

**SOCIAL SCIENCES & HUMANITIES**Journal homepage: <http://www.pertanika.upm.edu.my/>**Rape Talks Louder Than Guns Feminising Men via Wartime Rape in Judith Thompson's *Palace of the End*****Elaff Ganim Salih\*, Hardev Kaur, Ida Baizura Bahar and Mohamad Fleih Hassan***Faculty of Modern Language and Communication, Universiti Putra Malaysia, 43400 UPM Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia***ABSTRACT**

Wartime rape is a widespread phenomenon that accompanies most wars and conflicts, especially contemporary ones, yet there is much misconception about it. Earlier studies done on war rape focused exclusively on the experiences of female victims. Men as victims of war rape is a topic not many are familiar with or even aware of. The inclusion of men as victims of rape is very rare in society. Moreover, the rape of women often finds its way to the stage, but not the rape of men. Thus, the rape of men in time of war has been overlooked due to unfamiliarity with the topic or to the myth of the invulnerability of man to rape. More importantly, wartime man rape is not taken into consideration as a strategic weapon. Thus, the present study aims to explore the sexual victimisation of men in times of war as an orchestrated combat tool. It investigates the reasons why American combatants raped Iraqi prisoners in Judith Thompson's play *Palace of the End*. Inger Skjelsbæk's Social Constructionist Concept is used to explain the rationale behind wartime man rape and to map out the mechanism of its victimisation and perpetration. The present study concludes that men can be victimised like women by rape. In addition, the present study contributes a new understanding of the strategic function of rape with the inclusion

of male rape. More importantly, it concludes that the rape of male prisoners in this play is not a natural consequence of war stemming from sensuality or abnormality but a pre-planned institutional act to dominate the perceived enemy.

*Keywords:* Judith Thompson, *Palace of the End*, strategic weapon, social constructionist concept, wartime rape

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## INTRODUCTION

The horrors of rape are a well-known, widely discussed topic worldwide but the rape of men is rarely discussed openly. Even more so, the wartime rape of men is hardly ever discussed, even in literary works. Indeed, the use of male rape as a strategic weapon of war has been overlooked by literary works. Dramatic works usually portray wartime rape as a feminist issue by dramatising women as targets of rape, and men as rape perpetrators (Salih, Kaur, & Yahya, 2016). Wartime man rape was an issue disguised under categories such as 'torture' (Blatt, 1991) and 'crime of violence' (Cleiren & Tijssen, 1994). Unlike the rape of women, man rape is neglected for various reasons, but mainly because it threatens the very fabric of masculinity that hinges on the myth of invulnerability of the hetero-normative man to rape. Moreover, there is the misbelief that only homosexual men are raped because 'they ask for it', whereas the hetero-normative man is not (Wakelin & Long, 2003). In fact, these assumptions enhance the submersion of this phenomenon. Although rape and sexual violence against men have been reported in 25 wars and armed conflicts around the world, including in the former Yugoslavia, Sri Lanka, South Africa and more recently, Iraq (Russell, 2007; Sivakumaran, 2007) and now Syria, these reports are categorically overlooked in the contemporary dramatic world. Equally, wartime man rape as a strategic weapon is overlooked and/or not considered as good fodder for the stage.

Most of the previous dramatic research on wartime rape failed to recognise man rape in wartime since women's victimisation has always been the sole point of research. These studies examined female victims-combatants and civilians and shifted the attention away from men. This is due to the typical discourse surrounding rape that casts the woman as the non-violent and the man as the perpetrator, by attributing it to misogyny and hegemony over women, as it would appear that "[war] provides men with the perfect psychological backdrop to give vent to their contempt for women" (Brownmiller, 1975, p. 32). To list some works, Ellen McLaughlin's play *Ajax in Iraq* (2011) and Eve Ensler's *Vagina Monologue* (1996) both address these issues. Women, combatants or civilians in both plays, are depicted as victims of masculinity and the patriarchal military system. In both works, rape is depicted as a natural product of a biased society that considers women as weak and objects of rape, and man as powerful and a rapist by nature, either because of his sexual drive or hatred for women. Consequently, these studies draw no attention to man rape in a war context. By excluding man rape from dictionary definition, rape is associated synonymously with women.

Furthermore, dramatic studies tend to focus on man rape in peacetime only. Wartime rape of male civilians and its strategic function of humiliating and dominating the enemy are rarely tackled. Some of the research into man rape is stereotypic in its approach. First, it is

shown that the rape of man happens only in homosexual communities. One example is found in David Rudkin's *The Sons of Light* (1981) and Mark Ravenhill's *Shopping and Fucking* (1996). These plays depict man rape as a homosexual, queer act. Second, past studies dealt with only one type of man rape, that is male/male rape within a peace context, as depicted in James Dicke's novel *Deliverance* (1970). There is, however, a noticeable dearth of studies on the strategic function of wartime rape.

Accordingly, the present study aimed to explore the sexual victimisation of men in times of war as an orchestrated combat and political tool and to consider the motivations behind this act of violence and domination. The study does this by investigating the act of rape committed by American soldiers against male Iraqi prisoners in Judith Thompson's play *Palace of the End* (2007) as an exercise of power and humiliation. Since male rape has not come under any theoretical lenses in previous studies, Inger Skjelsbæk's *Social Constructionist Concept* (2001) is utilised as a framework to look at the process by which men are raped, with a focus on the reversal of the male-female power dynamics of wartime rape.

The current study contrasts sharply the feminist paradigm of 'male-female' that sets the male as the stereotypical rapist and the female as the ultimate victim of rape because of misogyny and gender conflict (Brownmiller, 1975). This study refutes all these assumptions and argues that man rape is a war tactic exploited to humiliate and emasculate men and dismantle and distort

their ethnic and religious identity to achieve the essential aims of war. The analysis will focus on man rape enhanced by the political motives beyond their commitment in *Palace of the End*.

### THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONIST CONCEPT (2002)

Inger Skjelsbæk (1969) is a Norwegian psychologist and peace researcher specialising in sexual violence during war. Her Social Constructionist concept maps out the complex relationship between rape as a form of sexual violence and war. It also explains why men are targeted for rape in warfare although women constitute the largest group of victims. More importantly, it perceives rape as a weapon of war to achieve more of the strategic goals of war. Accordingly, it argues that both men and women can be victims and understands femininity and masculinity as malleable categories that could conceivably be applied to anyone within contexts of conflict.

However, Skjelsbæk's concept posits that the hierarchical power relationship between the genders is not perceived as fixed and universal but flexible. Thus, it revolutionises the traditional assumption that the woman is the only victim and the man is the ultimate rapist. Moreover, it emphasises that the hierarchies of power and dominance are constructed through social interaction and transaction between gender, ethnic, religious, political and other identities. Rape as a practice of political power and control is not a result of gender and patriarchy but a combination of many

social transactions, including gender and patriarchy. Consequently, the victim of sexual violence in the war zone is victimised by feminising both gender and the ethnic/religious/political identity to which the victim belongs; likewise, the perpetrator's gender and ethnic/religious/political identity is empowered by becoming masculinised. Briefly speaking, these positions under the Social Constructionist Concept demonstrate clearly that wartime rape is institutionalised violence deployed to realise far-reaching goals via planned political and military agenda. It is committed against and by both men and women, whose bodies are weaponised to achieve planned strategies.

Practising masculinity in international conflicts is not born of biological impulse; it is situational, governed by pre-determined outcomes. Skjelsbæk's Social Constructionist Concept refutes the static nature of war rape that posits women as mere victims and men as the sole perpetrator. It, however, expounds a dynamic theory that posits that the hetero-normative man is in the victimisation cycle and the hetero-normative woman is in the cycle of perpetration, respectively. In this case, the victims, the Iraqi prisoners, are feminised and the offender is masculinised, irrespective of their gender: "The base of violence against both men and women is not in hetero- or homosexuality of an individual male actor but in an inseparable construction of masculine = heterosexual = power" (Skjelsbæk, 2001, p. 225). This equation highlights masculinity as a core element, by having power enhanced by heterosexuality.

Thus, the concept of masculinity is related to heterosexuality, which means that the perpetrator, be it man or woman, will be masculinised. Thereby, a new perception of wartime rape is found by including men and women as both victims and perpetrators.

The goals of emasculation and feminisation underlying orchestrated wartime rape are clearly stated through the assertion that "the purpose behind targeting victims by sexual violence is to masculinize the identity of perpetrator and feminize the identity of the victim" (Skjelsbæk, 2001, p. 225). Actually, this argument includes men's victimisation in its theorisation and women in its perpetration. The occurrence of this reversal of gender roles is related to circumstantial and contextual factors such as war.

#### **JUDITH THOMPSON'S *PALACE OF THE END* (2007)**

*Palace of the End* is the play of the Canadian playwright Judith Thompson (1945). It is based on real-life persons and events dramatising the act of rape and sexual abuses committed against Iraqi detainees by American combatants in the Abu-Ghraib prison during the American war in Iraq. These highly publicised rape acts came to be known later on as 'the scandal of Abu-Ghraib' (Stemple, 2009, p. 605). Through the use of the monologue technique, the dramatist gives a straight and authentic record of what actually happened in this war, away from the falsified narratives presented by American policy. Thompson is inspired in naming and structuring content as well

as character by the atrocious photos of Lynndie England and other soldiers in the media as mentioned in her "Playwright's Notes" (Coates, 2015, p.169). She names her character 'Soldier' to give her a national and general identity. The play dramatises acts of rape in which the victims are men, making man rape no longer an anomaly (Cohen, 2013).

## DISCUSSION

### Feminising Men via Wartime Rape

To underline the mechanism of man rape and its perpetration alongside its strategic use as a war tactic in *Palace of the End*, there are some structures and dynamics to be first considered. There are certain structures of power and dominance as well as masculinisation and feminisation that are motivated by the dynamics of patriotism and national identity. Intentionally, these are adopted to humiliate the male prisoners and their national identity in order to realise far reaching purposes by subduing them to America's will. It can be claimed that the relationship between the two is that of colonisation. Thereby, the text analysis will be organised accordingly. These structures and motivations will be explored by examining acts of rape that are committed by American soldiers on Iraqi prisoners in Thompson's play, in light of Skjelsbæk's Social Constructionist Concept. They are posited through mapping out the mechanism of victimisation and perpetration as a practice of power and dominance. Thus, rape is not an end in itself to show

the perpetrator's sexuality but a tool of projecting violence (Seifert, 1993).

### Structures and Dynamics of Wartime Man Rape

In Skjelsbæk's concept, the focal points in understanding the strategic rape are power, masculinity and femininity. They are different from the feminist approach, which focusses on the patriarchal victimisation of women. These points interrelate since the common meaning of masculinity includes having power, especially the physical power to attack and subjugate femininity. In the current study, power and subjugation are employed on the national and collective level. Man, like woman, is objected and feminised by rape in times of war. This means that there must be a masculine power in this process which is absolutely 'other' than the victimised man. In Thompson's play, the masculine role is exercised by the female character, Soldier, and the feminine role is taken by male figures, the prisoners. It is a reversal of the traditional masculine and power hierarchy that sets man at the top and woman at the bottom of social power relationships. Arguing that man, like woman, can be victimised in warfare and thus feminised introduces a new perception and explanation of this type of rape, which diverges from the feminist gender paradigm of 'male-female' (Skjelsbæk, 2001). Taking this into consideration, power, masculinity and femininity are not gendered, since gender is related to social and cultural roles. Therefore, the roles of 'powerful' and

'powerless' are flexible and not assigned to gender in wartime by the one who is more powerful and dominant (Skjelsbæk, 2001). They are the key elements in understanding the organised nature of war rape in Thompson's play, which highlights the complex perpetration and victimisation process of man rape.

**Collective power and dominance.** Wartime rape, in Skjelsbæk's concept, is a practice of power and dominance over the enemy in order to achieve strategic aims. Skjelsbæk stated that rape is "an exertion of control over the enemy's bodies and sexual entity driven by far reaching military and political goals" (p. 47). In Thompson's play, the hand of power is masculine in that the American combatants exert dominance over the feminised victims, the Iraqi prisoners, by perpetrating rape against them. Thompson names the perpetrator 'Soldier' to show that she is a representative of the American military institution in general. Skjelsbæk clearly stated that "the masculinized and feminized identities are situated in a hierarchical power relationship where masculinized identities are ascribed power and feminized identities are not" (p. 226). In a war context, where human relations are condensed into power hierarchies, rape becomes the means by which these hierarchies are intensified. Usually, when talking about rape, the victim is understood to be a woman and the aggressor, a man. However, in *Palace of the End*, the feminine individual is not a woman but a male

prisoner who is emasculated by rape and pushed into a position of powerlessness traditionally attributed to women.

In the play, different acts of rape are committed against the detainees. These acts indicate power and submission dynamics for strategic goals. One of these acts of rape is nakedness. Coercing the Iraqi captives into nakedness and herding them in a sexually abusing way is also considered an act of rape. Because rape includes in its meaning and definition nakedness and duress, the definition of rape and sexual abuse has been broadened by including "acts that did not constitute physical invasion of the body, penetration or even contact, such as forced nakedness" (Zawati, 2007, p. 31). Although the ideas for rape are the character, Soldier's inventions, these ideas are instructed implicitly if not directly by her military training for her to act upon, as she says in the play:

Human pyramids WAS ALL MY IDEA. Actually, it's the first thing that come to my mind when I walked into that prison and seen all them men that look exactly alike. I know what might be fun: HUMAN PYRAMID WITH NAKED CAPTIVE MEN" (*Palace of the End*, p. 15)

She talks about one of her rapes, saying that she accumulated the naked male prisoners' bodies to form a human pyramid. She feels proud of her egocentric actions as she declares, "And I am very proud to say that" (p. 15). This incident of war rape both in

the play as well as in the actual photos of prisoners show how the victims were forced to undress while being sexually threatened (Sivakumaran, 2007). Soldier exploits her military power over the captives by forcing them to be naked and to shape a pyramid made by human bodies as an act of humiliation and emasculation. Emasculation occurs because nakedness, being a form of rape against men, "can reduce the targeted man's status to that of a 'de facto' female, which in turn sends the message that his community is 'lesser' as well" (Manivannan, 2014). This is what is meant by turning a man's body during war into a symbolic construction by which his community is shamed and emasculated.

In return, the abused prisoners are reduced to a feminine position characterised by powerlessness, which becomes the source of Soldier's amusement. Again, there is a relationship between amusement as a motive for humiliating the captives by rape and their humiliation by feminising them through rape. Thus, Soldier's exultation of power stems from "the coerced submission of the male prisoners" (Rajiva, 2007, p. 228). The point is that the actors in a real war scenario are neither feminine nor masculine but are placed in such position by the conditions of war. By remembering that a soldier is not an individual representation but stands for the policy of the nations at war, in this case, American policy, the study concludes that man rape in this drama is institutional since "men being raped by [a]

woman is an ultimate public humiliation and emasculation" (Couturier, 2012, p. 7).

Making fun of the prisoners "willies" is another case of rape practised by the character, Soldier, as rape is defined to include "any violence, whether physical and/or mental, carried out through sexual means or by targeting sexuality" (Lewis, 2009, p. 3). It is used in this context to humiliate and dominate the prisoners as Soldier directly confesses that "according to their culture, me laughin at their willies was worse than a beatin', way worse" (POTE, p.15). Clearly, the collective identity of the prisoners is set by the perpetrator. She is completely aware of the cultural considerations of sexual entity at play in the context of this conflict. Therefore, she attacks them sexually to show her American dominance over them. Actually, psychological degradation of the Iraqi prisoners through nakedness and ridicule is considered a plan for humiliating them and their nationality. Thus, male rape "attacks a man's personal and social identity, leaving long-lasting psychological consequences for the victim" (Russel, 2007, p. 27). In this context, empowerment and supremacy are extended to the American soldiers and their national and ethnic identity, while dehumanisation and humiliation extend to the prisoners' collective identity. In *Palace of the End*, the rape of the male prisoners functions as a means by which the combatants, male and female, show power and dominance, as well as their ethnically superior status to the victims.

The rape of the male prisoners is institutional, not a personal or natural product of war, as evidenced by the American claim that they are destroying terrorists. Prisoners are consistently labelled ‘terrorists’ in the play, as Soldier says:

We was not entertaining ourselves. We was breaking down the terrorists.

And it worked. We did attain information (POTE, p. 16).

The text clearly shows that these claims against prisoners were orchestrated in order to justify American brutality and violation of their enemies. Ethnic, racial, religious and nationalist hatred is the motive that aids in the dehumanising of the enemy’s army and their civilian population through the act of rape as an effective warfare tool to achieve strategic aims (Skjelsbæk, 2001). Soldier insists that rape is a war tactic by which the army can get information from the enemy, obligatorily believing that these men represented the enemy who master-minded the attacks of 11 September, 2001 and other terrorist attacks against America. She clearly states that they are:

guys who had

KILLED AMERICANS. GUYS WHO WERE

PLANNING ANOTHER 9/11, dude, AND

YOU ARE UPSET THAT I laughed AT THEIR WILLIES? (POTE, p.18)

These accusations expose the real motive behind the atrocities committed by the

American soldiers. These violations are neither personal nor individual but institutional and pre-planned acts executed to dehumanise the Islamic and Iraqi identity (Holloway, 2006, p. 140). Thus, this form of rape is a violation, a means of interrogation that grants the perpetrators power to ridicule and weaken their victims. In other words, by practising this form of rape, Soldier acquires power and superiority over the prisoners, who are powerless. This inversion of power relations occurring in specific contexts is “a transaction of identities between the perpetrator and the victims i.e. how their social identities become situated” (Skjelsbæk, 2001, p. 226). This concept claims that wartime rape is a matter of acting, not being, which means that it is not about gender and sexuality but about the situation and circumstances; the latter are the conditions that decide who will be the victim and who will be the aggressor (Skjelsbæk, 2001). Thus, the perpetrator’s sexuality is not an end by itself in the act of rape, but a means of projecting violence (Seifert, 1991).

In the text of the play, another reference to this strategic and collective power lies in Soldier’s confession that:

I was doin what had to be done,  
*to get the intelligence....* I was softening them up; you might put out hard butter on the windowsill” (POTE, p. 15).

The American combatants integrate the motives of their rape of Iraqi prisoners with the collective conception of their own national and ethnic identities. Rape in this



war context is about power and dominance over the victim as a representative of his ethnicity or religion, and not done to realise for sexual or individual motives. Therefore, performing rape in public and against large numbers of people is intended to realise a further end other than sexuality, that is, it is to spread fear in the community (Oosterhoff et al., 2004). In fact, these acts of rape are perpetrated as part of a strategy to destroy a particular ethnic or religious group, which in this case, was the Iraqis. The feeling of having fun and of ecstasy arising from these acts stem from a political agenda that is based on dehumanising and despising the Muslim prisoners by attacking their sexual integrity.

Thus, this is clear evidence that the rape of the prisoners in this play is a strategic tool. Soldier declares this fact again when she states that she was trained to do what was supposed to be done. It can be said that "In moments of national conflicts, the formation of national identity and collective subjectivities involving acute power relations can occur in moments of exceptional physical violence and psychological upheaval" (Edkins, 2003). Thus, the prisoners are the victims of this war and the American combatants are the means of achieving the far-reaching goals of the conquering nation.

### **Engendered masculinity and femininity.**

In this play, American war leaders employed rape to humiliate and intimidate prisoners in order to discourage resistance to American forces. This strategic combatant tool

masculinises the perpetrator and feminises the victim. Men when victimised by rape, take the feminine position of women: "a man who is victimized through sexual violence in the war-zone, is also feminized" (Skjelsbæk, p. 225). The position of the perpetrator is also drawn as that of masculinisation, depending on the structure and dynamics of masculinity and femininity. Rape appears as a form of violence that best communicates these structures and dynamics of masculinisation and feminisation (Skjelsbæk, 2001). Masculinity as an expression of military dominance is heightened in times of war and conflict.

In *Palace of the End*, there are many forms of rape that demonstrate the mobilisation of masculinity and femininity in this process of organised sexual victimisation. The character, Soldier's, participation with another American soldier, Ronnie, in demasculinising the prisoners by coercing a religious Iraqi prisoner, 'Sheikh', to have sex with another prisoner is also named rape. Thus, the forced sexual intercourse between the prisoners themselves is considered war rape as happened at Abu-Ghraib (Sivakumaran, 2007; Maier, 2011). Thompson depicts this act through Soldier's revelation:

One of 'em, who the other ones seem to look

up to? I think he was like, a holy man.  
Ronnie

goes to him: "Hey you. Wise Man. Mullah. Fuck him, fuck your friend in the butt, man! Do it now," (POTE, p. 21).

In so doing, the American soldiers deliberately impose the label of 'homosexual' on these prisoners even though they are not homosexual men, thereby bringing disgrace to the prisoners and their community. Talking about the psychological damage caused by this rape, these victims "struggle with the 'taint' of homosexuality attached to male/male rape," (Sivakumaran, 2007) which causes societal stigmatisation especially in Arabic Muslim societies. This is the far-reaching strategic intent of the perpetrator i.e. "to cast this emasculating 'taint' on the victim, his community and society, and simultaneously cast the role of masculinity onto herself and her nationality," (Vermeulen, 2011) as Soldier does in this rape incident. Skjelsbæk stated that the victim of sexual violence in the war-zone is victimised by feminising both the sex and the ethnic/religious/political identity to which the victim belongs; likewise, the perpetrator's sex and ethnic/religious/political identity are empowered by becoming masculinised (p. 225).

Masculine power here is associated with the dominant male and female combatants who are empowered to impose a weaker position on the prisoners. Accordingly, this form of rape de-masculinises the victims but masculinises the perpetrators through their domination (Lewis, 2009). Gender does not equate with the hand of power because the key element is power, not gender. This means that whoever wields power and dominance is the masculine, whether man or woman. Both men and women may be victims, and must understand femininity

and masculinity as malleable categories that can conceivably be applied to anyone within conflict contexts (Skjelsbæk, 2001). Thus, these ascriptions of power are not gender-related but power-related.

Yet another demonstration of masculinity and femininity behind institutional rape in the play is masturbation. Forcing one of the detainees to masturbate is considered rape (Peel et al., 2000). It is clearly revealed by Solider in the text:

I will tell you something. We did a hell of a lot of

Worse than what you seen. Or what you heard.

What YOU seen is tiddlywinks: we made a

man masturbate. Ohhhhhh. So SCARY!!!! SO?

So WHAT? (POTE, p.18)

This type of wartime rape, 'enforced masturbation', between victims or with perpetrators is also reported in Abu-Ghraib (Manivannan, 2014, p. 645). This type of rape of the prisoners denotes dehumanisation through sexual acts in a culture that considers a man's masculinity as the main element of his superiority and dignity. The character, Soldier, is ascribing masculinity to herself and femininity to the prisoner when she forces him to masturbate. Raping the captives in this way is not for sexual gratification, but to achieve a political agenda that aims to destroy the dignity of the enemy, the Iraqis, by arousing fear and shame in the community. Such acts

guarantee the supremacy and dominance of the perpetrators over the powerless (victims). Both victims and perpetrators are symbolic representations of their national and religious identities, masculinising the perpetrators empowers their identity, while feminising the victims weakens their identity.

Thus, humiliation resulting from rape in this context is a strategic weapon because “sexual violence is a weapon of war if the effects are so dependent on time and circumstance” (Skjelsbæk, 2001, p. 229). The captive in this case of rape is powerless and obligated to do whatever he is forced to do. In the play, whether rape is labelled as “intelligence” or “destroying the terrorist,” its ultimate aim is to humiliate the enemy by denying them their humanity. In times of conflict, the structures of masculinity are more prominent, so the male victim is subjected more significantly to the contamination of feminine or homosexual characteristics (Seidler, 2006). Skjelsbæk thus maps out the perpetrator and victim’s hierarchal power relationship and asserts that the perpetrator is masculinised, whereas the victim is feminised, irrespective of whether male or female. This claim refutes the universal assumption that the heterosexual man is invulnerable to rape and highlights male victimisation in a war context. The American war agenda on Iraq seen in this play supports the argument that men, like women, can be victimised by rape in wartime to achieve strategic national goals. Thus, masculine sexuality and violence are connected inextricably (Couturier, 2012).

The American war in Iraq was a geopolitical one in which America tried to impose its military control over Iraqi prisoners and their collective identity via rape. Thus, man rape is also centred on power and masculine domination as in the case of the raped of women; therefore, both forms of violence include similar constructions of masculinity and masculine-heterosexualised domination (Sivakumaran, 2007). The powerful position and myth of men being invulnerable to rape are diminished the moment a man is raped and rendered powerless. The normative belief is that the heterosexual man is not an object of rape but according to the present study, this belief is inaccurate. In return, Skjelsbæk’s concept argues against the invulnerability of the heterosexual man and against the homosexual assumption of male war rape. A man raped by another man is stripped of his masculinity and is forced to take the feminine position. Thus, ascribing homosexuality on the prisoners by forcing them to rape each other is “largely an exertion of power and control through feminizing the other by forcing a man into the sexually submissive role of the female” (Skjelsbæk, 2001, p. 225). In this way, a man’s body works like a means of communication by which many messages are sent from one side to the other in the conflict. The rape of their men relays to the Iraqi community that “their male members, their protectors, are unable to protect themselves ...the manliness of the man is lost and the family and community are made to feel vulnerable” (Sivakumaran, 2007, p.

269). Accordingly, the male prisoner and his whole community are stigmatised and disempowered since rape has turned the male prisoner into a social body; symbolically, the victim's national identity is also feminised and humiliated. The demonstration of ethnic variants and the masculine military power of the American combatants over the identity of the Iraqi victims, who are predominantly Muslim, becomes public. American leaders tried to justify that the "[the] rapists are low-ranking personnel who represent only themselves and not America and whom they labeled 'the seven bad apples' who had to be punished for embarrassing the military and the administration" (Coats, 2015, p. 176).

By this feminised depiction of man in *Palace of the End*, the dramatist protests against the previous argument that war rape is a gender-based violence that targets only women because of misogyny and/or their ethnic and religious identity. Thus, man rape is acknowledged as "part of [the] backlash against feminism." (Stemple, 2009, p. 629). In this way, the present study presents a new strategic reading of war rape that is different from the feminist one.

## CONCLUSION

The present study dealt with man rape in Judith Thompson's play *Palace of the End*. The rape of men is believed to be abnormal or invisible. However, the act of man rape as a strategic weapon of war has been overlooked under the guise of homosexuality, gender-based conflict and the invulnerability of man to rape. The dramatisation of

rape against Iraqi male prisoners by American soldiers in Thompson's *Palace of the End* introduces new concepts to the understanding of wartime rape away from the labels of 'torture', 'crime of war' or 'natural consequence of war'. Thus, the study explored man's sexual victimisation in times of war as an orchestrated combat tool. Following Inger Skjelsbæk's argument in her *Social Constructionist Concept*, the act of raping men prisoners of war is an exertion of control over the enemy's body to achieve far-reaching military and political goals. In contemporary wars, men are the object of rape instead of the subject of rape. The present study proves that Thompson's play introduces rape as an exercise of power and dominance perpetrated against Iraqi prisoners by American troops. Rape functions to masculinise and empower the collective identity of the perpetrator, while simultaneously feminising and conquering the victim's collective identity. Therefore, the man's body is like that of the woman's in times of war; both are a symbolic construction through which many messages and meanings are delivered to the opposite side in a war. Finally, the study created awareness that man rape in *Palace of the End* is an intended act strategised to terrorise, dominate, emasculate and then defeat the collective identity as well as religion of the conquered by inflicting fear and shame on the captured Iraqi prisoners in order to end resistance and win the game of war.

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