

“We are going to rape you and taste Tutsi women”:  
Rape During the 1994 Rwandan Genocide

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## **Abstract**

Over the past decades, scholars have paid greater attention to sexual violence, in both theorization and empirical analysis. One area which has been largely ignored, however, is the sexual violence during times of armed conflict. This paper examines the nature and dynamics of sexual violence as it occurred during the 1994 Rwandan genocide. Drawing upon testimonies given to the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR), descriptions of rapes--both singular and mass—were qualitatively analyzed. In general, three broad types of assaults were identified: opportunistic, assaults which seemed to be a product of the disorder inherent within the conflict; episodes of sexual enslavement; and genocidal rapes, which were framed by the broader genocidal endeavors occurring at the time.

Key Words: genocidal rape, genocide, sexual violence, Rwanda

## **Introduction**

Over the past decades scholars have paid greater attention to sexual violence, in both theorization and empirical analysis. Largely catalyzed by the development of a distinctly feminist criminology in the 1970s, the scholarly literature on rape has included examination of both behavioral and legal environments in many Western nations. One area which has been largely ignored in this boom of rape studies is the study of sexual violence during times of war or other armed conflict. By no means rare, the raping of women in combat and occupation zones is a nearly universal condition of military campaigns. Despite this near ubiquity, few studies have attempted to theorize such behavior and those which have (e.g., Brownmiller 1975, Diken and Laustsen 2005, Gottschall 2004, Seifert 1994) do not draw upon systematic empirical data in their discussions, but rather make general theoretical claims based on popularly available discussions of such incidents.

As part of the genocide in the former Yugoslavia, sexual assault was a central component. The wide-spread sexual violence generated quite a bit of journalistic and feminist discussion, but little in the way of systematic analysis (see Barstow 2000, Diken and Laustsen 2005, and Gottschall 2004 as examples). Further, over the past 15 years, human rights focused NGOs, especially Human Rights Watch, have extensively documented the existence of wide-spread sexual violence in conflict zones around the globe (especially Africa, see Human Rights Watch 2005a, 2005b, 2002, 1999). While highly valuable, this work is descriptive in nature and theorizations of any sort are absent.

This paper examines the nature and dynamics of sexual violence as it occurred during the 1994 Rwandan genocide. Drawing upon testimonies given to the International

Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR), thick descriptions of rapes--both singular and mass—were analyzed in a qualitative manner. In general, three broad types of assaults were identified: opportunistic assaults which seemed to be a product of the disorder inherent within the conflict; episodes of sexual enslavement; and genocidal rapes, which were framed by the broader genocidal endeavors occurring at the time.

### *Rape During War*

The sexual assault of women within combat zones and occupied territories is one of the not-so-secret elements pervasive within the history of warfare. It has been recorded in essentially every war in human history. Treatment of women in this matter boiled down to issues of property rights and the “proper” disposition of property after a military episode. When women are property, women are plunder. Women have historically been considered spoils of war. Before the rise of professional armies, loot was the way in which men were paid for their services and motivated into hostilities. The possibility of sexual release was a minor reward, though the taking of a foreign woman as a “wife” due to military victory was common—this is *rapine* in the classical sense of the term. Abduction of women into sexual and domestic servitude was part and parcel of the rights of plunder.

Brownmiller (1975) suggests that all wars produce rape because war becomes a fulcrum for masculinity enactment. Such a hostile enactment of gender is the focus of soldier-soldier hostilities; once a given engagement is finished, the women in the occupied territories then become the site for a similar process. Brownmiller then links such violence to a masculine psychology of violence and domination. Characterized by some as the “pressure cooker” theory of rape in war (see Gottschall 2004, Seifert 1994),

sexual violence is explained as a combination of biological drives for sexual release with the innate stresses and chaos experienced during and after combat. While a valid examination of the nature of power dynamics played out in conflict zones, this approach does not adequately explain the widespread nature of the events or the systematic use of rape as a weapon of warfare within genocide or crimes against humanity events. Specifically, it ignores the reality of the formal organization of sexual assault in the genocides of the former Yugoslavia and in Rwanda. Further, sociologically-grounded work on rape and gender has established strong cultural factors (Scully 1992) as well as broader macro-level social conditions (Sanday 1981, Baron and Straus 1989, Whaley 2001, among many) as instrumental in generation of sexual violence<sup>1</sup>. It also ignored the fact that the amount of sexual violence occurring within conflicts varies greatly. Wood (2007) found that in some conflicts rape was wide-spread (i.e, the Rwandan genocide and the Sierra Leonean civil war). Other conflicts showed much less sexual violence (i.e., the Israel/Palestine conflict, the Peruvian and El Salvadorian civil wars). She also established that some rapes were highly opportunistic, while others are the product of systematic military tactics. An individual level 'pressure cooker' theory cannot adequately address such facts.

Discussions of this highly organized form of mass rape emerge in the aftermath of both Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia. Perusal of journalistic and historical sources documents widespread sexual slavery (e.g., Korean comfort women) but the use of rape

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<sup>1</sup> Indeed the work on rape within in civil contexts is voluminous and need not be recited here, but suffice to say that it has theorized more 'routine' sexual violence in a more complex manner.

as an orchestrated tactic of warfare is generally unknown until the 20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>2</sup>. However this does not mean it was not common before—it just wasn't thoroughly recorded, discussed, or examined. Absence of documentary evidence does not mean an absence of a phenomena. In the post-colonial African context, rape has been as pervasive as in any conflict (cite removed for blind review). Militia and regular army routinely rape women and girls once a village is taken; some of them are forced into marriages or held in sexual slavery for months or years at a time. When looking at the manifestation of rape in association with recent atrocities, we see an intensification of the nature and scope of sexual assaults on female civilian populations. In the former Rwanda, *Cote D'Ivoire*, Uganda, the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Darfur region of Somalia (to name a precious few) domestic conflict has produced wide-spread rape scenarios that go beyond the individualistic scenario of men satisfying their immediate sexual desires in a forceful demonstration of hypermasculinity. In such cases, rape has been used as a tool of terror and of population elimination—here I use the term genocidal rape to categorize such events. This term originates in explorations of sexual violence occurring during the genocide in Serbia and Kosovo. During these wars, rape was used as a wholesale tactic and weapon in the conflict, with some military units being expressly charged with raping women and girls in villages and camps (See Bracewell 2000, Diken and Laustsen 2005, Salzman 1998, Wood 2007).

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<sup>2</sup> Still, though, there is debate. The first two World Wars produced systematic documentation of rape associated with the conquering of an enemy territory (see “The Molotov Note” 1946, Morgan 1916; Ryan 1966). While a multitude of officers acknowledged its existence, there has been no proof that it was used purposefully as a tactic of war. The real question is whether officers knew of it and knew they couldn't stop it, or whether officers saw it as an essential tool in a population's demoralization as a part of early occupation. Within the events in the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda, sexual assault became an ordered act, qualitatively different than the opportunistic and retaliatory rapes recorded in these conflicts.

For the purposes of this work, genocidal rape is defined as a systemically organized military tactic of terror and genocide. It is used to generate fear in subdued population, humiliate the population (both men and women), derogate women (through spoilage of identity), and create a cohort of mixed-ethnic children to maintain the humiliation/spoilage/domination. Such a use of sexual assault is an orchestrated tactic of warfare. Fear of rape is a common emotion that all women near or within a combat zone experience; the widespread existence of this type of assault clearly enhances the stresses and anxieties all ready experienced by civilians. Genocidal rape capitalizes upon this and elevates assaults to a tactic of terrorism<sup>3</sup>. Another primary motivation for mass rape is the humiliation of male community members. Often men were made to watch as their wives and daughters were assaulted; isolated reports of soldiers forcing men to rape their own daughters have also emerged (see Chang 1997 for a discussion of this in China). Such actions are vivid demonstrations of the new-found powerlessness of men in the combat zone. Having to either actively or passively participate in this process is an assault on the masculinity of husbands and fathers; due to long standing patriarchal value systems, these men and women simultaneously experience the destruction of their ability to enact enforced gender norms.

Derogation and identity spoilage of the rape victims are another set of key motivators behind genocidal rape events. Unmarried women who have been raped are

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<sup>3</sup> Some have argued that all rape is a form of terrorism. For example, a radical feminist interpretation sees all sexual assaults as a tool that men (as a category of person) use to control and denigrate women (as a category of person). Indeed, many women world-wide live with the constant threat (and fear) of being raped. The key difference between this general and diffused condition and the nature of genocidal rape lies in intentionality. Simply, men worldwide do not conspire to organize rape events and men (as a category of person) do not tolerate rape because it terrorizes women. In the Rwandan genocide, Hutus consciously and purposefully used sexual assault as a tactic of war with the express purpose of creating fear and anxiety (cite removed for blind review).

typically no longer looked upon as potential wives—the rape has destroyed their marital desirability. Further, they are in turn shunned by family members and have nowhere to turn for survival. Such women will either starve or live the rest of their lives in highly marginal social positions (e.g., begging, prostitution, etc). Such conditions are genocidal as they assist in the elimination of a population physically and socially.

Finally, as seen in the former Yugoslavia and post-war Bangladesh, such widespread rapes often produced a birth cohort of mixed ethnic children. The effects of this are three-fold. First, it provides a long lasting reminder of the humiliation and derogation of the people as whole. The children that survive to birth and into youth are a constant symbol of the genocide experience. Second, as the children and their mothers are often outcasts from their kin groups because of the assaults themselves, this enhances the social disorganization of villages and cities which now bear the burden of either caring for or ignoring this new underclass of community members (Diken and Laustsen 2005; Salzman 1998). Thirdly, in societies where lineage membership is determined via patrilineal parentage, the children in question are members of the father's and not the mother's ethnic group. In effect, this can change the symbolic ethnic group membership of a community and work towards the elimination of a population (Bracewell 2000; Card 1996; Salzman 1998).

While sexual assault was not as structured in its organization as the rapes in Bosnia and Kosovo were—there were no rape brigades for example—rape was widespread throughout the 1994 Rwandan genocide. Further, it was organized and encouraged by those with military and political power. Before examining the nature of

the sexual violence during the genocide, it is best to briefly summarize the key events within the 1994 genocide itself.

*The Rwandan Genocide in Brief*

The late spring of 1994 saw widespread genocidal violence throughout Rwanda. Hutus and Twas across the country rose up to slaughter their Tutsi neighbors, along with Hutu and Twa that were married to or otherwise friendly with Tutsi. Examinations of the onset of the genocide have made it abundantly clear that it was planned well ahead of its execution. Within minutes after Rwandan President Habyarimana's plane was shot down on April 6th, militia members set up roadblocks throughout the streets of Kigali. Militiamen and Presidential guards began house to house searches for anyone they had deemed an enemy, killing them on sight.

At the onset of the genocide, victims were carefully selected and primarily slaughtered by Presidential Guards. The early killings were being carried out from a list that had been prepared months in advanced. Birara, former governor of the Central Bank, stated in *La Libre Belgique* on 24 May 1994 that General Nsabimana, then Army Commander in Chief, showed him a list of 1,500 names of individuals in Kigali alone on 24 February 1994 that were slated for death. The list expanded to all Tutsis and any Hutu sympathizers (cite removed for blind review; Prunier 1995).

The genocide spurred the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF)—a Tutsi rebel group operating in exile— to re-start their military operations. On 9 April they began to move down from the north. At the same time, the French Air Force was dropping paratroopers into the Kigali airport with orders to evacuate all foreign nationals and leading members of the MRND. Many of the dignitaries of the French Embassy were Tutsis and as such

were abandoned to meet their fate. By 12 April, the fighting between the RPF and government troops turned into a full-fledged battle and the momentum increased across all of Rwanda where civilian massacres had turned into a full-fledged genocide.

By the second week of April, the acting militia were 50,000 strong. They manned the roadblocks, took part in the house-to-house searches, and acted as executioners carrying out orders from the highly centralized, tightly controlled, central government and local councilors. The massacres spread as officials continued to incite anger and hatred, drawing on the ideology of Hutu supremacy. While the degree of participation varied from region to region and from individual to individual, a general pattern of widespread involvement of the Hutu population cannot be dismissed. The fear of not participating in the genocide was as much of an incentive as was the prevailing propaganda used to incite the violence from the onset.

Murder was not the only tool of the genocide. Systematic sexual assaults were carried out across the country. Some were spontaneous but most were planned—part of the official battlefield tactics of the genocide. Women and young girls were often killed after being brutally raped. Sexual mutilations of bodies were common including the removal of females' breasts and, less commonly, men's penises (cite removed for blind review).

The slaughter continued throughout April. Some areas saw the violence dissipate at the time, but only because nearly every Tutsi had been killed (e.g. Ruhengeri and Gisenyi). Other areas experienced continuous violence well into June (e.g. Kibungo, Southern Kigali., Butare, Kibuye and Cyangugu). Nearly 80% of the victims, approximately 640,000, were killed between the second week of April and the third week

of May. In all estimates of the total dead vary from 800,000 to well over 1,000,000 people (Prunier 2005). The total number of assaults, robberies, and incidents of sexual violence are essentially uncountable.

### **Methods**

The data from this paper comes from court records of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda. The ICTR keeps a public judicial records database which includes all indictments, redacted transcripts of all trial proceedings, evidence exhibits, and court rulings, be they trial outcomes or appeal outcomes. These records are made available in redacted form in both French and English. This data base was essential in this project as it contains rich data about the nature and dynamics of the 1994 genocide. The data is not necessarily representative of events and witness/victim perceptions; it provides the prosecutorial construction of the events and the defense's response to the construction. As with any court proceedings, the prosecution was interested in presenting a narrative of events which established *actus reus* of the accused. The goal was not an objective, general depiction of the events of the Rwandan genocide and the sexual violence which was embedded in the broader homicidal events; rather, prosecutors limited their presentation to specific actions which had produced indictments and called witnesses to provide evidentiary testimony establishing that the defendant in question had engaged in the actions listed in the indictments. Witnesses who testified were those that the ICTR was able to locate and interview and who were willing to appear in the trial. They may or may not be representative of the general Rwandan population and their experiences of the genocide may or may not be representative of the general experiences of the violence of 1994.

Despite this limitation, the constructed social reality contained within the trial transcripts provides a valid enough view of the events, the sexual violences in particular, to serve as the basis for this exploratory study. Considering the time which has elapsed, the large number of deceased who cannot give their accounts and the reorganization of Rwandan society, this is in all likelihood the best set of data available (or obtainable) to examine the nature of the events of interest here. In total, the ICTR has produced 73 individual indictments; due to the clustering of some indictments into single cases, 52 total trials have been carried out or are slated to be carried out. By examining the indictments, 22 people charged with sex crimes were identified (see Appendix 1). Of those individuals, 14 of the trials were completed with available records, 7 trials are in progress and 1 person still awaits trial. Once identified, cases involving charges of sex crimes were then examined for the availability of records in the public judicial records database. Thirteen cases had available records (those trials completed or on appeal).

The trial transcripts were searched for proceedings which deal with sexual violence—this was done through the examination of Daily Case Minutes in the ICTR archives and by searching each day’s English redacted transcripts. Once those days were identified, they were downloaded and printed out. Then, the trial transcripts were coded qualitatively to uncover themes and meanings presented within them. Primarily, the accounts of victims and witnesses were emphasized<sup>4</sup>. A total of 48 separate incidents of sexual assault were coded. Due to vague descriptions, it is not possible to determine the total number of victims within the incidents, though the number per incident ranged from

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<sup>4</sup> While offender perceptions are also crucial to understanding the nature and dynamics of sexual violence during the genocide, in the trial transcripts there was little of value within defense witnesses and accused testimonies. Typically, the defense would simply deny the accused was involved within the sexual violence.

1 to 6. The unit of analysis here is the specific incident of sexual violence, with some events described by more than one witness.

During primary coding, transcripts were read and coded for major themes concerning the dynamics of the sexual violence as they occurred and for the emic meanings ascribed to the events by the witness. Where available, offender motivation and meanings were coded. However, it should be noted that these understandings were primarily the construction of the prosecution and witnesses, as defendants typically denied the actions in question. Secondary coding involved rereading the transcripts and identifying sub-themes to better understand the nuances of the sexual violence.

Before this piece begins to discuss key findings, a few things need to be said about the nature of the testimonies. First, the prosecutorial team came late to the issue of sexual violence during the genocide. As Pierre-Richard Propser, a lead prosecutor, told the tribunal on 17 June 1997 (during the Akayesu case) its first signs of existence came through hints of certain witnesses testifying about general genocidal episodes and from NGO reports. A sexual violence team was formed in late summer of 1996 to collect data for prosecution of such actions, but early investigations proved insufficient. By the time the Office of the Prosecutor was seriously committed to the investigation of sexual violence, the majority of Rwanda was too dangerous to allow free movement of ICTR personnel and rather could only travel with UN armed escorts, seriously limiting their access to persons and information. This is particularly problematic for investigations of sexual violence as, “investigators stick out like a sore thumb and it draws attention to the witnesses” (17 June 1997, page 10, line 11). Maintaining the secrecy of witness identities was essential to convince women to come forward and testify; in fact, many witnesses

testified from behind a screen and were only referred to by pseudonyms so that their identities could be kept private.

The shame which Rwandan culture places on sexual victimization also kept women from volunteering incidents (see Jefremovas 1991 for a discussion of female gender positions in Rwanda). Three times during the trials examined witnesses brought up their sexual victimizations during the trial itself or immediately before; these victimizations which were not mentioned during their initial statements and affidavits to investigators. When asked why they hadn't brought up the incidents before, typically by defense council in cross-examination, the witnesses said that, first, they were too ashamed, and second, they had never been directly asked about their own victimizations, just those they had witnessed. It is also not uncommon in the transcripts to find the prosecutor or one of the judges attempting to calm a victim down during highly emotional testimony or to break the proceedings for short recesses while a witness regained composure.

Pierre-Richard Prosper also pointed toward another issue in his presentation to the tribunal on 23 October 1997, in anticipation of the first witness to testify about sexual violence. Immediately prior to the trial, Kinyarwanda<sup>5</sup> translators informed the prosecution team that "Kinyarwanda witnesses and interpreters do not use the explicit language of penis or vagina or sexual organs" (23 October 1997 p.12, lines 3-6). While some witnesses do use such terms, it is only after the term is first directly used by prosecution or defense council, and then, of course, it is read in translation. Such

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<sup>5</sup> This is the indigenous language of Rwanda. While many Rwandan speak both Kinyarwanda and French, most witnesses testified in their local tongue. Thus, when one is accessing court transcripts both the French and English versions of events provided by witnesses are translations.

linguistic patterns do not prevent facts and events from being analyzed, but they are on occasion less graphic than may be expected. Some victims simply say they were “raped” or “used” or “tortured” with little other elaboration. This being said, others provided richer discussions of their own experiences; when testifying about what they *witnessed* they tended to be more detailed and specific.

### **Findings**

Overall, three general forms of sexual violence were identified within the trial transcripts: opportunistic rapes, sexual enslavements involving detainment and repeated rapes and structured genocidal rapes. Opportunistic rapes were those which seemed to be more of a product of the wide-spread chaos and disorganization of the on-going genocide than being controlled and organized. Sexual enslavement episodes were cases where the victim was kept in a specific location for the purpose of repeated sexual victimization. Genocidal rapes were those that were orchestrated as part of the broader genocide, often being ordered (or at least encouraged) by those in positions of power. While nearly all sexual assaults were flavored with ethnic perceptions brought to the fore by the genocidal violence occurring around them, the genocidal rapes were driven by more intrinsically genocidal motivations and were all accompanied by other forms of humiliation, mutilation and ethnically derogatory language.

#### *Opportunistic Rapes*

Opportunistic rapes are those sexual assaults which arise out of the general chaos and confusion of a military engagement (Wood 2007). In contrast with genocidal rapes, these assaults are motivated by individualistic drives not as part of the military campaign itself per se. Within the data analyzed here, this was the least frequently occurring

category of rapes. However, as explored above, there is good reason to believe that this is an artifact of data. As prosecutors were assembling testimonies and structuring cases, the most severe and specifically genocidal assaults were more likely to be included. Further, as cases at the ICTR were centered on leaders, it is more likely that episodes done under their express command would be elicited and presented.

One example of an opportunistic rape was described during the trial of Mika Muhimana. A Hutu<sup>6</sup> witness was raped on three separate occasions by Mika. She was targeted primarily because her husband was dead. She explained, “after the death of my relatives, he found that the opportunity was good and so he tortured [raped] me.” On each occasion, she was summoned to Muhimana’s office by *Interahamwe*, where she was raped and then released.

In some cases, opportunistic elements were blended with genocidal elements. In the case of one woman, Musema offered a reward of 40,000 Rwandan francs to produce her or her husband. In explaining why this woman was chosen, one of the witnesses to this rape testified that “She was a young girl who was very well known and very beautiful” and then added “she had been raped...because the comments were passed that she had been sleeping with Tutsis and now she can sleep with [us].” Musema raped her in front of four *Interhamwe* soldiers as well as a crowd of refugees. “After...she was lying her stomach...the troops turn[ed] her...made her lie on her back and they started raping her in turns” then they cut off her breast and tried to feed it to her baby. When describing the incident, another witness noted that Musema announced to the assembled women

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<sup>6</sup> Not all victims during the 1994 genocide were Tutsi. Hutu who had married or had other close social relations were also targeted. Hutu women were also subject to rapes, especially those who had Tutsi husbands.

who watched the attack, “We are going to kill you like the *Inyenzi*<sup>7</sup> killed our own people.” Thus, there were precise motivations behind this incident—the woman was sought out specifically for this treatment, with Musema offering a reward for finding her. The overall violence and chaos allowed for pre-existing dislikes to be translated into a war crime. Yet, as the act was done in front of a crowd and the genocidal elements made clear to all who saw, this event was also directed to the commune as a whole, especially the Tutsi members. There is no doubt that many such incidents occurred during the violence of 1994 which were never reported to the ICTR investigators. There were clearly certain defendants before the ICTR who were more prone to this type of behavior than others. Alfred Musema and Mika Muhamina were prone to engage in such conduct.

#### *Sexual Enslavement*

Some rapes were more than single episode events. Sexual enslavements occurred when a woman was detained, typically in the house of an *Interhamwe*, and subjected to repeated sexual assaults over a period of days. While their imprisonment typically last a few days, the incidents were more involved than either opportunistic or genocidal assaults. The added element of confinement with the intent to continue forced sexual interactions makes these events qualitatively different from other rapes during the genocide.

After having witnessed rapes of women under Musema’s leadership, one victim was then taken to the house of Ndimbuti, another leader in the community.

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<sup>7</sup> *Inyenzi* is a Kinyarwanda word that translates as ‘cockroach.’ It was commonly used to refer to Tutsi before and during the 1994 genocide.

He wanted to rape me and I told him I had seen him rape the corpses of the women who had been killed on the 13<sup>th</sup> of April...I asked him to kill me and then rape me...he became angry and locked me up in his office.

The victim was not sexually assaulted, however, as when Ndimnbuti left his house to continue supervising the killings of Tutsi in the village, the victim escaped his house through a window.

The victim described in the first example of opportunistic rape above, who was raped by Muhamina three times, was also targeted for sexual enslavement. After her assaults by Mika, the witness described how she was treated by one of the *Interahamwe* soliders in town. “[Mungonero—the assailant] said he wanted Mika to hand me over to him so he should smell the body of a Tutsi woman...he wanted to rape me. He did not know me.” While she was being escorted to his house, he made her carry his spear, still coated in blood. Such a clear expression of power also mirrored more traditional subservience that a Rwandan wife is expected to display toward her husband. After being led through town,

We arrived in his house he asked me to undress in order to sleep with him. I first of all refused. You cannot sleep with somebody you don't know and you have never loved. And he told me if I refused, he was going to pierce me through and through with the spear. He did what he did.

The victim was kept in Mungonero's house for three days, being raped several times each day and night. After three days and two nights, the victim escaped through a window and fled the community.

Another example of enslavement was described later in Mika Muhimana's trial. After witnessing the purposefully voyeuristic rape of three girls in a hospital being used to house refugees, the witness was recognized as a Hutu by an *Interhamwe* soldier, Ngendahimana. He took her from the hospital and let her go home. A few days later, he came to her and said. "I saved you when you were about to die in the hospital. You cannot refuse to be my woman." While she declined his advance, she was threatened with death if she disobeyed. She spent several days and nights in the house before she was released.

Later, the same victim met an *Interhamwe* she had known before the genocide named Rafiki. He had previously expressed romantic interest in her, but she had refused his advances. He took her to his house where she was locked up for two days and repeatedly raped, approximately six times per day. After two nights of suffering, she was chased out of the house. A few days later, when she was about to be killed and dumped into a mass grave with a large group of her peers, Rafiki pulled her out of the line, telling his comrades she was Hutu. Then, he escorted her back to his house, again locking her inside. This time he didn't rape her himself, but gave the key to the house to a number of different Tutsi soldiers over the course of a few days, who would come in and rape her. Eventually she escaped the house and was later found by the RPF when they took control of the commune.

### *Genocidal Rapes*

Genocidal rapes are those whose motivation and consequences go beyond more mundane catalysts for sexual assault. These violations are part of a broader attempt to eliminate a category of people in whole or in part, with the sexual violence being only

one of many tactics used. In the Rwandan genocide of 1994, genocidal rapes typically arose out of direct involvement of local leadership. One case such as this was presented in the case against Alfred Musema. Leading a group of 30 *Interahamwe*, Musema flushed six women out of their hiding place in some bushes off the road. As the witness recounted to the ICTR, “we thought we were going to be killed in the bush,” so they revealed themselves to the Hutu forces. After forcing them into a line, Musema selected a 25 year old Tutsi woman who was eight months pregnant. Telling his troops that “he would give them an example as to what to do with the women...the young men should take the Tutsi women and see how they are made,” he raped the woman then stabbed her in the throat. After their leader was finished, the militia men fell upon the rest of the women, “rap[ing] them and after raping them, they stuck some pointed sticks into their private parts...those who did not die were finished off either with clubs or with machetes.” After the initial sexual assault, Musema spent the time his men were raping the other five women shooting at men trying to flee into the hills.

Many incidents described during the trial exhibit strongly ethnicist language (recall the use of the term *Inyenzi* above). For example, a witness testified in the trial of Jean de Dieu Kamuhanda that *Interahamwe* told a group of female refugees, “We are going to rape you and taste Tutsi women.” In the Akayesu trial, Jean-Paul Akayesu was described by several witnesses on more than one occasion that “he addressed the *Interahamwe* and told them [after they had raped a Tutsi] ‘So, never ask me what a Tutsi woman is like.’”

In addition to specifically directed language, rapes were sometimes combined with public nudity, something seen as shameful in Rwandan society especially for a

woman who was a mother (see Jefremovas 1991). During the Jean Paul Akayesu trial, a female Hutu who was married to a Tutsi, saw a Hutu girl, a student in secondary school, made to stand naked and do gymnastics<sup>8</sup> in front of a crowd of *Interahamwe*. The goal here is clear—the humiliation of the girl as well as the community overall. After a time, Akayesu tells the assembled troops, “I told you, you should first of all make sure that you sleep with this girl,” before he leaves the scene. She was then taken between two houses and gang raped. A similar episode was reported during the trial of Mika Muhimana. A witness testified to being outside of Muhimana’s house and hearing a girl scream and cry. Muhimana emerged from the building and told his assembled troops, “I’m going to show you what a Tutsi girl looks like,” and forced the woman to emerge from the house nude. Once outside, she was set upon by the men with clubs and beaten to death.

In Muhimana’s trial another such incident was also reported. During an attack on a hospital where numerous Tutsi were seeking refuge, *Interahamwe* took control of the building. Mika selected three women from a large group of refugees and took them to a private room, demanding they undress and lie on their backs in front of the *Interahamwe* so “they could see what the genitals of a Tutsi looked like...they looked at us and raped us...[saying to us] we are going to kill you. After having raped you, we are going to pierce your genitals with a sharpened stick.” However, the witness reported that after the girls were raped they were returned to the other captives.

In another episode, a witness described a sequential gang rape,

My sister and I were taken by these men who started sleeping with us...they

spared us so that they could continue to rape us...my mother begged them to kill

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<sup>8</sup> This is the translation term used in the English version. It is also rendered as ‘exercises’ and ‘marches’ elsewhere.

us instead of raping us in front of her. The man replied that their principles was to make them suffer. They raped us then they left us.

Two more men came into the room, and the victim is raped again, “he said that marriage had been refused to them [Hutu men], but now they we’re going to sleep with us with out any trouble at all.” Then, after those two men left, two more came in, these were only 15 or 16 years old, who again raped the victim and her sister.

One witness testified in the trial of Sylvestre Gacumbitsi to being raped by three men. During the act they openly talked of how they “hated [Tutsi] and now they were going to freely take advantage of us...they meant that Tutsi women and girls didn’t like Hutu men and refused to marry them. And they said now they could do everything they wanted with us...[they] stuck me and then raped me and afterward they thrust a stick of a tree, a branch in my vagina.” Later, when the same victim was brought before Sylvestre Gacumbitsi and taken to a house, “he took out a pistol...he said he wasn’t going to waste a bullet...he said he was going to kill me with his penis...he took a police man’s weapon [a truncheon]...he raped me with that weapon” then with his penis. When he was finished, he told the victim “go and others shall kill you.”

Many of the genocidally driven attacks culminated with the mutilation of the victims body. A witness in the trial of Juvenal Kajelijeli testified that, “I heard him [Kajelijeli] say that they [*Interahamwe*] should forcefully rape them and then kill them, that he had to separate the good grain from the bad ones.” The witness was attacked by four men. Two held her legs while she was raped by a third. This was repeated so each attacker could have a turn, the third to rape her told her “I would like to taste the vagina of a Tutsi woman.” The fourth refused to rape her, he looked at her, said “I cannot fall on

a Tutsi,” and then put a cigarette out in her vagina and kicked her before wandering off to rejoin the killing happening elsewhere.

Many of the rape victims were killed as part of the rape itself, typically by having sticks or spears thrust into their vaginas.. A *Interahamwe* soldier testified in the Kajelie trial that, “I saw these two people rape a girl...I saw them rape her and after that they used a spear to pierce her and they also pierce her sexual organs...I saw [them] cut off [her] breast...after cutting the girl’s breast off he [Kajelie] sucked it.” Another witness described hiding in the bushes and watching a group of *Interahamwe* rape a woman and leave her dead. After the soldiers left, the witness walked over to the site of the crime and found that “they had slit her throat, torn her skirt and thrust a stick in her genitals. About ten meters away...I also found a body...the legs were apart and the body of her child...was placed on her genitals, as if she was being force to have sexual intercourse with the mother.” Such symbolically sexualized violence (in addition to the rape itself) highlights the intensity of the ethnicist and gendered emotions driving the genocidaires and framing their behaviors.

### **Discussion**

To theoretically explore the phenomena described above, I will draw upon various criminological theories and approaches. Context is critical to the understanding of any criminal action and of any gendered action (Birkbeck and LeFree 1993, Messerschmidt 1993, Miller and Mullins 2006, West and Zimmerman 1987). The context of the sexual violence here is only indirectly comparable to civilian assaults. The mechanics of the act are similar and and least in the case of opportunistic assaults, motivations and offender cognitive scripts may be the same. Yet, war and other forms of mass violence are a

behavioral context in and of themselves, with normative and expected behaviors for social actors being strongly different than daily life. Thus any explanation requires this be taken into account.

Some of the rapes during the genocide grew out of pre-existing interpersonal grievances. The on-going genocide and the wide spread prevalence of rape made these events possible and provided impunity for the actions. Within criminology, routine activities theorists would point out that this is a central element in any criminal action. Crimes are the product of motivated offenders coming into contact with suitable targets in the absence of capable guardianship (Felson 2002). Here, individual males carrying unrequited desires or humiliated by rejection found themselves able to exact revenge on a specific woman due to the impunity provided by the broader genocide event. Simply, there were no capable guardians in these communities. Those who could have assumed some guardianship function—militia leaders—specifically encouraged such behaviors. This is seen most strongly in the cases of sexual enslavement. Yet, indicating the opportunities existed does not explain why opportunities were translated into actions.

Much work has established the hypermasculine nature of the military and of military conflict. Not only are militaries male-dominated in any (and every) sense of the term, they produce an interactional and evaluative culture that fuses hegemonic masculinity and violence (i.e., ‘real’ soldiers are men and ‘real’ men are violent) (see Goldstein 2001; Hutchings 2008). The binary definitional process of both gender (masculine/feminine) and of militarism (military/civilian) structures the cognitive map of soldiers in such a way as there are very few ways to look at others encountered. Within the context of the Rwandan genocide, the female victims would be seen as otherized due

to their gender, their ethnicity, and their non-combatant status. Such definitional views would facilitate, if not outright encourage, the brutal treatments described earlier in this paper. Thus, while a routine activities approach suggests how guardianship mediates the interaction between motivated offenders and suitable targets, this gendered view of soldiers helps explain how they were motivated offenders.

As many of the episodes were gang rapes, the group nature and context cannot be ignored. Leaders called for the wide-spread rapes, often specifically cajoling their troops to rape and then kill. Even if men were hesitant to do so, the military group context is well known to breed conformity. Witnessing atrocities committed by one's fellow soldiers is a powerful tool of socialization that normalizes deviance and facilitates the learning processes of new troops as they begin to learn how warfare and combat is defined and what actions are and are not acceptable (see Chang 1997; cite removed for blind review). Further, as those who have studied gang rape in US fraternities have noted, these group contexts encourage participation in such acts and that the shared participation in an assault can serve as a form of homosocial bonding between group members (Card 1996; Sanday 2007). Thus, the gang rapes specifically could have cemented bonds among the *Interahamwe* which were loosely organized at best.

The frequent calls to rape made by the leadership during the genocide not only increased the level of harm and shame done to victims, their families and communities, it was also clearly directed toward the Hutu killers—spurring them on to greater and more atrocious levels of violence. By calling upon long held resentments built and reinforced by the ethnic segregation within Rwandan society since the colonial period, calls for soldiers to 'take' what had been historically 'denied' them enhanced their motivation

toward genocide. The dynamics of power—both its denial to an historically advantaged group and its reclamation by a subordinate group—are not only class and ethnic based but also gendered.

As a witness against Jean Paul Akayesu pointed out, “these rapes were really designed to humiliate us.” As shown, some of these incidents were preceded by sexualized abuses clearly designed as such. Making victims strip and walk around naked before the *Interahamwe* troops was commonly discussed. Not only are these shaming processes directed at the victims themselves, but they are also directed at the victim’s families and communities. Survivors would bear both the psychic scars of being victimized or witnessing the victimization of close relatives (as well as commune mates and strangers for that matter), which carried with it intense shame and stigmatization within the Rwandan culture.

Yet, the question arises, why humiliate a population that is in the process of being completely destroyed? What goals could be accomplished through sexual violence that couldn’t be accomplished through homicide? Clearly, most of the *Interahamwe* who used rape as a weapon of genocide had no compulsion against killing women. Many women were murdered during or after their rape victimization. It is not possible to advance an interpretation which sees men as acceptable targets for lethal violence while sexual violence is reserved for women. Rather, the rapes function to add socio-cultural insult to physical injury for the victim and the ethnic group itself. Not only will the population be destroyed—the ultimate goal of any genocide—but before the destruction occurs all dignity and rights held by the population will be removed. Thus, rape can be seen as a way to tarnish the reputation and memory of a people before killing them off—ensuring

that not only are the final experiences of the population horrible by nature but that the way in which they are remembered by others is also fixed on those end moments (i.e., a nude woman laying along the side of the road with her throat slit and a tree branch inserted into her vagina). Not only is the population itself eliminated, the final memories of the people's existence are tarnished.

Ideologically, such sexual violence and mutilations reinforced the very ethnicist beliefs undergirding the genocide itself while they were also simultaneously encouraged by such beliefs. The widespread and vicious sexual violence was facilitated by the genocidal discourse framing Tutsi (and Tutsi allies) as not just enemies of the state and Hutu people but as sub-human—literally *Inyenzi*—‘cockroaches’ was the most often used term.

The rapes kept the Tutsi women in a constant state of terror. Despite widespread killing of men, some of the women clearly didn't know if they were going to be spared or not. Numerous examples in the data showed people heading to commune centers, hospitals and even sports stadiums seeking refuge. Even after spending time in hiding, women would emerge into public centers thinking there would be some level of protection. While these assumptions were erroneous, they indicate that the overall extent of the violence was not known to the victims. Further, while a few of the incidents of sexual violence described in the ICTR archives occurred in tandem with the early killings of April 1994, many of them come from later during the genocide: late April, May and even June.

There are clear gender components to these crimes, some of which go beyond the hypermasculine context of military life and activity. Rape itself is infused with gendered

power dynamics; scholars have long acknowledged that rape is as much about power as it is about sex (Baron and Straus 1989, Brownmiller 1975, Sanday 1981). Sexual violence was just one more way for Hutu men to dominate and destroy the Tutsi population. The masculine nature of the sexual violence is also an important component to explore. Long periods of poverty and social inequity often produces a crisis within masculinity within a community (see Silberschmidt 1992). Scholars have noted this in a number of Africa societies <sup>9</sup>(i.e., South Africa, Kenya). While there has been no specific work done on Rwanda itself, Hutu men experienced as much deprivation of gender capital as men in those societies where research has established strong masculinity crises. Through murder, rape and the framing of these actions as an enactment of ethnic superiority, Hutu men denied access to typical masculinity capitals could use the genocide itself as a fulcrum for the reclamation of their masculinity. Even within opportunistic examples, men could reclaim masculine authority and power by raping specific women who had slighted or rejected them in the past. On the macro level, the overall attacks on Tutsi (and Hutu) women were a way to reclaim masculine dominance and empowerment lost to unemployment, transition from traditional to modern patterns of social organization and other social forces beyond individual control (and comprehension).

There are many facets to and many explanations of the sexual violence that accompanied the 1994 Rwandan genocide. No social phenomena is easily explained; the examinations presented here are no doubt only partial as well. More data from different sources could easily shed additional light or contribute completely different interpretive demands and insights. Gender and gendered definitions drove both the general violence

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<sup>9</sup> This has also been a key point of interpretation in the mass rapes during the genocide in the former Yugoslavia (see Bracewell 2000 and Salzman 1998).

as well as the sexual violence that occurred in the Spring of 1994 throughout Rwanda. Strongly driven by economic, political and ethnic inequality, the genocide was a fulcrum of destruction where no one was safe and the violence visited upon Tutsis (and Tutsi sympathizers) was gendered.

### **Conclusion**

This paper has examined the nature and dynamics of sexual violence as it occurred during the 1994 Rwandan Genocide. The widespread social disorder during the genocide provided individuals with ample opportunity and impunity to engage in sexual violence. Not a few men took advantage of this to gratify immediate sexual desires or to act upon more long standing desires or grievances against specific women. In some prefectures, rape was as much of a weapon for the enactment of the anti-Tutsi genocide as were guns and machetes. These cases tended to involve groups of perpetrators, were encouraged if not ordered by field commanders, and were accompanied by the ethnicist language and motivations of the broader genocide. The goal was clearly to kill many of the women, either in the immediate act of the rape itself, by leaving them to die of their injuries. Those who survived experienced social rejection and continued humiliation—not to mention continued physical and psychological trauma.

This paper has added to the extant literature on both sexual violence and war crimes by providing an exploratory empirical examination of victim accounts of rapes associated with wide-spread civil or military violence. Future work will hopefully continue the general trends begun here. Clearly, an advantage would be to collect data in a more systematic fashion *in situ*, thereby avoiding the selection bias inherent in analyzing trial transcripts.

Following the ICTY and ICTR, the International Criminal Court (ICC) has positioned sexual violence as a central focal concern of its prosecutorial investigations. Already, it has identified the massive levels of sexual violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (see Human Rights Watch 2005b, 2002; cite removed for blind review) and in the Darfur region of Sudan (see Human Rights Watch 2005a, cite removed for blind review) as primary issues. In terms of judicial praxis, there is a legal machinery in place that defines the atrocities explored in this paper as one of the most serious violations of International Criminal Law. To date ICC investigations have produced arrest warrants for 11 individuals in 4 situations. 9 of those 11 (81%) warrants list sex crimes as part of the overall case. Thus, the emergent practice of an international criminal justice is taking sexual violence during armed conflicts very seriously, in a large part due to the ICTY and ICTR's prosecutions. Even if such legal measures do not generate deterrence, they do suggest that some measure of justice will be enacted for the victims of wartime and genocidal rape.

## Appendix One

Individuals Indicted by the ICTR on Sexual Assault Charges (\*=transcripts analyzed in this study)

### *Awaiting Trial*

Jean Baptiste Gatete

### *Trials in Progress*

Augustin Bizimungu

Augustine Ndindiliyimana

Francois-Xavier Nzuwonemeye

Innocent Sagahutu

Edouard Karemera

Mathieu Ngirumpatse

Jospeh Nzirorera

### *Cases Completed*

Tharcisse Muvunyi (on appeal)\*

Jean Paul Akayesu\*

Paul Bisengimana\*

Sylvestre Gacumbitsi\*

Juvenal Kajelijeli\*

Jean de Dieu Kamuhanda\*

Clement Kayishema\*

Mikaeli Muhimana\*

Alfred Musema\*

Eliezer Niyitegeka\*

Joseph Nzabirinda\*

Laurent Semanza\*

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