, *Racial hygiene: Medicine under the Nazis*, p. 87, Kai Greg, “The War Children of the World,” War and Children Identity Project, Bergen, December 2001, p. 27.

<sup>27</sup> Proctor, *Racial hygiene: Medicine under the Nazis*, p.121. See also Weindling, *Health, race and German politics between national unification and Nazism, 1870-1945*, p. 530-532.

<sup>28</sup> Proctor, *Racial hygiene: Medicine under the Nazis*, p. 124.

<sup>29</sup> Atina Grossmann, “A Question of Silence: The Rape of German Women by Occupation Soldiers,” in Robert G. Moeller, ed, *West Germany under construction: Politics, society, and culture in the Adenauer era* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), p. 41.

<sup>30</sup> Weindling, *Health, race and German politics between national unification and Nazism, 1870-1945*, p.531.

<sup>31</sup> Human Rights Watch, “Shattered lives: Sexual violence during the Rwandan genocide and its aftermath,” September 1996, p. 27. Available at <http://www.hrw.org/reports/1996/Rwanda.htm>

Propaganda generated by the organizers of the genocide argued that Tutsi used their women to infiltrate and control Hutu communities. Extremist newspapers and radio stations, supported by government and military officials, continually broadcast warnings about Tutsi women. Stereotypes represented Tutsi women as believing themselves to be superior, arrogant and manipulative, using their sexual prowess to dominate and control Hutu men. Representations of Tutsi women as tools to demean and control Hutu men became increasingly pervasive in the extremist propaganda. Anyone in the military seeking to marry a Tutsi woman was expelled from the military. And when the violence began to unfold in 1994, the rape of Tutsi women was on a massive scale.<sup>32</sup>

“Most of the women interviewed described how their rapists mentioned their ethnicity before or during the rape. Rape survivors recounted comments such as: ‘We want to see how sweet Tutsi women are;’ or ‘You Tutsi women think that you are too good for us;’ or ‘We want to see if a Tutsi woman is like a Hutu woman;’ or ‘If there were peace, you would never accept me.’ When asked why rape was so widespread, one Rwandan woman who works with a nongovernmental organization in Kigali said, “Hutu men wanted to know Tutsi women, to have sex with them. Tutsi women were supposed to be special sexually. Other women noted that their attackers said, “You Tutsi girls are too proud,” apparently setting the stage for their degradation.”<sup>33</sup>

An estimated 250,000 Tutsi women were raped by Hutu militia groups. Many of these women were held as sexual slaves--sometimes collectively, sometimes as the private property of one individual. Some were held for days, others for years. The violence directed against these women was shattering. More than 10,000 children were born as a consequence of these rapes, some women held as sexual slaves bearing more than one.<sup>34</sup>

Genocide is one type of “social engineering,” designed to construct a society deemed perfect, or improved over its current status. In the Holocaust, this meant truly eradicating the genome (hence, “genocide”) of certain “races” as the Nazis called them; a very different approach than that in the former Yugoslavia or in Rwanda. After all, to truly wipe out a “race” of people from the face of the earth, one must kill the children, not bring more of them into the world.<sup>35</sup> The cases also reveal that the way in which the government frames the identity issue, both in terms of ethnicity and gender, will be an important determinant of how sexual violence manifests as a consequence.

### **The Language of Rape in Wartime**

While government policies may promote or inhibit sexual violence during warfare, the transmission of these ideas is paramount. Scholarship and journalistic

---

<sup>32</sup> Human Rights Watch/Africa, “Shattered lives: Sexual violence during the Rwandan genocide and its aftermath,” 1996. See also Human Rights Watch, “Struggling to survive: Barriers to justice for rape victims in Rwanda,” September 30, 2004.

<sup>33</sup> Human Rights Watch/FIDH interview, member, *Association des femmes chefs de familles*, Kigali, March 28, 1996, as quoted in Human Rights Watch, “Shattered lives: Sexual violence during the Rwandan genocide and its aftermath,” September 1996.

<sup>34</sup> Emily Wax, “Rwandans are struggling to love children of hate,” *Washington Post*, March 28, 2004.

<sup>35</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), p. 90-91.

accounts that portray specific images of women become critical. The narratives that are pervasive in the media and scholarship make policies such as forced maternity possible. The association of women's bodies with ethnic reproduction or interdiction, and the passivity of women all promote a framework within which egregious acts of sexual violence can take place. In other words, public writings serve as a site for the reification of the very narratives make widescale sexual violence and forced pregnancy possible.

On the one hand, very important advances have been made in the ways in which the heinousness of war crimes have been assessed in contemporary warfare. There is less of a tendency now to be dismissive of certain war crimes, such as rape or forced impregnation, than there was 50 years ago. And yet, on the other hand, while these war crimes have been getting more attention in the media and scholarly literature, the ways in which the issues are framed raises questions as well. The discourse that is used reflects and perpetuates normative assumptions regarding women as actors and as cultural symbols. In particular, women are represented as being devoid of agency in warfare, of being completely passive and the mere spoils of war; they are portrayed as vessels, able to perpetuate offspring which take on the identity of the father without imparting any of their own selves. These representations cloud the issues associated with the trauma of rape, forced impregnation and forced maternity,<sup>36</sup> as well as the provision of necessary support to the resulting children.

One noticeable tendency in scholarly and media portrayals of the women victims of rape during wartime is that women are assumed to be passive actors in men's war. Consider the following from the *Irish Times*: "impregnated by Serbs, Bosnian Muslim women become the pawns in genocidal warfare," or the headline from an article in *The Times* (London): "Caught in the Crossfire," and the opening sentence of the article, "They may not be in the front line firing bullets, but around the world women are dealing with the daily devastating fallout of war."<sup>37</sup> To be pawns or caught in the crossfire suggests that the women in question have no agency themselves, or are passive bystanders in wars fought by their husbands, brothers, and fathers.

Yet wars are not simply a male preserve; even women who stand opposed to a war are actively engaged in it. Further, women who are raped during wartime, forcibly impregnated or coerced into becoming mothers can only be caught in the crossfire or pawns if they exist exclusively as property of their combatant men. If a woman raped in war is merely a pawn, the implication is that the injury to her matters less than the injury to the men of her society. Similarly, if a woman who is raped during wartime is "caught in the crossfire," then the rape itself has meaning only to the extent that it affects the male combatants of her culture. Further, it suggests that the rape itself is directed at the enemy men, not the women who survive the assaults. In essence, the women are common sexual property, and the rapes represent the symbolic emasculation of the fighting men.

Viewing women as passive bystanders during wartime is a pervasive. As Catherine Niarchos observes:

---

<sup>36</sup> See R. Charli Carpenter's discussion of the use of the terminology "forced impregnation" versus "forced maternity" in "Surfacing children: Limitations of genocidal rape discourse, *Human Rights Quarterly*, vol. 22, 2000, p.428-477. I agree with her analysis and try to adopt her terminology here.

<sup>37</sup> "Perfect gentleman' on trial 2," *Irish Times*, February 16, 2002; Nick Danziger, "Caught in the crossfire," *The Times*, October 12, 2002.

Although warfare, by biology or circumstance, is the male habit, tragic numbers of women are the victims of men's wars. Women's suffering in war is specifically relate to gender—women are raped, forced into prostitution, forcibly impregnated. The war in the former Yugoslavia is the most recent episode in a long history; in that war, women have endured what women in all wars endure. Rape in war and rape in peace exist on a vastly different plane, but the connection is clear. In both situations, women are reminded that they are vulnerable, unequal, and exist only by man's good graces."<sup>38</sup>

The perspective that women's only role during wartime is as victim serves to perpetuate the idea that women are "pawns" or "caught in the crossfire," with no agency or independent meaning themselves. While Niarchos is correct to emphasize the gendered aspect of violence directed against women during wartime, she overstates the case, and in so doing ultimately perpetuates the image of the woman as passive victim during wartime.

An additional striking tendency in the media and scholarship on forced impregnation during wartime is to view the act as genocidal or a consequence of ethnic cleansing.<sup>39</sup> Anne Tierney Goldstein makes this point:

For at least the nine months it takes to carry the rapist's child to term, a woman is incapable of conceiving and bearing a child of her own ethnicity. If she is nearing the end of her child-bearing years, if she encounters complications in pregnancy that impair her future fertility, or if as a result of her pregnancy she is rendered unmarriageable within her community, the enforced pregnancy may preclude her permanently from having a child of her own ethnicity or genetic heritage.<sup>40</sup>

While the children born of rape during wartime may bring up painful visions for their mothers, and certainly may be rejected because of those memories, they actually are half the mother's genetic heritage, and, if raised by her then culturally even greater than that in regard to the child's ethnicity. Claiming that war babies are not of the mother's ethnic or genetic heritage actually validates the Serbian thinking which drove the policy of forced impregnation in the first place.

---

<sup>38</sup> Catherine N. Niarchos, "Women, War, and Rape: Challenges Facing the International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia," *Human Rights Quarterly*, vol. 17, no. 4 (1995), p.689.

<sup>39</sup> Genocidal rape is conceptualized in three ways: 1. as a tool to drive ethnic undesirables out of an area, never to return; 2. raped at concentration camps and then killed; 3. rape camps where systematically raped for long periods of time by Serbs. In other words, women are either driven out of an area, killed, or impregnated. See Beverly Allen, *Rape Warfare: The Hidden Genocide in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996) p. 62-63, Salzman, p. 360-361. See also R. Charli Carpenter, "Surfacing Children: Limitations of Genocidal Rape Discourse," *Human Rights Quarterly*, vol. 22, 2000, p.453.

<sup>40</sup> Anne Tierny Goldstein, "Recognizing forced impregnation as a war crime under international law," Center for Reproductive Law and Policy, New York, 1993, p. 24. For an elaboration on this point, see R. Charli Carpenter, "Surfacing children: Limitations of genocidal rape discourse," *Human Rights Quarterly*, vol. 22, 2000, p. 453-457.



Further, as R. Charli Carpenter, Vesna Nikolić-Ristanović, and others have pointed out, viewing children born of rape as a product of genocide or ethnic cleansing is tantamount to denying the genetic link between mother and child.<sup>41</sup> In fact, if we examine the words “ethnic cleansing,” the suggestion is that it is the male contribution to the reproductive process that not only forms the genetic and cultural heritage of the child, but somehow “cleanses” or abnegates the mother’s contribution to it. And yet there is wide acceptance of this interpretation of forced maternity. “As they try to ethnically cleanse Kosovo, paramilitaries – often aided by masked Serb neighbours – systematically searched villages for girls of prime, childbearing age. It was about power and control, humiliation and revenge. What better way to damage the enemy’s morale than to hit at his family?”<sup>42</sup> Here the women of childbearing age are the tools of ethnic cleansing and they are, again, merely pawns—a way of striking at the real enemy, the men. The rape itself takes on meaning only to the extent that it is directed against the enemy men; the crime itself is secondary.

In an article entitled, “Rape Camps as a Means of Ethnic Cleansing: Religious, Cultural, and Ethical Responses to Rape Victims in the Former Yugoslavia,” Todd A. Salzman defines ethnic cleansing as a “means [of] rendering an area ethnically homogenous by using force or intimidation to remove persons of a given groups from the area.”<sup>43</sup> Forced maternity can only completely remove people of a given ethnic group if one reproduces the thinking of the perpetrators, i.e., that maternal identity is unimportant in regard to her offspring. This is the thinking replicated in the media as well. For example, in an article about the rape camps in Bosnia, a report stated that a gynecologist from Bosnia “has completed a comprehensive list of the names and ages of every woman raped in the Kalinovik camp—perhaps the most detailed record yet compiled of the most evil aspect of Serbia’s ‘ethnic cleansing’ in Bosnia.”<sup>44</sup>

Even more pointed is an article that ran in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* on March 20, 2000 covering the rape case at the International Criminal Tribunal for Yugoslavia: “Since the battles of ancient Greece, commanders have given soldiers license to rape women, who were seen as a spoil of war. But what distinguished the Bosnian war was that women were prime targets in “ethnic cleansing” campaigns because of their role in propagating identity.”<sup>45</sup> In this case, women are really mere vessels—propagators of the identity of any impregnator, consensual or not. The article continues, quoting an author of a book on the war: “‘What is new, and extraordinarily horrifying, is that many of the rapes committed in the territory of the former Yugoslavia (were) ... committed with the intent to impregnate, in an effort to destroy a particular ethnicity.’”<sup>46</sup>

---

<sup>41</sup> R. Charli Carpenter, “Surfacing children,” *Human Rights Quarterly*, vol. 22, 2000, p. 428-477; Vesna Nikolić-Ristanović, ed., *Women, violence and war: Wartime victimization of refugees in the Balkans*, (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2000), p. 67-68.

<sup>42</sup> “Rape victims’ babies pay the price of war,” *The Observer*, April 16, 2000.

<sup>43</sup> *Human Rights Quarterly*, vol. 20, no. 2, 1998, p. 354, quoting the Final Report of the Commission of Experts Established Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 780 (1992) U.N. SCOR, Annex 1, paragraph 129, U.N. Doc. S/1994/674 (1994).

<sup>44</sup> Robert Fisk, “Rape victims say Serb troops ‘wanted babies,’” *The Toronto Star*, February 8, 1993.

<sup>45</sup> Jerome Socolovsky, “Landmark rape case opens today at tribunal on Balkan war crimes; For first time court will take up sexual enslavement,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, March 20, 2000.

<sup>46</sup> Jerome Socolovsky, “Landmark rape case opens today at tribunal on Balkan war crimes; For first time court will take up sexual enslavement,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, March 20, 2000.

Similarly, a report in *The Gazette* (Montreal) stated “that girls were systematically being impregnated and imprisoned past the three-month abortion deadline, so that they would be forced to bear Chetnik babies. Many women said their captors seemed to gloat over the prospect of making them pregnant. Besima recalled the drunken, bearded rapists saying: ‘Now you will be getting a little Chetnik. You can’t kill us all. We will multiply.’”<sup>47</sup>

These ideas regarding identity are socially constructed. The complete destruction of a race or ethnicity should not entail trying to bring about half Bosnian Muslim babies; yet the idea that identity is linked exclusively to paternity is so pervasive that it makes sense to a wide audience when explained in that way. Yet there is a critical difference between Hitler’s Final Solution to the Jewish problem, and the forced pregnancies in the Former Yugoslavia. While Salzman argues that the “research, planning, and coordination of rape camps was a systematic policy of the Serbian government and military forces with the explicit intention of creating an ethnically pure state,”<sup>48</sup> ethnically pure to Hitler meant that anyone with a drop of impure blood needed to be eliminated; reproduction by Jews and others who were ethnically impure was prohibited. As noted above, sexual relations between Aryans and Jews, whether consensual or not, were therefore expressly forbidden.<sup>49</sup> To Hitler, maternity was a condition to be reserved for women deemed racially appropriate. The Nazi genocide was designed to completely eradicate ethnic undesirables, not by allowing children of mixed heritage to survive. This is certainly in contrast to the numerous accounts of Bosnian Muslim women being forced to bear “Chetnik babies.”

### **Post-Conflict Responses to War Babies**

Ideas regarding the source of identity translate into policies to deal with babies who are conceived by rape during wartime. For example, ethnically undesirable women were allowed free access to abortions in Nazi Germany; in East Timor, Indonesian soldiers forced their rape victims to have abortions when they conceived, although numerous babies were nevertheless born.<sup>50</sup> The large scale rape of French (and Belgian) women by the invading German armies in WWI sparked national debate on the legalization of abortion. The children conceived of rape were considered “children of the barbarian.”<sup>51</sup> These babies were considered of “mixed race,” although in the discourse French blood of the mother could make the child French.<sup>52</sup> Interestingly, the Germans offered to take the babies and pay mothers.<sup>53</sup> Although the “children of the barbarian” were considered by many to be racially undesirable because of their German paternity,

---

<sup>47</sup> George Rodrigue, “Women: The targets of terror; Serbs accused of systematically raping Muslims in Bosnia,” *The Gazette* (Montreal), November 23, 1992.

<sup>48</sup> Todd A. Salzman, “Rape Camps as a Means of Ethnic Cleansing: Religious, Cultural, and Ethical Responses to Rape Victims in the Former Yugoslavia,” p. 356

<sup>49</sup> This is not to say that it did not occur, indeed, numerous acts of rape and sexual enslavement took place during the war. My point here is merely that it was not official policy sanctioned by the state.

<sup>50</sup> Kai Greg, “The War Children of the World,” War and Children Identity Project, Bergen, December 2001, p. 37.

<sup>51</sup> Ruth Harris, “The ‘child of the barbarian’: Rape, race and nationalism in France during the First World War,” *Past and Present*, no. 141, November 1993, p. 170-206.

<sup>52</sup> Susan R. Grayzel, *Women’s identities at war*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999) p. 51, 57-59.

<sup>53</sup> Grayzel, *Women’s identities at war*, p. 60.

the government did not entirely propagate this view. In fact, the French Ministry of the Interior offered full support for the women who chose to raise their children, and the news reported the irony that “children who nursed with milk of hate could become the ones to avenge their outraged mothers.”<sup>54</sup>

What is interesting to note here is that while children conceived by rape in wartime are frequently considered to assume the identity of the father by the perpetrators, the victims’ states do not necessarily adopt that view.<sup>55</sup> Even when the mothers consider their babies to be “monster” babies, the state itself may not follow suit.<sup>56</sup> In both Bosnia and Rwanda where recent wars yielded numerous children born of rape, where mass rape was used as a deliberate weapon of war, in the wake of the violence the governments have refused to allow the children to be adopted overseas. In both cases, the children were seen as an important means of repopulating the countries. As one newspaper report stated, “the Rwandan government classifies them as ‘genocide orphans’ and places them in orphanages around the country....Adoption by foreigners is not allowed by the government, officials say. ‘We have hundreds of thousands of orphans,’ said Aloisea Inyumbe, minister of women’s affairs [sic]. ‘Adoption to the outside means you are looting an entire population. The solution has to be from inside Rwanda.’”<sup>57</sup>

This was true in Bosnia and Kosovo as well.<sup>58</sup> Orphanages in the Balkans were overwhelmed by requests from foreign couples who wanted to adopt war orphans and children born of the mass rapes. Interestingly, requests from Serbian citizens were given preference before foreigners of Yugoslav descent or other foreigners were allowed to adopt. The same policy was in place in Croatia. ‘We have a centuries-old culture here and we can manage to bring up these children....We are not savages,’ said the director of a charity managing an orphanage.<sup>59</sup>

By contrast, the 300 children estimated born of rape in Kuwait after Gulf War are taken care of financially by the government, although their identity is considered in question.

“The Kuwaiti government pays the equivalent of \$90 US a month into a bank account in the child’s name until it is 21 years old. This financial nest egg enables the orphans to finance their own dowries, which are traditionally high in the emirate. Education, clothes, and even presents on feast days are also paid for by the state. ‘I challenge anyone to say we are not looking after these children,’ said Mohammed Razooki of the social

---

<sup>54</sup> Grayzel, *Women’s identities at War*, p. 54.

<sup>55</sup> By contrast, the German women who conceived from the widescale rapes by the Soviet army in WWII at the end of the war used the racial hygiene discursive practices of the Nazi government to petition the government for abortions. See Atina Grossmann, “A question of silence,” p. 47.

<sup>56</sup> Many Sandinista women who had been raped by Nicaraguan soldiers called their babies “monster” babies. See Hilary MacKenzie, “One family’s agony: After rape and butchery, how do you rebuild a shattered life? *The Ottawa Citizen*, August 22, 1999.

<sup>57</sup> Donatella Lorch, “Rwanda: Rape, used as weapon, creates ‘genocide orphans,’” *The Ottawa Citizen*, May 20, 1995.

<sup>58</sup> Carol J. Williams, “Bosnia’s orphans of rape: Innocent legacy of hatred,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 24, 1993; “Americans offer to adopt war child born of rape: A home must be sought in Kosovo first,” *The Ottawa Citizen*, May 11, 2000.

<sup>59</sup> “Children of rape: The (Balkan) war produces a new generation of victims,” *Maclean’s* (Toronto Edition), May 24, 1993.

affairs ministry. 'We will never forget what the Iraqis did, but we must heal the wounds.' Some have also been lucky enough to be adopted by well-off Kuwaiti families. The uncertain area is their nationality and name. The orphanage official, Mrs. Ghareeb, explained that usually they make up names for the children like Abdul Lateif Mohammed, but no family name is added. 'We can't give them family names because that is against Islamic law,' she said. Citizenship is still a hazy matter, however, for the Kuwaiti government stopped granting even limited nationality to orphans in 1983. In Kuwait, citizenship is jealously guarded for the privileges and financial benefits it brings.<sup>60</sup>

The assumptions that underpin sexual violence that takes place in warfare culminate in policies for treating the resulting pregnancies and war babies. When mixed race pregnancies are forbidden and undesirable, abortion is permitted. More often in contemporary times, however, in cases where civil war has decimated a population, governments may seek to retain the babies in order to repopulate the country. Despite the desire on the part of governments to ensure the war babies stay in their respective countries, the cloud of shame that follows these children throughout their lives does not dissipate. They are very nearly always considered second class citizens and serve as a physical reminder of divisive conflict that devastated their nation states.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has argued that identity is contingent and socially constructed as evidenced by state rape policy as well as redress for victims. Further, it has demonstrated that language matters; the way in which the atrocities are framed reproduce the identity narratives and make rape and discrimination against war babies possible. Above all, this chapter illuminates the ways in which assumptions about gender, biology, and ethnicity, promote dangerous policies which dehumanize women and the offspring they bear during wartime against their will.

Although a lot more research is necessary to draw out the issues embedded in questions of war and identity, it is possible to assert that the discourse surrounding both have a profound effect on the lives of many. As Bruce Lincoln has written, "together, discourse and force are the chief means whereby social borders, hierarchies, institutional formations, and habituated patterns of behavior are both maintained and modified."<sup>61</sup> We need to continue to winnow out the ways in which these two factors, discourse and force, affect gender relationships, the relationships between individuals identified with different social groups, and, ultimately, the perception of mixed heritage children, the legacies of war.

Despite progress in scholarly and policy making spheres regarding broadened notions of the war experience, rape, and gender violence in warfare, the discourse surrounding these issues suggests that we still have a long way to go before we achieve a complete understanding of them. The representations of rape, forced impregnation, and forced maternity in wartime continue to perpetuate gender stereotypes about women's

---

<sup>60</sup> Kathy Evans, "Legacy of war: Kuwait's littlest victims," *Calgary Herald*, July 29, 1993.

<sup>61</sup> Bruce Lincoln, *Discourse and the construction of society*, (NY: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 3.

social and biological passivity, and institutionalize the marginalization of war orphans resulting from rape. In addition, government policies regarding rape and the resulting children promote and solidify certain beliefs about genetics, culture, gender, and identity.

The most salient characteristics of women who undergo the trauma of rape, forced impregnation, and/or forced maternity for the media and scholarship on the topic focus on the women's age, sexual history, appearance, political passivity, and nurturing skills. The assumptions embodied in this discourse further suggest that the ideas of the perpetrators are a part of mainstream thinking about maternity and identity; that is, that it has less bearing on offspring identity than paternity does. There is no other way to understand broad based acceptance of the idea that rape and forced maternity may be used for genocidal purposes during wartime.

The narratives constructed surrounding the children born during wartime have a tremendous impact on the ways in which these war babies are then treated.<sup>62</sup> Consider the following from the *Sunday Observer*, for example:

He was a healthy little boy and Mirveta had produced him. But birth, the fifth in her short lifetime, had not brought joy, only dread. As he was pulled from her loins, as the nurses at Kosovo's British-administered university hospital handed her the baby, as the young Albanian mother took the child, she prepared to do the deed. She cradled him to her chest, she looked into her boys' eyes, she stroked his face and she snapped his neck. They say it was a fairly clear business. Mirveta had used her bare hands.... 'Who knows? She may have looked into the baby's face and seen the eyes of the Serb who raped her.'<sup>63</sup>

This narrative suggests that because this baby was one of the "children of shame," his death is less tragic, more understandable, than it would be if his identity had been more directly connected to his mother.<sup>64</sup>

Governments differ in their approach to dealing with the practice of rape during wartime as well as their policies regarding the children who are born of these rapes. The practices in which governments engage reflect broader social assumptions about the sources and derivatives of identity. For Nazi Germany, the smallest drop of what was deemed impure blood tainted an individual, whose identity thus derived exclusively from that taint. For the Serbs, identity was paternally given, thus impregnating Bosnian Muslim women and forcing them to bring those pregnancies to term would prevent these women from having children of their own ethnic background. In Kuwait, the state's responsibility for the war babies included financial compensation, but not citizenship. The Bosnian and Rwandan governments, however, viewed their war babies as an important way to replace at least a small proportion of the population lost in their respective wars, reflecting still a different social reality, opting to understand at least part

---

<sup>62</sup> See Consuelo Cruz, "Identity and persuasion: How nations remember their pasts and make their futures," *World Politics*, vol. 52 (April 2000): 275-312.

<sup>63</sup> "Rape victims' babies pay the price of war," *The Observer*, April 16, 2000. Mirveta is the woman who is referred to later in the article as "the pretty infanticidal mother."

<sup>64</sup> R. Charli Carpenter points out the outrageousness of this perspective in quoting Beverly Allen's remark in *Rape warfare: The hidden genocide in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), p. 99, that many women "attempt to kill their babies at birth in a reaction that, speaking strictly in terms of the mother's psychological well-being, might even be considered healthy." See Carpenter, "Surfacing children," p. 458.

of the identity of these children as deriving from their mothers. The interconnections among the agents constructing identity undermine in important ways the human rights of war babies.

The state, society, and media all play an important part in framing the discourse surrounding the issues of biology, genetics, ethnicity, and identity. These discursive practices reflect assumptions that are tied, at least in part, to cultural and historical practices. In order to better understand the nature of identity and its relationship to war, we need to continue to unpack the language that surrounds the issues of rape, forced impregnation and maternity during wartime. While important steps have been taken in recognizing these events as critical ones in war, the ways in which they are treated reveal that a tremendous amount of work still needs to be done. Even more important is the work we have ahead in tracing the fates of war babies and understanding their experiences as a central part of the larger issues of identity and war.