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“Let Us Have a Little Fun”: The Relationship between Gender, Violence and Sexuality in Armed Conflict Situations*

The genealogy of sexual violence in war, inter-war and post-war periods can only be understood through an analysis of the relationship between gender, violence and sexuality. Armed conflicts function as a kind of magnifying glass, making visible definitions of sexual identity constructed through the legitimization of violence. Wartime crimes of sexual violence, viewed until now as limit phenomena characteristic of a state of exception, thus point to regularities whose form and function may vary but whose reference points are rooted in the social expression of power.

Keywords: women’s studies; femininity; war; masculinity; violence; sexual violence.

Human beings are never obliged to act violently, but can always do so; they are never obliged to kill, but can always do so – individually or collectively, together or separately; in all situations, fighting or partying; in different states of mind, enraged, without rage, willingly, unwillingly, screaming or in silence (the silence of death) and with all imaginable purposes – any person can do it.

Heinrich Popitz, *Phänomene der Macht* (1986: 76)

The uneasiness caused by sociologist Heinrich Popitz’s claim that any human being has the potential for violence is usually countered by the consensus that violence is, as a rule, illegitimate and subject to sanctions. In this article, I shall try to demonstrate that a similarly unequivocal unanimity is difficult to achieve in the case of *sexual* violence.

First of all, I should say something about the context in which I work, the Hamburg Institute for Social Research. One of the Institute’s three areas of research is the theory and history of violence, a subject that the classical canon of academic theory has had problems dealing with. The genesis and specificities of the theoretical approach to the subject of violence, especially in sociology, are themselves explicit subjects for debate in the Institute, as a perusal of our journal, *Mittelweg 36*, will show. In the context of these debates, the aim is increasingly to analyse the extent to which certain concrete forms of violence manifest a hierarchy of masculinity and femininity through action. The still current and influential construct of the patriarchal couple (the vulnerable woman and her male protector) seems to serve, as in the past, not only to protect the male’s heroic self-image (thereby relegating the female to position of victim and object) but also to legitimize the use of violence.

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However, a perspective that views women as active subjects in all situations and men as frequently feminized in acts of violence reveals the arbitrary nature of the sexual identity construct that has imposed itself in so durably in western history. Sexual identity constructs are defined essentially through the body. Although it is clearly unsatisfactory to consider the body as a historically immutable and self-evident entity, and although discourse analysis may prove useful in deconstructing bodily constructs in order to overcome restrictive preconceptions, it is nevertheless necessary to simultaneously understand and thematize the *factual* existence of the body and the respective perception of pain within a particular historical and cultural environment of life and experience.

We can usually only speak meaningfully about violence when it is located in *relations* of violence, and when these relations of *violence* are, for their part, based on relations of *power*: i.e. one subject grants him/herself the right to carry out a violent act, during which s/he seeks to subjugate the target of that violence as object. Therefore, as Popitz states, there is power to injure on one side, and a vulnerability to injury on the other. The attribution of a gender identity to these positions (the man with the power to wound and the woman vulnerable to be wounded) is well known, and all too often considered an anthropological constant derived from the assumed particularities of biological sex.

The acts of violence that I shall describe here generally seek not only to injure a body and cause pain and suffering, but also to humiliate. I expressly mention these somewhat obvious commonplaces because, strangely enough, theory has often overlooked them. Popitz's claim shocks and unsettles not as an abstraction, but when the inarticulate body and its perception of pain are taken into account.

"The first blow," wrote Jean Améry in his attempts to deal with the experience of torture in Nazi prisons, "makes the prisoner aware that he is impotent – and, in this sense, contains the essence of all that follows. [...] The other, against whom I am physically in the world and with whom I can only be while he does not touch the boundary that is the surface of my skin, imposes his own corporality upon me with that blow. He is on top of me and with this he annihilates me." He adds: "It is like a rape..." (Améry, 1977: 56).

This is surprising. Whilst the common argument seems to diminish the sexual dimension of the threat by claiming that rape is torture, Améry's comparison can be read as a hint to the interconnection between torture and sexuality. However, as in the past, it continues to

come up against the persistent subconscious idea that rape and sexual violence are ambivalent acts, in which the aggressor-victim positions are ambiguous.

This attitude is perfidiously underpinned by a fact that constitutes a specific feature of sexual violence and which I take as a starting-point for some of the points that I wish to make here: sexual violence not only causes pain to the victim, it also potentially represents an invasion of his/her libido. Blood runs, sperm is spilt, and tears are wept, not only of pain, but also of shame.

Debates around sexual violence, particularly those that occur in armed conflicts, are permeated by considerations about whether they are crimes of violence that make use of sexuality, or whether sexuality is actively relished in these crimes of violence. I'm afraid that the first definition overlooks the extent and the drama of this specific form of violence. The rapist himself – to the extent that he uses his body, or more precisely, his penis – cannot avoid feeling sexual excitement, even if violence, rather than sexual pleasure, motivates the act. What is more, the act, for its part, inflicts upon the victim something that is much more than an offence against physical integrity – s/he is potentially robbed of an expression of fundamental life, which is generally supposed to be positive:

The victim's as well as the torturer's sexual structures are involved in the psychodynamics of this interaction, and the victim experiences the torture as directed against his or her sexual body image and identity with the aim to destroy it. Thus, the essential part of sexual torture's traumatic and identity-damaging effect is the feeling of being an accomplice in an ambiguous situation which contains both aggressive and libidinal elements of a confusing nature. (Inger Agger & Soren Buus Jensen, *apud* Skjelsbaek, 2001: 220)

In the case of the Korean Kim Young Suk, one of twenty thousand so-called “comfort women” that were sexually enslaved by the Japanese army during the Second World War, it is difficult to believe that the rapist succeeded in exciting her libido by force. Suk describes how she was treated by Officer Nakamora:

‘You Korean girl, you are pretty, let us have a little fun.’ But I was only twelve years old and had no idea what ‘Let us have a little fun’ meant. Nakamora took out his penis and he undressed me and I was so afraid. He forced me to lie on the floor and injured me with his bayonet and I bled. He took off my pants and raped me until I bled.¹

We can conclude from this account that Officer Nakamora derived “fun” from both the physical and verbal cruelty and from the sexual act of penetration. His assumption that the victim would also “have fun” may seem cynical, but may not be as much as we might expect.

¹ Recorded testimony given in the Tokyo Tribunal.

“One, two, three, four. Every night we pray for war. Five, six, seven, eight. Rape. Kill. Mutilate” (example quoted in Askin, 1997: 377). This rhyme, containing the equivalent of the “Blood, Sperm and Tears” triad, is hammered into American marines during their training, presenting rape, killing and wounding as the fun aspect of war. We should not assume that recruits take this view of war literally. However, these and other similar examples from military jargon undermine the argument that the association of sexual pleasure and pleasure in inflicting violence is only generated through brutalization during the course of warfare. Cooper, an American GI stationed in the United Kingdom during the Second World War, asks his rape victim, “Why don’t you speak to me – all the girls around here do,” and threatens her: “If you don’t let me get what I want, I’ll strangle you.” Before letting her go after the rape, he asks her if she would like to go dancing with him the following week. Porter, a companion, beats his victim unconscious in order to get what he wants. Then, he helps her to dress, gives her some money and asks where the nearest phone booth is as he has to find his way back to Kingsclere.² We are not dealing here with an escalation of violence in a combat zone. These soldiers have not been brutalized by combat; they are young men serving in supply units.

“Rape is neither private nor public; it is both of those things simultaneously: with its help, the border between the two fields is traced and controlled” (du Toit, 2007: 25). This is what is in fact found in both civilian and military scenarios.

My proposal is that a thick description of acts of sexual violence should trace the lines that define these acts in times of peace, war and post-war. Although sexual violence increases substantially in war and has specific functions in that context, it brings with it premises that have arisen in peacetime (or rather, in periods between wars), and is not exhausted after the war. Wartime practices, as a “state of exception,” and practices of sexual violence experienced as permissiveness have to be part of this description, as they are inscribed into a society’s potential for experience and action, transmitted from generation to generation.

Despite all this, in civil life, the association between the use of massive violence and sexual pleasure is still predominantly believed to be pathological. Hence, it is surprising that, in war, it may be considered “combat effective” in a way that is relatively uncontested and

² Cases described in Lilly (2007: 54; 59).

persistent, especially after successful war operations. The former officer Yoshio Suzuki recounted the following to the Tokyo War Crimes Tribunal:

As the head of an artillery unit I myself allowed the soldiers after an operation in 1944 to 'do as they pleased.' In a group of older women I met a woman who was about thirty. I sent the others away – she tried to get away by way of the toilets. Seeing her like that heightened my sexual arousal. I undressed her, she was naked and I raped her brutally, beat her with my rifle. She couldn't defend herself, she was shaking, her face was white, and she was speechless, she obeyed me without contradiction.³

Numerous declarations from soldiers prove that combat and the exercise of violence up to the point of killing in fact function as a sexual stimulant (Baker, 1981; Greiner, 2007). In this case, the victim's fear increased the aggressor's arousal. However, we need to analyse more closely the extent to which the fear felt by the aggressor (fear of losing control, of losing his life in combat) is in turn actively discharged in the form of aggression, particularly against women. I will return to this question later.

In the following description by a Vietnam war veteran, *hatred* and *frustration* function as a sexual stimulant:

She was crying. I think, she was a virgin. We pulled her pants down and put a gun to her head. [...] I was taking her body by force. Guys were standing over her with rifles, while I was screwing her. [...] Baby-san, she was crying. So a guy just put a rifle on her head and pulled a trigger just to put her out of the picture. [...] That's what the hatred, the frustration was. (testimony quoted in Baker, 1981: 211)

Declarations made by aggressors suggest that, in sexual violence, misogyny may also be discharged upon the depersonalized object. Thus, a Serbian rapist describes his victim, who had already been raped by twenty other men, as follows: "her hair [was] sticky. She was disgusting, full of sperm." After the rape, he killed her "with five bullets in the belly" (case described in Pohl, 2004: 9).

After the First World War (alongside the debates around the so-called hysteria of war), mention was already being made to the way soldiers' sexuality was transformed through the brutality of war, causing not only impotence but also a constant association between sexual sensation and massive acts of violence (that is to say, they derived pleasure from killing). Jonathan Shay, an American therapist who treated Vietnam War veterans, describes similar consequences of war in his book *Achilles in Vietnam* (Shay, 2010/1994).

³ Yoshio Suzuki, testimony given before the Women's International War Crimes Tribunal on Japan's Military Sexual Slavery.

In recent years, there has been an increasing number of documented cases of sexual violence practised by members of peacekeeping forces. More research is required to understand the extent to which these situations should be considered the consequence of crimes practised in previous wars or as an autonomous phenomenon. The case of Rhongi, a member of the peacekeeping forces in the former Yugoslavia who intentionally raped and murdered an eleven-year-old Albanian Kosovar girl, shows how also in this field sexual violence is sometimes accompanied by extreme brutality: "Rhongi had told some soldiers that he had a plan to grab a little girl and rape her, but would have to kill her to get away with it and would blame the Serbs" (Lilly, 2007: 32). This member of the peacekeeping forces has clearly no problem confessing to satisfying a sexual desire of this type, and is only concerned with how to avoid being punished for his act. He seems to have found the solution: killing the victim, the witness to the crime. The idea that he has of himself as peacekeeper does not seem to have been shaken by this incident.

War and masculinity are closely bound up in everyday discourse in a way that does not seem to have been affected by either the entry of women into the armed forces or by the marked transformations that have taken place in recent decades in the way war is waged – which has no longer anything to do with the myth of the heroic body-to-body combat. The association between sexuality and violence in war is by no means taboo, as is frequently claimed; on the contrary, in war propaganda or in subtexts such as war narratives, it is explicitly present as a natural consequence of the state of exception that is war, or as collateral damage. At the same time, it nevertheless seems to have escaped public and theoretical debate.

Despite the public thematization of sexual violence in violent conflict in recent decades (and the scandal in the wake of revelations of such crimes),⁴ there continues to be a certain amount of hesitation about trying to gauge the interdependence between these two affective manifestations. The notion that there is an inevitable association between war and violence, because it is inherent to the nature of things, is tolerated provided that (ideally) the exercise of violence is "honour-bound" and limited by rules and agreements.

"Few have wanted to look into the mechanisms which create perpetrators," writes Inger Skjelsbaeck in "Sexual Violence and War," "perhaps out of fear that the possibility of

⁴ The contradictions between the thematization and "dethematization" of violence are analysed in Stanley & Feth (2007).

committing the same crime is a potential we all have" (Skjelsbaeck, 2001: 212). It was not only in the case of Lyndie England that we were confronted with the fact that women also belong potentially to those "all." In Kelly Dawn Askin we find the following examples:

They would undress a man, line the rest of us [men] up and make us perform oral sex on him, another prisoner. There were two Ustaša women, sisters [who were prison guards], who liked to force us to do this. (Askin, 1997: 270)

Prisoners of Serbians were "lined up naked while Serbian women from outside undressed before the male prisoners. If any prisoner had an erection, his penis was cut off. (Askin, 1997: 270)

However, the media coverage of the England case demonstrated how a female aggressor could be used unhesitatingly to show sexual violence as a phenomenon of exception, an anomalous behaviour for women, and mostly restricted to pathological aggressors.⁵

The argument that the detailed public description of sexual attacks functions like pornography, causing further aggression to the victim (an argument that has been hypocritically repeated in this context, despite the fact that Abu Ghraib has in fact been the reiterated object of pornographic restagings), fails to problematize a sexuality that makes use of violence in this way, and instead displaces the shameful moment of the act from the aggressor to the victim. Behind the pretext of wanting to protect victims from renewed exposure, women are still secretly being blamed for being sexual subjects that transgress their boundaries and before whom men are helpless.

However, denying the humiliation experienced by victims ends up prolonging their suffering. Accounts by victims show how important it is for them that their social environment recognises as an injustice what happened to them as subjects (including the humiliation), and to know whether it attributes this to the aggressor or *stigmatizes* the victim as a shamed and dishonoured object. Louise du Toit argues:

My continued use of the term "victim" is not meant to betray insensitivity towards the feelings of those who have survived rape, nor to further deny women's agency and subjectivity by emphasising our powerlessness in the face of rape. I believe we need to critically interrogate these feelings rather than simply affirm them. Rape victims much more than other victims (say of car crashes) resist the associations of powerlessness tied up with the term "victim" because powerlessness lies at the heart of the humiliation and injury of rape. It is thus important to address the root of the problem (women's lack of political subjectivity and agency) rather than be satisfied with superficial linguistic changes. One does not become a survivor by denying the extent to which one has been a victim. In fact, such a stoic denial of victimhood with its emphasis on the victim's agency and resilience may well inadvertently prevent thorough

⁵ On this matter, see the very informative study by Oliver (2007).

investigations such as the one undertaken here into the ways in which wider societal beliefs endorse a rapist ethic. (du Toit, 2007: 4-5)

Many of the efforts to control or operationalize the power of aggression hide the vulnerability of the male person through the active expression of his power to injure a female or effeminate person, in peacetime as well as in war. However, in war, where masculinity is constructed most sharply and its characteristics are most in demand, the construction of masculinity is also shown to be particularly fragile. The combatant, who is required to kill and therefore granted the disposition to do so (power of aggression), also has to come to terms with his own vulnerability, with the possibility of being killed. Sex is revealed here as a “category of conflict” (Knapp, 2001): the painful ambivalences of dealing with one’s own fear and weaknesses may be resolved by assuming an invulnerable form of masculinity, an artificial hypermasculinity (Bereswill, 2006: 244). In order to make sense, this variant of masculinity tries to rid itself completely of its feminine opposite – during and after the First World War, for example, this was taken to extremes by Ernst Jünger, for whom the experience of war became an orgiastic and erotic substitute for women. Another variant consists of escaping subjugation through the violation of an opposite.

In order to successfully instrumentalize the act of rape for military purposes (in the sense of increasing the soldiers’ willingness to fight and kill), a regulation that imposes limits is also necessary. Occasional voluntary individual acts, which are always predictable and can be counted on from the outset, are in principle punished. Whether or not there is de facto punishment will depend upon the military commanders’ assessment of the act’s combat effectiveness. This military calculation (which involves releasing and using the soldiers’ potential for violence to combat the enemy) coexists somewhat problematically with the soldiers’ own motives for becoming sexually violent. Indeed, they may be opposed in the most grotesque fashion, as in the case quoted by Johanna Bourke regarding the My Lai massacre of 16 March 1968, when women were raped and killed in the most cruel manner:

Of course some men had been shocked by what they had done or seen, but ‘war was war’ and there were other battles to fight. However, Lieutenant [William L.] Calley was very definite about his duty to obey orders. A useful insight into Calley’s attitude can be taken from his autobiographical account of the massacre, *Body Counts* (1971). He recalled that at one stage during the bloody morning, he came across Dennis Conti forcing a young mother to give him oral sex. Calley ordered Conti to “Get on your goddam pants!” but admitted he did not know “why I was so damn saintly about it. Rape: In Vietnam it’s a very common thing. [...] I guess lots of girls would rather be raped than killed anytime. So why was I being saintly about it? Because: if a GI is getting a blow job, he isn’t doing his job. He isn’t destroying communism ...

Our mission in My Lai wasn't perverted, though. It was simply 'Go and destroy it'. [...] No difference now: if a GI is getting gain, he isn't doing what we are paying him for. He isn't combat-effective." (Bourke, 1999: 173)

Dennis Conti, who thought he could exercise his right to the spoils of war and enjoy himself sexually, was wrong. What was expected of him was that he should use his capacity for sexual violence in a way that was combat-effective.

The American General Patton was also more concerned with imposing limits than with punishing the crime itself: "I then told them that, in spite of my diligent efforts, there would unquestionably be some raping, and that I should like to have the details as early as possible so that the offenders could be properly hanged." However, on another occasion he said tersely: "If a soldier don't fuck, he won't fight" (*apud* Lilly, 2007: 29).

The 20th- and early 21st-century wars that we are considering here as theatres of sexual violence are distinguished not only by their totalitarization but also by a gradual erosion of their limits. This emerges in a particularly clear manner in asymmetrical wars. The classic distinction between the home front and the war front has become obsolete: the constellations of belligerent powers and theatres of war have altered. It is therefore necessary to analyse the consequences of these changes for the form of bellic violence in discussion here.

The logic traditionally underpinning the regulation of warfare is oriented towards the possibility of constructing a *synoptic battlefield*. Ulrich Bröckling has devoted himself to the study of this, and describes it as "space of contingency *par excellence*," as a "zone of frictions, [...] place of *fortune*, of unexpected opportunity, of suddenly changing luck" (2003: 189). In this space of contingency in which the "extended duel" (Clausewitz) of life and death takes place, "all actors are obliged to use maximum strategic and tactic calculation, and to make a rational use of force and an efficient use of violence" in order to produce clarity and a superior perspective. What is required are "operations that are carefully prepared and coordinated, [...] spontaneous improvisation, command and obedience, as well as initiative and self-accountability." This is a challenge in a situation that is determined by "extreme emotions – from a feeling of paralysis caused by fear of death to the furore of the ecstasy of combat," feelings that "inhibit or disinhibit action and alter its direction." Those that act in it have a "radicalized experience of contingency," which "requires no less radical concepts for controlling it," such as those manifested in the rigid demands for obedience and military

disciplinary tactics. Thus, Bröckling describes military action as “management of contingencies with the aim of aligning all activities with a view to augmenting one’s own potential for violence and, consequently, weakening the enemy’s.” That action thus takes into account “the inevitable limit, which can never be previously defined, of all the planning and organization” that “determines the military efforts to control individual and collective action in war.” He continues: “Whoever wants to command does not only need power but also knowledge. And to deal with frictions or get around them, it is necessary to know them. [...] One has to take account of things that escape calculations” (Bröckling, 2003: 189-90). General Patton, mentioned above, tried hard to fulfil precisely this requirement.

Normative control, traditional disciplinary practices supported by moral training and punishment of transgressions are the means of military authority used. A glance at military training practices shows how these instruments are radically determined by conceptions of sexual identity. Frank J. Barrett, an American professor of systems management, used interviews to analyse “the construction of hegemonic masculinity” through the example of American marines (Barrett, 1999). The idea of being hegemonic in relation to others is transmitted by “hate training,”⁶ in which the adversary is degraded as inferior, threatening, despicable.⁷ The female becomes the cumulus of that inferior and despicable other. The slang of both the soldiers and their military instructors is riddled with sexism. It is clear that a real hatred of women could be constructed from this, a hatred that is unlikely to be manifested in combat situations alone.

Male bonding/Exclusion of women

Jonathan Shay claims that the gender system is transferred to the army and that social roles based on gender identity are redistributed in that context: “Armies, like families, are institutions that create a world. Both successfully engender the new member’s respect, loyalty, love, affirmation, gratitude and obedience” (Shay, 2010: 150). The formation of primary groups and communities of partners (two men joining up as a unit) plays an essential role, as Bröckling also stresses:

The feeling of being in the hands of an impersonal machine of destruction and powerless on the battlefield, and the awareness that you might die at any moment [makes] soldiers turn

⁶ On this matter, see ch. 5 (“Love and Hate”) in Bourke (1999).

⁷ On the significance of this other – or rather, of this inferior, threatening female other against whom one acts – being in practice predominantly female and the male opposer being classified as feminine, see Pohl (2002).

into themselves in an existential way. The certainty of being part of a group and of being able to count on your companions may not be able to eliminate this experience of atomization, though it may compensate for it a little. [...] The interconnection and reciprocal reinforcement of institutional norms and primary group norms are especially revealed in the codification of masculinity. The need to be a man is part of what is most commonly expected from a soldier. It corresponds to social conceptions of the army as an agency of socialization, it is inscribed as a subtext in military training programmes, and also forms a central part of the code of conduct of primary groups. These are constituted not only as communities of protection and solidarity, but also as egalitarian leagues of men, which produce cohesion through the devaluation of supposedly feminine characteristics and exteriorise homoerotic libido by transforming it into aggression. (Bröckling, 2003: 197-8)

This militarily desirable aggression, considered vital for generating readiness to fight, is deployed with all intentionality not only against enemy combatants, but also for “combat effective” mass rapes of the female as well as the male civilian population, as happened in Belgium in the First World War, in Nanking, in the former Soviet Union, in Berlin, Bangladesh, Vietnam, the former Yugoslavia, Rwanda – the list does not end here.

Sexual violence against men

Sexual violence against men during wars is one of the “most well-kept taboos of our culture” (Seifert, 2003: 243). However, as some examples show, it occurs on a regular basis.

During the Nanking attack, Chinese men were anally raped or forced to practice sexual acts on one another while the soldiers watched and laughed (Iris Chang, *apud* Mischkowski, 2006). In the spring of 2000, the *New York Times* reported that male prisoners detained by Russian troops in a camp in Grozny, Chechenia, heard the screams of men being raped by their captors. It was also reported that the aggressors gave female names to their victims after the rape (Lilly, 2007: 20).

In Kelly Dawn Askin’s book we find reports like the following from Bosnia-Herzegovina:

They [the Serbian soldiers] took us outside, and one by one, they beat us and pulled teeth... They tortured us in all possible ways. They would take two brothers ... and force them to have sexual intercourse... They would take two friends outside and force them to take one another’s penis into their mouth... We would hear through the gates how they ordered men to molest or rape one another. (Testimony quoted in Askin, 1997: 271)

We might be tempted to suppose that the public debate on the form of violence suffered by these men would lead to a stronger condemnation of sexual violence in general. This presumption is belied by Antjie Krog, who recounts that, during the trials of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa, men refused to use the word “rape” in their testimony. They declared that they had been anally penetrated or that iron bars had been

inserted into them. “By doing so,” the author argues, “they make rape a women’s issue. By denying their own sexual subjugation to male brutality, they form a brotherhood with rapists that conspires against their own wives, mothers and daughters.” The term “rape” is, according to Krog, “reserved exclusively for the sexual submission of women and thus becomes *sexist in meaning*” (Krog, 1998: 182).

The crimes of sexual violence described here are usually accompanied by other forms of abuse that can lead to the death of victims. Sexual violence does not occur without social objectives and patterns, or in a social vacuum. It has specific meanings for the enemies, the victims and the aggressors, respectively.

In accordance with the self-proclaimed soldier’s mission, women should be protected, defended and kept away from combat. However, it is precisely this that makes them a target for aggression. They symbolize the territory that has to be defended, and whose profanation is particularly humiliating. The woman’s body becomes a battlefield both for a man-to-man fight and for a struggle against the whole of an ethnic, cultural or religious community. However, violence perpetrated on female subjects is omitted from the narrative of war. Thus, the reports of mass rapes in Belgium during the First World War, which so shocked public opinion, thematized not so much the suffering of women as the humiliation of the nation by brutalized enemies, with clear propaganda intentions on both sides.⁸

Violence/Desire

No matter how much military leaders might earnestly try – though in most cases without great conviction (Greiner, 2007) – to take control of the broom to which they delegated their powers, like the sorcerer’s apprentice in Goethe’s ballad, and no matter how they try to fulfil the task of imposing order and preventing, through military-style violence, “derailments” and manifestations of dissolution in precarious and diffuse situations, rarely are these objectives achieved. Even draconian measures (hanging, forced perpetual labour) did not prevent the American soldiers in the United Kingdom, France and Germany during the Second World War from raping women “just for fun,” most commonly with weapons.⁹ While in France the stereotype, inherited from previous generations, of the sexually permissive French woman functioned as a licence to rape, in Germany there were also motives of

⁸ On this matter, see Horne & Kramer (2004) and Crauthamel (2008).

⁹ On this matter, see Lilly (2007).

hatred and revenge. Thus, a soldier that had visited Dachau before an act of rape argued that a woman being undressed by three Americans was nothing compared to what had happened in the concentration camp (Lilly, 2007: 136). The sexual crimes committed in this scenario, as occasional and individual acts, had no military meaning and contravened the rules; as such, they were indeed punished (*ibidem*: 29). Nevertheless, these attempts at disciplinary control are not comforting, as they are not directed strictly and systematically against the practice of sexual violence.

In her book of memoirs *Seed of Sarah*, the Hungarian Jew Judith Magyar Isaacson describes how the Lichtenau camp commander one day ordered her to follow him:

The Kommandant strode ahead in his stiff breeches and pounding boots. Instinctively, I followed, my head cast down, my eyes on the graveled road. I had a flash of recognition, as if I had followed a past master in such dumb obedience. Do women inherit memories of rape? I recalled the myth of the Sabine women and the tale of Hunor and Magor and their abducted mates, the legendary ancestors of Huns and Magyars. 'My plight is not unique,' I told myself, 'I am caught in an ancient rite of sex and war.' (Isaacson, 1990: 90)

Translated by Karen Bennett

Revised by Teresa Tavares

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