

Radical Racial Ideals and Sexual Violence: Rwanda, Bosnia, and Nazi Germany

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Abstract

Sexual violence greatly varies across and between different wars, and this paper examines the extent to which this also holds true for genocide. Specifically, it attempts to address why there was relatively little sexual violence against the Jews in Nazi Germany and during the Holocaust. By drawing upon theories concerning the escalation of war into genocide and ethnic cleansing, and the various potential mechanisms behind the use of sexual violence in such cases, the Holocaust is compared to the similar, yet unique, episodes of genocide and ethnic cleansing in Rwanda and Bosnia. After an examination of each case, it is concluded that sexual violence in Nazi Germany was limited because of the combination of and interaction between a set of unique characteristics and policies.

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Introduction

Episodes of mass ethnic killing in Rwanda, Bosnia, and Nazi Germany have marked important historical events for each country. All three conflicts are characterized by strong racial, ethnic, and national ideals, which ultimately resulted in the murder of hundreds of thousands of people and the displacement of millions more. In each case, a select group of elite leaders with a strong sense of nationalism combined with radical homogeneous racial ideals brought about these events of mass ethnic violence. Such mass ethnic killing was manifested either through policies of exterminating or forcefully deporting the perceived “threatening” group. This suggests that mass killings are part of an instrumental policy, which seeks to gain the leaders’ most important goals by eliminating any serious, oppositional threats (Valentino 2004: 3)². In Rwanda, Bosnia, and Nazi Germany, the particular methods of obtaining their respective racial and political goals, however, differed with each leader’s ultimate intentions.

In the pursuit of policies of mass ethnic killing, both individuals and armed groups often exploit sexual violence. This paper specifically examines the reasons for the presence, or absence, of sexual violence in these three conflicts. The cases of Rwanda, Bosnia, and Nazi Germany were specifically chosen as cases in which to examine the extent of sexual violence in mass ethnic violence, because the ethnic violence in each case manifests itself in slightly different ways. By examining these differences in conjuncture with differences in the use of sexual violence, we can gain more insight into the uses and reasons for increased sexual violence during times of ethnic violence.

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² This perspective, developed by Benjamin Valentino, is known as the strategic perspective because of the use of mass killing as a planned strategy developed by a small group of elite leaders.

The 1994 Rwanda genocide, which resulted in the death of approximately half a million people within three months, clearly illustrates the exploitation of sexual violence both by individuals and armed force³. While the context and intentions of the killings by the Serbian elites during the wars of Yugoslav secession varied greatly from the Hutu extremists in Rwanda, similar exhibitions of sexual violence were also present in Bosnia. Very differently, Nazi Germany presents yet another unique situation: as in Rwanda, millions were murdered as part of national genocidal policies, but the presence of sexual violence was comparatively absent relative to Rwanda and Bosnia. This striking difference opens the door to many important and puzzling questions concerning the nature and characteristic of both sexual violence and Nazi Germany. Why, when sexual violence is very prominent in Rwanda and Bosnia, is there so little sexual violence reported among the many Holocaust witnesses and survivors? Are there unique characteristics and practices that set Nazi Germany apart from these other episodes of mass ethnic killing?

This paper therefore attempts to provide an answer to these questions. It first looks at how members of the targeted ethnic group were persecuted in Rwanda and Bosnia, and why sexual violence was used against them. It then compares these findings to Nazi Germany in order to discover whether there were unique characteristics in Nazi Germany, and subsequently the Holocaust that would account for the startling differences of sexual violence. In order to address this puzzling dilemma, it is important to examine the role that sexual violence plays in situations of mass ethnic violence. How and why is sexual violence used? Why do individuals and regimes, both together and independently,

³ As reported in HRW 1999, by William Seltzer. This number is about 77 percent of the registered Rwandan Tutsi population. For full analysis concerning the establishment of an accurate death toll for the

manipulate the power and fear associated with sexual violence in order to obtain their fundamental goal of racial homogenization?

Many scholars have presented other ideas and theories concerning both the outbreak of mass ethnic killing and the presence of sexual violence during such violence. First, some argue that mass ethnic killing is simply an escalation of long, historical rivalries between competing ethnic groups. Sexual violence was always prevalent throughout these long-term conflicts, and only when international attention is drawn to the escalated violence does it become properly documented. Another argument asserts that sexual violence increases during mass ethnic killing purely because of the chaos surrounding the violence. Individuals then use the cover of war as an opportunity to employ acts of sexual violence. However, after examining Rwanda, Bosnia, and Yugoslavia, it will become clear that the evidence for these two alternative arguments does not hold.

Terms and Definitions

In order to understand the specific details differentiating Rwanda, Bosnia, and Nazi Germany, it is important to define and clarify several terms. I have so far been referring to these three cases as “mass ethnic violence” or “mass ethnic killing”, for they all can not be categorized under the same title of “genocide” or “ethnic cleansing”, or even “mass killing” since the violence in Bosnia, while primarily ethnically based, did not result in the same large scale deaths reminiscent of the Holocaust or Rwanda. I therefore define mass ethnic killing as the killing of a massive number of noncombatants

Rwanda genocide, see Introduction: Numbers, HRW 1999.

because of their ethnicity⁴. I consider genocide and ethnic cleansing to be two mechanisms of the broader, more encompassing term of mass ethnic killing. For the purposes of this paper, I will differentiate genocide and ethnic cleansing along the lines identified by Norman Naimark (Naimark 2002). Accordingly, genocide refers to conflict in which either part or all of an ethnic, religious, or national group is intentionally killed. Ethnic cleansing, on the other hand, pertains to the removal (not necessarily through killings) of a people along with any of their traces from a specific territory (Naimark 2002: 3). The difference between these two terms lies in the intentions of the perpetrating group. Drawing a line between the two is often difficult, because ethnic cleansing often escalates and results in genocidal violence.

The focus of this paper is about the use of sexual violence and not just about the escalation of mass ethnic killing in each respective case. While rape and sexual violence are often considered one in the same, rape actually lies under the larger umbrella of sexual violence. Whereas rape is defined as “the coerced penetration of the anus or vagina by the penis or another object, or of the mouth by the penis”, sexual violence incorporates an extensive range of non-penetrating sexual assaults (Wood 2005: 1). According to the ICRC, sexual violence, therefore, is not limited to rape but also “encompasses forced prostitution, sexual slavery, forced impregnation, forced maternity, forced termination of pregnancy, enforced sterilization, indecent assault [that

⁴ This definition is based upon Benjamin Valentino’s definition of *mass killing* (Valentino 2004: 11-12). Valentino’s definition incorporates violence resulting from imperialist conquests and rebellions, counter-guerrilla wars, terror bombings, ethnic cleansing, and expansionist wars, just to name a few. He considers a “massive number” to be the death of 50,000 or more people within a time period of five years or less. He recognizes that this is a slightly arbitrary number but believes that it is better suited for this definition than the use of a percentage. He argues that while a percentile is also randomly chosen, it is often difficult to define ethnic and victim boundaries. However, I believe that using a percentage is slightly more encompassing, for the intentional removal or murder of a small village less than 50,000 should also be considered as an act of mass killing.

encompasses the performance of mutilation of sexual organs], trafficking, inappropriate medical examination and strip searches” (ICRC 2004). From this understanding of sexual violence, it can be seen how the act of rape, while brutal and violent, is in fact only one of the many possible forms of sexual violence. It is important to note that women are not the only victims of sexual violence; men, too, can be targeted.

Categories and Mechanisms of Sexual Violence

Once leaders choose to follow policies of genocide or ethnic cleansing, the combination of strategy and opportunity results in the widespread use of sexual violence. When sexual violence is strategically employed, it is consciously as a tool for genocide and ethnic cleansing. It is deliberately and intentionally used to provoke and intimidate victims (Lilly 2000: 320). In other words, sexual violence, and rape in particular, is often used instrumentally as a means to obtain a collective end separate from itself. Because of its negative social consequences, political elites turn to the use of sexual violence in order to assist them in the process of obtaining their ultimate goal: “the whole point of violence is to ensure that there will be no continuation of coexistence, and rape seems a powerful weapon, even more powerful than murder, to bring about that end” (Hayden 2000: 31).

Sexual violence is therefore employed as a tool of genocide and/or ethnic cleansing because victims of sexual violence are often subject to strong social consequences and shame, like exclusion from the community. As clearly illustrated in both Rwanda and Bosnia, women faced severe stigma after being raped because the virginity and chastity of women holds important honor for both women and her family (ICRC 2004). Sexual violence humiliates not only women, but also men because it

shows men that they are incapable and unable to protect their women (Seifert 1994:54). Employing sexual violence can therefore greatly aid in the process of ethnic cleansing, for it influences families to leave their home and the surrounding area. In this light, perpetrators do not necessarily rape members of the targeted group because the perpetrators hate them. Rather, perpetrators rape in order to make their victims hate them and therefore not want to return (Hayden 2000: 31). Some rapists are individually driven by hatred, while others are actually quite conflicted. Nevertheless, sexual violence is thus meant to induce hatred.

Although hate⁵ does not have to be behind the use of sexual violence, its strategic use may result from elite leaders seeking vengeance against the threatening group because of a recent inversion in the ethnic power structure. When an oppressed group of people gains power and authority, they sometimes seek revenge and domination against those who previously held the ruling power. This sort of power inversion can lead the now ruling group to claim vengeance upon their previous oppressors. In order to punish and to illustrate their dominance, perpetrators often instrumentally employ sexual violence. The lesson of mass ethnic killing is to show that life between the different ethnic, religious, or national groups is finished, and sexual violence is an extremely effective tool for conveying this message (Hayden 2000: 32). Sexual violence is therefore chosen strategically in order to pursue revenge by inflicting terror and devastating humiliation, and by creating hate towards their perpetrators.

⁵ The emotions of Hatred, as well as Rage, and Fear are also very important mechanisms for why people engage in ethnic violence – Roger Petersen believes that everyday interactions between the bulk of the people and their corresponding emotions constrain elite leaders, for little leadership apparently is necessary to pursue ethnic violence (Petersen 2002). While I agree that the emotions of the people do indeed constrain leaders to some extent, leaders can actually manipulate these emotions in order to obtain their ultimate goals.

During episodes of mass ethnic killing, sexual violence may also become largely widespread because of opportunistic reasons. In this way, sexual violence is used as an end unto itself. The violence and conflict surrounding mass ethnic killing therefore provides a cover for individuals to pursue acts of sexual violence for the mere pleasure of doing so. As Robert Hayden argues, in times of partition when the state is liminal or where its future is uncertain, the use of sexual violence in conflict escalates because of the sense of unlikely consequences and retributions in the future (Hayden 2003: 32)⁶. The lack of potential penalties, and even the conscious ignorance and possible encouragement of sexual violence on the part of the state, allows individuals to pursue aggressively sexual acts that would be condemned under normal times of peace. Sexual gratification and personal resentments are typical mechanisms behind the use of opportunistic sexual violence.

However, in some conflicts where the state is more centrally organized and powerful, like the Third Reich, the use of sexual violence tends to manifest itself in more individualistic and covert ways. This implies that in less liminal states, the presence of sexual violence can be explained opportunistically rather than strategically. In such situations, men clandestinely pursue acts of sexual violence against members of the victimized group that under normal, peaceful conditions would be condemned.

In each of the proceeding cases, either the form in which mass ethnic killing materializes or the presence of sexual violence differs. For each case respectively, this paper will provide a background to the conflict, examine the patterns of sexual violence, and analyze the apparent purpose that sexual violence did or did not play.

⁶ While I believe that much of his argument is true, I do not believe that it provides a sufficiently universal explanation for the presence, or lack of presence, of sexual violence in areas of conflict.

Rwanda

Historical Background: The Escalation into Genocide

The 1994 Rwanda genocide is often characterized not only by its brutal massacres of thousands of Tutsis, but also by the widespread use of sexual violence against women. While ethnic tensions between the Hutus and the Tutsis were exaggerated by the genocide, the genocide itself was not the product of long, historical ethnic hatreds and rivalries. Prior to European colonization, the two groups regarded their differences closer to the likes of castes or classes, in which people fluidly moved between the groups by means of intermarriage or the acquisition of wealth (African Rights 1994). While occupation, economic status, and minor physical differences distinguished the two groups, Hutus and Tutsis spoke the same language and followed the same religion and customs. Additionally, systematic violence between the Hutus and the Tutsis was unknown before European colonization (African Rights 1994).

The period of European colonization, however, marked a turning point in the self-perceived ethnic differences between the two groups. Colonists racialized the differences between the Hutus and the Tutsis, by deciding that one group was biologically superior to the other. Colonists claimed that the tall, angular faced Tutsis placed higher in the racial hierarchy (HRW 1999). Tutsis were therefore awarded more powerful political positions, and subsequently gained better privileges (Green 2002). However, shortly before the end of colonial occupation in the 1950's, the Belgians (who, post World War I, gained control of the country from Germany as part of the Treaty of Versailles) sought to promote a democratic system and end the ethnic differences that the Rwandans had adopted over the

centuries. This shift led the Hutus to push for more political and economic power and representation, leading to political conflicts between the Hutus and the Tutsis (Valentino 2004: 178). Such conflicts escalated into several violent attacks against the Tutsi, ultimately resulting in Hutu control of the government. Many Tutsis subsequently fled Rwanda into neighboring countries, and sporadic acts of violence between the two groups continued.

Despite politically based struggles between the two groups, Hutus and Tutsis often intermarried and cohabitated in the same villages and prefectures (HRW 1999). Hutu extremists, however, never allowed ethnic differences to completely abate, and within the context of what Hutu extremists perceived as a “Tutsi threat”, mild conflict escalated into genocide by the mid-1990’s. These Hutu extremists felt they were being jeopardized by consistent threats of invasions by the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF)⁷ in Uganda. This was accompanied by several actual RPF massacres of Hutu civilizations in the early 1990’s. Rather than fearing just those associated with the RPF or oppositional parties, extremists saw all Tutsis as enemies (Valentino 2004: 182-185). In other words, Hutu extremists did not distinguish between ethnic and political differences; they saw every single Tutsi as posing a threat to the actual physical safety of the Hutu population. The messages conveyed through the Hutu controlled radio station was that the Hutu must either “kill or be killed”, for if the Tutsi gained power, the Tutsi would seek vengeance and murder all Hutus in a gruesome manner (Green 2002). The threat of past and present RPF attacks infused the political and social atmosphere in Rwanda with continual ambiguity and a lack of security. Hutu extremists also felt betrayed by power-sharing talks between the two groups. Because of their radical conceptions concerning the Tutsi,

Hutu extremist assumed that sharing power was an impossible alternative to the growing Tutsi threat (Valentino 2004: 182). They believed that such talks between the two groups as threatening to their general economic and political predominance. Extremists feared that in practice Tutsis would not easily share power; instead Tutsi would seek to regain the domination they held pre-1959. Such power-sharing talks, of course, also threatened Hutu personal holds on power.

The extreme Hutu perceptions of a Tutsi “threat” exaggerated by the uncertainty created by pressures from the RPF ultimately escalated into a national policy of genocidal mass killing. This decision, however, was decided upon only after Hutus observed the failures of their own efforts to deal with the Tutsi threat. For example, despite violent, but not systematic attacks against small Tutsi civilizations and assassinations of Tutsi leaders, negotiations with the Tutsis continued and the RPF continued to grow (Valentino 2004: 182-183). The extremists also deemed other alternatives ineffective and/or impractical: they believed that the deportation, for example, of all Tutsis from Rwanda into neighboring countries would only result in the continuation of both the conflict and the inherent Tutsi threat.

The complete annihilation of the Tutsis, therefore, was the only “practical” solution in the eyes of the Hutu extremists. However, because Hutu military strength was inferior to the RPF, extremists “probably concluded that their genocidal strategy could only succeed if they acted quickly. Although the killing was performed primarily with small arms and edged weapons, 500,000 to 800,000 people were murdered in less than three months” (Valentino 2004: 187). In order to successfully carry through this policy of mass killing, Hutu extremists engaged not only armed groups in the violence, but also

⁷ The RPF was a Tutsi-led rebel movement formed by exiles in neighboring countries.

encouraged thousands of noncombatant civilians to turn against each other and join in the carnage. Thus, while many, but not all, attacks were carried out by government organizations like the army, the paramilitary, and the militia, which consisted of many embittered and desperate young men (Turshen 2001), attacks by civilians greatly intensified the violence. It appears that fear largely influenced this large civilian participation: “ordinary citizens acted from fear, both of the Tutsi whom they had been taught were coming to kill them, and fear of other Hutu who threatened reprisals on any who did not join in the carnage” (HRW 1996: 13).

Evidence for the influence of internalized anti-Tutsi propaganda combined with group pressure suggests that extremists meticulously designed the genocide using a “culmination of sweeping efforts” (Green 2002). The influence of print and radio propaganda was the most critical instrument in this plan to disseminate essential and effective hate speech (HRW 1999). In order to create an atmosphere in which “neighbors killed neighbors”, the media effectively popularized the fear and hatred that the extremists already felt towards the Tutsi. Through the combination of the written press and the RTL radio, Hutu extremists incessantly reiterated the legacy of nineteenth century colonialism that the Hutus and Tutsis were fundamentally different people (HRW 1996: 14).

Because of their strong influence over the print, newspapers, magazines, and pamphlets became an important way for Hutu extremists to relay their messages to the public at large. *Kangura*, a newspaper that published articles and cartoons promoting Hutu supremacy and strongly criticizing the Tutsi, was one of the most influential sources of print media. Perhaps its most infamous article was published in early 1990 under the

title of the “Ten Commandments of the Hutu”, which advocated a “doctrine of militant Hutu purity” and officially declared the Tutsis as enemies of the Hutus (Green 2002). These messages quickly disseminated throughout the public, for sixty-six percent of the Rwanda population was literate, and those who could read, read to those who could not (Green 2002).

Although printed media was clearly important, the manipulation of the radio became the most influential and central way through which the Hutu extremists spread their anti-Tutsi doctrine. Around twenty-nine percent of all Rwandan households had radios, and in urban areas, the figure rose to about fifty-nine percent (Green 2002). In 1991, Rwanda had only one radio station, Radio Rwanda, which the government (the MRND) dominated. After the death of President Habyarimana and the establishment of a coalition government in April 1992, there was a call to reform Radio Rwanda to make it more politically moderate. In reaction to this, Hutu extremists created the *Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines* (RTL) a year later in April 1993 (HRW 1999). The purpose of the new station was to publicize extreme racial beliefs as part of the extremists’ preparation for genocide (Green 2002). Broadcasters incessantly referred to the Tutsis using *inyenzi*, meaning “cockroach”. RTL airings warned Tutsis: “You cockroaches must know you are made of flesh! We won’t let you kill! We will kill you!” (Green 2002). These statements clearly illustrate the Hutu fear of Tutsi strength and vengeance.

Hutu leaders also used the radio to exert their influence over both the armed forces and the civilians. For example, once an opposing individual was identified and denounced on the radio, the Interahamwe, a powerful Hutu paramilitary group, would

track the individual down and eliminate him. The idea that the attack against the Tutsis would have to require the participation of all of the Hutu population as well as the armed forces was also widely advocated through radio broadcasts (Green 2002; HRW 1999). Through this use of strong anti-Tutsi propaganda articulating the perceived Tutsi threat, the stage for genocide was set.

The Patterns and Purposes of Sexual Violence

Even though Tutsi women were murdered along with Tutsi men, many women were in fact not killed but taken by their perpetrators, raped, humiliated, and left to “die of sadness” because of the strong cultural taboo shaming rape victims (HRW 1996: 2). The use of sexual violence was therefore not necessarily a product of genocide, but rather, it aided in the “process of deconstruction of the Tutsi group – destruction of the spirit, of the will to live, and of life itself” (Green 2002). While Tutsi men and women, the young and old all suffered from homicide and rape during the genocide, women in particular were targeted with sexual violence because of their gender and ethnicity (HRW 1996: 3). Although rape, individual and gang, was commonly used against women, it was not the only form of sexual violence employed. Women were succumbed to mutilations of their breasts, vaginas, and pelvic region using sticks, machetes, knives; they were raped with inanimate objects like sharpened sticks; they were taken into sexual slavery and forced into marriages; and they were held collectively by militia men or were selected individually by militia men to be held for the men’s sexual gratification (Green 2002; HRW 1996).

The extreme use of sexual violence in Rwanda can be broken down and explained by the interaction between the two categories of sexual violence. First, through its conscious use and condonement, sexual violence was strategically used as a way of destroying the Tutsi race. Because Tutsi women were perceived as a symbol of their ethnic identity, sexual violence in Rwanda was instrumentally used against them as a tool for annihilation. This destruction was largely accomplished through the degrading, and sometimes slow, process of humiliation and social stigma associated with raped and sexually violated women in Rwandan culture. Because of this shame attached to such victims, Hutu men would often rape women, and then instead of killing them, they would leave the now disgraced women either to be raped by other men, to die of shame and humiliation, or to be shunned and killed by others because of their status as rape victims (HRW 1996: 2-3). Sexual violence was not only aimed at the disgrace of individual women, but at their families and communities too: “The humiliation, pain, and terror inflicted by the rapist is meant to degrade not just the individual woman but also to strip the humanity from the larger group of which she is part – the harm done to the individual woman is often obscured or even compounded by the perceived harm to the community” (HRW 1996: 3). Sexual violence was thus a tool to affect large groups of people, with the hope that the associated fear and humiliation would assist in annihilating the Tutsis.

Another important mechanism behind the strategic use of sexual violence is the ethnic power inversion that was created at the time of Rwandan independence. Among Hutu extremists, this resulted in a collective sense of revenge against the Tutsi, which further added to the perceived Tutsi threat (particularly Hutu holds on power). In order to seek revenge and punishment, extremists strategically employed sexual violence because

of its effectiveness as a tool for genocide. Particularly through messages conveyed by propaganda, men were encouraged to seek revenge for any injustices or grievances they had experienced in the past⁸. The media specifically focused on injustices based on gender and ethnic stereotypes. For example, one journalist reported

Hutu women were made for work, to be servants...Tutsi women were made for sexuality and beauty...Tutsi women were seen as spies because they know how to present themselves to whites and to Hutu men, so they become an arm of the RPF. Hutu understood the propaganda. It was time for revenge... (HRW 1996: 16)⁹.

This clever conscious use of propaganda helps provide evidence for the use of strategic sexual violence. As already seen, propaganda was used to infiltrate the Hutu society with hatred, resentment, and fear. Much of this propaganda was gendered and focused specifically on degrading Tutsi women. Llezlie Green asserts that the campaign against Tutsi women in fact had begun years before the actual genocide: “in 1990, four years before the start of the genocide, Tutsi women were frequently the centerpiece of propagandist efforts to heighten ethnic tensions and engender hatred” (Green 2002). In fact, four of the Ten Commandments dealt specifically with women:

- *Every Hutu should know that a Tutsi woman, wherever she is, works for the interest of her Tutsi ethnic group. As a result, we shall consider a traitor any Hutu who: marries a Tutsi woman; befriends a Tutsi woman; employs a Tutsi woman as a secretary or concubine.*
- *Every Hutu should know that our Hutu daughters are more suitable and conscientious in their role as women, wife, and mother of the family. Are they not beautiful, good secretaries and more honest?*

⁸ I believe that Hutus sought revenge not only because of cultural beliefs concerning the superiority of Tutsi women, but also because of both hatred for having been succumbed to Tutsi rule pre-1959 and of the fear of a potentially successful RPF invasion resulting again in Hutu oppression.

⁹ This vengeful mechanism is only one aspect of the strategic use of sexual violence. If it were the prominent mechanism, then one would expect to find high levels of sexual genocide by the RPF against the Hutus when the RPF regained control of Rwanda in July 1994 – similar to the Soviet, Polish, and Czech sexual attacks on the Germans following the end of World War Two.

- *Hutu women, be vigilant and try to bring your husbands, brothers and sons back to reason*
- *The Rwandese Armed Forces should be exclusively Hutu. The experience of the October [1990] war has taught us a lesson. No member of the military shall marry a Tutsi (as documented in Green 2002).*

These messages illustrate the radical beliefs that Tutsi women were the doorway through which the Tutsis were trying to destroy the Hutus. Thus, any connection between the two ethnicities was to be eliminated.

Propaganda increasingly presented women as sexual objects, and played on the dangerous stereotypes that Tutsi women were more beautiful and desirable than Hutu women. Propagandists claimed that because of their beauty, Tutsi women were arrogant and looked down upon the ugly and inferior Hutu men. This led to jealousy and hate that was clearly internalized by many Hutu perpetrators, for many rape survivors mention that while they were being sexually abused their perpetrators at some point referred to their race with statements like:

“We want to see how sweet Tutsi women are”;

“You Tutsi women think that you are too good for us”;

“We want to see if a Tutsi woman is like a Hutu woman”;

And “If there were peace, you would never accept me” (HRW 1996: 16).

Many of these were subsequently followed by phrases like *“We thought that Tutsi women were different, but they are just the same”* (HRW 1996: 36). Graphic cartoons were also published sexualizing Tutsi women. For example, a common cartoon theme showed the sexual seduction that Tutsi women used over various politicians and organizations, like

the UN peacekeepers, all of which the extremists associated with the RPF (HRW 1996: 14).

Additional evidence for the use of sexual violence lies in the examination of cross-ethnic marriages between the Hutus and the Tutsi. Despite intermarriages in the years leading up to the genocide, marriage between Tutsi women and Hutu men was more common than marriage between Hutu women and Tutsi men. Hutu extremists saw Tutsi women as being “pivotal enemies” to Hutu efforts to separate and purify the Hutu race largely because ethnicity is passed down to children patrilineally, through the father (Green 2002). The “more beautiful” Tutsi women were accused of being “enemies of the state” and used by Tutsi men to infiltrate and de-purify Hutu ranks (HRW 1996: 4). Tutsi women were thus targeted because “they were socially positioned at the permeable boundary between the two ethnic groups” (Green 2002).

However, it appears that the biological threat posed by the Tutsi was not as threatening to the Hutus as the Tutsi political threat. Tutsi women, therefore, were not targeted purely because they posed a biological threat (like the Jews did to the Nazis), but rather, because the Hutus associated all Tutsis with the RPF. Hutu extremists assumed that all Tutsi wanted to gain domination of Rwanda and then subordinate and destroy the Hutu race (HRW 1996: 3). The strong sexual images portraying Tutsi women in the propaganda, therefore, perpetuated the sexual violence against Tutsi women as a means of dehumanizing and subjugating all Tutsis so that Hutu domination would continue indefinitely¹⁰.

¹⁰ Tutsi women were not the only women specifically targeted. Hutu women in fact were not even safe from sexual attacks by those of their own ethnic group. Hutu women married to Tutsi men were often targeted, as well as those who offered protection to condemned Tutsis or who were affiliated with oppositional parties (HRW 1996: 46). A number of Hutu women, however, were simply attacked in spite

Although sexual violence appears to have been strategically employed, it is unclear whether explicit orders to practice sexual violence were indeed given by Hutu leaders and commanders because there is no hard documentary evidence. However, the orchestrated, gendered propaganda against women suggests strategic planning of sexual violence, for it dehumanized and sexualized women making them more vulnerable and accessible as sexual objects to be violated. Despite the lacking documental evidence, both military and civilian authorities condoned and in some cases even encouraged both homicide and sexual violence by militia and other military groups: “Administrative, military and political leaders at the national and local levels, as well as heads of militia, directed or encouraged both the killings and sexual violence to further their political goal: the destruction of the Tutsi as a group” (HRW 1996: 2).

While it can be inferred that the widespread, systematic sexual violence in Rwanda largely resulted from some form of strategy, it clearly does not account for the whole picture. Opportunistic individuals seeking personal sexual gratification also contributed to its extensive use.

The prominence of sexual slavery and forced marriages illustrates this opportunistic element of sexual violence. Throughout the genocide women were often singled out and held captive for personal sexual service for militiamen. Sometimes this lasted only for a brief period, while other times it extended for the duration of the genocide. Such women were often dubbed the name “women of the ceiling” (HRW 1996), for they were frequently held captive in the space between the roof and the ceiling

of their so-called ethnicity (HRW 1996: 3). Thus, for example, any form of compassion that Hutu women (and men) showed to those of the other race was sufficient enough to label them as offensive targets. During the three-month genocide, between 10,000 and 30,000 Hutus were murdered for suspected sympathizing with the RPF (Valentino 2004: 187).

so that others could not find them and kill them. Young girls, and especially those considered most beautiful, were particularly at the mercy of militia groups (HRW 1996: 3). This suggests that many men participated in acts of sexual violence for the very pleasure of the act itself. Women were also often forced into “marriages” with their captors, though this term disregards the lack of consent Tutsi women gave to such men (Turshen 2001). These marriages sanctioned the legitimacy of both rape as intercourse and the acquisition of the “bride’s” land¹¹.

This process of taking land from the Tutsi also illustrates the underlying presence of revenge and punishment. While Hutu extremists clearly strategically manipulated these sentiments, they were also taken advantage of and used opportunistically by individuals. Those who used sexual violence as a form of revenge partly depended upon those who strongly responded to the war propaganda. People who had individual hatreds and old scores to settle were more likely to positively respond to anti-Tutsi hate propaganda, than others who were not harboring similar sentiments. Men might also have pursued sexual violence opportunistically purely to satisfy sexual tendencies that they normally would have repressed.

It is thus clear that both strategy and opportunity played a critical role in contributing to the high levels of sexual violence used in the 1994 Rwanda genocide. It is most likely that strategy and opportunity actually influenced one another. As illustrated in the use of propaganda, some Hutus engaged in acts of sexual violence because of an internalization of the negative, sexual images displayed in cartoons and described in the hate speech broadcast on the radio. Some perpetrators, on the other

¹¹ Turshen (2001) extends this argument by suggesting that women were targeted with sexual violence largely because of their relationship to property. In other words, through the institutionalization of attitudes

hand, directly responded to the same propaganda. They understood the relayed messages as a form of “permission” to employ sexual violence. Thus, opportunistic individuals using the cover of genocide and its violence to pursue personal sexual gratification is not the sole explanation for the widespread employment of sexual violence during the 1994 Rwanda genocide. Rather, the general chaos and disorder of the genocide along with strategic employment of sexual violence increased its opportunistic use.

The Former Yugoslavia

As is well known, the extensive practice of sexual violence primarily in the form of rape and sexual slavery played a central role during the wars surrounding the Yugoslav secession. Even though mass killing occurred in the former Yugoslavia, a general policy calling for the liquidation of specific ethnic groups did not exist as it did in Rwanda. Although the Yugoslav wars were concerned much more with claiming territory and establishing homogeneous nations, the life of targeted ethnic people was not highly valued. Rather, such killings, for the most part, appear to have occurred as a by-product of ethnic cleansing; that is, people were targeted and killed in the process of their removal from their homes. This is not to say, however, that people were not treated with immense disrespect or intentionally killed because of their ethnicity: refugees were forced into long marches where they were abused, beaten, and shot at; some were killed (Little 1996: 278). The elimination of a targeted ethnic group, however, was not at the forefront of the

and practices that treated women as property, raping them actually stripped them of their assets and worth.

war, as it was in Rwanda. It is clear that many episodes of ethnic cleansing during this time push the thin line separating ethnic cleansing and genocide.

Historical Background: the Breakdown of the Yugoslav State

The origins of the Yugoslav wars can be traced back to the mid-1980s with both the collapse of the communist regime and the rise of Serb nationalism primarily among Belgrade intellectuals in conjuncture with the secession of Croatia and Slovenia in 1991 (Little 1996: 25). Following the end of World War Two, Tito's solution to the failure of the first Yugoslavia was to grant each nation its own defined territory and governmental system, creating a Communist triad of "party, police, and army" (Naimark 2002: 146-147). Tito therefore purged all Serb, Croat, Muslim, Slovene, Macedonian, and Albanian nations and mercilessly suppressed nationalism in order to prevent the state from meeting the similar fate that destroyed the first Yugoslav state (Little 1996: 28-29). Despite his efforts, by the late 1970s and the early 1980s, each republic "looked and acted as though they were socialist, but were increasingly nationalist in their essentials" (Naimark 2002: 147).

With Tito's failing health and his eventual death in May 1980, the federal institutions he created slowly fell apart (Little 1996: 29), and what central power there had been now devolved to the individual republics. This intensified trends of separatism and nationalism, especially in the two largest nations of Serbia and Croatia. By manipulating the weakened federal system, each saw an opportunity to further their national interests (Naimark 147). The shift from socialism to capitalism between the late 1980s and the early 1990s led to further national solidarity and patriotism, which

cemented the demise of the multinational state (Valentino 2004: 153-154). This growing nationalism in conjuncture with an economic crisis in the 1980s, characterized by severe inflation and high unemployment, prompted the wealthier republics of Croatia and Slovenia to seek independence in 1991.

Tensions further escalated with a wave of Serb nationalism, particularly among the intelligentsia and elite in Belgrade, which sparked sentiments that Serbs had been poorly treated under Tito's rule and that their interests had been sacrificed in the Yugoslav system. The creation of the *Memorandum of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts* in 1986, which played a key role in evoking Serbian nationalism clearly illustrates these sentiments. The *Memorandum*, written by Serbian intelligentsia, argued that Serbs had been unfairly treated under Tito's rule, for the Serbs had the greatest contribution to the Yugoslav military, and subsequently had suffered more than any of the other regions. Yet, such loss had neither been properly compensated nor acknowledged. The *Memorandum* also relayed feelings that the Serbian nation, and especially Serbian people living outside of Serb proper, was being threatened by the rise of nationalism in neighboring nations. It actually stated that their "very existence was threatened" (Little 1996: 32).

The *Memorandum* continue to claim that Serbs were unjustly the victims of economic and political discrimination at the hands of the Croats and the Slovenes: "Not all national groups were equal...The Serbian nation, for instance, was not given the right to have its own state. The large sections of the Serbian people who live in other republics, unlike the national minorities, do not have the right to use their own language and script; they do not have the right to set up their own political or cultural organizations

or to foster the common cultural traditions of their nation together with their co-nationals” (Naimark 2002: 149-150). In other words, the Serb elite felt discriminated against and under appreciated. In reaction to both growing nationalism in neighboring countries as well as the perceived unjust treatment towards them, the Serbs in Belgrade therefore began to seek greater dominance and power within both Serbia and any Serbian inhabited lands outside of Serb proper (Naimark 2002: 147).

The *Memorandum* sparked a “political bombshell”, for it signaled a shift from the “promotion of Yugoslavism, colored with a tinge of Serbian patriotism, to outright Serbian nationalism and even pan-Serbianism” (Little 1996: 31). It simultaneously marked a public turn in the ideology of Serbian intelligentsia, illustrating the transformation of Serbian intellectuals into national propagandists. The *Memorandum* itself did not necessarily create nationalism. Rather, it simply “tapped [into] sentiments that ran deep among the Serbs, but which were suppressed and, as a result, exacerbated by Communism. The Academy’s tract echoed opinions whispered throughout Serbia” (Little 1996: 33).

After the collapse of the Communist regime these nationalistic whisperings began to emerge and gain a strong foothold. This growing patriotism was then manipulated by Slobodan Milosevic (Little 1996: 25) in order to obtain the Serbian vision of a unified and powerful Serbia. Tension and conflict, however, did not erupt into active fighting until 1991 when both Slovenia and Croatia declared independence. The subsequent war was centered on each republic seeking the consolidation of power and the creation of a homogeneous nation. The resulting ethnic cleansing in the former Yugoslavia, however, was not a necessary consequence of nation-state building. Instead, it was a path

consciously chosen by governmental elites, primarily Milosevic in Serbia and Trudjman in Croatia. These two men had concrete political goals in mind, which were then backed by their respective political supporters in Serbia and Croatia (Naimark 2002: 152).

Bosnia-Herzegovina

Although violence, and in particular sexual violence, characterized much of the fighting throughout all regions of Yugoslavia, this paper specifically focused on the episodes of violence in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The violence against the Albanians by the Serbs, against the Muslims by the Serbs and Croats, against the Serbs by the Croats, against the Croats by the Serbs, and against the Slovenes by the Serbs are all equally important. But, because events during the Yugoslav secession are complex and intricate, focusing in on a particular region within the wars in Yugoslavia allows for more specific, in-depth research and analysis. Most importantly, while sexual violence was rampant in both Croatia and Kosovo, the use of sexual violence in the conflict in Bosnia was especially extensive (most of it occurring in Bosnia in the latter two-thirds of 1992 (UNSC 1994: Annex IX, 11)). Even though many ethnic groups among all of the nations report having been victims of sexual violence, sexual violence in Bosnia was much more dominant than elsewhere (UNSC 1994: Annex IX).

After attacks throughout Yugoslavia¹² against non-Serbs, Milosevic turned his attention to expelling Bosnia of its non-Serbian inhabitants, who were predominately Muslim. As in other violence surrounding the wars of Yugoslav secession, the mass

¹² James Ron's examination of the Serbian military showed that while non-Serbs outside of Serbia proper were readily attacked, those non-Serbs within Serbia were left relatively unharmed – see [Ron 2003](#).

killings against the Bosnian Muslims was more a product of ethnic cleansing¹³ than genocide, even though it did at times take a genocidal element (Naimark 2002: 157). In August 1992, Newsday published a story titled “The Death Camps of Bosnia”, which actually accused Serbs of organized killing:

The Serb conquerors of northern Bosnia have established two concentration camps in which more than a thousand civilians have been executed or starved and thousands more are being held until they die, according to two recently released prisoners interviewed by Newsday.

The testimony of the two survivors appeared to be the first eyewitness accounts of what international human rights agencies fear may be systematic slaughter conducted on a huge scale (Newsday 1992).

Whether or not the Serbs were performing organized, systematic killings, the Serbian paramilitary soldiers¹⁴ forced Muslims out of their towns and cities by beating, brutalizing, raping, and killing them beginning in early 1992. As in Rwanda, neighbors turned against neighbors, adding to the extent of violence. This process of ethnic cleansing was therefore about attacking, expelling, and punishing any non-Serbs (Naimark 2002: 159) in order to create the Serbian elite vision of a homogenous Serbian society.

Sexual Violence: Patterns and Purposes

Bosnian Muslims were not only the primary victims of ethnic cleansing, but they were also victims of extensive sexual violence. The patterns of sexual violence present were similar to those found in Rwanda, though here the most common use was rape and

¹³ The term “ethnic cleansing” actually gained its name *ciscenje terena*, literally meaning “cleansing the ground”, after initial attacks of ethnic cleansing by the Serbs against Croat populations at the beginning of the war (Naimark 2002: 156).

¹⁴ The extent of the Serbian military and paramilitary groups’ participation within Bosnia, however, is not explicitly clear. Evidence and subsequent debates of their involvement is currently being investigated, reviewed, and discussed at the Hague.

sexual slavery. A commission by the UNSC (United Nations Security Council) in 1994 identified five dominant patterns of sexual violence in the Yugoslav wars. All five directly pertain to patterns of sexual violence within the Bosnian conflict: 1) before general fighting broke out in a region, the target group is intimidated by individual or small groups through the use of looting and sexual violence; 2) in conjunction with fighting, individuals or small groups performed sexual violence against women, often publicly raping them; 3) widespread use of sexual violence against men and women in detention centers or other collection centers for refugees; 4) use of rape and sexual violence, along with abuse and torture, against women held especially for these purposes, and often with the intention to impregnate women and incarcerate them until abortion is impossible; 5) the detention of women, not just to sexually abuse them, but to actually provide sexual favors and gratification to the armed forces (UNSC 1994: Annex IX, 7-9).

It is important to recognize, that more Muslim men faced sexual abuse at the hands of the Serbs than Tutsi men did during the Rwanda genocide. Even though men as well as women were sexually abused in Bosnia, attacks against women were far greater in number (UNSC 1994: Annex IX), largely because a family's honor was inextricably tied to women's chastity: "[sexual] violence against a man shames him personally, [while] sexual violence against women in the context of ethno-national conflicts shames the group to which she belongs (Hayden 2001: 37). Sexual violence against men, therefore, did not have the same severe consequences of shame and humiliation that was associated with women. As in Rwanda, sexual violence also occurred between people of the same ethnicity. Motivations for such attacks were often related to issues of ethnicity: people who sheltered or were married to members of the targeted ethnic group were

likely targets for violence. However, the numbers of these victims are comparatively few (UNSC 1994: Annex IX, 9).

As in Rwanda, the mechanisms of strategy and opportunity appear to lie behind the widespread, systematic use of sexual violence in Bosnia. Examination of the strategic and opportunistic use of sexual violence also helps account for why women were generally targeted more often than men. It appears that sexual violence was instrumentally used in the process of ethnic cleansing of the Bosnian Muslims, for rape, in particular, was used to intimidate, humiliate and degrade women and others affected by her suffering (Naimark 2002: 167). Serbs engaged in acts of sexual violence in order to humiliate Bosnian Muslim families and consequentially facilitate in the process of ethnic cleansing. In this way, rapists did not necessarily rape because they hated the victims; rather, they raped and used sexual violence to make the victims hate them, and therefore not want to return. In such a way, the act of rape became rational (Hayden 2000: 31) because it was not purely motivated by groundless emotions.

Although Serbia does not claim responsibility for the use of sexual violence (Naimark 2002; Lilly 2000; Chang 2004), and while some argue that sexual violence was purely opportunistically used, examination of available evidence strongly suggests that sexual violence was indeed employed as a matter of strategy. Numerous Serbian soldiers actually claim that they were given orders, or at least encouraged, by commanders to perform acts of sexual violence against Bosnian Muslims. The 1994 UNSC commission asserts that “in both custodial and noncustodial settings, many victims report that the alleged perpetrators state that they were ordered to rape and sexually assault the victims, or that they were doing it so that the victims and their families would never want to return

to the area” (UNSC 1994: Annex IX, 9). The document furthermore claims that some of the rape allegations and other criminal sexual acts were either commissioned by military and camp commanders, or were at least overlooked or left unpunished when they were discovered (UNSC 1994: Annex IX, 12). According to Amnesty International’s report on the violence in Bosnia, “the rape of women has been carried out in an organized or systematic way, with the deliberate detention of women for the purpose of rape and sexual abuses” (Amnesty International 1993)¹⁵.

The numerous reports of forced impregnation help illustrate the strategic use of sexual violence against Bosnian Muslims. Women were reportedly raped to induce pregnancy, and then incarcerated for the duration of the pregnancy, or at least until it was too far along to seek an abortion (Naimark 2002: 167; UNSC 1994: Annex IX). Serbian philosophy behind this form of sexual violence contained a genocidal element, for it was aimed at eradicating the Muslim population. Rape and forced impregnations sought to expand the Serbian population, while simultaneously destroying the Bosnian Muslims. Serbs believed that the Bosnian Muslims had historically been coerced to convert to Islam, and so contemporary babies born to Serbian fathers would be “savable” for the Serbian nation (Naimark 2002: 168). In the meantime, the Muslim mothers and their families would be devastated and destroyed by the experience. Rape, therefore, not only served as tool for ethnic cleansing in Bosnia, but it also lent a genocidal hand. In summary, the probable organization of sexual violence from above suggests a twofold purpose: the first to accelerate ethnic cleansing with rape because of the humiliation and stigma attached to rape victims; and the second to create “Chetnik” babies through forced

¹⁵ Many other reports, including the UNSC commission and the [Helsinki](#) report on Bosnia, also asserts that deliberate political policies lay behind the rampant use of sexual violence.

impregnations, which would humiliate the women while simultaneously increasing the Serbian population (Naimark 2002: 170).

However, no documentary evidence has been found giving explicit orders to use sexual violence against targeted groups. Despite this, the general patterns, witness and victim reports, and the overwhelming centrality of sexual violence in Bosnia does suggest that there was some form of central organization dictating and condoning its use¹⁶. Even if rapes in Bosnia were not committed because of a deliberate policy, the existence of numerous international media reports on the rapes at the time implies that Serbian commanders should have known and had reason to know about the existence of mass rape (Chang 2004: 9).

Similar to Rwanda, it appears that revenge and punishment of non-Serbs was another mechanism driving the strategic use of sexual violence. The Helsinki report asserts that Muslim women were often beaten with the intention of punishing them for their very existence (as reported in Naimark 2002: 167). Such sentiments most likely originated in part from feelings developed under Tito's rule, as was expressed in the *Memorandum of the Serbian Academy of Science*. As already discussed above, the *Memorandum* focused on the political difficulties that faced Serbs in Yugoslavia, in particular pointing to both Tito's deliberate hobbling of Serbia's power and the difficulties faced by Serbs outside of Serb proper (Little 1996; Naimark 2002).

Revenge and punishment were most likely additionally fueled by Tito's recognition of Bosnian Muslims as a nationality in 1968. This promoted Muslims' demand for better status within the Yugoslav state, which worried and angered Serbs

¹⁶ This interesting puzzle concerning the systematic use of sexual violence, but a lack of documented and hard evidence has also led to a long, on-going investigation at the Hague.

living in Belgrade as well as those Serbs living in both areas (Naimark 2002: 147-148). This recognition of the Bosnian Muslims not only threatened the existence of Bosnian Serbs, but it also exaggerated Serbian jealousy and animosity against the Muslims. Because of the effectiveness of sexual violence, Serbians therefore used sexual violence to punish those who were non-Serbian, for what Serbs viewed as immense injustice against their people. Serbs manipulated the associated humiliation and stigma of sexual violence behind a façade of growing resentment by Serbian elites and their wish for revenge.

Not only did the important mechanisms of revenge and punishment motivate the Serbian elite, but they also drove the opportunistic use of sexual violence by both Serbian and Bosnian Serbs against Bosnian Muslims. While “outsiders” (i.e. Serbs from Serb proper) raped in order to demoralize Muslim fighters who would be humiliated by the stigma attached to their raped female family members, “insiders” raped in order to settle old scores, repay old slights, and bring down “uppity” Muslims (Naimark 2002: 168). This helps explain why rape and sexual violence frequently occurred among neighbors and members of the same towns and communities, much like it did in Rwanda.

Opportunistic uses of sexual violence, however, were not just confined to personal motives of revenge and/or punishment. Similar to Rwanda, mass rape was used in the partitioning of the Yugoslav state, and under these chaotic circumstances, men opportunistically pursued acts of rape and other forms of sexual violence for their own personal gratification. The widespread prevalence of sexual slavery and rape houses suggests that under these specific warlike conditions, men seized the opportunity to fulfill their misogynist and pornographic sexual fantasies (MacKinnon 1992). At play, there

also appears to be a psychologically complex factor of deep-seeded attraction against the targeted group beneath layers of repulsion (Theweleit 1987: 171-224).

Neither strategy nor opportunity alone can account for the widespread systematic use of sexual violence in Bosnia during the wars of Yugoslav secession. Documentation suggests that when tensions in Bosnia were higher, sexual violence increased (UNSC 1994: Annex IX, 11). Conversely, as the ethnic conflict subsided and power was consolidated, sexual violence was no longer so widely practiced (Hayden 2000: 34). This suggests that the chaos and disorganization during the time of the Yugoslav wars in conjuncture with the strategic use of sexual violence allowed men an opportunity to pursue acts of sexual violence, which under peaceful conditions would have been condemned. Similar to Rwanda, the use of sexual violence was therefore exceedingly prevalent because of the interplay between its strategic and opportunistic components. These apparent components were additionally exacerbated by the chaos and disorder of the violence.

Nazi Germany and the Holocaust

Unlike the use of sexual violence previously examined in Rwanda and Bosnia, sexual violence in Nazi Germany both took on a different form and played a different role during the war against the Jews. The attack against the Jews was one of the first events in history that did not treat women primarily as “spoils of war”. Instead, men, women, and children alike were sentenced to death (Ringelheim 1998). Reports of sexual

violence, and in particular rape, are relatively minimal compared to other cases of mass ethnic killing. Other forms sexual violence, like sexual slavery and verbal and psychological sexual harassment, were more commonly reported than rape, but none prominently factor into the general violence as they did in Rwanda and Bosnia.

Escalation into the Holocaust

The Nazis' radical concept of race, in particular that of Jews as an inferior "race", combined with a Jewish-Bolshevik theory and pseudoscientific eugenic ideas, led to the conclusion that the elimination of the Jewish race was the only way to save Germany, and ultimately the rest of Europe from destruction¹⁷. Shortly after their ascent to power in 1933, the Nazi regime began taking steps toward racial purification by first cleansing its own Aryan German population of people Hitler deemed socially and 'biologically' unfit. The philosophy of such action was based on theories of Social Darwinism and pseudo-scientific eugenics, claiming that particular groups of people were more socially fit to survive and succeed than others (Weindling 1989: 27-30). At the outset, policies for the forced sterilization and then the "medical murder" of the physically and mentally handicapped (Bartov 1991: 412) infiltrated the social purification process. The motivating force behind the National Socialist laws was to achieve a "racial renewal" (volkscher Erneuerung) (Kitchen 1995: 175), and the *Law for the Prevention of Hereditary Diseased Offspring* in July 1933 began the implementation of this radical

¹⁷ Because mass ethnic killing in Nazi Germany primarily focused in the extermination of the European Jewry, this paper will predominately focus on acts of sexual violence specifically against the Jews. However, it should be noted that Nazi ideology and policy also dealt with the extermination of the Gypsies as well as the removal of the Slavic people, especially the Poles, from the *Lebensraum* (meaning "living space", which was considered to be today's eastern Europe and Western Russia). Sexual violence against these Slavic people is more widely documented and reported than it is against the Jews. I suspect that this

ideology. The law legalized eugenic sterilization, which was often administered without people's consent. It was directed at averting the reproduction of people who were considered to have unworthy physical or psychological problems, like schizophrenia, inherited blindness, and epilepsy (Bergen 2003: 63). Social criteria were also used to diagnose people 'unworthy', meaning that any undesired or antisocial behavior like perversity, degeneration, severe alcoholism, or even unruliness, could lead to sterilization (Gellately 2001: 96).

With the sterilization program already underway for several years, Hitler instigated a euthanasia program in 1939 for the handicapped that was first aimed at children born with chronic illnesses or disabilities. Later that year, under the name of T-4, Hitler extended this program, giving doctors the ability to 'mercifully' kill patients with diagnosed incurable problems (Gellately 2001: 101). Through cleansing the Aryan race, the program simultaneously tested methods and developed effective ways to aid in the execution of the Nazis' race ideology (Bergen 2003: 102). For example, the planners and functionaries of the program learned methods of how to kill large numbers of people¹⁸ and then efficiently dispose of their bodies.

The policies of sterilization and euthanasia targeting 'biologically' inferior Aryan Germans were quickly expanded to include any groups of people deemed racially inferior, like the Jews and Gypsies. Although unsure of the specific method, Hitler was largely preoccupied with finding a solution to the "Jewish Question" (Gellately 2001: 100); that is, of removing all traces of the Jewish 'race' from every part of the German nation.

is largely related to Nazi ideology, which dictated that Jews were the largest threat. Although Hitler felt all non-Aryan races jeopardized the Aryan race, Jews presented the greater and more significant threat.

The elimination of Jewish presence from Germany was centered on the belief that the Aryan Germans were the most racially pure and sophisticated people. Jews, in particular, presented the largest threat to Hitler and the purity of the German race. He believed that Jews were trying to infiltrate, dirty, and destroy the Aryan race (Burleigh, et. al: 1991). Because of the seriousness of the presumed biological nature of the Jewish threat, the Nazis could not tolerate nonpracticing or converted Jews, or even those individuals with one Jewish grandparent. This constructed biological Jewish threat was further exaggerated by the also constructed threat of an international Jewish conspiracy, in which Jews were believed to be influencing enemy countries to fight against Germany. This fabrication “was obviously meant to give weight to Hitler’s theory that this was a war of the Jews against Germany, not the other way around” (Gellately 2001: 146), largely because the Nazis attributed all German defeats, and in particular that of World War I, to the Jews. They even believed that Jews were connected both to the Bolshevism of the Russian regime and to the brutality of Stalin’s communism. As in Rwanda, the Nazis infiltrated propaganda posters, press articles, and radio reports in order to convey to the public what Hitler perceived as the very real threat of the Jewish race to the German people.

Throughout the years leading up to the Holocaust, Nazi execution of their racial ideology to create a pure “Aryan” race underwent several different stages. The Third Reich first began dealing with the ‘Jewish Question’ by implementing programs and policies aimed at increasing segregation and emigration (Valentino 2004: 169). During the period before 1939, treatment towards women was still moderated by “normal social conditions”, which restrained Nazi violence toward Jewish women (Ofer, et. al., 1998: 5).

¹⁸ T-4 experimented with various methods of murder, including the use of gas.

At least in the beginning, Jews generally believed that Germans were “civilized” and would honor traditional gender norms, not harming women and children. Thus, initial Nazi focus was on the arrest and incarceration of Jewish men, while women were only individually targeted. Even in the violence of the early years, men were much more likely to be beaten, arrested, killed, and imprisoned than women (Friedlander 1983: 105). Women most likely escaped these initial attacks because Nazis viewed women’s roles as secondary to men and believed that they should be confined to home and the raising of children¹⁹. They were therefore to be excluded from political violence. Women also did not occupy leadership positions in the political oppositions, and so they were rendered much less exposed to attacks than men (Friedlander 1983: 106).

Although Jews were ‘voluntarily’ emigrating during the prewar period, it was proving slow and inefficient. With the outbreak of war in 1939, solving the ‘Jewish Question’ took on a new urgency among Hitler and other Nazi officials. Between 1939 and 1941, ‘voluntary’ emigration escalated into external population policies of displacement and forced deportation into ghettos and labor and concentration camps (Valentino 2004: 170). With the beginning of the war, collective targeting of women and children with the hope of killing off the future of the Jewish people began in earnest.

¹⁹ These roles were predominately prescribed to Aryan German women because part of the Nazi plan to push for the purification and expansion of the ideal German race was to promote the return of women’s role back into the domestic arena. Aryan, and only Aryan, women were thus called upon to take up the position of being reproductive mothers of future generations of patriotic soldiers. In a letter to members of the SS, Himmler called this responsibility a “noble task” (Himmler 1939). For the Third Reich, these women were not important just as mothers, as they were, for example in fascist Italy. Instead, they were crucial as “mothers of the race” (Gellately 2001: 14). Social policies were created in order to promote this responsibility. For example, generous marriage loans were provided to women to leave their jobs to have children, and repayments were then reduced by almost one-quarter with each subsequent child (Gellately 2001: 14). Women were also delegated to the home, and only the man should be the “breadwinner”. The Nazis believed that this principle applied even in the time of war and should only be compromised in emergency situations (Kitchen 1995: 143). In the eyes of the Nazis, women were thus to be relegated to the roles and responsibilities solely in the spheres of “*Kinder, Kirche, Kuche*” (children, church and kitchen) (Koonz 1993: 287).

Within a few years, policies of deportation, however, were also rendered impractical. The Nazis then turned to genocidal mass killings as the final solution to the “Jewish question”, but only after other tactics of expulsion from Europe were deemed to be insufficient to deal with the problem as the Nazis so narrowly defined it (Valentino 2004: 167). Although it is debated whether or not Hitler had always intended to exterminate the whole Jewish race, most historians agree that a decision to quickly and systematically exterminate the Jews was made between the early spring and late fall of 1941 (Valentino 2004: 171-172; Bergen 2003). Similar to Rwanda and Bosnia, it was therefore only through the accumulation, and in the eyes of the Nazis, the failures of the different policies that the Nazi regime arrived at the “Final Solution”, that is, the intentional policy to liquidate the Jews.

Surprisingly dissimilar to Rwanda and Bosnia, there was a relative absence of sexual violence leading up to and throughout the Holocaust²⁰. It becomes even more puzzling when one imagines the hundreds of thousands of predominately Jewish women incarcerated in the numerous labor and concentration camps throughout Germany and Poland for long periods of time, and yet, they were not victims of widespread and systematic sexual violence. Especially in the light of Rwanda and Bosnia, one would hardly be surprised *had* there been an extensive use of sexual violence; and yet, it appears there was not. There are indeed some known cases of rape, but such instances were limited and appear to have been opportunistic. Because there are debates surrounding the actual presence of sexual violence in Nazi Germany and the Holocaust, it is imperative to demonstrate the evidence for the lack of sexual violence. In order to do this, I will first

describe the few instances in the Third Reich where sexual violence, and specifically rape, was present; and then I will explain why this suggests that sexual violence was indeed relatively absent.

The only extensive documentation of sexual violence during the Third Reich occurred during the events of *Kristallnacht* on November 9, 1938 (Lilly 2000: 318). This infamous pogrom began with the assassination of Ernst vom Rath, a German diplomat, in the Nazi's Paris embassy by Herschel Grynszpan, a protester against the deportation from Germany of his fellow Polish Jews. In reaction, Goebbels incited anti-Semitic demonstrations throughout Germany to punish German Jews. Events were also motivated by the Nazis' increasing frustration with the insufficiency of anti-Semitic propaganda and laws forcing Jewish emigration. This heightened tension also helped trigger the mass violence of this event, for the Nazis felt that the Jews still in Germany ought to be punished for their arrogance in remaining (Naimark 2002: 66). Jewish businesses and people were therefore readily attacked, and widespread accounts of rape were reported (Milton 1993: 218)²¹.

Apart from *Kristallnacht*, there are some other known cases of rape (individual and collective) of Jewish women by German commanders, but reports of such instances are rare. These events also appear to be opportunistic and seem to have much more to do with individual German's "libido" (Karay 1998: 289) than with the implementation of a deliberate policy. The known cases of individual and collective rapes of Jewish women

²⁰ Because systematic histories are lacking and most accounts focus on men's camps, the treatment of women and the conditions of their camps are hard to know. However, existing documents and testimonies can help us infer what women would have uniquely experienced.

²¹ Not only was sexual violence unusual, but this kind of explicit, collective violence was also rather uncommon throughout the duration of the Third Reich, partly because Hitler was relatively conscious of potential public dissent concerning the use of such public violence (Bartov 2005: Lecture).

implies that German commanders were periodically “reluctant to deprive themselves of any of life’s pleasures” despite consequences of imprisonment or unemployment (Karay 1998: 289)²².

German commanders sometimes chose women from concentration camps to serve them as “escort girls” (Karay 1998: 290). As in the case of the Werkschutz commander, Fritz Bartenschlager, five women were taken from the camp, ordered to serve his guests at a dinner party naked, and then subsequently raped. In other cases, the most beautiful women were often taken by commanders and brutally raped. Some commanders actually chose the most beautiful women from each newly arrived transport and then designated the women as personal “housemaids” (Karay 1998: 290-291). When asked about experiences living in the ghettos, one survivor, Gertrude Schneider, recalled the behavior of Krauser, a German commandant.

He loved young, pretty girls. He did. When he liked you, that was it, you got a better kommando. Since he made the law he was above and beyond Rassenschande which means the racial sin that a German and a Jew could not have intercourse” (Katz, Esther et. al., 1983: 48).

This story illustrates the setting and the pretenses under which sexual violence was employed. While it was indeed limited between the Germans and the Jews, those with high levels of authority could venture employing sexual relations with Jews because their more powerful positions often left them “in charge”. Each episode, therefore, is opportunistic and deviates from the Nazi norm of prohibiting sexual contact between Germans and Jews. Similar cases of sexual violence are repeated in many other testimonies about the Holocaust.

²² Many women in the Conference for Survivors account cases of rape and sexual violence they remember,

While sexual slavery appears to have been the dominant form of sexual violence during the Holocaust, it was not the only form present. Women were also shamed and sexually humiliated. In particular, after arriving at the camps, women were forced to stand naked, be shaved and searched, and sometimes undergo invasive medical exams, procedures, and experiments. German soldiers often verbally abused and taunted women, even though they were not typically physically raped (Goldenberg 1998: 336). For example, women would often be forced to stand around naked while waiting for their clothes to be disinfected and be subjugated to soldiers' "lewd and cruel threats" (Goldenberg 1998: 336). As already briefly mentioned, women (and periodically men) would sometimes be selected from the camps and forced to undergo numerous medical experiments.

The Nazis also employed the psychological fear associated with rape to terrorize targeted women²³. Although actual rape by the SS in the camps was rare, the Nazi manipulated the fear associated with sexual violence to their advantage. Jewish women repeatedly mention rumors of rape, which caused them much anxiety and terror (Goldenberg 1998: 336). It is only natural that in the threatening context of the Third Reich, targeted women were both conscious and fearful of their physical vulnerability and the potential use of sexual violence against them by their perpetrators. One survivor of the Holocaust recalls such fear immediately after she arrived at Auschwitz-Birkenau:

Our female bodies were stripped...and exposed to the lascivious gaze of the German soldiers. Oh, no! It was a fleeting, terrifying, agonizing thought. But the soldiers couldn't care less (Vago 1998: 275)²⁴.

but they acknowledge that on the whole, the Germans did not regularly engage in acts of sexual violence.

²³ Although I could not find any documentary evidence, this appears to be the only form of sexual violence instrumentally and strategically implemented or condoned by the Nazis.

²⁴ Similar accounts were also reported by participants in the *Conference on Women Surviving the Holocaust*.

While this paper argues that the use of sexual violence, and in particular rape, was relatively absent leading up to and throughout the Holocaust, some scholars suggest that rape was more prevalent than is popularly believed. Accordingly, they suggest that victims and witnesses have not had the opportunity to report cases of rape partly because the victims experience so much shame and humiliation that they are unwilling to come forth and testify. However, this line of thinking does not seem to hold in light of Rwanda and Bosnia where many women were able to overcome social stigma in order to report the widespread use of sexual violence.

We also have reports of the abundant use of rape during the episode of *Kristallnacht*, by the Germans against other non-Jewish and non-Aryan people, and sexual slavery and sexual humiliation during the Holocaust. This suggests that despite social stigma, if sexual violence had been systematically present, it would have been reported and documented. Even though specifics are not known about women's experiences in the camps since almost all of the histories have concentrated on men's experiences, we do have testimonies confirming a general aversion of sexual violence. Documentation of other episodes of sexual violence during the Third Reich also suggests that its minimal mentioning in reports is because of its relative lack of presence.

Not only does rape in particular appear not to be prevalent, but there is also no evidence suggesting its strategic use as there was in Rwanda and Bosnia. The question, therefore, still remains as to why sexual violence was explicitly averted. Why did Nazi policy and propaganda not target women collectively with sexual violence, which characterized the other cases of mass ethnic conflict killing? An examination of specific aspects of Nazi culture suggests that the primary reason lies in the combination of

several unique factors: the conjuncture of the Nazi's radical race ideology with a well trained and organized army that was coherently disciplined by a strong hierarchical state. The relevant element of Nazi ideology that affected the presence of sexual violence was the severe belief in racial hygiene and purity. Many policies resulted from this essential aspect of their ideology, some of which condemned the reproduction of Jewish people. Women arriving pregnant at the concentration camps (or subsequently becoming pregnant after their arrival either from relationships with other inmates or from being held in sexual slavery) were immediately sentenced to the gas chambers. Many survivors account watching girls and young women in the prime of their life being led off to the gas chambers purely because they pregnant (Katz, Esther et. al., 1983; Vago 1998).

Aryan men and women were also discouraged and punished for creating or maintaining any relationship with a Jew. Indeed, *Rassenschade* ("racial sin") prohibited any sexual liaisons between Germans and Jews with imprisonment or dismissal from employment (Karay 1998). For example, Gerhard Palitzsch, an SS officer in Auschwitz, acquired a Jewish inmate "girlfriend" and was dismissed from his position and sentenced to five years imprisonment for "racial miscegenation" (Katz, Esther et. al., 1983: 20).

The Nazi elite was so strongly dedicated to their racial ideology that *any* form of contact between an Aryan and a Jew (or even any other non-Aryan) was believed to be enough to defile and depurify the Aryan race. For example, there was a popular book at the time that told the story of an Aryan woman who had once been interested in a Jewish man. The woman, however, ultimately married a good, strong Aryan man, but when she gave birth to their first child, he was of the Jewish race. The moral of the story was that even non-sexual contact with Jews would defile the perfect Aryan race. This "racial

shame” was so deeply embedded in Nazi ideology that the use of sexual violence was therefore prohibited. One survivor actually asserted:

We women and girls were very lucky because one of the most respected laws of the German Reich was the law of the purity of the German race. They were not allowed, by threat of – well, I don't know what, death and imprisonment – to even touch Jewish women. Otherwise, let me tell you, not one would have escaped (Katz, Esther et. al., 1983: 41).

However, the existence of laws alone would not have been powerful enough to minimize sexual contact between the German and the Jews. It was therefore also necessary to have a strictly disciplined military that would obey and enforce the rules and commands of the Third Reich. Indeed, the various sectors of the military (the Wehrmacht, the SS, and the Gestapo) were all well trained and disciplined under strict Nazi supervision. German historian Omer Bartov describes that “the severity of the Wehrmacht’s discipline was not simply part of an old Prussian tradition, but rather the result of profound changes introduced into martial law under the Third Reich, as were indeed the instructions issued to the troops concerning the manner in which enemy soldiers and civilians were to be treated” (Bartov 1991: 7). The code of conduct for the SS guards was based on a demand for the blind and absolute obedience to all orders from SS superior officers (Sydnor 1990: 11). Sexual violence was most definitely controlled by the military’s extensive discipline, but situational and social pressures that influenced behavior perhaps might have also played a role in limiting its use. Because the use of sexual violence was prohibited and viewed negatively by the Nazi regime, pressures would therefore arise *against* the use of sexual violence.

Despite this extreme discipline and even situational pressure, individual beliefs in the regime’s ideology did not necessarily have to be particularly strong in order for

people to follow orders and participate in the killings (Valentino 2004). Situational pressures combined with a process of self-selected recruitment effectively led these men to carry out mass killings (Valentino 2004). However, even if individual beliefs in the overall Nazi system were relatively shallow, men were still held accountable to general, overarching rules and codes of behavior set down by the Nazi elites, whatever their individual, personal inclinations might have been.

Just as the radical racial ideology would not have been sufficient enough to minimize sexual violence without military obedience, military obedience would not have been effective without the presence of a hierarchical state to enforce consequences and punishments. Although plunder and indiscriminate shooting was often left unpunished (Bartov 1991: 6), soldiers were likely to fear the consequences of raping women and using other physically explicit forms of sexual violence because sexual contact with Jews was unequivocally forbidden. In the effort to enforce discipline among the ranks, “the Nazi SS legal office decreed that the unauthorized killing of Jews was to be treated as murder or manslaughter if ‘the motive is selfish, sadistic or sexual’” (Valentino 2004: 42).

Very unlike Rwanda and Bosnia, men were generally deterred from using sexual violence because of social and legal consequences that could be enforced by the state through the military. Because this would have added to the relative order of the genocide, one would expect to see a lack of both general violence and sexual violence, particularly between “neighbors”. Much of the killing was preformed covertly and was not widely advertised, leaving less opportunity and providing less incentive for neighbors to turn against neighbors. As one Tutsi official described this difference between Rwanda and the Holocaust:

In Germany, the Jews were taken out of their residences, moved to distant far away locations, and killed there, almost anonymously. In Rwanda, the government did not kill. It prepared the population, enraged it and enticed it. Your neighbors killed (Valentino 2004: 37).

The government's direct engagement in the genocide rendered it less chaotic, and consequentially helped minimize the use of sexual violence. The sexual violence that did occur, therefore, took on an opportunistic form.

The combination of the extreme racial ideology enforced through the disciplined army and the hierarchical state most certainly appear to be the main reason behind the relative absence of sexual violence during the reign of the Third Reich. However, I believe that there are a couple of possible additional explanations that add to the general picture. First, Nazi propaganda and ideology did not contain rhetoric similar to the cases in Rwanda and Bosnia of seeking revenge and punishment. The Germans had never been oppressed or treated unfairly by the Jews, as the Hutus in Rwanda and the Serbs in Yugoslavia had felt. Instead, the Jews posed a biological threat exaggerated by the fear of a Jewish-Bolshevik conspiracy to take over all of Europe. Additionally, sentiments to inflict severe humiliation and shame upon victims through the use of sexual violence were perhaps weaker in Nazi Germany than they were in Rwanda or Bosnia, because shallow beliefs in Nazi ideology and anti-Semitism would not have led individual soldiers to seek personal revenge and punishment against the Jews. In other words, Jewish women were not targeted with sexual violence because of the Nazis' strong sense of complete racial superiority.

I also expect, although I could not find any documentation, that in light of protecting and keeping the Aryan German race pure, sexual violence was limited because of awareness concerning the spread of sexually transmitted diseases through the act of

rape. In fact, Nazi ideology believed that “inherently immoral, Jewish men gravitated toward pimping, pornography, and other forms of sexual deviance, spreading syphilis and other sexually communicated diseases wherever they went. Jewish women were no better, seducing racially pure German men into their depraved and degenerate subculture” (Naimark 2002: 59). This suggests that the Nazis believed Jews to be the carriers of sexually transmitted diseases and felt that this further added to the urgency to eliminate all contact, and especially all sexual contact, with the Jews²⁵.

Conclusion

In Rwanda, Bosnia, and Nazi Germany, a small group of elites decided upon policies of genocide or ethnic cleansing only after other measures to deal with their perceived “threats” either failed or were deemed impractical and/or ineffective. While sexual violence within both Rwanda and Bosnia played a prominent role, it did not result from long historical animosities between groups, nor was it simply the result of opportunistic individuals. Rather, it was a combination of both strategy *and* opportunity. On the other hand, the presence of sexual violence leading up to and throughout the Holocaust was relatively absent. There are documented cases of sexual violence in Nazi Germany, but they all appear to be opportunistic and performed in spite of racial shame and its consequences of unemployment or imprisonment. The combination of a strong hierarchical government structure, military discipline, and radical racial ideology created

²⁵ It is interesting to note that Ofer, et. al., argues that specific strategies employed to avoid the appearance of personal deterioration sometimes deterred beatings against women. Women tried to keep their hair and bodies clean, mend their clothing, and maintain a human and feminine appearance. This nearly normal appearance “induced their overseers to give them more assistance, to subject them to fewer beatings, and,

social conditions that limited the use of sexual violence.

Implications

The study of patterns of sexual violence in mass ethnic violence holds important contemporary implications, for increased understanding informs discussion concerning patterns and characteristics of sexual violence in current cases of mass ethnic killing. By informing and opening up discussion about the use of sexual violence, this kind of study can help increase women's agency. It can also help sexually abused victims seek justice as well as empower women to overcome social stigma. Of course, such study can be used to minimize, and ideally, end the use of sexual violence. Academically, the examination of the absence of sexual violence under the Third Reich can also help us to better understand the history of the Holocaust and the direct and indirect implications of Nazi ideology.

Further Areas of Study

The conclusion to this paper simply adds a small piece of insight into the characteristics and patterns behind the use of sexual violence in times of war. The process of researching and discussing this topic has naturally opened the door to further questions and puzzles concerning sexual violence both in general violence and in terms of these specific cases. Some additional questions that need examination are the following:

most importantly, to treat them more humanely” (O and W 11). Although this is debatable, these tactics

- 1) In Nazi Germany, how and why does sexual violence against the Slavic people and other non-Aryans differ from sexual violence against the Jews?
- 2) Statistically, how does sexual violence relate to episodes of mass killings? Is there some kind of relationship between the two? In other words, how present is sexual violence when there are mass grave executions?
- 3) How does the governmental and economic status of the state affect the prevalence of sexual violence during times of violence? Is sexual violence less likely to be used by democracies when they are war? Or, do economically wealthier states employ sexual violence less often?
- 4) Is sexual violence *really* qualitatively different during warfare than during peace?

might have also influenced the lack of sexual violence used against them.

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