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# Recognizing Gender-Based Violence Against Civilian Men and Boys in Conflict Situations

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While gender-based violence has recently emerged as a salient topic in the human security community, it has been framed principally with respect to violence against women and girls, particularly sexual violence. In this article, I argue that gender-based violence against men (including sexual violence, forced conscription, and sex-selective massacre) must be recognized as such, condemned, and addressed by civilian protection agencies and proponents of a 'human security' agenda in international relations. Men deserve protection against these abuses in their own right; moreover, addressing gender-based violence against women and girls in conflict situations is inseparable from addressing the forms of violence to which civilian men are specifically vulnerable.

**Keywords** Gender-based violence • humanitarian • protection • sexual violence • conscription

## Introduction

THE PROTECTION of war-affected civilians is front and center on the new human security agenda within international institutions (Golberg & Hubert, 2001). As part of this agenda, organizations engaged in the protection of civilians have recently begun to address gender-based violence, both in times of war and in post-conflict situations. In theory, gender-based violence is 'violence that is targeted at women or men because of their sex and/or their socially constructed gender roles'.<sup>1</sup> It includes, but is not limited to, various forms of sexual violence.<sup>2</sup> Understood in this way, both men and

<sup>1</sup> Women's Caucus, 'Clarification of the Term "Gender"'; available at <http://www.ytech.nl/iccwomen/wigjdraft1/Archives/oldWCGJ/resources/gender.htm> (accessed 2 February 2006).

<sup>2</sup> In addition to rape, sexual violence is now understood to include sexual slavery, forced impregnation, sexual mutilation, and forms of harassment or humiliating treatment such as being forced to disrobe publicly; see Human Rights Watch (2003).



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women can be victims and perpetrators, and the violence is gender-based owing to configurations of gender ideas that justify or naturalize it.

However, with rare exceptions, international efforts to address gender-based violence in conflict situations, and documents and reports advocating for and evaluating such efforts, have so far tended to focus primarily on the kinds of gender-based violence to which women are exposed. Although adult civilian men and older boys are sometimes acknowledged as victims of wartime sexual violence, as well as other forms of gender-based abuse, these kinds of harms have not generally been analyzed or discussed at length in efforts to counteract gender-based violence in conflict situations.

The main goal of this article is to problematize this discursive and programmatic gap in the human security literature by applying the concept of gender-based violence explicitly to the experiences of civilian men and boys in armed conflict. The article uses an inclusive definition of 'gender-based violence' to discuss a range of harms not currently understood as such within the human security community.<sup>3</sup> While I draw on relevant scholarship within the field of international relations, my main goal is to contribute not to academic debates but to a conceptual understanding among human security practitioners of how gender-based violence manifests in conflict zones.

I begin with an overview of approaches to gender-based violence within the network of organizations concerned with the protection of war-affected civilians. I then highlight three specific forms of gender-based violence faced by men and boys in conflict situations: sex-selective massacre, forced recruitment, and sexual violence. All these patterns of violence might be objectively considered 'gender-based', and all constitute civilian protection issues, but none appear to date as salient issues on the human security agenda (Carpenter, 2006). Recognition of this conceptual gap illuminates a problem with grave implications for humanitarian programming and our understanding of human security. While an explanation of this is beyond the scope of the present article, I conclude with some thoughts about the contradictory relationship between the 'securitization' of gender-based violence and the protection of war-affected civilians.

<sup>3</sup> For example, the Liu Institute's (2005) *Human Security Report 2005* includes a short section describing male vulnerability to death, indirect death, and displacement in war zones, and it mentions that sex-selective killing is a form of gender-based violence. It does not, however, address sexual violence or forced conscription against men, and it does not distinguish violence against civilian men from 'battle deaths'. Adam Jones's *Gendercide Watch* website does discuss forced conscription alongside massacre, but his 'gendercide' frame cannot accommodate sexual violence. I argue that a 'gender-based violence' frame is most appropriate to describe and draw attention to all of these practices.

## Constructing 'Gender-Based Violence' in Conflict Situations

In recent years, gender-based violence in armed conflict has increasingly been recognized as a human security issue broadly, as manifest in UN Security Council Resolution 1325, which called 'on all parties to armed conflict to take special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence'. Resolution 1325 refers to earlier activities within the international women's movement that sought to redefine violence against women as a human rights issue and link it to the emerging 'human security' discourse (Joachim, 2003). This resolution and subsequent Security Council activities are only the most recent manifestations of a longer trend toward reconceptualizing gender violence both as a security threat in itself and as an extension of broader security problems such as disarmament.<sup>4</sup>

By reconceptualizing gender violence not just as a humanitarian concern but as a 'security' problem, advocates for women's human rights and for the protection of civilians have strategically connected the discourse of 'high politics' to the previously overlooked social dynamics underpinning violent conflict.<sup>5</sup> Ole Wæver (1995) has dubbed the process of constructing a problem as a security threat 'securitization'. To treat something as a 'security' issue is to 'imbue it with a sense of importance and urgency that legitimizes the use of special measures outside the usual political process to deal with it' (Smith, 2005: 34). However, expanding the security agenda in this way has not necessarily involved a radical reconstitution of the idea of security or, in this case, of the gender roles that underpin the very logic of gendered violence. Instead, I argue that much of the 'human security' discourse in international institutions is based upon a highly gendered understanding of who is to be secured, characterized by the exclusion of civilian males as subjects of 'protection' or as victims of 'gender-based violence'.<sup>6</sup>

According to a recent report from the Reproductive Health for Refugees Consortium (RHRC), 'gender-based violence is an umbrella term for any harm that is perpetrated against a person's will; that has a negative impact on the physical or psychological health, development and identity of the person, and that is the result of gendered power inequities that exploit distinctions between males and females, among males, and among females (Ward, 2002: 8–9). Although an 'official' definition of gender-based violence

<sup>4</sup> Even before the emergence of 'women, peace and security' on the international agenda, gender-based violence was defined as a particular programmatic concern in humanitarian settings. For overviews of these developments, see Mertus (2001); Baines (2005). On feminist redefinitions of security, see Tickner (2001).

<sup>5</sup> For example, the Human Security Network presented a statement emphasizing gender-based violence under this rubric during the Security Council's debate on 'Women, Peace and Security'; see Jaffer (2004).

<sup>6</sup> This is consistent with the predictions of much feminist scholarship on the gendered construction of 'security' as a service provided to vulnerable 'women and children' by 'good' men charged with their 'protection' against 'bad' men; see Yuval-Davis (2004); Tickner (2001).

does not exist, and in fact the term is contested, most definitions in the human security literature are worded along the same lines:

Gender-based violence refers to violence targeted to a person because of their gender, or that affects them because of their special roles or responsibilities in the society (Benjamin & Khadija, 1998).

The description 'gender-based violence' clarifies that reference is made to violence rooted in prescribed behaviors, norms and attitudes based upon gender (Lang, 2002).

Gender-based violence is violence directed at an individual, male or female, based on his or her specific gender role in society (Human Rights Watch, 2002a).

In the context of definitions such as these, most of the gender-related harms men and boys face in conflict situations qualify as gender-based violence and should be addressed as part of efforts by human security practitioners to eradicate such violence. As the Liu Institute (2005) has recently recognized and as the Women's Caucus acknowledges, most of the harms men and older boys face during wartime – sexual mutilation, forced conscription, sex-selective massacre – may qualify conceptually as gender-based violence.<sup>7</sup>

Moreover, since part of the gender-mainstreaming project in humanitarian assistance has claimed to involve a move away from 'women' and toward 'gender' as encompassing relationships among all social sectors, one might imagine that addressing the victimization of men and boys on the basis of gender might have been an integral part of this process.<sup>8</sup>

Given the intention behind and inclusiveness of these definitions, it is very interesting that the concept of gender-based violence has been linked almost exclusively to the issue of violence against women in the human security sector, even where gender-mainstreaming documents give lip service to the relational character of gender analysis and to war's effects on men and boys. 'The bottom line', asserts the proceedings of UNHCR's 2001 Inter-Agency Lessons Learned Conference, 'is that gender-based violence is predominantly men's violence towards women and children' (UNHCR, 2001: 6). The World Health Organization conflates gender-based violence with violence against women on its website.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, various 'fact sheets' on gender-based violence circulated by NGOs claim that the UN General Assembly's 1993 definition of violence against women is the 'UN's Definition of Gender-Based Violence',<sup>10</sup> though the UN document defines *violence against women*,

<sup>7</sup> Women's Caucus, 'Clarification of the Term "Gender"'; available at <http://www.ytech.nl/iccwomen/wigjdraft1/Archives/oldWCGJ/resources/gender.htm> (accessed 2 February 2006).

<sup>8</sup> Within the United Nations system, the term 'gender mainstreaming' broadly means 'the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels'; see ECOSOC (1997a: 2).

<sup>9</sup> See <http://www.who.int/gender/violence/en/> (accessed 30 January 2006).

<sup>10</sup> For example, see the International Planned Parenthood Federation Fact Sheet 'The Facts About Gender-Based Violence'; available online at <http://www.ippf.org/resource/gbv/ma98/1.htm> (accessed 30 June 2005).

which many scholars and practitioners consider to be only a subset of gender-based violence.<sup>11</sup>

Even when gender terminology is used in its broader sense, international organizations have seldom given due attention to male victims of gender-based violence. The Background Paper for the Inter-Agency Standing Committee's statement on gender mainstreaming in humanitarian assistance is illustrative. Although the paper begins by claiming it will summarize the 'differential impact of emergencies and crisis situations on women and girls, men and boys', it provides detailed analysis only of the former. There is a section on 'Violence Against Women', but not on gender-related abuse of males. The report contains three sentences on 'masculinity' as an 'important factor when considering boys' and men's involvement in armed militia and their acts of violence against women' (IASC, 1999: 3). The gender-based violence males themselves experience is not mentioned, except as a means of highlighting women's plight:

In many cases, women and teenage girls in conflict zones are the sole providers and protectors for their families, as wives, mothers and sisters, since their husbands, brothers, sons and fathers have either been exiled or killed or are away on combat duty (IASC, 1999: 2).

Even the RHRC report cited above, which acknowledges that men and boys can be victims of sexual violence and also briefly lists 'forced conscription of boys' as a form of gender-based violence, largely excludes attention to civilian males:

Although gender-based violence encompasses violence against boys and girls and men and women, the findings of this report focus almost exclusively on women and girls. The reasons for this orientation are two-fold: first, *gender-based violence programming targeting men and boy survivors is virtually non-existent among conflict-affected populations*; and second, women and girls are the primary targets of gender-based violence worldwide (Ward, 2002: 4; italics added by author).

The justification is extremely counter-intuitive, since the overall objective of the report claimed to be 'to provide a baseline narrative account of some of the major issues, programming efforts, and *gaps in programming* related to the prevention of and response to gender-based violence among conflict-affected populations worldwide' (Ward, 2002: 3). The author acknowledges that attention to men and boys is the single biggest gap in programming, yet uses this as a reason for excluding them from analysis rather than for calling attention to their vulnerabilities (Ward, 2002: 16). This is combined with a statement that women and girls are the primary targets of gender-based

<sup>11</sup> According to the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, 'the term "violence against women" means any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life' (United Nations, 1993).



violence, an assertion that is impossible to confirm without comparable data on the victimization of men and boys.

I argue that these tendencies in the human security sector require urgent reconsideration. The need to sensitize humanitarian workers to women's issues is pressing, and UN efforts to do so represent crucial steps forward. However, the exclusion of the gender-specific victimization of civilian men and boys from both the discourse and the programmatic realities of this agenda is problematic, serving neither to protect the civilian population nor to promote gender mainstreaming as a policy.

In the following sections, I sketch some of the major forms of violence to which civilian men and boys are particularly exposed during conflict situations, drawing on secondary sources as well as interviews conducted with humanitarian practitioners between June 2001 and October 2003. In presenting the evidence, I aim to make the case both that these forms of abuse are endemic and that they can correctly be conceptualized as gender-based violence. I then turn in conclusion to some thoughts about what the failure to do so tells us about the human security community, in practical and theoretical terms.

## Sex-Selective Massacre as Gender-Based Violence

Men are more vulnerable to getting killed. That's a pretty big deal. Getting sick, getting raped, getting attacked are all pretty bad things but dead is dead and they are much more vulnerable to getting killed than women.

*Programme Officer, US Office of Disaster Assistance, July 2002*

The empirical record suggests that, of all civilians, adult men are most likely to be targeted in armed conflict. The singling out of men for execution has now been documented in dozens of ongoing conflicts worldwide.<sup>12</sup> More often than women, young children, or the elderly, military-age men and adolescent boys are assumed to be 'potential' combatants and are therefore treated by armed forces – whether engaged in formal battle, in low-intensity conflict, or in repression of domestic civilian populations – as though they are legitimate targets of political violence (IASC, 2002: 175; Lindsey, 2001; Liu Institute, 2005: 110).

Though so common historically as to be seen as 'natural', these patterns of sex-selective violence are gender-based, because they are rooted in assumptions about male wartime roles, assumptions that both reflect and reproduce

<sup>12</sup> The most comprehensive source for such data is the human rights watchdog group Gendercide Watch, whose website contains extensive case literature and news reports; see <http://www.gendercide.org>.

gendered hierarchies prevalent in both peacetime and war.<sup>13</sup> Although primary data on the motivations of belligerents who massacre men have not been collected for this study, several interrelated explanations can be gleaned from secondary literature on the subject.

Some authors have emphasized the property status of women relative to men (Ehrenreich, 1997; Niarchos, 1995). If the point of killing is to eliminate a human community, only the humans must be killed. Their chattels (domesticated animals, belongings, women, children) can simply be appropriated as booty. A related belief suggested by some scholars is that men, but not women, are assumed to carry ethnicity (Wing & Merchan, 1993). Therefore, eliminating an ethnic group only requires the destruction of male members; women, who simply absorb the ethnicity of those who 'own' them and father the children to whom they give birth, can be appropriated as reproductive vessels (Allen, 1996). Although this explanation would only hold in cases where target groups were delineated according to ethnicity, it does appear salient in some recent cases, such as Rwanda. According to a report from African Rights, collaborators with the *genocidaires* persuaded them to spare women because they did not have an ethnicity – 'the bad ones were men' (African Rights, 1995a: 692) – and female survivors reported being told they were safe because 'sex has no ethnic group' (Human Rights Watch, 1999: 296). In Rwanda, as well, some Tutsi women were transferred as 'wives' to the Hutu *genocidaires* after their husbands and children were killed (Baines, 1999).<sup>14</sup> In some cases, sex-selective mercy can be explained by systems of reciprocity. Lindner (2004: 47), discussing women's relative security and freedom of movement during warfare in what she terms 'honor societies', describes a 'kind of contract between the warring parties not to rape each other's women' during the warfare in Lebanon.

Perhaps one of the most convincing explanations for sex-selective massacre is the gendered way in which the concept of the 'civilian' has been constructed in international society (Carpenter, 2006). In particular, the codified laws requiring belligerents to distinguish between combatants and civilians on the basis of a person's actual participation in an armed conflict are interpreted in practice according to the use of sex as a shortcut to distinction. Grossman (1995: 174), who has conducted an extensive study on the psychological processes by which soldiers rationalize killing, suggests as much when he writes: 'If a soldier kills a child, a woman, or anyone who *does not represent a potential threat*, then he has entered the realm of murder (as opposed to a legitimate, sanctioned combat kill) and the rationalization process becomes quite difficult'.

<sup>13</sup> Paradigmatic historical examples include the razing of Melos and the sacking of Carthage; see Chalk & Johnsson (1990); Jones (2000).

<sup>14</sup> However, as Baines argues, even this de-ethnicized construction of sex broke down in the later stages of the genocide, when Tutsi women were also constructed as a 'threat'.



There is much evidence of this rationale today, particularly in counter-insurgency operations. Rummel (1994: 329) reports that the Pakistani army initially sought to crush the East Pakistani independence movement by conducting 'sweeps . . . of young men who would never be seen again . . . bodies of youths would be found in fields, floating down rivers, or nearby army camps'. In Rwanda, where *genocidaires* took diapers off infants to discover which were boys to be killed (African Rights, 1995b: 815), the 'opening blast of the genocide was accompanied by an injunction not to repeat the 'mistake' of the 1959 revolution, when male children had been spared only to return as guerilla fighters' (Jones, 2002: 73).

A counterpoint to the argument that sex-selective killing of male civilians is gender-based would be to say that men are indeed more likely than women to take up arms and belligerents simply have less legitimate interest in eliminating young women. Yet, it is notable that women do also participate in armed conflicts: the Liu Institute has reported that between 5% and 15% of government armed service personnel are women, with ratios higher in some guerilla groups (Liu Institute, 2005; Goldstein, 2001; Bennett, Bexley & Warnock, 1995), and in many conflicts large proportions of adult men attempt to remain in the civilian sector (Kidron & Smith, 1991). Even in these cases, however, such patterns of atrocity hold, supporting the case that it is assumptions of gender, rather than purely strategic and therefore arguably legitimate considerations, that account for this pattern of violence. For example, in Colombia, where the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) consist of between 30% and 40% women (Penhaul, 2001), massacres of rebel suspects by the government and right-wing paramilitaries have continued to predominantly target men (Human Rights Watch, 1998; Gendercide Watch, 2006). Conversely, in the former Yugoslavia, scene of a conflict characterized by mass resistance to mobilization among draft-age men on all sides (Wilmer, 2002), adult men and adolescent boys were by far most vulnerable to summary execution,<sup>15</sup> and commentaries from humanitarian workers in the region consistently describe the justification by the Bosnian Serb Army authorities that every battle-age male was a potential combatant and therefore a legitimate target (United Nations, 1999).

The case for sex-selective massacre should not be overstated, as what Kuper (1981) calls 'root and branch' genocide targeting all members of a victim population stands in stark contrast to the more demographically limited killings particularly associated with low-intensity conflict and counter-insurgency operations. Moreover, countless women and children have died and continue to die in war, particularly from war's side-effects, such as starvation, disease, and indiscriminate attacks on buildings. In a probabilistic sense, however, adult men and older boys are more likely than

<sup>15</sup> One witness reported 'a paramilitary gunman announcing, "the women and children will be left alone . . ." as for the Muslim men, he ran his finger across his throat' (Honig & Both, 1997: 76).

females and younger children to be targeted outright by enemy forces. Gendered assumptions about wartime roles explain this tendency and therefore need to be specifically addressed by human rights advocates working in the area of civilian protection in armed conflict.

## Forced Recruitment as Gender-Based Violence

Conscription's often an issue. Officially refugees were not allowed to cross the Afghani border into Pakistan last year, only 'vulnerable' groups, only women and children. But in fact the men were perhaps the most vulnerable and the women themselves were most concerned about the men who had the risk of being conscripted to the Taliban at this time.

*UNHCR Official, Evaluation and Policy Unit, August 2002*

While forced recruitment of children is increasingly condemned, the forced recruitment of adults, a practice largely targeted at lower-class males, is still considered legitimate and is neither condemned nor addressed by civilian protection organizations. Although it is gradually becoming accepted that a right of conscientious objection exists, derived from Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, this is only applicable to individuals who make the case that their religious beliefs prohibit killing (OHCHR, 1993). The right not to be subject to the denial of fundamental human rights implicit in military service itself remains a gap in international law.<sup>16</sup> As a UNICEF official told me unequivocally in a 2002 interview:

We don't protect men from forced conscription. Forced conscription is not a human rights violation. Forced conscription of children is. We will advocate against the recruitment of children. But every government has a right to conscript men unless they have it in their laws that they shouldn't.

This has meant that there is very little protection within the humanitarian community for civilian men attempting to flee conscription. Some protections exist in the refugee regime for draft evaders 'who fear persecution on political grounds' (UNHCR, 2002: 11) or who are fleeing a conflict characterized by massive humanitarian law violations (USCR, 1992), but the act of forcible recruitment itself is not considered a form of political repression or slavery, and the concept of 'gender-based persecution' as grounds for asylum has been articulated primarily with reference to the kinds of persecution faced by women.

<sup>16</sup> The United States Selective Service System website, describing the basis on which claims for conscientious objector status may be affirmed, warns that 'a man's reasons for not wanting to participate in a war must not be based on politics, expediency, or self-interest'; see <http://www.sss.gov/FSconsobj.htm> (accessed 30 January 2006).

These international norms play out in context-specific resistance to the protection of men and boys from forced recruitment. Consider the former Yugoslavia. Contrary to the notion shared by belligerents and the international community that most of the adult men were eagerly participating in hostilities, approximately 700,000 people had fled to avoid conscription at the war's onset, and over 9,000 charges of desertion were initiated in 1992 alone (Wilmer, 2002: 157). The same year, the United States Committee for Refugees considered the question of whether the asylum regime extended to draft evaders during the breakup of the former Yugoslavia. Its report pointed out that 'deserters generally engender little sympathy in the asylum context . . . the *UN Handbook on Procedures for Determining Refugee Status* . . . holds that states have a sovereign right to conscript their citizens' (USCR, 1992: 21–24). Given such prevailing norms, the case remains to be made that forced recruitment is a form of violence – indeed, of slavery – that ought to be condemned by governments and, as gender-based violence, should be addressed by humanitarian practitioners operating in war-affected regions.

First, is forced recruitment 'violence'? Involuntary recruits are coerced into military service through both actual and threatened violence. Conscientious objectors are harassed even in societies that recognize their right not to serve. Among countries that prosecute 'draft dodgers', penalties vary between fines and the death penalty (ECOSOC, 1997b). In the USA, such individuals may be fined and imprisoned for up to five years, a fate which carries with it the risk of male-on-male sexual violence in prison (Human Rights Watch, 2001). Elsewhere in the world, the use of press gangs to terrorize draft dodgers into serving is common (Jones, 2004). In northern Afghanistan, a system of extortion is in place whereby families desperate to keep their sons out of the military are forced to make cash payments to local commanders (Human Rights Watch, 2002b); in Iraq, the problem of desertion became so severe after the 1991 Gulf War that the Hussein regime implemented a policy of mutilating captured deserters by removing ears, feet, or hands in hospitals (Erdem, 1994).

However violent it may be, is forced recruitment 'gender-based'? I argue that it is so in two respects. First, it is gender-based insofar as it is sex-selective – that is, adult men are typically targeted in ways that women, girls, and even younger boys (though this is changing in several theaters) are only to a lesser degree. In the USA, for example, young men are penalized for refusing to register with the selective service, forgoing government benefits such as grants for college education. Similarly, Israel, which drafts women as well as men, allows women but not men a limited right of conscientious objection (War Resisters International, 2003).

Second, forced recruitment is gender-based insofar as it is justified and naturalized by collectively held assumptions about masculine identity, nationalism, and militarism. As several feminist scholars have pointed out,

the emergence of mass conscription in the early modern period superimposed the 'able-bodied adult male' onto the concept of the militarized state (Steans, 1998). 'The hierarchical order of gender relations was ideologically underpinned by the designation of arms-bearing man as the protector of weak and defenseless woman' (Hagemann, 2000: 189). Gendered hierarchies result in men being pressed into military service, but masculinized and male-dominated military institutions in turn reify gender hierarchies, as 'women and children' are *made* defenseless by their exclusion from the bearing of arms, and as disproportions of male soldiers create the appearance of a masculinized nation-at-arms naturally willing (rather than forced) to fight. In conflict situations, such as the Balkans, this in turn justifies the perception that men are threats, which invites sex-selective patterns of atrocity against men who manage to remain in the civilian sector.

The uncritical assumption that adult men should be required to fight for their country when asked raises questions about conflict-prevention policies, particularly in areas where the international community is attempting to prevent the violent outbreak of ethnic or civil war. If adult men are denied the right to remain in the civilian sector, they may have little choice but to join the armed forces. Moreover, if, as civilians, adult men are denied the protection afforded other demographic groups, they may reluctantly take up arms simply to protect themselves. Such policies are counterproductive to conflict-prevention strategies, which have a stake in reducing the number of individuals actively engaged in violent conflict.

In short, forced recruitment of adult males deprives civilian men of their liberty and civilian families of their male kin, while reproducing the sex-gender structures that naturalize gendered perceptions of threat and put other civilian males at risk of lethal violence. It is thus a form of gender-based violence that should be addressed by human rights advocates engaged in the protection of civilians and the mitigation of violent conflict.

## Sexual Violence Against Males as Gender-Based Violence

I imagine there are quite a lot of cases in which young men are being abused and no one is talking about it. Especially in conflict situations in certain countries one does not talk about the abuse of young men.

*Swedish Red Cross Worker, May 2002*

Sexual violence in armed conflict has typically been defined as an issue affecting women.<sup>17</sup> Even those authors who admit that men also get raped

<sup>17</sup> See, for example, Copelon (1994); MacKinnon (1994).

often mention this only in passing, and often to minimize its importance: 'Yes, men do get raped, but it is usually by other men and it happens less frequently than is the case for women,' writes Sara Sharatt (1999: 80), commenting on the Foca Indictment at the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. Similarly, a recent report from the Liu Institute claims without any systematic data that while men may be more likely to be killed than women, women are *far* more vulnerable to sexual violence (Liu Institute, 2005: 110). In interviews carried out with humanitarians in 2001–03, I was often told that women comprised the vast majority of rape victims, but these same practitioners told me they were unaware of any data collected that assessed the extent of men's vulnerability to sexual assault.

Despite the tendency to treat sexual violence as primarily a crime against women, men and boys have historically been and continue to be targeted for sexual violence in particular and gender-specific ways that deserve the attention of the human rights community. As Zarkov (1997) notes, however, both the forms this violence takes and the particular meanings it communicates are very different for men than for women in armed conflict. Here, I want to draw attention to and 'reframe' several different categories of sexual violence that are recognized in the literature but seldom addressed specifically as the gender-based atrocities that they are.

### *Rape and Sexual Mutilation*

Perhaps the most prevalent form of sexual violence against men and older boys involves a combination of rape and sexual mutilation. The ritual castration of male prisoners and enslavement of adolescent boys along with women for sexual purposes has been a notable feature of warfare throughout history (Ehrenreich, 1997). Such acts, along with the appropriation of 'the enemy's' women, are a means of using both gender symbolism and gendered violence to 'feminize' and thereby humiliate conquered men (Lentin, 1997).

More recently, such crimes appear most likely to take place in detention during times of armed conflict, alongside other forms of torture. The 1994 Final Report of the Commission of Experts, for example, documented numerous cases of sexual assault against men during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, primarily in detention camps, with such acts including castration, circumcision or other forms of sexual mutilation; in many cases, prisoners were forced to perform sexual acts on the guards or on other prisoners, and there were reports that some prisoners were forced to bite off the testicles of other prisoners. One incident involved prisoners being lined up naked while Serb women from outside undressed in front of them; if any prisoner had an erection, his penis was cut off; another ex-detainee told of suffering electric shocks to the scrotum (Bassiouni, 1994). In addition to



being humiliated and mutilated, men may be raped anally in detention or forced to sexually service male guards. Cases of male rape have also been reported in the war in Sierra Leone (Human Rights Watch, 2003). Adolescent boys appear to be the most vulnerable (Nordstrom, 1999).

The human rights community has been slow to label such violence against males as sexual violence specifically. For example, Jones & del Zotto (2002: 23) have observed that although sexual mutilation of men was reported in the context of the Bosnian concentration camps, it has not been prosecuted as rape or sexual violence at the Hague tribunal, being described rather as 'torture' or 'degrading treatment', and witness-protection initiatives undertaken by the tribunal have identified only female victims of rape as in need of protection and psycho-social attention.

Similarly, while the humanitarian assistance community has taken strides in addressing the physical and psycho-social needs of female rape survivors, it has been noted that services for male survivors of such violence in conflict situations are nearly non-existent (Ward, 2002: 4). This needs to be changed, and recognizing that men are also victims, as well as the main perpetrators,<sup>18</sup> of sexual violence in armed conflict should be an important component of any agenda to address gender-based violence.

#### *Civilian Men Forced To Rape*

Another common form of sexual violence to which men have been exposed in time of war, one that is seldom recognized as such and for which a suitable label has not even been invented,<sup>19</sup> occurs when a man is forced to sexually assault another person, often a family member. In detention, male prisoners have been forced to rape or mutilate other prisoners. In Bosnia, there were cases of fathers and sons detained together, forced at gunpoint to anally rape each other (Bassiouni, 1994: 8). Other testimonies from the Balkans referred to fathers and brothers forced to rape their female relatives (Robson, 1993). In other wartime contexts, such as the occupation of Nanking during World War II or more recent violence in Africa and South Asia, fathers have been forced to rape their daughters, brothers to rape their sisters, or sons to rape their mothers (Chang, 1997). According to a Human Rights Watch report on sexual violence in Sierra Leone:

The rebels have forced civilians to commit incest, one of the biggest taboos in any society. One survivor witnessed the RUF trying to force a brother to rape his sister in

<sup>18</sup> This is a probabilistic statement only: women have also been involved in acts of sexual violence. The Bassiouni Report documents cases of Serb women participating in sexual torture of Bosniac men; see Bassiouni (1994: 8). During the Rwandan genocide, there have been numerous cases of Hutu women encouraging and abetting mass rape and sexual enslavement, and a woman has been convicted of planning and fomenting systematic rape; see African Rights (1995b).

<sup>19</sup> The term 'forced incest' is sometimes used, but this only captures cases in which men are forced to rape family members, rather than, for example, other male prisoners in detention.



Sambanya village in Koinadugu district. When the brother refused to do so, the rebels shot him. Fathers were forced to rape their daughters. Fathers were forced to dance naked in front of their daughters and vice versa. (Human Rights Watch, 2003: 36)

Some may argue that it is incongruous to claim that men forced to rape family members are victims rather than perpetrators of rape, suggesting that only the 'passive' partner in a sexual assault can be conceptualized as a victim, regardless of elements of coercion involved. If rape is understood as the exercise of power, however, we cannot ignore the way in which sexual assault is used against men as well as women to undermine and invert gendered constructions of protector/protected roles, with the aim of terrorizing entire societies. Although there has been very little research on the psycho-social reactions of men to these forms of sexual violence, it is likely that such acts are deeply humiliating, violating private space, the sanctity of family relationships, and other cultural norms. The process of personal and familial healing after such trauma will depend on support services for both the women and the men who have been subject to these forms of abuse.

#### *Secondary Victimization: Rape of Women as Psychological Torture of Men*

They gathered five young girls together, including my fifteen-year-old daughter, and put them in the back room . . . one of them opened the door and asked who the fathers of the girls were. One of them took us and lined us up right in front of the bed and said, 'Don't you want to see what we do to your daughters?' We begged them to leave them alone but they said, 'If you continue to talk, we will burn this house and kill everyone of you.' A rebel had his gun pointed at us the whole time and there were two more at the door. My daughter was crying but they covered her mouth and told her to shut up.

*Interview with a male survivor of the 1999 invasion of Freetown by RUF/AFRC Rebels, cited in Human Rights Watch (2003: 36)*

From a gender-based violence perspective, it is important to address the psycho-social harm to men of being forced to witness the sexual torture of their female relatives in time of war. The literature on sexual violence against women has often emphasized the assault of women as a means to communicate messages to enemy men (Brownmiller, 1994), but there has been very little specific effort to recognize the trauma of such atrocity for the male relatives of the victims. Indeed, the emphasis has understandably been on redefining sexual violence as a crime against a woman's bodily integrity in contradistinction to a traditional construction of rape as a violation against men's property rights (Aafjes & Goldstein, 1998). This is an important advance in our understanding of gender-based violence, but it risks ignoring the fundamental fact that men are also affected by these acts.

Just as women are deeply harmed by the loss of male relatives in time of war

(a point often noted in the gender and armed conflict literature), and just as parents may be victimized by watching their children suffer, the psycho-social impact for an adult man of watching a female relative raped and/or killed can be understood itself as a form of secondary torture, stemming from the manipulation of gender-based roles and identities as a form of psychological warfare. I concur with Anne Tierney Goldstein (1993: 22), who writes:

Men, too, are injured by the sexual assault of women for reasons untainted by offensive, antiquated notions of chastity and ownership. To watch helplessly as someone you love is tortured may be as bad or worse than being tortured yourself, and international law should be able to reach and punish such harms.

To those who would respond that taking aim at the effect of rape on male bystanders risks obfuscating the fundamental physical harm to women themselves, it should be pointed out that a number of studies suggest that for many female rape survivors, it is not the rape itself but the social stigmatization in the aftermath that constitutes the deepest trauma (Nikolic-Ristanovic, 2000). To the extent that men's experience of this can be validated and psycho-social support provided, it may be possible to alleviate those side-effects, encourage more progressive constructions of rape survivors, and promote post-atrocity healing among rape victims and male family members. Additionally, to the extent that 'strategic rape' of women is *intended to be* a psycho-social attack on men of a group, addressing the psycho-social consequences could undermine the utility of rape as a strategy of war and thus serve as a prevention mechanism.

## Conclusion: Implications for Human Security Discourse and Practice

This article has argued that international efforts to address gender-based violence in the context of the civilian protection agenda have relied on the assumption that women and girls are the major victims of such violence, ignoring the fact that, in conflict situations, adult men and adolescent boys also face major risks of abuse and violence based upon culturally constructed notions about gender roles. In particular, I have argued that the human security proponents have failed to adequately recognize, condemn, or respond to adult men's risk of summary execution, sexual violence or mutilation, and conscription as a human rights abuse and a human security problem.

How might the human security community begin to address gender-based violence against men and boys in conflict zones? This would necessitate, first, a change in the way that human rights data is collected and interpreted. There is a remarkable lack of gender-specific data on atrocities in complex

emergencies.<sup>20</sup> There is a general understanding that women are more likely than men to be displaced or sexually assaulted, and that men are more likely than women to be massacred, detained, or recruited. However, it is both difficult to confirm or study these general patterns or to gauge variation in the patterns by context without the collection of data that takes seriously the experiences of both men and women in complex emergencies. For example, while it is plausible that women and girls comprise the vast majority of rape victims, the truth is we have no means of assessing that without gender-disaggregated prevalence data.

Understanding the proportion of adult men, women, and children under arms in a particular context is also important in assessing the character of the civilian population and the particular gender-based harms to which they may be exposed. It is common to claim in the humanitarian community that the vast majority of civilians are women and children, implying that men are a marginal category in terms of civilian protection policies. However, these relevant numbers will vary greatly depending on the context. In Sri Lanka and Eritrea, the combatant population also includes large percentages of women or children. Data may also be a useful advocacy tool. A response received by those humanitarian practitioners in the Balkans who tried to argue with belligerents on behalf of civilian men's freedom of movement was that such men were potential combatants and therefore not entitled to the protection of the civilian immunity norm (Sudetic, 1998; Honig & Both, 1997). Possibly, available statistics on the proportion of adult men under arms in a particular context could provide bargaining leverage to humanitarian workers, whose efforts to advocate on behalf of civilian men as civilians are only as good as the normative and fact-based arguments they are able to make. Data on male deaths in war, such as those recently publicized by the Liu Institute, need to be disaggregated between male 'battle deaths' and massacre of civilian males in order to disrupt these gendered assumptions.

Finally, men's needs for culturally appropriate medical assistance, psychosocial support, and perhaps better measures to prevent atrocity should be addressed in humanitarian programming, in the wider context of a gender-mainstreaming agenda that takes into account the concerns of the entire civilian population. There is some evidence that such programming not only assists men, but can promote the well-being of the civilian population generally in conflict zones and can assist in initiatives aimed at countering gender-based violence. In Tanzania, for example, the International Rescue Committee found that 'encourag[ing men] to discuss their own experiences of violence and how it was directed toward them because of their gender

<sup>20</sup> A good example of such an approach is the report on war crimes in Kosovo undertaken in 1999 by Physicians for Human Rights (1999).

... helped men to understand how women experience violence because they are women' (UNHCR, 2001: 9). When men's experiences of gender-based violence are named and validated, this arguably can provide a jumping-off point for including them as partners in efforts to reduce other forms of gender-based violence in conflict situations.

Yet, concerns are sometimes raised that naming gender-based violence against men as such will only draw attention away from women's issues. As one UNHCR gender-mainstreaming official told me, 'I recognize our discourse is a bit outdated. But it's very difficult because as soon as you stop talking about women, women are forgotten. Men want to see what will they gain out of this gender business, so you have to be strategic.' As Chant & Gutmann (2001: 19) describe in a recent analysis commissioned by Oxfam, one of the main reasons for the marginalization of men's issues in gender-mainstreaming is the well-founded fear that this will divert already limited funds away from women-focused initiatives.

In my view, the emphasis must remain on gender, rather than on men, but gender must be defined inclusively so as not to remain synonymous only with women. In short, I suggest that human security advocates and those seeking to address gender-based violence must take seriously the gender-mainstreaming instruments that have been developed to assess the needs and vulnerabilities of populations across lines of gender, ethnicity, class, age, and other social distinctions, rather than reifying an essentialized notion of women as victims and men as perpetrators that feeds into all forms of gender-based violence endemic in war-affected areas.

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