

THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY  
SCHREYER HONORS COLLEGE

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY AND RELIGIOUS STUDIES PROGRAM AND  
DEPARTMENT OF WOMEN'S STUDIES

LIFTING THE VEIL  
A COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN IRAQ AND  
AFGHANISTAN FROM 1989-2009

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Summer 2011

A thesis  
submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements  
for baccalaureate degrees  
in History and Political Science  
with interdisciplinary honors in History and Women's Studies

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## *Abstract*

Iraq and Afghanistan have labored under the stresses of occupation and war which dramatically affected their civilian populations. Both nations serve to illustrate a new trend in warfare as sexual violence and armed conflict become increasingly and inextricably tied together. In recent decades, this complex relationship has jettisoned to the forefront of human rights concerns as armed forces began using rape as a weapon of war in order to subjugate local populations beneath their control. Iraq and Afghanistan already have high levels of violence in their societies, as gender based violence is employed in order to strip women of their agency. Forcible marriage, acid throwing and self immolation have been extensively documented as abuses that disenfranchise women in their own homes and society at large. However, rape is a dramatic departure from other types of gender based violence. This new “weapon of war” systematically terrorized and humiliated local women and children into submission as part of a larger military strategy. Despite the fact thousands of women were brutalized during these military engagements, there was a severe lack of legal recourse available to rape victims. Due to the fact both Iraq and Afghanistan are highly conservative Islamic societies; the victim is more apt to be blamed rather than the assailant. This thesis will examine the types of gender based violence that occurred in Iraq and Afghanistan from 1989-2009, with special emphasis on how militaries utilized rape as a weapon of war in order to reward, recruit, punish and cleanse ethnic populations.

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## *Acknowledgements*

This thesis is dedicated to two individuals who shaped both my academic and personal life lives. To the strongest women I have had the privilege to know, this work is for both my mother Anne G. Stulpin and my adviser Dr. Mia Bloom.

First of all to my Momma,

She lives through example that every woman can have it all. Her love and sacrifices are a tribute to the person that I am and will eventually become in my lifetime.

Also, to Dr. Mia Bloom,

Who is the consummate professor, adviser, confidante and friend. She always believed in second chances and it is because of her unwavering confidence and perseverance that “Lifting the Veil” was born. I will never be able to thank you for all that you have done; you are truly an inspiration and role model that I hope to emulate throughout my life.

I must also thank several individuals for their support throughout this arduous process...

My siblings, Kate, Elizabeth and Gregory,

Who always supported my “liberal arts education.”

Dr. Mark Neely,

Thank you for allowing me to follow a different path.

Dr. Catherine Wanner,

My personal cheerleader in the History Department and who “Never Said Die” throughout every revision, topic change and crisis. “Lifting the Veil,” could not have been completed without your support and guidance.

Dr. Lorraine Dowler,

Your arrival in the eleventh hour is greatly appreciated.

Marcella Fickes and Lisa Batchelor,

Who unknowingly became my advocates in the Women’s Studies Department and always thought outside the box.

My roommate Jennica Finney,

Her unwavering faith and support is a testament to the bonds of friendship.

Greta Righter,

Who believed that nothing was impossible.

Evan Garfield,

I could not have done this without you. Midnight phone calls and your steadfast support throughout the worst were invaluable throughout this process.

Andrew Quinn,

A friend that always saw the best in others.

Bradley Guest,

Who was never afraid to tell the truth.

Scott Wandel,

All the hours spent formatting this thesis during your days off from WCBP is greatly appreciated.

Nittany, Boomer, Ruby and Clifford,

Who always gave me a love, licks and refuge from academia on the Avalon porch swing.

Finally to the women and children of Iraq and Afghanistan,

Your lives provided threads in which to weave this academic tapestry. Your strength is a testament to the human spirit.

## *Terminology and Methodology*

The context of my research is defined by the complex relationship between armed conflict and sexual violence in Iraq and Afghanistan. In order to delineate the boundaries of my exploration into this subject matter beyond the years of 1989-2009, comprehensive definitions of both armed conflict and sexual violence must be illustrated.

An armed conflict is defined as: “a contested incompatibility that concerns government and/or territory where the use of armed force between two parties, of which at least one is the government of a state, results in at least 25 battle-related deaths.”<sup>1</sup> The UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset distinguishes two categories of armed conflict, classified according to their annual casualty rates: “minor” conflict is defined as a conflict in which between 25 and 999 battle-related deaths are recorded in a given year, and “war” is defined as a conflict in which at least 1,000 battle-related deaths are recorded in a given year.<sup>2</sup> Battle-related deaths are defined as: “those deaths caused by warring parties that can be directly related to combat over the contested incompatibility, including traditional battlefield fighting, guerrilla activities, and all kinds of bombardments of military bases, cities and villages, and urban warfare (bombs, explosions and assassinations.”<sup>3</sup> Explicitly excluded from this definition of conflict-related casualties are “direct and indirect deaths due to disease and starvation, criminality, or attacks deliberately directed against civilians only.”<sup>4</sup> Notably, this definition captures both full-scale wars as well as lower intensity armed conflicts. The various types of conflict include: (I) Intrastate armed conflict, which occurs between the government of a state and one or more internal opposition group(s) without intervention from other states; and (II) Internationalized

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<sup>1</sup>Nils Peter Gleditsch et al., “Armed Conflict 1946-2001: A New Dataset,” *Journal of Peace Research* 39, (2002), 615-637.

<sup>2</sup>UCDP/PRIO, *Armed Conflict Dataset Codebook v. 4-2006*. (Oslo, Norway: PRIO, 2007)

UCDP, *Definitions, Sources and Methods for Uppsala Conflict Data Program Battle-Death Estimates*. (Uppsala, Sweden: UCDP, 2005).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

internal armed conflict, which occurs between the government of a state and one or more internal opposition group(s) with intervention from other states (secondary parties) on one or both sides, and (III) Interstate conflicts (between the governments of two states).

Sexual violence, as characterized by recent international recent war crimes tribunals, includes I) rape, (II) sexual mutilation [including but not limited to cutting/severing of breasts or genitals], (III) sexual slavery, (IV) forced prostitution, (V) forced pregnancy, and (VI) forced sterilization/abortion.<sup>5</sup> This definition does not exclude the existence of female perpetrators and male victims. I plan to focus on behaviors that involve direct force in coercive contexts (including highly credible threats of force) and/or violence; excluding acts that do not go beyond verbal sexual harassment and abuse, including sexualized insults or verbal humiliation. For the purposes of comparison I will be using six dimensions of sexual violence; (I) prevalence (II) perpetrators (III) victims (IV) form (V) timing (VI) location. Beginning with prevalence, this dimension examines the magnitude of sexual violence by the actor. It is coded to scale ranging from systematic/massive, several/many, some or none. The prevalence dimension builds larger patterns of sexual violence to determine if systematic sexual violence is a component of an overall military tactic. The perpetrator variable describes who physically commits the sexual violence. I first determined if the act was random or selective. If it was in fact a selective or targeted attack it can be quantified by various characteristics like religion, ethnicity, age, group affiliation, refugee, prisoner, male or child. This leads directly into the victim variable. I analyzed why these specific victims were targeted for sexual violence by assorted perpetrators. Then the form of sexual violence needs to be broken down from the six types are outlined above by the war crime tribunals. I added another dimension to form by including context such as gang, public or byproxy rape. Timing illustrates when the violence

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<sup>5</sup>International Code Council, *Definitions of Crimes of Sexual Violence in the ICC*. (Washington D.C.: ICC, 2010).

occurs. Specific phrases that indicate any type of pattern or strategy like “on Sundays,” “after recapturing a village,” or any other information on timing that indicates a larger pattern or strategy will be analyzed. Location, the last dimension analyzed, will show the diverse locations that sexual violence occurs. For example, various locations include but are by no means limited to a victim’s home, cars, a neighboring field, military barracks and checkpoints. Through the examination of the six dimensions of sexual violence a better relationship between victim and perpetrator can be established. Furthermore, a comprehensive potential victim profile emerges.

An accurate count of women and girl victims of sexual violence is almost impossible to achieve since many victims do not report such cases or even seek medical attention. In addition, the breakdown in police record keeping and widespread looting of court and hospital records during times of conflict compromise the successful completion of long-term statistics. Unfortunately that makes organizing the comparative analysis of Iraq and Afghanistan by the six dimensions of sexual violence problematic. Instead, the larger trends of sexual violence will be discussed and compared between each country. This allows for broader generalizations to be concluded based upon the evidence gathered from one specific type of sexual violence or larger trend that was born from the research.



## *An Overview of Gender Based Violence*

Violence against women and young girls is arguably the most pervasive human rights violation in this globalized world. While forms of this subjugating behavior are both subtle and overt, gender targeted violence has a huge effect on developing nations. The UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women declared violence against women as, “any act of gender based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women.”<sup>6</sup> The various types of gender based violence vary within districts, states, countries and continents. However, the common thread is the inherent subjugation of women and girls in society. After a thorough analysis of the subject, it is clear certain themes emerge depending on when the violence actually occurs. While some acts are committed in the home, others are perpetrated by society at large. While some types occur during times of war, others are more likely to happen in peacetime. Certain types of gender based violence targets women, whereas in other cases young girls are more likely to be victimized. Furthermore, it is important to mention that in some select cases it is actually men and boys who are targeted and brutalized. While all of these acts vary in nature, they are all instrumental in confining a woman’s role in society.

Gender based violence has been deeply embedded in the cultural morays of various societies over the course of several centuries. Therefore, changing the status quo is an internationally waged uphill battle. However, it is only by eliminating gender based violence and empowering women that developing nations can be brought into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The various types of gender based violence will be discussed and analyzed to show its widespread effects on the role of women and girls in society. If the rights of women and girls cannot be

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<sup>6</sup> Charlotte Watts and Cathy Zimmerman. “Violence Against Women: Global Scope and Magnitude,” *The Lancet* Vol. 359, April 6, 2002.

secured, peace both domestically and internationally is a faraway dream. Eliminating gender based violence is paramount to the advancement of human progress.

For millions of women, the home is their own private hell. Intimate partner violence or domestic violence is one of the most common forms of gender based violence. It poses a serious threat to women due to the fact it occurs behind closed doors. Furthermore, in most countries domestic abuse is regarded as a private family matter. Most laws are silent in regards to violence that is committed by family in the safety of the nest.<sup>7</sup> Generally perpetrated by husbands, lovers or family members, it includes physical violence ranging from slapping and hitting, assault with a deadly weapon, homicide, forced sexual intercourse or participation in degrading sexual acts. Oftentimes, accompanying emotionally abusive behaviors such as intimidation, humiliation, social confinement or restrictions, confiscating a women's wages or other controlling behaviors are auxiliary effects to the physical abuse.<sup>8</sup>

The most accurate data on the prevalence of intimate partner violence comes from cross-sectional population surveys. Over the past sixteen years, more than 50 population-based surveys on violence by intimate partners have been done in various parts of the world. In these studies, women are asked directly about their experiences of specific acts of violence. For example, "has a current or former partner ever hit you with his fist or with something else that could hurt you?" The findings of these surveys indicate that between 10% and 50% of women who have ever had partners have been hit or otherwise physically assaulted by an intimate male partner at some point in their lives. In a review of surveys, between 3% and 52% of women reported physical violence from the previous year.<sup>9</sup> Findings on the prevalence of physical and sexual violence by intimate partners vary greatly between studies. The variation can be

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<sup>7</sup> Charlotte Bunch, "The Intolerable Status Quo: Violence Against Women and Girls," UNICEF: Women Commentary, 1997.

<sup>8</sup> "Domestic Violence Warning Signs," Michigan State University, 2011.

<sup>9</sup> Watts and Zimmerman, "Violence Against Women: Global Scope and Magnitude," 2.

attributed to a variety of factors like sampling techniques, definitions of violence and cultural differences that affect a respondent's willingness to reveal personal experiences. For these reasons, it is almost impossible to make direct comparisons between cultures or countries, or to make judgments about which society has the worst or most frequent accounts of intimate partner violence.<sup>10</sup>

The three main effects of domestic violence greatly affect the next generation and society at large. Firstly, the offspring of violent fathers are often physically or emotionally abused alongside their mothers. In effect, it has been widely documented that the children of violent parents are more likely to repeat the cycle of abuse with their own children or take out their pent-up frustration in the form of violent acts committed in society at large. Studies have shown that domestic violence is a gateway behavior to larger social problems, including street children, child labor and prostitution. Secondly, violence cripples women and girls both physically, psychologically and socially. As a public health concern, the women and girls who suffered from domestic violence can suffer life-long effects from the abuse. Lastly, family violence affects the healthy development and productivity of all societies. It is an internationally accepted belief that the empowerment of women and girls is paramount to sustainable development. Social endeavors ranging from family planning to food production all hinge upon the elevation of women's status in society at large.<sup>11</sup> While domestic violence is viewed as a problem within the home, there are definitive parallels both in the home and in society at large. If the systematic degradation of women and girls is accepted and perpetuated in the home, the society will be shaped in accordance with the prevailing family values. Even though domestic violence is a gender based violence that begins in the home, its continuation is supported by the values of society at large.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Bunch, "The Intolerable Status Quo: Violence Against Women and Girls," 42-43.

Forcible marriage is also a type of gender based violence that is perpetuated in the home. It is performed under duress without the full or informed consent of one or both parties. It can occur between children, a child and adult or two adults. Both physical and emotional pressure is employed by the respective families in order to ensure the marriage takes place.<sup>12</sup> Oftentimes it is an arrangement made between the fathers of two families, without any input from their respective wives or children. After all, forced marriages take place in cultures where women are viewed as property. A strategic match can increase the wealth of a family or bind two different communities together. It can also serve to repay debts, solve disputes and pay family expenses.<sup>13</sup> In some highly depraved circumstances, girls are abducted and raped for the purpose of marriage. Once her virginity has been taken, she is viewed as unmarriageable in larger society so a marriage is forced between the victim and her attacker. After being forced into marriage, young women and girls generally live in an unfamiliar home, suffocating from isolation and terror.<sup>14</sup> They are often raped by a stranger the law recognizes as their husband and forced to bear children at too young of an age. Forced marriage is one of the types of gender based violence that enforces a woman's subservient role in society by taking away her most basic right to choose a man to love and cherish in marriage.

While domestic violence and forcible marriage are gender based violence that is perpetrated at home, female genital mutilation is supported by various societies at large. The practice of female genital mutilation or FGM involves the cutting or removal of a young girl's otherwise healthy external genital organs. The female equivalent of the act is the amputation of part or all of the penis.<sup>15</sup> Despite the barbaric nature of this act, the purpose is to show a woman her confined role in society and restrain her sexual desires. The procedure is commonly

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<sup>12</sup> "Definition of Forced and Child Marriage," United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, 2011.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Bunch, "The Intolerable Status Quo: Violence Against Women and Girls," 43.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

performed on girls between the ages of four and twelve as a rite of passage to womanhood. It is estimated that 129 million women and girls are affected by the practice worldwide.<sup>16</sup> Meaning about two million girls each year, 6,000 each day are subjected to this practice. FGM is performed without any anesthetic, making the procedure irrevocably terrifying and traumatic. Due to the usage of unsterilized and oftentimes crude instruments, excessive bleeding, infection and the transmission of diseases (notably HIV) are all inherent risks.<sup>17</sup> Later in life possible incredible pain in both intercourse and childbirth result. Despite the risks, the practice continues. If a girl is not subjected to FGM, her marriage prospects diminish. In many societies a girl who has not undergone the procedure is deemed unmarriageable by her society. Even if a woman escaped FGM in childhood, after marriage many husbands have sent their wives to undergo to procedure in hospitals. The same parallel of Chinese women that were pressured to undergo foot binding in order to manipulate the bone structure into the desirable “lotus feet.” Both FGM and the archaic foot binding constrained a woman to the home and to a subservient position in society. Thankfully, due to increased pressure from the international community, the rate of new FGM procedures has diminished in recent years. However, the problem is still widespread in much of the African continent.

The fall of the Eastern Block created a new internationally supported black market industry, the trafficking of women and girls for forced labor and sexually exploitive work. While trafficking is a type of gender based violence that occurs during peacetime, it is a direct result of the Cold War. The widely accepted definitions of trafficking highlight the use of violence, coercion, deception or debt-bondage and the misuse of power and control over women in the name of profit. The root causes for this newfound problem can be traced to war and the accompanying displacement, economic and social inequalities and the demand for low-

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<sup>16</sup> Carla Makhlouf Obermeyer, “Female Genital Surgeries: The Known, the Unknown, and the Unknowable,” *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* Vol 13, no. 1 (1999): 80.

<sup>17</sup> “Female Genital Mutilation Fact Sheet,” World Health Organization, February 2010.

wage labor and sex.<sup>18</sup> More often than not underground thugs control this industry, mafia, gangs and even high-ranking immigration officials in the police force engage in this highly profitable business venture. The standard trafficking tactic is to initially deceive women they have secured sought-after positions as nannies, waitresses or even dancers. Upon arriving at the “job site”, their citizenship documents, like passports or visas, are confiscated. They are soon faced with the harsh reality that they have unknowingly been sold into the sex industry or sweatshop labor. After being successfully trafficked by the mafia or gangs controlling the operation, women are routinely subjected to beatings and rape.

Human trafficking is an underground business, which the lack of reliable statistics on trafficked women and children reflect. Rough estimates suggest that 700,000 to 2 million women and girls are trafficked across international borders every year.<sup>19</sup> It must be noted, this figure does not include the substantial number of women and girls who are bought and sold within their own countries, for which there is little to no information. Reports of trafficking in women come from nearly every world region. The greatest numbers of victims are thought to come from Asia (250,000 per year), the former Soviet Union (100,000 per year), and from central and eastern Europe (175,000 per year). It is believed an estimated 100,000 trafficked women have come from Latin America and the Caribbean and more than 50,000 originate from Africa.<sup>20</sup> It is widely accepted that the former Soviet Union is the largest source of women trafficked into prostitution due to the lack of economic opportunities after the Cold War. What is most alarming is the amount of children unknowingly trafficked into sexual slavery. More than 1 million children are forced into prostitution every year, the majority being in Asia.<sup>21</sup> Not even young children are safe from this horrible fate. In the wake of the AIDS epidemic,

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<sup>18</sup> Watts and Zimmerman. “Violence Against Women: Global Scope and Magnitude,” 4.

<sup>19</sup> Watts and Zimmerman. “Violence Against Women: Global Scope and Magnitude,” 5.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

younger and younger children are being sought in the belief that they are less likely to be infected.

One of the side-effects of human trafficking constitutes its own type of gender based violence, rape. Due to the highly stigmatized nature of the act, many women are unwilling to report they were victimized. For those who are brave enough to come forward, most available data is derived from police and hospital records, women's crisis centers and retrospective studies of the sexual abuse of children. It is important to note the variety of circumstances rape can occur. Rape can happen while women are asleep, under the influence of alcohol, recreational drugs, or other drugs such as the date-rape drugs rohypnol and gamma hydroxybutyrate.<sup>22</sup> The prevailing belief of rape is that is committed during a violent and random act of violence by a stranger. However, in n reality the opposite is true. Most forced sex is perpetrated by individuals known to the victim, such as intimate partners, male family members, acquaintances, and individuals in positions of authority. Sexual violence by men who are not known to the victim may involve physical force or non-physical coercion to compel women to have sex against their will.<sup>23</sup> Nonphysical pressure often includes blackmail, trickery, and threats. Although sexual assaults by strangers are widely acknowledged as crimes, by contrast, rape in marriage, sexual coercion in schools, sex in return for a job, and forced marriage are tolerated or socially condoned in many countries. Furthermore, rape of women by gangs of men are common in many areas, the act is associated with gang initiation, rites of passage, ethnic hatred, and racism, as well as with punishment.

In recent years rape has been employed in a new and terrifying way. Wars in the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda highlighted the use of rape as a war tactic. Rape was chosen as a deliberate strategy to undermine community bonds, weaken resistance to aggression and to

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<sup>22</sup> Watts and Zimmerman. "Violence Against Women: Global Scope and Magnitude," 3.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

perpetrate ethnic cleansing through impregnation. But, the rape of women in war is not a new phenomenon. Japanese troops raped civilian women systematically in Korea, China, and the Philippines during World War II. Unfortunately there are not accurate data sets on rape during war. Due to the widespread civil unrest, many hospital records are compromised or looted during bombing raids and attacks. Furthermore, many women are unwilling to come forward to report rape for fear of retribution against their families. The unreliable rape and war statistics are highlighted in the estimates of the number of Muslim women raped by Serb soldiers during the 1992–95 conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Figures range from 20,000 to 50,000 assaulted women which could be anywhere from 1-2% of the total prewar female population.<sup>24</sup> Until very recently, violence against women was thought an insignificant form of collateral warfare damage. It was only recently that the International Criminal Tribunal in The Hague defined sexual offences as a crime against humanity. In a show of solidarity they convicted three Bosnian-Serb soldiers of raping and torturing Muslim women and girls who they enslaved, abused, and rented and sold to other soldiers.

Rape as a weapon of war differs from other types of gender based violence dramatically because it fits into a larger military strategy. While domestic violence and forcible marriage may be supported by society at large, they do not have long-term goals for after the abuse takes place. Rape during times of war is employed strategically against the surrounding community for specific purposes. After much analysis, there are four rationales for utilizing rape as a weapon of war. They include reward, recruitment, punishment and ethnic cleansing. Reward is a huge incentive for troops to rape women and children. Oftentimes these innocents are viewed as the spoils of war and to the victor go the spoils. After participating on a protracted military campaign for months, deprived of necessities like food, water, sleep and women soldier are at

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<sup>24</sup> Watts and Zimmerman. "Violence Against Women: Global Scope and Magnitude," 5



their wits end. However, if their superiors promise their troops the women and children of their enemies in successfully waged attacks, the incentive to win is incredible. Months of suffering may be well worth it when soldiers have an entire village of victims to choose amongst. Furthermore, the morale of the troops is greatly improved when the spoils of war are so enticing. Recruitment is one of the more newly developed rationales for utilizing rape during times of war and occupation. For centuries women have often been viewed as the victims of warfare, however, with the rise of suicide terror women are now becoming perpetrators of conflict.<sup>25</sup> There are many benefits to terrorist organizations for recruiting women and girls into their ranks. Successful suicide bombing missions perpetrated by the opposite sex garner much more media attention. Furthermore, they are less likely to attract suspicion in public places. A seemingly pregnant woman could breeze through a checkpoint far more easily than a middle-aged man; however, instead of carrying child the woman could be concealing an IED ready to detonate.<sup>26</sup> Lastly, if women are participating in the movement, terrorist organizations have successfully undermined the security of the local population. Now it is no longer a fringe movement, instead it has successfully infiltrated society at large meaning no one is safe from an attack. One of the largest reasons for women joining the ranks of terrorists groups is because they themselves were raped or sexually abused during conflicts by the enemy. Training as a suicide bomber is a way to get justice for the violence they suffered. Now women can finally get retribution against those who damaged them physically and emotionally, instead of being a passive victim they have transformed themselves into a soldier of war.

Punishment is another large component of utilizing rape as a weapon of war.

Associating with men of the enemy makes women and young girls a target for violence.

Armies may strategically rape the enemy in order to punish them for aligning with the wrong

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<sup>25</sup> Mia Bloom, *Dying to Kill* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 143.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, 151.

side; punishing them for this choice may help to weaken support networks within enemy camps. In order for their wives and daughters to escape similar fates, allegiances on the ground change rapidly. This provides military troops with a growing base of support and a decreased amount of resistance from local communities. Lastly, some militaries employ rape as a means of ethnic cleansing. Many wars and conflicts are fought by opposing enemies and ethnicities. One of the best ways to undermine the enemy is to “outbreed them.” Purposely impregnating women by raping them, the enemy gene pool is not passed on to the next generation. Due to the fact women were born into the wrong ethnic or religious group, they could easily be targeted in ensuing conflicts for something as trivial as skin color, religious beliefs or ethnic tradition.

Gender based violence takes many forms and occurs in a variety of circumstances, whether in the home, like domestic violence and forced marriage; or during times of war or occupation when rape is used as a weapon by armed forces. This list is by no means the ultimate reference to gender based violence, there are several other types like gender-targeted infanticide or elder abuse that have not been mentioned. This field of study is a constantly evolving and as such has garnered increased attention in recent decades. The development and progression of society in regards to health and education deeply depends upon the enfranchisement of women and girls. It prevents women from being active participants in the development of society and in their own lives. If communities and states hope to prosper in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, ending gender based violence against women is the key to a healthy society.

## ***Iraq*** ***“Lives Blown Apart”***

Iraq has garnered a lot of media attention in recent decades, in large part because several United States military endeavors have been fought in this Middle Eastern nation. One side effect of the conflict was the international community was able to better see how daily life in Iraqi society functioned. Unfortunately, after several years of observation it became exceedingly obvious that many human rights abuses were committed, especially in the way of gender based violence. Although forcible marriage differs greatly from rape, it is important to mention in this analysis because both types of gender based violence serve to strip women of their agency. While forcible marriage occurs in the home and is supported as cultural traditions or rites of passage, rape has been systematically employed for the benefit of the militaries in recent years.

### ***Forcible Marriage***

On March 16, 2008 would have been another ordinary day for the citizens of the Saydani village in the Erbil governorate, except for the fact thirteen year-old Rojan committed suicide by setting herself on fire. According to her older brother, this bright and promising thirteen year-old girl was to be forcibly married to an older man.<sup>27</sup> Unfortunately the forcible marriages and violence that precedes them are not uncommon in Iraq, like FGM it is a tradition supported by the community at large. Iraqi women human rights defenders say that many abused wives were forced to marry – often as a teenager without obtaining the judicial approval formally required under Iraqi law for a marriage of anyone aged between 15 and 18. Marriages of girls younger than fifteen are illegal, but they continue to be conducted in private or religious ceremonies without those responsible being held to account.<sup>28</sup> For example, a woman’s rights activist from Karbala told Amnesty International about a case in August 2004

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<sup>27</sup> “Trapped by Violence: Women in Iraq,” (London: Amnesty International, March ,1 2004), 4.

<sup>28</sup> “Trapped by Violence: Women in Iraq,” 6.

where a thirteen year-old girl was forced into marriage by a much older man. The ceremony was performed by a Shi'a Muslim cleric.<sup>29</sup> In northern Iraq the practice of “jin be jin” contributes to the high incidence of forced marriage. This Kurdish expression literally means “changing one woman for another.” It involves the exchange of girls-the girl from one family marrying the son of another (or from the same extended) family, while his sister is given in marriage in return – to avoid having to pay “bride prices” for the daughters. Similar marriage arrangements take place in other regions of Iraq.<sup>30</sup>

Once forcibly married, the cycle of abuse continues and is exacerbated. A 2008 World Health Organization survey revealed that an overwhelming majority (over 83 percent) of married women interviewed said that they were subject to “controlling behavior” by their husbands. This included husbands insisting on knowing where they were at all times and forced sexual intercourse.<sup>31</sup> A WHO survey conducted from 2006-2007 in Iraq found that 21.2 percent of Iraqi women had experienced physical or sexual violence. There were marked differences between Kurdistan and the rest of Iraq. In central and southern Iraq 22.7 percent of women reported at least one form of physical abuse, whereas in Kurdistan the figure was 10.9 percent.<sup>32</sup> This life of confinement and misery has very negative effects on the women and young girls. Due to the fact divorce initiated by a woman is not a viable choice; many opt for a more permanent solution to their predicament. In October 2002 the Asuda Centre reported an alarming number of women who died or were injured by intentionally setting fire to themselves. According to the Centre’s findings, in 2001 105 women were admitted to the Sulaimaniya Training Hospital for this reason. Of the 105 women admitted, 63 died and 42

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<sup>29</sup> “Iraq: Decades of Suffering, Now Women Deserve Better,” (London: Amnesty International, February 22 2005), 23.

<sup>30</sup> “Iraq: Decades of Suffering, Now Women Deserve Better,” 22-23.

<sup>31</sup> “Iraq: Decades of Suffering, Now Women Deserve Better,” 23.

<sup>32</sup> “Carnage and Despair: Iraq Five Years On,” (London: Amnesty International, March 17, 2008), 17.

survived.<sup>33</sup> When questioned, the 42 survivors reported forced marriage and sexual violence at the root cause of their intentional burning.

Forcible marriage and the marital rape that ensues rarely have a happy ending.

Interviews conducted with the victims of these traditions speak of isolation, physical and sexual abuse, confusion and terror. A now seventy-seven year old mother of three reported her father forced her to marry an older man illegally when she was just thirteen years old. This is the account she gave in May of 2008 to Amnesty International.

Years later, she said, her husband falsely accused her of adultery because he wanted to divorce her and evade responsibility for supporting her. She was being detained in Erbil because of her husband's accusations. She said she had received only minimal education as a child and, alone, could not support herself and her children. She now hoped that her husband would allow her to return to the family home to live as her husband's "servant", if this was what he required, so that she could at least be with her children.<sup>34</sup>

Forcible marriage is a huge and often underreported aspect of sexual violence. Unfortunately girls under the age of fifteen are the most at risk for being subjected into forced marriage which inevitably leads to statutory rape and more often than not pregnancy. Pregnancy as the result of child marriage is hazardous to both mother and child, with premature birth or death being the most dangerous side-effects. Women denied the right to marry often forsake their right to love and a future of happiness, most often to satisfy the political desires of their families.

### ***Rape***

Rape is an incredibly stigmatized crime in the Middle East that has the potential to provoke "honor killings" or social stigmatization from family and the local community. Furthermore, there are many forensic and legal obstacles a woman must endure to report an incident of sexual violence. For that that reason many rapes go unreported, undocumented and uninvestigated. However, from the information that has been reported to hospitals, certain

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<sup>33</sup> "An Alarming Statistic on Cases of Burned Women," Hawlati Newspaper, October 7, 2002.

<sup>34</sup> "Trapped by Violence: Women in Iraq," 6.

trends emerge. Incidents of rape in Iraq have generally correlated directly to times of war and conflict. Amnesty International has observed that forms of gender discrimination and violence that pre-date a conflict situation appear to be exacerbated during periods of conflict.

Three known catalysts for sexual violence in Iraq are the Gulf War, Anfal Campaign and 2003 invasion of U.S. troops during the Iraq War. War tactics have increasingly turned to sexual violence against women as an overall tactic for victory; these three conflicts illustrate this movement in modern warfare. According to the 1997 U.S. State Department Human Rights Report, “After the 1991 Gulf War, victims and eyewitnesses described war crimes perpetrated by the Iraqi regime--deliberate killing, torture, rape, pillage, hostage-taking, and associated acts--directly related to the Gulf War.”<sup>35</sup> The deliberate choice to commit murder, torture and rape can garner undecided or neutral citizens to support one side over another. The Anfal Campaign marked an increase in the brutality against women and children. The 1996 U.S. State Department Human Rights Report states, “Evidence concerning the Anfal Campaign indicates that the Government killed many women and children, including infants, by firing squads and in chemical attacks. Government forces also raped many women during the Anfal Campaign as well as during the occupation of Kuwait.”<sup>36</sup> The Gulf War had shown how murder and sexual violence could be employed as effective methods of warfare. At the time of the Anfal Campaign, these unseemly methods were utilized in more frequent and brutal methods.

While both the Gulf War and Anfal Campaign saw the usage of sexual violence against women, the 2003 invasion of U.S. troops marked a turning point and severe increase of rape. In the first months following the overthrow of Saddam Hussein’s government, a climate of lawlessness prevailed in Iraq. Unfortunately, the inevitable increase of reports of kidnappings,

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<sup>35</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Iraq: Report on Human Rights Practices for 1997*. (Washington D.C.: U.S. State Department, 1998).

<sup>36</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Iraq: Report on Human Rights Practices for 1996*. (Washington D.C.: U.S. State Department, 1997).

rapes and the killing of women and young girls by criminal gangs soon followed.<sup>37</sup>

Furthermore, Iraqi officers at a police station in Bagdad reported in June 2003, “that the number of [rape] cases reported was substantially higher than before the war.”<sup>38</sup> Many believe this increase in violence can be attributed to opposition of U.S. troops in Iraq and the problems associated with a lack of ruling government. It is for that reason that many of the rapes reported in Iraq will be from 2003 onward. However, the issues associated with the Gulf War and Anfal Campaign proves that sexual violence against women has been an issue in Iraq for decades before the U.S. invasion. In Iraq, rape was often used as a means of recruitment, punishment and ethnic cleansing. There is little documentation of the use of rape as a reward mechanism for the troops. However, it can be inferred that the lawlessness that prevailed in Iraqi society following the 2003 invasion had two rewards for the men of Iraq. Firstly, it created an environment that supported their desire to abduct young women for the purposes of rape. Lastly, this environment created such perverse fear-mongering amongst the local communities women ceased from doing their daily activities for fear of abduction and rape. The post-2003 Iraq only further subjugated women and young girls beneath the chauvinist men who controlled them.

### Reward

While this classification of rape does not fit into the traditional definition of using rape as a reward, the lawlessness in Iraqi society following the 2003 invasion Iraq has created an environment that rewards the rapists that inhabit it. In the post-Hussein era, Iraq is going through an unprecedented level of violence and turmoil. Two benefits of this lawless are the greater availability for to criminal gangs to rape women without fear of prosecution and the climate of fear that further disenfranchised women in society. Since the U.S.-led invasion of

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<sup>37</sup> “Iraq: Decades of Suffering, Now Women Deserve Better,”<sup>10</sup>.

<sup>38</sup> “Climate of Fear: Sexual Violence and Abduction of Women and Girls in Bagdad,” (New York: Human Rights Watch, July 2003), 8.

Iraq, women have been victims of kidnapping and rape by criminal gangs and abuses by armed groups opposed to the Iraqi government and the presence of foreign troops.<sup>39</sup> Due to the fact the rights of many Iraqi men have been suppressed by the United States military, they are acting out in other ways namely abduction and rape. In response for their subjugation by U.S. troops, many women and girls are being forcibly abducted to be raped at a later location. This phenomenon Iraqis cite as new: “This never happened before the war” was an oft-repeated refrain.<sup>40</sup> However, now men can take women and girls as they please. Throughout the city, Iraqis talk of women and girls being seized from public locations while walking down the street conducting normal errands. Even in broad daylight women are at risk for being forcibly abducted to eventually be raped.

Unfortunately the prevailing fear of Iraqi women has been validated by various and traumatic accounts of abduction. Take the case of nine year-old Saba A. (real name withheld). On May 22, 2003, at approximately 4:00 p.m., Saba A. was abducted from the stairwell of the building where her family lived, taken to an abandoned building nearby, and raped. A family friend who saw Saba A. immediately following the rape reported, “She was sitting on the stairs, here, at 4:00 p.m. It seems to me that probably he hit her on the back of the head with a gun and then took her to [a neighboring] building. She came back fifteen minutes later, bleeding (from the vaginal area). (She was still bleeding two days later, so) we took her to the hospital.”<sup>41</sup> A copy of the medical report by the U.S. military doctor who treated Saba A. documented bruising in the vaginal area, a posterior vaginal tear, and a broken hymen. Lieutenant Monica Casmaer, a physician’s assistant attached to a U.S. military unit, examined Saba A. with the attending pediatrician. She described the injuries as fairly severe, especially

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<sup>39</sup> “Stop ‘Honour Killings’ in Iraq,” (London: Amnesty International, June, 6 2007), 1.

<sup>40</sup> “Climate of Fear: Sexual Violence and Abduction of Women and Girls,” 8.

<sup>41</sup> Interview (name withheld) with Human Rights Watch Interviewer. Bagdad, Iraq. June 10, 2003.



given the time that had elapsed before she was examined.<sup>42</sup> Unfortunately Lt. Casmaer's experience with the abduction of Iraqi girls did not end with young Saba A. She also recounted the time she treated a woman who reported that she had been walking home from the supermarket in the middle of the day, on approximately May 12, when she was abducted and raped by several unknown perpetrators. Lt. Casmaer said she saw bruising consistent with the woman's account of struggle.<sup>43</sup>

The true accounts of a nine year-old being taken from her home stairwell and a woman abducted on her way home from the supermarket, strike fear into the hearts of Iraqi women. This climate of fear also has another reward to the men of Iraq; it further subjugates local women making them inferior to their male counterparts. Following 2003, it became the prevailing perception that women were not safe to leave their homes. In late May, women and girls were rarely seen outside in Baghdad, even during daylight hours when male shoppers and workers crowded the sidewalks and streets. Although by the end of June women formed more of a public presence, they continued to report that they limited their movements and remained afraid. Out of the thirty or so women and girls interviewed in Baghdad, virtually every one cited fear of abduction and sexual violence as justification for not returning to or looking for work, holding children back from school, and in many cases, preventing young women and girls from leaving the house.<sup>44</sup> One woman from Bagdad attested to this prevailing climate of fear.

We want security. Although the Americans sometimes are at the schools, to have tanks guarding us is not the point. You can't walk the streets alone. Tomorrow my daughter has exams, and she will be safe inside the school, but to there and from there, it is dangerous. We need security, then freedom. My husband told the Americans, you will make us say we prefer Saddam Hussein's rule, because then it was safe, even though everyone hated him. Even though he was oppressive, at least it was safe. Yesterday I

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<sup>42</sup> Interview with Lieutenant Monica Casmaer of the 4-64 Armored Battalion, Second Brigade, Third Infantry Division with Human Rights Watch Interviewer. Bagdad, Iraq. May 31, 2003.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> "Climate of Fear: Sexual Violence and Abduction of Women and Girls in Bagdad," 8.

went to a funeral, and all the women were afraid, they were worried about themselves and what might happen to them for venturing outside, just to go to a funeral.<sup>45</sup>

Because of the real or perceived prevalence of such attacks, women and girls clearly believe they are more vulnerable than they were before the war.<sup>46</sup> This makes women dependent upon the male figureheads of the home because they believe they cannot go to the market, find work or even leave the house without fear of retribution. This fear even prevents mothers from sending their young daughters to school for fear of abduction during the commute. The benefit of gaining a new victim pool for abduction and rape and further subjugating Iraqi women in society were two new rewards that stemmed directly from the 2003 invasion of U.S. troops.

### Recruitment

Statistics provided by the U.S. military reported that in 2007, there were only eight attacks carried out by female suicide bombers. However, in 2008, thirty-six female bombers attempted or carried out thirty-two separate attacks. The staggering increase shows how successful women suicide bombers could be at accomplishing missions in the name of jihad. Now the question posed to various insurgent groups was how to recruit more young women and girls to end their lives so suddenly for similar purposes. Fifty-one year old Samira Ahmed Jassim also realized how successful women suicide bombers were and made it her mission to recruit more in the name of jihad. However, her tactics and recruitment eventually got the mother of six arrested. Deemed “the Mother of Believers” by the militant Sunni group she was aligned with, Jassim was arrested on February 3, 2009 for her recruitment and transformation of over eighty girls into suicide bombers. Of the eighty she recruited over a number of years, twenty-eight successfully completed missions Samira pre-arranged.<sup>47</sup> At the time of her arrest, many wondered how Jassim was so successful at recruiting formerly non-militant women into

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<sup>45</sup> Interview with Dalal S.’s Mother with Human Rights Watch Interviewer. Bagdad, Iraq. June 20, 2003.

<sup>46</sup> “Climate of Fear: Sexual Violence and Abduction of Women and Girls in Bagdad,” 8.

<sup>47</sup> Deborah Haynes, “Female Suicide Bomb Recruiter Samira Ahmed Jassim Captured,” The Times, February 3, 2009.

her ranks. She revealed in later prison interviews that rape was the key to recruitment. Insurgents would strategically rape women; afterwards Jassim would appeal to the “shamed” women to redeem themselves through suicide bombing missions. She would explain to the traumatized women that completing a suicide attack was their only option to be released from the shame of the rape.<sup>48</sup>

In the Middle East and Iraq specifically, this rationale is not implausible. The shame and more importantly blame for an act rape is often carried by the victim not the perpetrator. Jassim was aware of this reality and exploited it to the fullest. After training these victims of rape in an orchard near her home, she would send her recruits off to accomplish their missions. They ranged from blowing up a police station in Diyala, a neighboring bus station and other public places. According to Jassim, women represented an ideal opportunity for the insurgency because of the stigma they held in society. Women are viewed as docile and maternal figures; furthermore, Islamic sensibilities prevent them from undergoing the frisking all males are subject to at checkpoints. Concealing explosives under a woman’s billowing robes so she appeared pregnant led to more successfully accomplished missions by the suicide bombers. Jassim created a new utilization for rape during times of war. Instead of being a shamed, rape victims were now active seekers of justice against the militant groups suppressing their communities.

### Punishment

As stated previously, it is well documented that Iraqi security forces and military systematically use rape as a weapon of war. However, punishment has been the most prevalent motive behind its employment over the course of various occupations. This punishment is

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<sup>48</sup> “Monstrous Face of Jihad: Samira Ahmed Jassim,” The Global Jihad. July 2, 2009.

being administered by the military, in prisons under both Iraqi and U.S. supervision and by individuals at large.

Beginning in the late 1990's, security forces routinely sexually assaulted women affiliated with both regime officials and opposition members in order to blackmail their more powerful male relatives into compliance. Former Mukhabarat member and Technical Operations Directorate Khalid Al-Janabi reported that rape and sexual assault were used in a systematic and institutionalized manner for political purposes. The unit reportedly videotaped the rape of female relatives of suspected oppositionists and used the videotapes for blackmail, to act as an impetus to cease all oppositional political activities and to ensure their future cooperation.<sup>49</sup> In June 2000, a videotape showing the rape of a female relative was sent to Najib al-Salihi, a former army general who fled Iraq in 1995 and joined the opposition. Shortly after receiving the videotape he received a telephone call from the Iraqi intelligence service, asking him whether he had received the film and informing him that his relative was in their custody.<sup>50</sup> Women of these connected military associates were being punished for their allegiances. Furthermore, by raping close family members the military hoped to subdue the opposition into submission and compliance. In addition to videotaping the rape of women associated with men opposed to Saddam Hussein, many were often punished by being falsely imprisoned and raped. By holding these women hostage, they could often coerce a relative who escaped abroad to return to Iraq and surrender. For example, according to one of Saddam's prison guards "the last young women to be imprisoned here died in these fetid cells two months ago. The Peshmerga say they found three of their bodies, naked and with their hands bound, on the floor. One of the girls was 12 years old. Another older woman had been gang-raped and

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<sup>49</sup>U.S. Department of State, *Iraq: Report on Human Rights Practices for 1997*. (Washington D.C.: U.S. State Department, 1998).

<sup>50</sup> "Iraq: Decades of Suffering, Now Women Deserve Better," 10.

died later.”<sup>51</sup> These women had close male relatives who were opponents of Saddam, in order to punish them for their alliances they were falsely imprisoned and raped while in custody. Rape was just the cost of doing business in the Hussein regime.

While the military engaged in rape as a means of punishment, one of the most widespread and systematic uses of sexual violence occurred in prison. No one subset of the population was immune from this mistreatment; individuals ranging from juvenile boys to innocent women were targeted for sexual violence while behind bars. In addition to the sexual violence many inmates were forced to endure, torture techniques like branding, breaking limbs, dripping acid on the skin, suspension from ceiling fans, denial of food and water and electric shocks. The living conditions were also abysmal. Overcrowded and unhygienic prison cells were the norm, in both the U.S. and Iraqi systems. Sexual violence could be employed as a method to control the many prisoners, raping or abusing one inmate has the benefit of terrifying dozens more. Furthermore, if the inmate in question was a political prisoner with sensitive information, sexual violence and torture could be employed to learn enemy secrets. The overcrowded Iraqi prisons during times of occupation made the inmates especially vulnerable to sexual violence due to the need to control the overflowing amount of detainees admitted either justifiably or unjustifiably. Lastly, punishing an inmate by means of rape, can give some satisfaction to the perpetrator (ie: prison guards). More often than not, both sides have suffered on account of another’s actions during war. Family and friends have been lost in the conflict and many have suffered the innumerable effects of war. Rape was used as a punishment against someone affiliated with a group that caused the other pain.

The largest stain on the United States prison record stems from the reports of abuse at Abu Ghraib. The Taguba Report in conjunction with a 60 Minutes special and article by

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<sup>51</sup> Abby Goldberg, “Invisible and Silenced Women,” Global Justice Center, 2007.

Seymour M. Hersh in April 2004 brought the purposeful psychological, physical and sexual abuse of Iraqi prisoners to light in the United States. Eventually seventeen officers were removed from duty and eleven were court marshaled for their decision to massively violate human rights in the prison system. For example, one teenage boy testified that he was raped by an army translator during his time in Abu Ghraib.<sup>52</sup> In addition to his testimony, there are thousands of photographs that document various atrocities committed by U.S. troops. One photo depicts a female prisoner being raped by an American soldier while another shows a female prisoner being harassed.<sup>53</sup> In a report given by Major General George Fray three personnel received non-judicial punishment for this incident of harassment that occurred on October 7, 2003. Fray reported,

First the group took her out of her cell and escorted her down the cellblock to an empty cell. One unidentified soldier stayed outside the cell; while another held her hands behind her back, and the other forcibly kissed her. She was escorted downstairs to another cell where she was shown a naked male detainee and told the same would happen to her if she did not cooperate. She was then taken back to her cell, forced to kneel and raise her arms while one of the soldiers removed her shirt. She began to cry, and the shirt was given back as the soldier cursed at her and said they would be back each night.<sup>54</sup>

The purposeful humiliation and rape of various prisoners in Abu Ghraib was part of a systematic punishment mechanism devised by a select few individuals. However, it garnered massive amounts of media attention due to the barbaric and depraved nature of the acts. While the rapes perpetrated by the U.S. military at Abu Ghraib served to punish inmates, in the long run it only punished the reputation of the United States armed forces by leaving an indelible mark on their human rights record.

While the United States was forced to answer to the Abu Ghraib incident, the Iraqi prison system had decades of documented abuse against prisoners in various detention

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<sup>52</sup> Julian Borger, "U.S. General Linked to Abu Ghraib Abuse," *The Guardian*, May 22, 2004.

<sup>53</sup> Duncan Graham. "Abu Ghraib Abuse Photos 'Show Rape'." *The Telegraph*, May 27, 2004.

<sup>54</sup> "Iraq: Decades of Suffering, Now Women Deserve Better," 10.

facilities. Beginning in 1996, the U.S. State Department Report on Human Rights documented the torture of inmates. Furthermore, after enduring the torture and rape, many prisoners' bodies were mutilated before they were returned to their respective families.<sup>55</sup> In the following years there were many individual accounts of sexual abuse. Allegations of rape and other torture were made by male juveniles held in al-Karkh juvenile prison in Baghdad.<sup>56</sup> At another Baghdad prison on June 10, prison guards allegedly tortured and raped female detainees at an MOI detention facility in the Adamiya neighborhood. Two MOI officers were charged, but there were no further updates at the conclusion of the calendar year.<sup>57</sup> Documented sexual violence even occurred at the preliminary booking of inmates into various prisons. For example, on October 20, 2005 administrators of Baghdad's Kadamiya women's prison confirmed the rape of one inmate had occurred while the individual was in police custody before being formally admitted.<sup>58</sup> All of these incidents of rape in the Iraqi prison system correspond to other forms of torture. Rape was just another tool to punish inmates into submission.

On an individual level, there is no better example of the systematic utilization rape as a means of punishment than through the analysis of Uday Hussein's actions. As the eldest son of Dictator Saddam Hussein, Uday utilized his useless bureaucratic position of Head of Iraq's Olympic Committee from 1991 onward in order to hide his transgressions behind the title of the office. Having Uday secretly perform Saddam's dirty work by terrorizing his enemies was a huge asset in helping to perpetuate Saddam's reign of terror. One of Uday's favorite methods was raping the daughters of his enemies and subordinates. According to his former aid Adib Shabaan at a 1998 outing at the equestrian club, Uday selected a pretty 14 year-old girl in a

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<sup>55</sup> "Iraq: Report on Human Rights Practices for 1996."

<sup>56</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Iraq: Report on Human Rights Practices for 2009*. (Washington D.C.: U.S. State Department, 2010).

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Iraq: Report on Human Rights Practices for 2005*. (Washington D.C.: U.S. State Department, 2006).

bright yellow dress sitting with her family to be his next target. When the girl left the table for the ladies room, she was cornered by his many bodyguards to meet the son of her president. After she politely declined, the bodyguards immediately turned to Uday's standard backup plan. They covered her mouth so she could not cry out and carried the young girl to the backseat of Uday's car. After three days the girl was returned to her family, with a variety of gifts from Uday. She was tested for rape in a nearby hospital and the result was positive. Shabaan further reported when Uday heard she had been tested he sent aides to the clinic where they threatened doctors not to report the rape of the ex-governor's daughter.<sup>59</sup> His voracious sexual appetite and misconduct were legendary amongst the elite Iraqi social circles. Despite the fact he knowingly preyed upon the wealthy daughters of his enemies and social climbers, he was unstoppable. The inaction of his father allowed Uday to terrorize young women and girls until the day he died, making sexual violence a hallmark of Saddam's reign in Iraq.

### *Ethnic Cleansing*

In the early morning of mid-February 2007 four armed masked men forced their way into a family home in Baghdad. The children and their father were beaten and shackled, while their forty year-old pregnant mother was forced into another room, kicked in the stomach, burned with a cigarette and raped. The rapist said that he wanted to make her miscarry because of her religion. The mother lost consciousness during the assault and woke up in hospital to discover that her pregnancy had been terminated because of the injuries sustained during the attack. The family, members of the minority Sabean-Mandaean community, subsequently fled the country.<sup>60</sup> While this is just isolated incident of ethnically-targeted sexual violence it does illustrate the reality that affiliating with the wrong ethnic or religious group can target a woman to be raped. This point can be illustrated through the genocidal campaign of the Kurds during

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<sup>59</sup> Brian Bennett and Michael Weisskopf, "Uday's and Qusay's Gulag Archipelago," The Times, May 27, 2003.

<sup>60</sup> "Trapped by Violence: Women in Iraq," 2.



Saddam Hussein's Anfal Campaign. Translated from Arabic *Anfal* literally means "the spoils of war," which greatly serves to illustrate how women were treated during this military campaign.<sup>61</sup> In addition to rape, mass executions, torture and the usage of chemical weapons against civilians were all horrors the Kurds had to endure. After being captured by Hussein's forces, they were transplanted to various detention camps where even more suffering awaited their arrival. Rape was used both as a method of torture and an extension of genocide. In regards to torture, coerced sex was used as a means to cause extreme agony and suffering. After enduring the rapes victims were in a weakened physical and emotional state. Military forces hoped to glean important information about their enemy while their victims were compromised. In regards to utilizing rape as a genocidal tactic, two purposes were served. First and foremost, it is basic biological knowledge that sex, whether consensual or coerced, can result in pregnancy. Iraqi forces hoped to "outbreed" the Kurds through this purposeful impregnation in detention camps. Also, being regularly subjected to rape in the abysmal conditions of the camps was part of a deliberate plan of destruction. Being subjected to these horrors was designed to bring about the physical destruction of a person, whether in pieces or entirely. By systematically breaking the spirits of the Kurdish people, Iraqi soldiers hoped to destroy their will to live. Rape was considered an instrumental weapon of war during the ethnic cleansing of Kurdish people during the Anfal Campaign; whether it be through purposeful impregnation or destroying a Kurd's will to live another day.

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<sup>61</sup> "The Anfal Decision: Breaking New Ground for Women's Rights in Iraq," (New York: Global Justice Center, 2007).

## *Afghanistan* *“Invisible and Silenced Women”*

According to the Thomas Reuter Foundation, Afghanistan is the most dangerous place for women to reside. Released in 2011, the foundation found that an ongoing war, dismal healthcare, lack of education, sexual violence, extreme poverty and prejudiced cultural practices make Afghanistan the most dangerous country in the world for women specifically.<sup>62</sup> This newly released information brings the harsh reality of an Afghan woman’s daily life to light in the international community. In order to continue to suppress women’s rights, an unprecedented level of gender based violence has been systematically employed to further disenfranchise women in Afghan society. Unlike Iraq where rape was the primary weapon utilized against women in order to create a climate of fear and ensure submission, Afghanistan has evidence of many types of gender based violence being employed. Although rape was utilized to ensure the coerced cooperation of women, forcible marriage acid throwing and self-immolation also echo the frustration women endured in this suffocating society. While some of these acts are committed in public and supported by society at large, others occur in the home. An Afghan woman is not safe from violence anywhere; she has the potential to be targeted in the four walls of her home or even in the public market. It is this extensive usage of sexual violence strips women of their agency in Afghan society. The types of gender based violence that occur in the home will be discussed, before progressing to gender based violence that occurs under the watchful eye of the public.

### ***Forcible Marriage***

When fourteen year old Fatima’s father arrived home in a new car full of presents she was skeptical about this overt expression of generosity. She had never been showered with so many new clothes and presents before in her young life. However, all of those gifts were

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<sup>62</sup> “Report: Afghanistan is Most Dangerous Place for Women,” MSNBC News, June 15, 2011.

bought with funds Fatima's father received for selling his young daughter into marriage. When she went to visit the man that would be her husband, she traveled to a faraway district of Afghanistan to meet and marry a much older man from a different ethnic group that spoke a different language. When Fatima was dressed as a traditional bride for the wedding, she tore off her clothes in protestation. However, it was too late. Fatima was sold into marriage to a perfect stranger at the age of fourteen.<sup>63</sup>

The legal age for marriage in Afghanistan is eighteen and sixteen for men and women respectively. While that may be the legal standard, in reality many marriages involve underage parties and conducted without the full consent of either the bride or groom. Due to a variety of factors, forcible marriage is considered one of the cultural norms of an Afghan woman's existence. In fact, between sixty to eighty percent of marriages are forced in Afghanistan.<sup>64</sup> For wealthy families, a well matched marriage can solidify political alliances or add social status to the family name. However in poorer families, daughters are viewed as a financial burden who must be married quickly to ease financial strains. In light of the ongoing conflict and occupation more and more young girls are being forcibly married so their futures can be secured in these uncertain times.<sup>65</sup> In rural areas especially, forcible marriage presents a real problem. It is expected that young girls between the ages of seven and eleven are married away to much older men in their community.<sup>66</sup> As a proverb from a rural region of Afghanistan states, "A girl should have her first period in her husband's house and not her father's house."<sup>67</sup>

Once these young girls are sold into marriage, they are practically imprisoned by the duties of being an obedient wife and mother. Their new homes become a cell of sorts they are

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<sup>63</sup> "Afghanistan: 'No-One Listens to Us and No-One Treats Us as Human Beings.' Justice Denied to Women," (London: Amnesty International, October 5, 2003), 12.

<sup>64</sup> Tahera Nassrat, "Forced Marriages in Afghanistan," Foreign Policy Association, April 6, 2010.

<sup>65</sup> Cornelia Walther, "Forced and Early Marriages Still Common in Afghanistan," UNICEF 2009.

<sup>66</sup> Nassrat. "Forced Marriages in Afghanistan."

<sup>67</sup> "Afghanistan: 'No-One Listens to Us and No-One Treats Us as Human Beings.' Justice Denied to Women", 13.

never allowed to leave without permission from their husband or a male escort. Many women report sexual abuse, physical and psychological abuse and justifiable feelings of isolation. However, escaping from this terrible fate has not proven to be a viable option. In the case of thirty year old Shaima, she was married as a twelve year old to a man twenty years older than she. When she was thirty she already born ten children. With her children in tow, Shaima fled from her husband Mohammed to Kabul's Alaoddin One Hundred Bed Mental Hospital where she is being treated for depression and a refusal to eat. The One Hundred Bed Mental Hospital has been transformed into a safe-house of sorts for battered women in Afghanistan. Every bed is filled with a woman fleeing from a husband that has abused her since girlhood. According to Shaima her schoolteacher husband, "Is very rude with me and the children."<sup>68</sup> However, despite Mohammed's overt maltreatment of his wife, Shaima will be expected to return to his home once she is eating regularly again. Once she returns, there is no doubt she will be punished for her act of insubordination against her husband.

### ***Self-Immolation***

While forcible marriage occurs in the home, in recent years its terrible effects are being manifested in the public eye. While suicide violates one of the tenets of Islam, many women are turning to self-immolation in order to permanently escape their isolating and abusive home fronts. In the western province of Herat, women are setting themselves aflame in alarming numbers. At the start of the Afghan solar year, March 22, 2004 until February of the following year, there were 234 registered burn victims at the Herat regional hospital being treated. Of those cases 84 ended in death due to injuries sustained from the burns.<sup>69</sup> Unfortunately this trend is not abating with time. From March 2009 to March 2010 approximately 103 women set

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<sup>68</sup> Anna Badken, "Liberation Eludes Afghan Women," San Francisco Chronicle, April 16, 2004.

<sup>69</sup> Ron Synovitz, "Afghanistan: Self-Immolation By Women in Herat Continues at Alarming Rate," Radio Free Europe/Free Liberty, February 4, 2005.

themselves on fire.<sup>70</sup> According to Dr. Ahmed Shah Wazir who runs the burn unit of Kabul's Istiqlal Hospital, more than 80 percent of women who attempt to commit suicide via self-immolation cannot be saved.<sup>71</sup> In the meantime, these women keep the burn unit very busy, as ten percent of the patients admitted are due to self-immolation.<sup>72</sup> The burns women sustain during the act coupled with a recovery process often wrought with infection ensures a successful self-immolation. Despite the obvious suicidal connotations self-immolation carries, many families categorize these acts as accidental in nature. However, doctor's can tell if the burns were in fact accidental or purposeful. The telltale sign of self-immolation being there is no burns on the arm used to pour the gasoline before lighting a match. Despite this evidence, a woman who commits suicide brings shame upon her family therefore most are in denial about what drove a woman to end her life so savagely.

From the various data that has been collected over the years, it has been established that most women at risk to self-immolate are between the ages of thirteen and twenty-five who were either recently married or about to be married.<sup>73</sup> There was even documentation of a thirteen year-old betrothed bride who set herself aflame in order to escape her fate.<sup>74</sup> The threat of forcible marriage or the effects of suffering from years of abuse are the impetus for hundreds of women who have self-immolated. Trapped in abusive marriages their families arranged without their consent in adolescence, women are forced to bear the consequences of that decision for a lifetime. Women report they not only endure physical and sexual abuse from their husbands, but also psychological abuse from their mother-in-laws. Instead of being an ally to these young girls in their new homes, the mother-in-law has been known to be the main

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<sup>70</sup> Abigail Hauslohner, "Afghanistan: When Women Set Themselves On Fire," Time, July 7, 2010.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Adrienne Mong, "Afghan Girls Burn Themselves to Escape Marriage," RAWA, October 29, 2009.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> James Astill, "Death by Burning: The Only Escape for Desperate Afghan Women," The Guardian, April 24, 2004.

abuser of some young brides. Another cause of self-immolation is the frustration women feel after the fall of the Taliban and the lack of progress that has been achieved. Many educated women who were nurses and teachers, turned to self-immolation after their basic freedoms continued to be denied. Post-2001 Afghanistan had access to radio and television and women began to see what freedom had the potential to be. However, their reality in Afghanistan did not match their expectations. Still faced with age-old misogynistic harassment and repression in order to be denied rights women know they deserved was just too much to bear. With no other way to end the cycle of abuse, women have turned to self-immolation. When twenty year-old Anargol had any advice for women in similar situations she gave this sobering response, “Don’t burn yourself. If you want a way out, use a gun; it’s less painful.”<sup>75</sup>

### ***Acid Throwing***

Acid throwing is the first type of gender based violence that occurs in public but has a wide base of support in the conservative community. Many of these attacks stem from the educational progress achieved by Afghan society post-Taliban rule. Under the rule of the Taliban, fewer than one million children received an education. Since those dark days have passed, over six million children are enrolled in the Afghan education system, two million of those individuals being young girls.<sup>76</sup> This is a reflection of the huge push to educate the young girls that for so long were subjugated under the Taliban. Under Taliban rule, from 1996-2001 girls were banned from entering Afghan schools. However, this escalating level of educated women is being met with severe resistance from many conservative Afghan men. While acid attacks were generally directed towards schoolgirls in 2008, it must be mentioned that once the Taliban was removed from power in 2001 acid throwing was one weapon in their arsenal against women. Women seen in public without a male escort or dressed inappropriately by

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<sup>75</sup> Martin Patience, “Afghan Women Who Turn to Immolation,” BBC News, March 19, 2009.

<sup>76</sup> “Acid Attack Keeps Afghan Girls Away from School,” MSNBC News, November 14, 2008.

Islamic standards were targeted for acid attacks. Following the fall of the Taliban, they still did everything in their power to prevent the education of women. When they arrived in new towns to set up their headquarters, they started peppering mosques with posters that said, “Do Not Let Your Daughters Go to School.”<sup>77</sup> When that message began to be ignored acid attacks began being directed toward young girls attempting to go to school.

In 2008, many young girls were maimed by passing motorists who threw acid on young girls while they commuted to school. The most heinous attack maimed fifteen young girls from the Mirwais Mena Girl’s School in Kandhar by several men on motorcycles in mid-November 2008.<sup>78</sup> The assailants would slow down their vehicle and ask unsuspecting schoolgirls “Are you going to school?”<sup>79</sup> When the girls positively responded to the question, the unidentified men used water bottles, toy water guns and jars to spray their unsuspecting victims with disfiguring acid. Some of the girls were lucky enough to only have their uniforms sprayed; however, many sustained irreversible injuries to their faces. While the long term effects of this specific attack are yet to be determined, victims of acid throwing suffer from permanent facial scarring, lifelong emotional problems associated with the trauma and sometimes blindness.

Before the attack, attendance at the Mirwais Mena Girl’s School and surrounding educational institutions was perfect for both male and female attendees. However, the day following the acid throwing incident no girl was present at school, which illustrated how effective acid attacks were at preventing young girls from being educated. While the United Nations deemed this specific attack a “hideous crime” it is by no means the only incident of acid throwing in response to the education of women. UNICEF reported that there were 236 school-related in 2007, the majority of which were targeted specifically against women.

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<sup>77</sup> Dexter Filkins, “Afghan Girls, Scarred by Acid, Defy Terror, Embracing School,” *The New York Times*, January 13, 2009.

<sup>78</sup> “Acid Attack Keeps Afghan Girls Away from School.”

<sup>79</sup> Filkins, “Afghan Afghan Girls, Scarred by Acid, Defy Terror, Embracing School.”

Arsonists repeatedly target girl's schools in attempts to permanently shut down the institutions and halt the education of the attending students. According to one student, "Yesterday we didn't go to school. Today we didn't go to school. I don't know about the future."<sup>80</sup> These gender-specific attacks reflect ingrained cultural biases against women, by creating a climate of fear these acid attacks continue to keep women out of school and deprived of education.

### ***Rape***

In the Dasht-i-Qaleh region of Afghanistan, the rape of local women became such a common occurrence that a new moniker was developed in order to better cope with the trauma. "Lying down" is the euphemism that unfortunately has become synonymous with rape and sexual assault.<sup>81</sup> The brutalization endured by the women of Dasht-i-Qaleh is just one small example within a larger pattern of sexual violence. Over the years it has become increasingly apparent that gender based violence is ingrained and even supported within Afghan society. While the rights of women continue to be marginalized, they are at even greater risk to become victims of sexual violence. Even though they are at great risk to be targeted, the conservative nature of Afghan society allows for victims to be stigmatized or even blamed. This becomes a very powerful weapon in the arsenal of the assailant, knowing that crimes against women can be committed without fear of retribution. With that social construct in place, utilizing rape during times of military occupation or conflict can be an incredibly powerful control mechanism when subjugating the enemy. This has allowed for systematic usage of rape during times of conflict as a means of reward, punishment and ethnic cleansing.

One of the biggest catalysts for rape began with the overthrow of the Soviet-backed government by Mujahideen forces in 1992. After ousting the Soviets, the various Mujahideen groups began fighting amongst themselves for control of various cities, districts and provinces.

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Richard Lacayo et al, "About Face," Time, December 3, 2001, 3.



Alliances came and went as various political and ethnic groups attempted to take control of the nation. However, because no all-powerful group emerged to establish a centralized authority lawlessness spread across the country. Unfortunately, utilizing the civilian population to motivate the troops or strike fear in the enemy became part of the standard military procedure. With no governing body to control the warlords and military groups, human rights abuses ran rampant. Unfortunately the women and children became pawns in this military struggle and rape was the ultimate checkmate military forces could wield over civilians and their enemy.

### Reward

In the Shahrara district of Kabul a young widow whose husband recently was killed in a bomb attack left her home to find food for her three young children. Two Mujahideen guards plucked her off the street and brought her to their base outside of Kabul. For three days this young mother was raped by twenty-two different assailants. When she was finally released, she found her three children had died from hypothermia in their beds. The woman has since gone insane and relocated to Peshwar.<sup>82</sup> While this story describes only one woman's story, it does fit into a larger trend of armed guards treating women and children as the spoils of war.

One of the most effective usage's of rape during times of occupation was to use it as a reward mechanism amongst the troops. Women and children were viewed as collateral during battle and as the saying goes "to the victor goes the spoils." This created great incentive for successful military engagements because troops could win local women and children for their own depraved needs after the enemy was conquered. For example, when a territory or town was captured armed guards thought they earned the right enter civilian homes for their own selfish purposes.<sup>83</sup> Many armed political groups took this opportunity to continue to terrorize and humiliate their enemy. If the male heads of household resisted entry, they were killed as

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<sup>82</sup> "Women in Afghanistan: A Human Rights Catastrophe," (London: Amnesty International, May 17, 1995), 16.

<sup>83</sup> "Amnesty International News Service 279/94," (London: Amnesty International, December 12, 1994), 2.

their families watched in horror. The armed guards would then confiscate any property that was deemed to be of value, which included young children that could be sold into prostitution. This left them to attend to the truly valuable assets of the house, the leftover women. After suffering from prolonged beatings, women and children were repeatedly raped; in fact many mothers had to watch as their daughters were raped before their very eyes. This type of scenario became a huge problem for the civilians of Kabul following the fall of the Soviet-government of 1992.<sup>84</sup> Because Kabul is such a desirable and powerful city in Afghanistan, the civilians were constantly being looted and raped by the current victorious warring political faction. In January 1994, General Dostum was slowly gaining control of various blocks in Kabul. A man walking past an apartment complex recently captured by Dostum's forces heard screams coming from within the building. He was told by various neighbors that armed guards had stormed the building to loot the property and rape the women.<sup>85</sup> General Dostum considered both property and women rewards for his hard working troops. This environment caused women and children to live in constant fear of being raped by armed guards for many years. Even after the amount of exhaustive evidence against the Mujahideen, there is not one incident where punishment was administered for acts of sexual violence.<sup>86</sup> With the armed guards of the Mujahideen were immune from prosecution, they continued to terrorize and take local women and children as rewards for their hard work during military engagements.

### Punishment

The utilization of rape as a punishment mechanism proved to be the most diverse and widely used rationale out of any other reasoning for sexual violence in Afghanistan. The reasoning behind using rape as punishment varied according to circumstance, however, the common underlying message was to terrorize or humiliate the enemy into submission.

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> "Women in Afghanistan: A Human Rights Catastrophe," 9.

<sup>86</sup> "Afghanistan: Foreign-Sponsored Human Rights Disaster Ignored by the World," (London: Amnesty International, November 29, 1995), 2.

Educated women or young girls attempting to get educated were huge targets for rape as a means to punish their behavior. In the conservative Afghan society, women were expected to be subservient and remain powerless from the ever-changing whims of their often abusive husbands. Progressive Islamic women represented a direct threat to the status quo of a society built upon the disenfranchisement of the female gender. Once the Mujahideen gained power, it was not unusual for armed guards to storm workplaces or homes where they suspected women of not observing the strict Islamic dress code. Women who worked in high government offices were targeted in these raids and oftentimes they were raped for their modern dress code and educational level.<sup>87</sup> Many Mujahideen believed that women's minds were "poisoned" because of the education they received in the former regime. Educated women were viewed as political enemies that had to be punished for their subversive behavior. Rape was one way to silence what the Mujahideen viewed as a threat to the status quo.

Young girls also attempting to go to school and get educated were punished by armed guards through rape. Educating the next generation of women was almost more perverse in the eyes of the Mujahideen. They could not prevent that the former regime allowed for the education of women and girls, but now that power had changed hands they could absolutely prevent the further "poisoning" of female minds. First armed guards would break into the home of teachers known for educating young girls, then they would beat the educator in question senseless. In some cases the individual in question would be killed in front of his family, a fate a young father of four from Farah was dealt.<sup>88</sup> This was meant to discourage other teachers from continuing the educational process and for young girls to stop attending school out of fear. When young girls continued going to school, they were raped as punishment for their actions. In March of 1994 a fifteen year-old from the Chel Sotoon district learned this lesson

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<sup>87</sup> "Afghanistan: Political Crisis and the Refugees," (London: Amnesty International, August 31, 1993), 4.

<sup>88</sup> "Women in Afghanistan: A Human Rights Catastrophe," 15.

the hard way. Armed guards entered her house at nine o'clock in the evening and killed her shopkeeper father for sending his daughter to school. The young girl was then raped repeatedly by the guards while the body of her dead father lied next to her.<sup>89</sup>

Mujahideen prisons and detention centers were the last outlets for rape with a motive of punishment. After the overthrow of the Soviet government in 1992, several political and ethnic groups were pitted against one another. In order to keep better track of their enemies the Mujahideen set up prisons and detention centers all across Afghanistan. However, many of the inmates filling the cells were arbitrarily detained.<sup>90</sup> It was not unusual for people to be unlawfully detained on the grounds of their political opinion, ethnic group or to be used as hostages in exchange for money. However, while these individuals were detained in prison, they were subjected to gross violations of their human rights and sexual violence. Torture tactics typically were based upon gender. Men reported repeated subjection to electric shock, having their testicles crushed by pliers, being beaten by rifle butts, tied to the decaying bodies of former prisoners and suffocation.<sup>91</sup> However, women and children were routinely raped while in custody. Rape was the most effective way to torture and punish women detainees. The arbitrary rape of women and children was meant to inspire fear in the opposition. These stories of torture and depravity were meant to discourage resistance in the civilian population, for now they knew what horrors awaited them.

### *Ethnic Cleansing*

After the Soviets left Afghanistan, the rival political and ethnic groups were left to fight amongst one another for control of the country. However, it became abundantly clear that the smaller ethnic groups would be targeted for rape. Kabul was where most of the ethnic disputes

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid, 17.

<sup>90</sup> "Afghanistan: The Human Rights Crisis and the Refugees," (London: Amnesty International, February 1, 1995), 5.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

and fights took place, as one of Afghanistan's most powerful cities it became a battleground for the Mujahideen. In Kabul the Pashtuns and Shi'a minorities were targeted

When General Dostum's troops arrived in Kabul in April of 1992, his first action was to beginning raiding the homes of members of the Pashtun community.<sup>92</sup> Despite the fact Pashtuns made up almost half of the population of Kabul, they were still just one ethnic minority in the whole of Afghanistan. During these raids, homes were looted and women were often raped. Men who resisted were killed immediately by armed guards. However, that was just the beginning of the suffering in Kabul. When the raids did not rid Kabul of the Pashtun's, General Dostum's forces began firing rockets from the Chel Sotoon Mountains on known Pashtun residential areas. A woman from the Deh Dana area recalled how after the artillery attack guards swarmed the city looking for Pashtuns, sparing all other ethnic minorities that crossed their paths.<sup>93</sup> Men were killed indiscriminately and women were raped. One young woman was abducted and raped by the armed guards, her body was not found until days later.

Once 1995 arrived, the Pashtuns were done being targeted for raids, rape and murder in Kabul. Unfortunately the Hazara sect of the Shi'a minority began to suffer at the hands of the Mujahideen. In March of 1995 the Hazara minority began to be targeted by President Rabbani's soldiers. Several armed guards are reported as saying, "They wanted to drink the blood of the Hazara." With that mindset, they began exhaustive raids in hundreds of civilian homes in the southwestern section of Karte Seh, Kabul.<sup>94</sup> Throughout these raids, the looted homes, beat or killed entire families and raped scores of Hazara women. Medical workers in the area confirmed at least six incidents of rape and two attempted rapes. However, these were

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<sup>92</sup> "Afghanistan: Political Crisis and the Refugees," 6.

<sup>93</sup> "Afghanistan: International Responsibility for Human Rights Disaster," (London: Amnesty International, November 9, 1995), 26.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

just the reported figures; the amount of women who were violated and refused to come forward due to fear of retribution is much higher.

## ***Conclusion***

### ***Enfranchising Cultures of Violence***

After enduring a brutal rape, a young Afghan woman sought refuge in a local hospital. Unlike many rape victims in the Middle East, she wanted forensic evidence of her attack so she could prosecute her assailant. The hospital staff asked her to remove all of her clothes in a crowded hospital ward, full of men, so they could conduct the “necessary tests.” After the doctors and nurses subjected her to several unnecessary, humiliating and invasive tests they sent her home with an inconclusive diagnosis. The rape victim ended up going home and setting fire to herself.<sup>95</sup> The combined shame of the rape and her treatment in the hospital was too much for this conservative woman to bear. While this is indeed a tragic incident, it does allude to a larger pattern of victimization of rape victims in Iraq and Afghanistan. Instead of being treated as victims of rape, they are often traumatized further and blamed for admitting that a sexual act took place; regardless if the act was consensual or not. In the conservative societies of Iraq and Afghanistan, the dual maintenance of virginity and morality before marriage is the social and legal expectation. The loss of either tenet, regardless of circumstance, can earn a woman swift retribution. As one man who witnessed the rape of a young girl in Afghanistan stated, “What’s the point of investigation? Her life is over.”<sup>96</sup>

In Islamic societies a woman is expected to remain a virgin until she marries, it is her most precious gift that must be maintained at all costs. If she is raped, she has violated the unspoken marital agreement that is expected of her and her marriage prospects evaporate. In rural areas traditional settlements called *baad* exchanges are reached between the families of the affected parties. In this agreement, a woman is given for marriage as retribution or

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<sup>95</sup> “We Have the Promises of the World: Women’s Rights in Afghanistan,” (New York: Human Rights Watch, December 2009), 35.

<sup>96</sup> “Afghanistan: ‘No-One Listens to Us and No-One Treats Us as Human Beings.’ Justice Denied to Women,” 20.

compensation for a crime.<sup>97</sup> Because a young rape victim will no longer have any other marriage prospects, their families coerce her to marry her attacker. However, this has opened a Pandora's Box of problems for young women in the Middle East. If a raped woman has no other marriage prospects but her attacker after she is raped, young men will often purposely rape women in order to ensure they become their wives. According to one observer, "The first thing they do is rape the girl to stop her family seeking justice... When a girl loses her virginity she has no value. Usually, when families find that their girls have been raped by gunmen, they themselves ask them to marry their daughters."<sup>98</sup>

While it may seem perverse that a woman would be forced to marry the man that raped her, oftentimes it is the only option. The legal obstacles presented to rape victims could get them prosecuted themselves for unlawful sexual activity. In Islam, the only way to prove rape in a court of law is to have four male witnesses.<sup>99</sup> The Qur'an (24:13) states, "Why did they not bring four witnesses of it? But as they have not brought witnesses they are liars before Allah."<sup>100</sup> Therefore a woman who alleges rape without the benefit of four male witnesses has subsequently admitted to having to unlawful sexual relations. If the accused happens to be married she has just proven that she committed adultery. Because rape is usually a secretive act committed between two people, it is almost impossible for a woman to produce four male witnesses. Furthermore, if a woman is gang raped, it is highly unlikely her assailants will serve as witnesses to a crime they themselves committed. Rape victims are essentially railroaded by the legal system to prevent testimony. Also, there is a prevailing assumption amongst prosecutors and judges that the female victim is at fault. It widely believed that a rape victim

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<sup>97</sup> "We Have the Promises of the World: Women's Rights in Afghanistan," 40.

<sup>98</sup> "Afghanistan-Abduction and Rape at the Point of a Gun," (London: Amnesty International, November 13, 2004), 1.

<sup>99</sup> "How a Woman Must Prove Rape," *The Religion of Peace: Guide to Understanding Islam*, 2011.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*



behaved in a way that invited the sexual violence, rather than treating the woman in question as a victim.<sup>101</sup>

If a woman cannot successfully overcome all of the legal obstacles to prove she was raped, it is highly likely that rape victims will be prosecuted for unlawful sexual activity. Unfortunately the Penal Code does not criminalize rape. Instead rape is categorized under the broader heading of *zina* offences which also include acts of adultery and extramarital sex.<sup>102</sup> Meaning, rape victims can be prosecuted for committing adultery while their attackers run free, able to victimize more women. Courts regularly view a woman's admission of rape as an admission of unlawful sexual activity, punishable by imprisonment. In fact a 2006-2008 UN study concluded that in 30 of the 34 Afghan provinces that in almost every investigated rape case, the victim was also charged with committing *zina*.<sup>103</sup> This includes a fifteen year-old who was abducted and gang raped by two men, while she was charged for unlawful sexual activity her attackers were released on bail. Rape victims faced with countless legal obstacles in order to prove they were brutalized in a court of law. However, if they cannot meet all the requirements they themselves can continue to be victimized by the legal system under broad umbrella that compasses *zina* crimes.

While being forced to marry a rapist and being imprisoned for rape while your assailant runs free are all gross injustices, they are still not as atrocious as being murdered at the hands of family. A defiled daughter brings shame upon a family name that has been built over the course of several generations. In order to regain the family honor, many rape victims are killed by their own flesh and blood. Families in rural and tribal communities can be ostracized and isolated for acknowledging an unlawful sexual act; rather than experience the shame it is much

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<sup>101</sup> "We Have the Promises of the World: Women's Rights in Afghanistan," 33.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid, 32-33.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid, 33.

easier to kill the victimized woman.<sup>104</sup> Unfortunately acts of this nature are on the rise. In the city of Basra Iraq, religious based killings are up seventy percent from the year prior alone.<sup>105</sup> In 2008, approximately eighty-one women had been killed for “honorable reasons,” only five people were convicted. Women can be killed for an act as innocent as associating with someone their family does not approve. Rand Abdel-Qader was killed by her family for forming a friendship with a twenty-two year old British infantryman named Paul. Rand was suffocated by her father before her hacked her body to pieces with a hunting knife. He boasted after the murder that the local police were congratulating him for killing his daughter.<sup>106</sup> There is little legal recourse for someone who kills for “honorable reasons” for the society at large supports this rationale. It is much easier to dispose of the offending woman in question than deal with the repercussions of being shamed by their surrounding community.

Sexual violence and rape is an omnipresent feature in the lives of Iraqi and Afghan women. Their constant maltreatment and brutalization is endorsed and encouraged by the social, legal and religious institutions that surround them. Due to the fact they have so little rights and standing in the legal system, it is nearly impossible for victimized women to seek justice. Instead, victims of sexual violence can be forced to marry their rapists, imprisoned for admitting to unlawful sexual activity or even killed by their own flesh and blood for disgracing the family name. There is no outlet of safety or support network for these women in which to turn, so the cycle of violence continues to be perpetuated to the next generation. The only way to prevent the further victimization of Iraqi and Afghan women is to raise their status and society. Empowering women through education and legal freedoms will not only enfranchise individuals, but society as a whole. Unless the women of Iraq and Afghanistan are able to

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<sup>104</sup> Vivienne Walt, “Marked Women,” *Time*, July 19, 2004 (2).

<sup>105</sup> Afif Sarhan, “Hitman Charge \$100 a Victim as Basra Honour Killings Rise,” *The Guardian*, November 30, 2008.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*

successfully seek justice for crimes of sexual violence, their degraded status in society will only further strip women of their agency and futures.

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# *Academic Vita*

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### ***Education:***

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The Pennsylvania State University, Summer 2011  
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### ***Relevant Experience:***

Research Assistant  
International Center for the Study of Terrorism  
*Mapping the Trajectories of Military Occupation*  
Dr. Mia Bloom  
Spring 2011

Congressional Intern  
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### ***Organizations and Affiliations:***

Penn State Crew Team  
-Women's Team Captain, Public Relations Chairperson and Hiring Committee

Penn State Lion Scouts  
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### ***Publications:***

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***Awards:***

Mark McGreevy Award

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