

# Social Suffering and Social Healing in Bosnia: A Holistic Study of Rape Warfare<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

*Using the construct of social suffering, we analyze the practice of rape warfare. Material drawn from the Bosnian Civil War of 1992–1995 is featured. Social suffering is shown to bridge three themes essential to the study of this practice—health, human rights, and post-conflict development. The relationship between structural violence, which underpins rape warfare, and social suffering is demonstrated. From our perspective, society as a whole mirrors this suffering even more than do individuals. Social healing is introduced as an alternative kind of treatment paradigm for victims.*

## Introduction

An analysis of the ominous practice of rape warfare is a complex undertaking that transcends various fields and that benefits from the use of a systems approach in order to determine its causes, its social manifestations, and its political ramifications. For the purpose of this article, we selected a comprehensive social construct, namely social suffering, to guide our systems approach to understanding the practice of rape warfare. Indeed, social suffering is a construct that effectively integrates the theoretical and the practical. It bridges three cardinal themes essential to the study of this practice: health, human rights, and post-conflict development. In this article, we present our interpretation of rape warfare during the 1992–1995 Bosnian War as a set of behaviors associated with social suffering. First, we establish what relates the practice of rape warfare to the construct of social suffering. Second, we show how structural violence, which transpires in rape warfare, was a cause of this social suffering in the Bosnian War. Third, we interpret how the individual and, more relevant to our construct, the society mirrors the manifestations of social suffering. The analytic roles played by anthropologists are noted. Fourth, we introduce the concept of social healing as an alternative kind of treatment to overcome the social suffering caused by rape warfare. While intended to contribute to studies conducted on-site, in the field, the article also is intended as a contribution to concept development.

It is crucial to define operationally *social suffering*. Concerned with “the tendency to naturalize suffering on mass scale, or to medicalize

and bureaucratize the response to it” (Janzen 2002:106), anthropologists Arthur Kleinman and Robert Desjarlais coined the complex term social suffering to “show the connection between large-scale suffering and the institutions and power relations that bring about and perpetuate it” (2002:106). Because these institutions and power relations extend across the spectrum of human societies and experiences, Kleinman and Desjarlais agreed that “social suffering results [not only] from what political, economic, and institutional power does to people and, reciprocally, from how these forms of power themselves influence responses to social problems” (Kleinman, Das, and Lock 1997:ix), but also includes “conditions that simultaneously involve health, welfare, legal, moral, and religious issues” (1997:ix). These anthropologists argued that “while the trauma, pain, and disorders to which atrocity gives rise are health conditions, [they emphasize the fact that] they are also political and cultural matters” (1997:ix). Researchers must stress “drawing attention to the social as a possible cause of unnecessary forms of human suffering” (Chuengsatiansup 2001:31). Social suffering thus becomes a social construct that “collapses old dichotomies—for example, those that separate individual from social levels of analysis, health from social problems, representation from experience, suffering from intervention” (1997:x). The features of social suffering outlined in this section comprise the operational definition of this social construct as we apply it in this article.

This brief interpretation of social suffering illustrates why this construct is relevant for an encompassing analysis of rape warfare. Indeed, it

accommodates the anthropologists' ability "to cross the divide separating theoretical, applied, and advocacy anthropology" (Messer 2002:333). It is crucial to establish rape warfare as an example of violence, "a dimension of people's existence, not something external to society and cultures that 'happen[ed]' to people" (Nordstrom 1995:2), in this case during the Bosnian War. Examining the impact of rape warfare through the "interlocking lens" of health, human rights, and post-conflict development, with the support of anthropological findings, attests to the simple idea that "violence is not outside the realm of human society" (Nordstrom 1995:3). It amounts to understanding the political and social issues associated with the practice of rape warfare, as an example of terror warfare and structural violence.

### Relating Rape Warfare to Social Suffering

Rape warfare impacts individuals in the context of society as a whole. The definition of rape warfare, as Beverly Allen phrases it in her pioneering book *Rape Warfare: The Hidden Genocide in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia* (1996), unambiguously links pervasive societal impacts to this practice. Allen refers to rape warfare—or genocidal rape—as

a military policy of rape for the purpose of genocide practiced in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia by members of the Yugoslav Army, the Bosnian Serb forces, Serb militias in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, the irregular Serb forces known as Chetniks, and Serb civilians. Three main forms exist: (1) Irregular forces enter a village, take several women, rape them publicly, and depart, letting terrorizing rumors spread from villages to villages; (2) Concentration camp prisoners are chosen at random to be raped, often as part of torture preceding death; (3) Women are imprisoned in rape/death camps where they are raped systematically over extended periods of time (1996:62).

Even though Allen's definition only mentions the Serbs as the perpetrators of rape warfare, it is important to note that other parties to the conflict, the Muslims (or Bosniacs) and the Croats, also committed horrific atrocities, including

rapes, during the Bosnian War. Similarly, while Allen focuses on the victimization of women, some men also were victims of rape and sexual abuse during the war.

The clearest reflection of social suffering in Allen's definition of rape warfare transpires in her emphasis on the mass and systematic features of the rapes. Considering Allen's definition as well as additional statistics reporting that between 20,000 and 60,000 women were raped and sexually tortured during the Bosnian War (Seifert 2002:284), rape warfare unequivocally represents linked events of mass suffering, as understood in the construct of social suffering. Regarding mass rape from the perspective of large-scale suffering allows us to depart from the dangerously narrow interpretation of "human suffering in terms of personal stake and individual accountability" (Chuengsatiansup 2001:31) and, instead, allows emphasis on the collective dimension of the practice. Following Howard Stein (2004:6), "... mass trauma is often partly the result of the courting, tempting, and provoking of reality. Culture always anticipates and rehearses for later reality, even for reality for which its members consciously feel unprepared." In turn, this collective dimension returns full circle to a cardinal theme pertaining to social suffering, namely to "the often close linkage of personal problems with societal problems" (Kleinman, Das, and Lock 1997:ix). Viewing rape warfare from a social suffering perspective dissuades analysts from regarding rape only as the problem of each victim but rather also as a collective problem of all the victims, comparable to the C.S. Lewis claim that "the Holocaust cannot accurately be described [only] as the suffering of a single Jew repeated six million times" (Morris 1997:38). Clearly, interpreting rape warfare as a *social* rather than *personal* experience affords a gestalt and suggests a fundamental reason as to why it can (and should) be explored as a set of behaviors associated with social suffering.

This approach is supported by the on-site findings of Roy Gutman and others in the Foča area of southeastern Bosnia. As reported in Van Arsdale (2006:76–77), a quasi-formal set of rape camps was established by Serbs midway through the war. The recruitment of victims followed a

set plan. Muslim men would be rounded up and brought in for questioning. This ruse allowed militiamen or paramilitary Chetniks to enter the neighborhoods where the women remained and begin "interrogations." Many of these encounters quickly turned into rape at gunpoint. Over a period of several months, large numbers of Muslim women were taken to the town's Partizan Sports Center; systematized gang rapes occurred there. In the analytic sense, this definitely can be seen as a social/collective experience.

### **Causes of Social Suffering: Rape Warfare and Structural Violence**

Rape warfare is not conceived as a behavior associated with social suffering solely on the grounds that it transcends the individual and the collective. Indeed, rape warfare engages several factors of a specific political nature as these relate to social suffering, namely *structural violence*. We contend that structural violence, which characterized rape warfare in the Bosnian War, is a fundamental cause for the extent of social suffering experienced in Bosnia. Several premises of Paul Farmer's theory of structural violence corroborate this, as summarized by Van Arsdale (2006:6-7, 77).

First, rape warfare in the Bosnian War brings to light an array of differential power relations. These differential power relations emerged in various contexts: in gender relations, chiefly (but not exclusively) in the dominating man—the rapist—versus the dominated woman—the victim; in faith relations, generally in the Orthodox follower versus the Muslim or the Catholic victim; and in ethnic relations often seen in the Serb perpetrator versus the Muslim or Croat victim. The role of differential power relations in the practice of rape warfare unambiguously establishes the reality of rape warfare as an example of structural violence.

Second, the institutionalization of violence, as Peter Van Arsdale studied it on-site, and the related, horrendous instances of human rights violations during the Bosnian War further corroborate the characterization of rape warfare as structural violence, as prescribed in Farmer's theory. Van Arsdale's work (2006) supports the link between rape warfare and structural violence. Atrocities occurring at the Omarska and

Foča concentration camps reflect underlying structural violence and manifest in spectacular violence. The existence of a quasi-formal set of rape camps like that at Foča corroborates the highly organized and institutionalized features of rape warfare. Moreover, the rape camps also clearly show that "it was not rape out of control; it is rape under specific orders" (MacKinnon 1994a:190). Spectacular violence in the form of rape warfare served as a means to perpetrate the underlying structural violence that was manifest as institutionalized tensions and oppressions related to the multi-ethnic Bosnian society and the Bosnian War emerged.

Following Farmer, the practice of rape warfare produces social injustice and thereby social suffering. Indeed, in his *On Suffering and Structural Violence* (1997), Farmer establishes a close tie between structural violence and social suffering in that structural violence incarnates behaviors that lead to overt suffering. These acts have ominous consequences. Adherents to Farmer's theory would thus argue that the differential power relations and the institutionalization of the rapes during the war clearly "were not the result of accident or of force majeure; they were the consequence, direct or indirect, of human agency" (Farmer 1997:271) associated with key social attributes, including gender, faith, and ethnicity, that were, all tragically, "structured risks for forms of extreme suffering" (Farmer 1997:262).

### **The Ramifications of Rape Warfare as Manifestations of Social Suffering**

Identifying rape warfare as an example of structural violence and structural violence as the underlying cause for the overwhelming suffering seen in the Bosnian War amounts to only part of our interpretation of rape warfare as a behavior contributing to social suffering. The second part of our interpretation calls for exploring the various ramifications of rape warfare in terms of social suffering. Building on the earlier words of Kleinman, Das, and Lock, in the context of social suffering, the trauma, pain, and disorders to which atrocities such as rape warfare give rise are not only *health conditions* but also *political, social, and cultural matters* (1997:ix). Thus, our analysis of the ramifications of rape warfare as a

manifestation of social suffering takes into account the effects of such an atrocity on the health of individuals, and therefore collectively on the well-being of the society as a whole.

### Health Ramifications

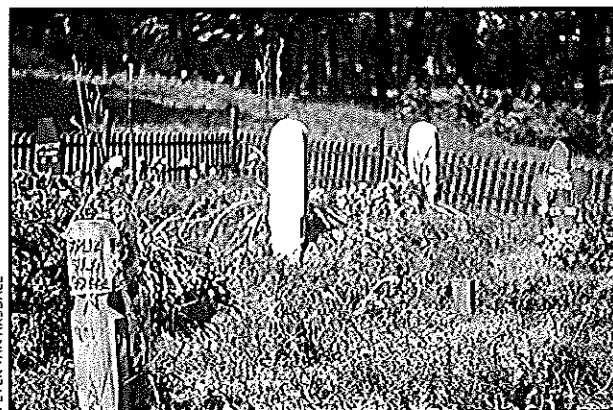
Because health is defined as a combination of the overall psychological, physiological, and social conditions of a being in a certain environment, interpreting the consequences of rape warfare on the health of an individual cannot be dissociated from the individual's social environment. In the rather narrow Western medical sense, victims of rape during the Bosnian War have almost automatically been diagnosed with acute stress disorder (ASD) and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Evident symptoms of ASD and PTSD which lead to such (at times) hasty diagnoses included:

various forms of re-experiencing the trauma (like flashbacks and nightmares); various forms of avoidance, detachment, memory loss, psychic and emotional numbing and behavioral changes; and manifestations of increased arousal of the autonomic nervous system; [...]; anxiety, depression, dissociative phenomena, personality changes, self-destructive behavior, guilt, complicity, anger and fantasies of revenge and retaliation (Buus Jensen 2002:302).

This array of symptoms diagnosed for the victims of rape warfare in the Bosnian War, as established by Western medical experts, hardly differ from the symptoms diagnosed for any other adult victims of rape. When Barbara Gilbert summarizes the symptoms diagnosed for "everyday" adult victims of rape in her short essay "Treatment of Adult Victims of Rape," she, too, simply suggests that "the damage of sexual assault can be extensive, involving the victim's physical, emotional, cognitive, relational, sexual, and spiritual satisfaction or functioning" (1994:67). Those traditional diagnoses, while useful to a point, do not appropriately contextualize the problem.

The symptomatology must be expanded, with the structural features of the society taken more clearly into account. This fundamentally changes the manifestations of the symptoms as

well as of the suffering. By contrast to "everyday" victims of sexual violence, victims of rape warfare in the Bosnian War suffered tremendously from *traumatic events* and *stress factors* uniquely linked to the war environment of the 1990s. For example, some rapes at Foča were committed in public. Mass rapes, gang rapes, ethnic cleansing, torture, internment and related means of expressing xenophobia, nationalism, misogyny, and political oppression all fall into the various types of traumatic events outlined in Soren Buss Jensen's "Front Lines of Mental Health under War Conditions" (2002:296). These traumatic events, even though they undeniably caused profound trauma on individual target objects, also generated a social trauma impacting an entire section of the population and clearly reflecting social suffering, viewed collectively.



Nearly 13,000 people were killed or died under duress in the Bosnian capital, Sarajevo, during the course of the 1992–1995 civil war. Cemeteries became so crowded that the graves of recent victims (marked with wooden plaques) had to be placed between those of residents (marked with marble plaques) who had died before.

Moreover, victims of rape warfare were exposed to additional stress factors which do not generally apply to "everyday" rape victims and which transform the individual experience into social suffering. In the aforementioned essay, Buss Jensen also describes four specific stress factors that contributed to the development of PTSD syndromes in victims of rape warfare in Bosnia:

- Threat or injury to self, personality, identity, physical integrity or health;
- Threat or injury to others that is witnessed directly or indirectly;
- Threat or injury to the built or modified environment;

- Threat or traumatic bereavement/loss or injury to personal relationships, attachments and social networks of personal significance (2002:297).

While the first denotes an individual form of suffering, the other three of the stress-factor types illuminate how the suffering of the self is closely associated with suffering in the victim's social surrounding. It is contextualized. Traumatic events and contextualized stress factors highlight the profound distinction between "everyday" victims of rape and victims of rape warfare. In the latter case, individual suffering with ASD or PTSD easily translates into social suffering when structural violence, in the form of rape warfare, is the cause of this suffering. Social suffering thus has an established cultural context.

The treatment of victims of rape warfare also fundamentally differs from that of "everyday" rape victims as soon as it is put into a cultural context. As Barbara Gilbert suggests, "several models successful in the general treatment of trauma are applicable for work with adult survivors of rape" (Gilbert 1994:73). She mentions "focus on anxiety management during exposure to the traumatic memory" as well as "focus on release of emotion connected with the trauma and articulation of the meaning of trauma" (1994:73). She stresses practice of supportive treatments which "focus on providing a nurturing, safe relationship, which is believed to facilitate the naturally emerging processes of healing" (1994:73). This approach is utilized in the holistic treatment offered to survivors of war trauma by the Rocky Mountain Survivors Center, co-founded in Denver, Colorado, by Peter Van Arsdale and Dennis Kennedy. A medical anthropologist who adheres to social suffering as a social construct would, however, argue that this approach needs to be modified or adjusted, depending on the specific circumstances confronting each Bosnian rape victim.

Some victims of rape from the Bosnian War have expressed their need for an essentially different approach than Gilbert's suggested treatment of PTSD. In the course of an interview Laure Almairac conducted with a prominent scholar of rape warfare, the interviewee (who, in this context, must remain anonymous) stressed that

in the tradition of the Bosnian Muslims, silence rather than a physical or psychological interventionist treatment can be more effective in the healing process of a PTSD patient. Thus, many women who had been raped in the context of systemic rape events during the war and who consequently suffered from various PTSD syndromes found a healing solace in silence rather than in reviving the horrors of rape in the course of receiving an interventionist treatment (Almairac 2006:2).

Gilbert's suggested treatment (1994), which urges reanimating the memory of the trauma or seeking its meaning, would contravene what these women might best need. David Morris says in his "About Suffering: Voice, Genre, and Moral Community," that

suffering is voiceless in the metaphorical sense that silence becomes a sign of something ultimately unknowable. It implies an experience not just disturbing or repugnant but inaccessible to understanding (Morris 1997:27).

And Howard Stein (2004:3) stresses that "even trauma-language can be a flight from what occurred and continues to occur." In the Bosnian tradition, the events of rape warfare were as disturbing and repugnant as they were inaccessible to understanding. Or, as the interviewee put it, they were an anomaly (Almairac 2006:8). Yet, they become institutionalized and pervasive. The opening scene of the harrowing documentary on concentration camps in the Bosnian War, *Calling the Ghosts* (Jacobsen and Jelincic 1996), quotes Jadranka Cigelj, a victim of rape warfare, as she attempts to articulate the very dilemma of silence that many other victims also experienced as a symptom of PTSD:

There was a period of self-questioning before me. To stay silent or to speak? If I stay silent, how moral would that be? If I speak, how good is that for me? I would actually have to expose myself.

Thus, some victims may not need to reanimate their suffering, and silence may be the ultimate healing process conceivable for these women.

Peter Van Arsdale also was told this during the course of fieldwork conducted in Bosnia in the late 1990s.

The phenomenon of culture-bound syndrome, articulated by John Janzen as "the notion that affliction syndromes and treatments may be specific to a given cultural setting" (2002:40), supports the suggestion that silence may serve as a valid process of healing for some Bosnian women. We contend that institutionalized structural violence in Bosnia created a possible culture-bound syndrome of suffering, and that for some victims it is best dealt with in silence. For others, more traditional talk therapy is appropriate. Whichever form of therapy is advocated, it is crucial to interpret this kind of social suffering with cross-cultural sensitivity, while being wary not to get caught up in excessive medicalization (Janzen 2002:212). Social suffering is much more than a medical issue.

Differing from Gilbert's and Janzen's respective interpretations of health, Doug Henry, in his forthcoming article "Violence and the Body: Somatic Expressions of Trauma and Vulnerability During War," introduces another interpretation strongly corroborated by medical anthropology. Henry suggests that

idioms of power and terror attempt to transform individual bodies into political ones, using individuals as symbolic ways to express structural domination through tortures, interrogation, dismemberment, rape or scarification (Henry in press).

Henry's suggestion can be applied to the case of rape warfare in the Bosnian War. Powerful Serb forces, at times aided by Chetnik proxies, carried out a policy of rape warfare which harmed the psychological and physiological health of tens of thousands of terrorized individuals in order to symbolically taint Muslim Bosnia's societal and political well-being. Raping the body of one was a rape of the collective body of all. It was a rape of society; of course, of the women; but also of the men who had to witness the rape of their wives, sisters, and daughters; and of the children who were conceived during the rapes. Indeed, harming the body goes far beyond injuring limbs and flesh. Henry informs us

the body plays such a key role in the creative processes that shape culture and experience [that it is crucial] to understand the multiplicities of ways in which people interact with attacks to their personhood, family, community, and existence (Henry in press).

It is essential for the perpetrators to establish a link between raping a woman and terrorizing society, thus causing both individual suffering and overarching social suffering. The last scene of the aforementioned film *Calling the Ghosts* illustrates this link with the following quote:

Destroying a woman is destroying the essence of nation. When they were raping older women, they were raping history. When they were raping younger women, they were destroying future generations (Jacobsen and Jelincic 1996).

### Human Rights Ramifications

Addressing the political, social, and cultural aspects of social suffering holistically is essential to understanding the ramifications of rape warfare as a manifestation of social suffering and to eschewing the danger of excessive medicalization. A meaningful and encompassing way to describe these ramifications of rape warfare in the context of social suffering is in terms of human rights violations. In his theory of structural violence, Farmer (1997) proffers that structural inequalities foment human rights violations. Analogously, rape warfare, as an example of structural violence, represents a horrendous array of human rights violations. Because "human rights are a social practice" (Donnelly 2003:204), states that violate their citizens' human rights inevitably cause social suffering. This is precisely what happened in the Bosnian War, as rape became an implicit weapon used by one faction of the state against its citizens' rights. An analysis of which human rights were infringed shows how these violations, occurring at the individual level and mirrored at the group level, reflect the basic premise of the construct of social suffering. The result is that "pain and trauma can be both local and global ... [and] at the same time individual and collective" (Kleinman, Das, and Lock 1997:x).

Anthropologist Janet Chernela (2006) advocates this type of documentary-analytic approach. First and foremost, rape warfare in Bosnia was a violation of Article II of the 1948 UN Convention of the Prevention of the Crime of Genocide. This Article states that:

In the present Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: (a) Killing members of the group; (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group (Brownlie and Goodwin-Gill 2002:108).

The perpetrators of rape warfare in Bosnia, primarily Serbs, used the following methods with the intent to cleanse the region of non-Serb populations: rape camps, forced pregnancies, individual killings, and massacres. All contributed to violating Article II of the Genocide Convention. Catherine MacKinnon reports in her *Turning Rape into Pornography: Postmodern Genocide* that

the world has never seen sex used this consciously, this cynically, this elaborately, this openly, this systematically, with this degree of technological and psychological sophistication, as a means of destroying a whole people (MacKinnon 1994b:75).

The violating of one individual's basic human right to bodily integrity, in the practice of rape warfare, became a tool to practice ethnic cleansing, an ultimate *violation of group rights*. Thus, this violation establishes a link between the individual and the collective suggested by the construct social suffering.

Our second point in the documentary-analytical approach is that rape warfare in Bosnia transgressed the Declaration on the Protection of All Persons from Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment of 1975. It also transgressed its sequel, the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel,

Inhuman, Degrading Treatment or Punishment of 1984. According to Lisa Kois, "there can be no question that rape by a state actor or agent is torture; state-sponsored rape unequivocally conforms to the Torture Convention's definition" (1998:94). Beverly Allen seemingly supports Kois' affirmation. In her encounters with many victims of rape warfare, Allen has gathered enough testimonies to establish a tangible link between rape warfare and torture. She even recounts how

male and female adults and children [were] raped as part of more extensive torture [but that] torture [was also] conducted with instruments. These include[d] commonly available objects such as wire, scissors, saws ... household appliances, such as irons, curling irons, and electrical wires used to inflict burns and electric shock. By far the most common instrument of torture, however, [was] the knife (Allen 1996:79).

The presence of wounds on the bodies of the Bosnian victims and in particular on the genitalia and on the reproductive organs provides evidence for the link between rape, sexual violence, and torture. Once again, this violation of yet another norm of international law relates to social suffering in that

torture [can be conceptualized] as a sophisticated institution that targets and undermines the individual as well as social structures through a systematic and deliberate campaign (Kois 1998:88). ... Long after arms have been set aside and peace accords signed, the consequences of these attempts to destroy the community reverberate throughout the community (Kois 1998:96).

The institutionalization of rape warfare and its ramifications in terms of *torture* thus directly mirror manifestations of social suffering.

Third, rape warfare in Bosnia infringes upon women's rights. In her powerful essay "Rape, Genocide, and Women's Human Rights," Catharine MacKinnon argues that

the sexual atrocities [of the Bosnian War] have been discussed largely as rape *or* genocide, not as what they are, which is rape as genocide, rape directed towards women

because they are Muslim or Croatian (2001:532).

As we contend, if rape warfare is indeed regarded as rape as genocide, then a gender-based dimension is added to the conceptualization of this practice. Although men, too, were sexually abused in the war, it was predominantly women whose basic rights were violated by rape warfare. Susan Brownmiller (1993) in her "Making Female Bodies the Battlefield," further interprets how women's rights are violated in rape warfare when she states that

rape of an object doubly dehumanized—as woman, as enemy—carries its own terrible logic. In one act of aggression, the collective spirit of women *and* of the nation is broken, leaving a reminder long after the troops depart. And if she survives the assault, what does the victim of wartime rape become to her people? Evidence of the enemy's bestiality. Symbol of her nation's defeat. A pariah. Damaged property (1993:181).

The integrity of a woman is violated time and again to the point that it destroys her own life of dignity and flourishing, the latter two terms reflecting what our colleague Jack Donnelly (2003) sees as the fundamental function of human rights. Brownmiller's explanation thus unambiguously speaks for the *violations of women's rights* caused by rape warfare transcending individual rights and entering the realm of collective rights, yet another manifestation of social suffering.

Anthropologists have argued that interpreting the ramifications of rape warfare as human rights violations from a mere legal perspective is narrowly incomplete. It is true that rape warfare violates a myriad of fundamental human rights, whether outlined according to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights or to the first and third generations of human rights discussed by Ellen Messer (2002). Even though it is further true that "human rights are designed to promote agency and protection of the body" (Merry 2006a:4), such a legal perspective does not fully allow an understanding of the practice in the context of social suffering. Indeed, as Messer explains, "in practical terms, human-rights

[analytic] activities of anthropologists build on, and are consistent with international principles, but not limited by them" (2002:333). Instead, anthropologists attempt to bring about an analysis of human rights rhetoric

that penetrates local parlance and governance and informs advocacy, social organization, and practice ... [as well as providing an] historical and cultural analysis of the conditions under which particular rights or responsibilities and notions of the community deserving rights or assuming accountability expand or contract (Messer 1993:241).

While still emergent, we contend that the anthropological approach to understanding human rights abuse powerfully translates in the case of rape warfare. It strengthens the argument that rights violations are analogous or reflective of social suffering. Indeed, while the legal perspective emphasizes the harm that is done to the individual, the anthropological viewpoint emphasizes the need to translate human rights ideas into local terms and to situate them within local contexts of power and meaning in order for them to be effective in changing lives (Merry 2006b:1). Analyzing the context in which rape warfare was practiced in Bosnia leads to the conclusion that the ramifications of such horrendous rights violations and the associated suffering reaches beyond the individual and spreads across the societal.

## Social Healing

In this section, we advocate a healing process aimed at overcoming social suffering in a post-conflict society like Bosnia. We suggest referring to this process as *social healing*. Just as suffering reverberates not only on the health of the individual but on society as a whole, a coming to terms with suffering should occur at both the individual and societal levels. Understanding and encouraging the process of social healing in a post-conflict environment is essential:

Though the survivors are very much individuals, the loss of moral order does not generally refer to psychological states writ large—as in discussions of frightened or traumatized populations, which are merely



aggregates of individuals [but rather] it refers to things that make sense at the societal level (Desjarlais 1994:10).

Our concept of social healing presses, in particular, for structural changes at the societal level. One such needed change is the *collective empowerment* of the victims. As Komatra Chuengsatiansup explains it, "the lived experience of suffering can attain a collective dimension and therefore be politically significant in forging the politics of empowerment" (2001:32). Building on Howard Stein (2004:2), such empowerment envisions an understanding of cultural boundaries: "... their permeability, their violation, their collapse, their reaffirmation ..." encourages the kind of structural change that will collectively empower yesteryear's victimized group. However, it is no easy task because "it inevitably runs the risk of individualizing 'social suffering' and resting the burden of solving the problems of suffering on the more docile bodies of individual victims" (Chuengsatiansup 2001:32). The healing process in post-conflict Bosnia must therefore unfold beyond the healing of individuals' psychological and physiological traumas. It must build upon the work of those organizations such as World Vision and Wings of Hope, which are contributing to the rebuilding of civil society, or of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which would be focused on the traumatic experience of survivors, including of rape warfare victims.

Collective empowerment as a recipe for social healing can come about in the form of *capacity enhancement*. Specific examples featuring the accomplishments of Bosnian women have been presented by Swanee Hunt (2004). Denis Goulet (cited in Thomas-Slayter 2003:12-13) proposes that capacity enhancement takes place by improving the life sustenance, self-esteem, and freedom of the victims. Goulet's three premises apply well to the Bosnian victims of rape warfare. Improving life sustenance could be supported by facilitative development schemes in which change agents facilitate indigenous opportunities, for example micro-credit projects or rural mixed strategy socio-economic projects, such as providing goats or chickens as long-term sources of revenues, as Peter Van Arsdale studied in Bosnia in 2004.

Raising self-esteem, a critical issue for victims of rape, could readily be supported within the society. Traditional Bosnian society, while patriarchal, has always been very respectful to women, and this tradition should by all means be pursued by groups such as Žena Ženama (Women for Women).

Improving the freedom of the victims (admittedly a noble yet nebulous good) could occur by promoting these victimized women to selected positions in the society such as university professors and NGO directors—professions that afford them a voice to express, share, and communicate issues in public circles. This would be a key step to escaping from the "unfreedom" that oppressed these women during the war. As Janet Chernela stresses, anthropologists participate in rescuing victims from "unfreedom" in that, by "work[ing] with local communities, they [can] contribute to expanding participation as well as to innovative means of extending inclusiveness" (2006:7).

These three premises of capacity building apply to the individual in the context of society as a whole. They reflect a psycho-social dynamic, which complements Barbara Thomas-Slayter's socio-economic perspectives on post-conflict development (2003). For instance, sustainable livelihood development featuring micro-credit activity run by women is also at the heart of capacity building. Such development can thus be seen as a mirror image for the psycho-social process of social healing. Socio-economic successes can promote healing, as a female respondent in rural Bosnia reported to Laure Almairac.

Collective empowerment and capacity enhancement should go hand-in-hand. Ideally, this would lead to an admirable exception to Paul Farmer and Carolyn Nordstrom's forecast that in post-conflict societies, a general worldview of pessimism and violence carries on for generations beyond the immediate time of spectacular violence. According to the interview data that Laure Almairac collected, the current post-conflict feminist civil society in Bosnia reveals hints of such strength and optimism and gives hope that the social healing process in post-conflict Bosnia is beginning to take place.

## Conclusions

Rape warfare has been analyzed from a variety of perspectives by a variety of authors, some more fully encompassing than others. We have chosen to interpret rape warfare as a set of behaviors associated with social suffering in order to bridge the most salient features of this atrocious practice, namely its impact on health, human rights, and post-conflict development in Bosnia. By showing social suffering as a construct central to the understanding of rape warfare, we have sought to illustrate some of the underlying causes, manifestations, and ramifications of this practice, while calling for an alternative process of healing, namely social healing. In this regard, social healing is presented as much more than traditional psycho-therapy, but potentially encompassing of it. It also is encompassing of silence.

An award-winning film about Bosnian victims of rape is proving to be a big hit among Bosnians of all ethnicities. Entitled *Grbavica*, Jasmila Zbanic (2006) directed it featuring the plight of Muslims raped by Serbs. As of April 2006, the commercial home version was the biggest-selling disc in the city of Banja Luka, a traditional Serbian stronghold, which indicates openness to cross-ethnic reconciliation and restoration.

Finally, the concept of victimization must be addressed. In the course of this article, we have repeatedly alluded to the thousands of individuals who suffered rape warfare as *victims*: The differential power relations proper to structural violence clearly distinguished the *victims* from the perpetrators; the health ramifications embodied the *victimization* of the physiological and psychological well-being; the human rights violations created *victims* of abuses; and the post-conflict development was designed to empower yesteryear's *victims*. Social suffering, then, might seem to impose the status of victim on the estimated 20,000 or more Bosnian women who experienced the horrors of rape warfare. In and of itself, suffering is linked to a negative, distressing, and painful experience, which initially can be translated as victimhood. However, it is vital to recognize that each living victim is also a survivor. Our notion of social suffering

mandates a return to hope by qualifying victims as survivors and by understanding the role this dichotomy can have on the very process of healing.

Even though the victimization of Bosnian women and, thereby of the Bosnian society, was the focus of this particular article, it is crucial to remember that countless other events of rape warfare have been recorded throughout the world (Van Arsdale 2006). Interpreting this practice in terms of suffering as a social construct bridging health, human rights, and post-conflict development applies far beyond the borders of Bosnia. The estimated 20,000 women who were raped in Nanking in 1937, the 120,000 in Berlin in 1945, the 200,000 in Bangladesh in 1971, and the 5,000 in Kuwait in the early 1990s all represented the devastating manifestations of social suffering as ramifications of rape warfare. There is no chance for a far-reaching social policy change in a country such as Bosnia as long as rape warfare is presumed "a mere aggressive manifestation of sexuality, as opposed to a sexual manifestation of aggression" (Seifert 1994:55). This situation remains true, too, as long as it is not considered a societal problem that causes social suffering and requires social healing. We believe that anthropologists can contribute by bringing forth the courageous and unfaltering voices of key women who can speak up for the thousands of victims of rape warfare, and for the advocates who work for survivors of social suffering. ○

## Notes

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