
Rape And Forced Pregnancies In Times Of Bosnian Conflict

In Foca, Tuzla, Vogosca, or Srebrenica, the practice of "cleaning" took place with the same scrupulousness in each of these villages: the detention of the non-Serb population, thanks to lists provided by Serbian municipalities or neighbors; then they proceed to the separation of men and young boys on one side, and women, children and the elderly on the other. The first group is deported or killed, the second group, after the rape rite, is very often sent to camps, where it is interrogated. The women are taken away, then raped in empty houses or in public.

Collective rapes are actually widespread: most of the violences can be considered collective rape. In any case those participants who do not have an active role, are nonetheless spectators. Women are raped under the eyes of their husbands and children. Sometimes their children or fathers are forced to rape them in turn, then the soldiers or militiamen attack on them.

The third type is the one in which rape takes place in detention. After cleaning a city, the survivors are sent to camps improvised or organized for this purpose. Women, children and the elderly are crowded in city schools or gyms, before being transferred. Soldiers, guardians, militiamen are allowed to enter and use them at will. Those in charge of the camps participate in these rapes that sometimes turn into massacres with the use of horrible torture. In the detention centers, the testimonies of women and girls speak of continuous rape. The fourth type of situation is that of rape camps. Some women were locked up with their children, raped, impregnated and held until they exceed the deadline for an abortion. Some of these camps are extensive and very well organized, others are houses, bars or warehouses and could hold more than 2,000 women.

Here the women were raped several times a day, as many as the guards wished, they were humiliated, insulted, beaten and sometimes killed. While the injured and sick prisoners rarely received doctor's visits, these women were regularly monitored by gynecologists. Pregnant women were kept isolated, shown as an example to other inmates and benefiting from some privileges, better treatments, until they reached the seventh month of pregnancy. At this point they were released by their guardians, confident that these women would give birth to a "small Chetnik".

The fifth type is that of sexual slavery and forced prostitution, as it had already happened in 1937 with the case of the Comfort Women in China. In Bosnia, women were forced into prostitution in brothels open to Serbian soldiers. They received no retribution for this job and were more often killed than released. Unlike the rape camp prisoners, they had no role in the construction of Greater Serbia and in the propagation of the Serbian race. This made their life less important, unless they were sold.

The testimonies of raped women recall that there are rules in rape used as a weapon. Among them, geographic and community proximity is fundamental. Sociologists and criminologists agree that one of the factors of rape is mutual recognition. In this type of crime, often, the culprit must be sought in the environment close to the victims, where desires can be developed towards them.

One of the peculiarities of the Bosnian conflict is this closeness which "authorizes" rape. The relationship of cultural, geographical and social closeness between the rapist and the victim increases the appeal of this crime, but also its violence. The language used during the aggression to the women is a further proof of this intimacy. In this sense, the systematic rape practiced in the former Yugoslavia is not so much, or not only, based on uncontrollable sexual impulses, but rather on the need to show one's strength, power, and ability to impose one's will.

On the other hand, the fact that the other is considered as a human being determines the degree of violence and the humiliation that precedes rape. This rite of dehumanization is indispensable before committing the inhuman act.

Forced pregnancies

Rape was institutionalized to "desecrate" Muslim society and culture and, in this sense, women became a fundamental element in this war strategy. It seems that the purpose was to create a sort of fifth colony, a society of Bosnian children, Muslims and Croats of a Serbian father, children who would have followed their father's purpose. The use of sexual violence and forced pregnancies carried out in this war can not be understood without analyzing the Serbian vision on the concept of identity. From a certain point of view it could be assumed that the Serbs, by fertilizing Bosnian women, only increase the ranks of the enemy, and that a Bosnian-educated child would be a Bosnian. In reality, things are different, and the theories of some Serbian intellectuals, influential on the subject, allow us to lift the veil on this paradox. In this perspective, the Serbian identity is considered a divine election that circulates sexually with the Serbian gene. It follows, then, a program of genetic improvement, proposed to foreigners. It is not strange that, in such a context, the forced pregnancy was used as a strategy. The definition of sexual transmission of the presumed collective identity (nobility, generosity, charity ...) and its assimilation of identity by others, through sexuality, are presented as truth. These same truths are exploited to legitimize the rapes perpetrated by the Serbs, as a "gift made to other ethnic groups".

The children born from these rapes are called "children of hate", children conceived in the horror of the shame of ethnic rapes. Often the women who were able to, had an abortion, and if it was too late to intervene they abandoned the child right after giving birth, or in the most desperate cases they killed them, because they reminded them too strongly of the violence suffered.

In 1993 Mladen Loncar, the psychiatrist who witnessed many women victims of ethnic violence, stressed the tragic situation in which women who could not have not aborted or did not want to: to feel the enemy entity grow in their own body and often perceive it with an ambivalent feeling, therefore as a lacerating conflict. Almost always the women who decided to abort did not want to see their child, in this refusal there was a very clear defense mechanism, there was the fear of noticing that they loved their child.