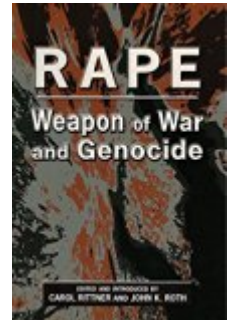


Carol Rittner, John K. Roth, eds.. *Rape: Weapon of War and Genocide*. St. Paul: Paragon House, 2012. liv + 263 pp. \$21.95, paper, ISBN 978-1-55778-898-6.



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Published on H-Histsex (February, 2015)

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Sexual violence as a weapon of war and genocide has not simply been ignored, but its victims silenced. Very little has been done to prevent it from happening. In 2007, a report by the United Nations secretary-general admitted that “In no other area is our collective failure to ensure effective protection for civilians more apparent--and by its nature more shameful--than in terms of the masses of women and girls, but also boys and men, whose lives are destroyed each year by sexual violence perpetrated in conflict.”[1]

In recent years, however, there have been concerted attempts to bring the scale of the problem to wider public and academic notice. Concern about rape and sexual violence emerged as a result of the conflict in the former Yugoslavia and the genocide in Rwanda, when mass rapes galvanized the international community into addressing the issue in the context of torture and war crimes. In those conflicts, sexual violence included rape, sexual assault, sexual mutilation, forced impregnation and forced pregnancy, forced prostitution, and forced cohabitation or marriage. In

2001, rape was recognized as a crime against humanity for the first time by both the Statute of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia and the Statute of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda.

Carol Rittner and John K. Roth's new edited volume--simply entitled *Rape. Weapon of War and Genocide*--is one of many attempts to highlight the problem. As distinguished scholars in their own right, Rittner and Roth approached other specialists in the field (including some of the leading names) and invited them to write a short chapter on some aspect of rape as a weapon of war, linked to a particular document or extract. Eleven scholars accepted.

What they put together is an accessible “primer” on the topic. The chief argument is that women are not treated as fully human. The evidence for this provocative statement is that they are routinely raped and sexually assaulted in armed conflicts throughout the world, including in Bosnia, Rwanda, Guatemala, the Democratic

Republic of Congo, and in Europe during the Second World War--to name just a few of the case studies included in this book. The contributors acknowledge that men are also sexually assaulted (there is a harrowing chapter on the sexual abuse meted out to homosexual men in Nazi concentration camps, for instance), but the main victims are primarily women.

Explanations for sexual violence are extensive. They include dehumanization and brutalization, as well as institutional and peer pressure, racism and retaliatory urges, and environmental confusion. None of the contributors fall into the trap of naturalizing sexual violence as somehow inevitable within the context of hyper-masculinity. The rapists are also portrayed as diverse. They include traditional warring enemies, but also the "liberators," in the context of much rape that occurred during the Holocaust.

I have two concerns about the book. The first is that it is not clear who is the book's proposed audience. Scholars already interested in rape and genocide will find most of the evidence and arguments familiar, yet the topic will probably be considered too "challenging" for young readers. First-year college students are probably the target audience.

The second is the focus on the emotions. The book begins by thanking readers for "opening its pages," adding that "courage and fortitude will be needed to cope with the darkness they contain" (p. ix). The right to claim to be in "pain" is surely not for the reader to make, and calling acts of sexual torture "darkness" elides the very complex military, political, and cultural forces at work in setting certain people outside the human.

Furthermore, each contributor was asked to reflect on what was "moving" about the particular document that they used to "orientate" their chapter. Some of these documents graphically described sexual torture. This is always a problem for scholars writing about sexual violence: is reproducing accounts of rape voyeuristic? Does it

contribute to the dehumanizing process? There are no easy answers to these questions, but I believe they should be at least acknowledged and addressed.

These criticisms are not intended to invalidate the book. Indeed, it is a very welcome addition to a broader and more scholarly debate and, as such, an extremely useful collection.

Note

[1]. United Nations Security Council, "Report of the Secretary-General on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict," October 28, 2007, S/2007/643, p. 12, <http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96F-F9%7D/Civilians%20S2007643.pdf>.

Shoemaker and Hoard, 2007 in USA).

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Citation: Joanna Bourke. Review of Rittner, Carol; Roth, John K., eds. *Rape: Weapon of War and Genocide*. H-Histsex, H-Net Reviews. February, 2015.

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