

How Rape Destroys

A Look into the Darfuri Genocide

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Author Note

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For eighteen-year-old Darelsalam Ahmed Eisa, going to fetch water for her family is about much more than just quenching thirst. Each journey brings back painful memories to her mind. “Slave woman! Slave woman! Slave woman!” she hears him scream as he lifts up her dress and forces himself inside her. Every morning, she must relive her rape, and she must do so with the fortitude of a castle wall. In Darfur, the decision comes down to this— risk the man’s life or sacrifice the woman’s right to safety and mental health. Eisa explained, “It is better for me to be raped than for my brother to be killed” (Timberg, 2006). President Omar al-Bashir’s National Congress Party has a mission: to destroy the “black” farmers inhabiting the country’s western region of Darfur. The reason I use quotation marks around the black farmers is because from a westerner’s view, all of the Sudanese people have dark complexions (Wax, 2006). In order to avoid confusion from this point forward I will refer to the suppressed black Africans as simply “African” and their oppressors as “Arab.” I would like to explore why rape is used as a genocidal weapon and how it deteriorates society in Darfur. More than 300,000 people have died and another 2.7 million people have been displaced from their homes in Darfur since 2003 due to persecution by al-Bashir and the National Congress Party (Miller, 2009). One of the main means to ethnic destruction used in Darfur is the raping of women. Many sources believe that al-Bashir has instructed his militiamen to mass-rape the women of Darfur (Straus, 2005). Statistics suggest that over 10,000 woman and girls have been raped in Darfur, each year, since 2003. However, rape statistics are difficult to gather in Darfur due to low report rates and tampering by the government (Miller, 2009).

In order to explain how and why rape is used as a genocidal weapon, I will appeal to multiple processes; physical and mental aspects of mass rape will be detailed in this work. I will document how the government suppresses and manipulates cultural models in order to maximize fear amongst the people. I will refer to Miller's (2009) theory on rape and its ability to inflict moral injury and its ability to play into the motivations of the oppressing government. For the people of Darfur, rape evokes even worse representations than those stereotypical characteristics of the Western world. For women here, being raped often means the complete abandonment by family and friends. This act, therefore, effectively unravels the fabric of society, especially when the rape happens in the public forum, as is often the case (van Zeijl, 2007). Through this process, along with mass killing and other atrocities, the National Congress Party hopes to instill lasting fear and self-loathing amongst the Darfuri people to ensure that they never plan to revolt again.

History – What Led to Today's Darfur

According to Scott Straus (2005), the conflict in Darfur arose from the political and economic suppression of African farmers by Omar al-Bashir's Arab government. The Arab people of the region are typically livestock herders and the African people tend to be farmers. This arrangement has meant that the two groups have traditionally had to share resources. Moreover, since the mid-1980s, a series of droughts in the region have increased tensions between the peoples. The government's response was to "support and arm" the Arab livestock herders while neglecting the African farmers. This led to the forming of Arab militias that proceeded to burn the villages of their African neighbors, killing thousands in the process. In response, the African population formed self-defense groups to fight back. The government and President Omar al-Bashir responded by further arming militia forces with the mission to

“eliminate the rebellion” of the African defense groups. This has led to a “campaign of violence” where Arab militiamen, called the Janjaweed, along with Sudanese soldiers began attacking not only “rebels” but also ordinary citizens, en masse. The mission to eradicate the rebellion has led to the attempt to destroy the African people in Sudan’s western region of Darfur, both, physically and mentally. The plan in Khartoum, home to Sudan’s central government, is to impose their domination on rebels and anyone who may, in any way, associate with them. The desired outcome of this attack would be to halt the current rebellion while simultaneously eliminating any future ideas of uprising against al-Bashir’s Government.

Physical Effects of Genocidal Rape

The wide-scale rape of African women inflicts a variety of physical destructions. The act of rape itself is the revocation of a woman’s ability to control her body in space (Miller, 2009). Her attacker decides every virulent move for her. After the rape is finished, she is still hampered in the way that she moves in space due to intentional mutilations as well as mental handicaps. The African women are subject to beatings by weapons including whips, sticks, and axes (Miller, 2009). Women are often times made into sexual slaves for the Arab militiamen. Arms and legs of girls as young as eight years old are broken in order to ensure that the slaves cannot leave (Bryjac, 2009). The militiamen’s penises, bottles, sticks, and bayonets penetrate these girls and women. Furthermore, some women are shot directly in the vagina in order to ensure loss of reproductive function (Corcoran, 2008). The most common result of this mutilation is an injury known as gynecological fistula, a condition marked by the damaging of the wall between the vagina and bladder or bowel. This condition is largely unknown in the western world and leaves the women susceptible for infection (Corcoran, 2008). The spread of STDs is also increased through mass unprotected rape (Bryjac, 2009). Also, Janjaweed militiamen generally leave a

visible scar on their victims to remind them and those around them of their tragedy. The use of marks lends evidence that this act of rape is part of a systematic attempt to destroy an ethnicity both mentally and physically. Omar al-Bashir and his men want to ensure that the African Darfuri people will never forget their wrath.

Another physical effect brought on by mass-rape is wide-scale pregnancy of the enemy's children. This increase in Arab children being born to African mother's means their ability to recreate their own ethnicity is compromised (Ghiglieri). This is not a side effect unbeknownst to the National Congress Party and the Janjaweed. The Janjaweed often inform their African victims that they are being raped so the Arab people who will wipe out the African tribes can inhabit the land (Corcoran, 2008). Furthermore, a law stating that abortion is only legal to save the life of a woman makes abortion impossible — forcing the woman to be reminded of her tragedy in a gut-wrenching fashion. Aisha Adam, a Darfuri rape survivor tells her story: "They left me without my clothing by the dry riverbed. I had to walk back naked. They said, 'You slave. This is not your area. I will make an Arab baby who can have this land.'" Often times this creates a situation where the women have little affection for their children before they are even born. A woman in Rwanda who suffered pregnancy from rape had this to say of her son, "I never loved this child. Whenever I remember what his father did to me, I used to feel the only revenge would be to kill his son. But I did not" (Bryjac, 2009).

One can see how this aids al-Bashir's mission to erase the African Darfuri people from existence. For one, the African lineage is literally being infiltrated by Arab genetics. More importantly, it creates a situation where a new generation of people is being born into a world where they are universally disowned. Their mothers don't want them, their society rejects them, and the Janjaweed still wishes them harm, since they were raised in African tribes. This

destruction, at the lowest level, profoundly aids the Arab mission. In a quest to eradicate a society, creating children rejected by that society is an important phenomenon to understand.

Mental Effects of Genocidal Rape

The mental ramifications of rape are plentiful and severely detrimental. This mental destruction is multiplied when speaking of mass genocidal rape. The most common disorder brought on is Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The symptoms of PTSD vary between cultural groups as well as individuals but generally include— painful flashbacks and intrusive thoughts, avoidance of stimuli reminding one of their attacks, as well as increased arousal of the sympathetic nervous system, which leads to sleep disturbances and increased fears (McCullough, 2004). Hawa, an eighteen-year-old Darfuri rape victim, describes her symptoms of PTSD. Alone, one night, in her cabin she hears gunshots. “I hide under my bed until it’s all over,” Hawa explained. “Those moments remind me of the last night in my village.” The night Hawa is referring to is the night she was brutally raped by two Janjaweed militiamen (van Zeijl, 2007). Anxiety, depression, and withdrawal from relationships and society are common effects of rape (Miller, 2009). In the context of genocidal rape, it is sometimes unnecessary for a woman to have actually been raped for her to feel some of the effects felt by her raped peers (Bryjac, 2009). This effect is essential to al-Bashir’s strategy of ethnic destruction. The rape, and threat of rape, is cause for wide-scale fear and anxiety among the African people. In this way, it is not necessary for the Janjaweed to destroy each individual woman. The large-scale rape effectively alters the way each African woman thinks about her safety, her family, and her future. Peace of mind is all but impossible in this pillaged land: proving rape is a useful tool in the context of war.

Moral Injury

Miller (2009) proposed the theory of moral injury to describe how rape can affect a victim, and in the case of genocidal rape, a society. Moral injury is described as severe and often irreparable damage done to a person's dignity. To inflict moral injury is to literally compromise their value in the eyes of their peers and through this means, themselves. This injury is felt physically, mentally, and emotionally and leaves one nearly useless. Rape effectively enacts moral injury. The act of rape literally strips a woman of her right to make decisions about how her body will act in space. The decision about what to do with her body is left to the perpetrator, and his choice is a harmful one. His temporary domination robs the woman of her liberty during the act of rape, and in the aftermath (Miller, 2009). Once the act is finished, the woman must still deal with the potential consequences of STDs and/or pregnancy. If she somehow escapes the peril of STDs and rape-babies, then she must struggle with the mental destruction brought on by rape.

Intense fear and stress will assuredly result, and in fact will often appear from the threat of rape alone. If women are aware that their peers are being raped they are also subject to many of the psychological problems that the raped victims deal with. Ideas with regard to future life plans, safety, and access to resources are all compromised by genocidal rape. However, arguably the most destructive aspect brought on by rape is the obliteration of one's perceived value, both by themselves and by their community. The question, "Did I do everything in my power to stop my attacker?" forces the victim to feel both powerless and somehow responsible for what has been done to them. Sussman (cited in Miller, 2009) illustrated this idea with his comment on how torture "involves a deliberate perversion of [dignity], turning our dignity against itself in a way that must be especially offensive to any morality that fundamentally honors it." When

considering this aspect, the motivation for genocidal rape becomes clearer. The act of rape turns the woman, the gender generally responsible for cultural transmission, against herself (Rossi, 1993). She is no longer of equal moral value in her own eyes, let alone in the eyes of her community. Thus, in destroying her dignity, the Janjaweed are in turn hampering her ability to effectively enculturate a new generation. Furthermore, the perpetrators go to great lengths to ensure that the women will never forget the unforgettable. In all cases, I've found that the men yell degrading slogans at their victims during the act such as "black dog," "gorilla," and "slave woman" (Miller, 2009). These expressions resonate in the woman's mind for indefinite lengths of time. Also, the men generally leave noticeable scars on the woman's face and genitals. Through this, the woman and her community are forever reminded that she was a victim of rape.

Manipulating Cultural Models

In Sudan, rape is an enormous taboo and leads to the women being ostracized and blamed (van Zeijl, 2007). In most cases, the woman will never speak of the attack for fear of punishment. A dominant myth of Sudan is that it is impossible for a woman to be impregnated by rape. There are many cases where raped women have been incarcerated for committing adultery. An investigation by the United Nations concluded, "A major obstacle to establishing accountability for sexual violence is the insensitive and often intimidating treatment of sexual violence by authorities" (van Ziejl, 2007). Furthermore, a husband shuns his wife because of the humiliation she has caused him. The woman is left to fend for herself in the truest sense of the statement. Her society no longer accepts her as one of their own. Sometimes the women are forced to live in a hut by themselves, and this ensures that interaction with society will not happen in any sort of normal manner (van Zeijl, 2007).

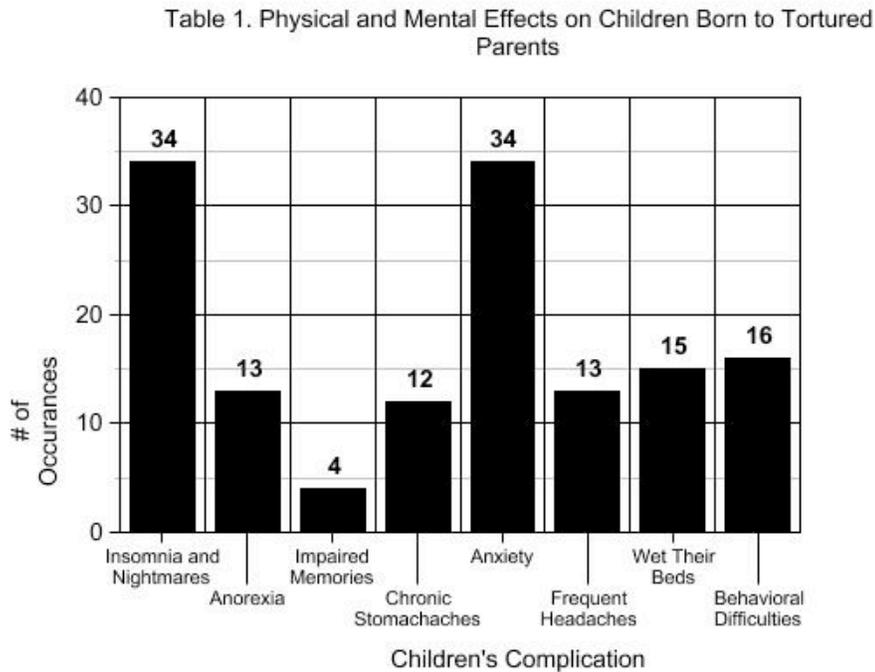
The government is aware of these models and uses them against the African people of Darfur. Janjaweed militiamen are instructed to rape these women by al-Bashir's government, and are encouraged to do so in the public spectrum. In an attempt to unravel the fabric of society, on multiple levels, perpetrators often rape the victims in front of their husbands, their children, and their entire tribe. Children who witness such acts of rape are forever scarred, men leave their wives out of embarrassment, and the women are rendered useless by society. Often times the end result of the rape is a woman raising her attacker's baby in isolation (Corcoran, 2008). Adrienne Fricke, an international rights attorney sums it up when she says, "When someone rapes a woman, they rape her entire tribe" (Miller, 2009). Comparing the dynamic of mass rape in Darfur to the genocide in Rwanda with regard to post-rape murder further demonstrates Khartoum's desire to play on local understandings of rape. In Rwanda, as well as most other ethnic cleansings, the majority of women are murdered after they are raped. In Darfur, this is not the case. In 90% of the rape cases in Darfur, the women are sent back to their society (Watson, 2007). In Darfur, killing the raped woman partially negates the destruction of society, given how rape is received in the region. The genocidal regime is aware of these understandings and has implemented well-thought-out strategies to fully take advantage of them.

An Example from Recent History – What is to Come

Forcing people into a state of panic and anxiety can only be harmful, and can have lasting effects. To take an example from history, the government of 1960s-70s in Argentina used similar fear and dehumanization tactics for their genocidal campaign (Robben, 2005). The government wanted to impede the rebel crowds through violence. The philosophy here, as described by Robben (2005), was that "Surgery on the diseased social body should accomplish the total destruction of revolutionary forces." This strategy focuses on the destruction of the

public psyche in order to deter future rebellion, mirroring the desired objective of rape in Darfur. These tactics elicited a feeling of passionate revenge amongst the Argentinean populous. They struck back against their oppressors with mass violence of their own. The government concluded that they would have to end the cycle once and for all. They undertook the mission to destroy the rebellion so harshly that no one would ever think to revolt again. This led to the mass invasion and torture of civilians, including rape. Survivors still feel the effects of their torture. Those who lived through it have internalized the conflict as part of themselves. Through this process, the social trauma is eventually passed down to the next generation. Parents compare their children's trivial fears to their own, thus causing their youth to feel the trauma in some way (Robben, 2005). This phenomenon of perpetual fear is certain to take place in Darfur given the use of rape to torture the population. This is the objective that al-Bashir wishes to accomplish through the mass-rape of the African women in Darfur.

The graph below details the effects on children caused by their parent’s torture. The



McCullough -Zander, Kathleen; Larson, Sharyn. "The Fear is Still Inside Me: Caring for Survivors of Torture. American Journal of Nursing, Oct2004, Vol. 104 Issue 10, p54-65, 11p

percentages are derived from a study of 85 children whose parents were victims of torture.

As one can see, the effects of torture such as rape are lasting—even beyond the generation receiving the torture.

Addressing Potential Refutation

Some may argue that rape could not effectively be used as a weapon of war. Opposition may come from people who believe that war is a battle amongst men, where women are a non-factor. Even if the raped suffer, it makes no difference on the overall agenda. I would have to disagree with this statement for a variety of reasons. First, one of the main overall missions of this undertaking is to destroy an ethnicity. As I have demonstrated, rape in Darfur succeeds toward this end in many ways. It successfully destroys the family and eventually places major

rifts in society. In Darfur, rape forces the man to leave his wife, thus successfully inflicting pain on the men in Darfur. Second, one of the reasons the Janjaweed rape and hold sex slaves is in an attempt to locate and kill their slave's husbands (Corcoran, 2008). This demonstrates a direct correlation between rape and traditional military strategy. Furthermore, social psychology has found that women are generally looked to as the transmitters of culture. Women have a greater role in exposing children to processes of socialization (Rossi, 1993). If the attempt is to destroy an ethnicity, social psychology suggests that women are a potent target. The argument that women are not a significant part of war is dated. In his mission to traumatize the African people of Darfur, President Omar al-Bashir has specifically targeted the women of the society. This fact alone demonstrates the importance of targeting women in this war.

Conclusion

I hope to have thoroughly demonstrated how and why rape is used as a genocidal weapon in Darfur. President Omar al-Bashir and his government have intentionally enacted rape as a means to further destroy the people of Darfur. This has been and is continuing to be done through the destruction of a woman's mental and physical faculties, compromising the dignity of women, and playing on local understandings to allow genocidal rape's effects to be felt by society at large. As of June 19, 2008, the United Nations (UN) has acknowledged, "rape and other forms of sexual violence can constitute war crimes, crimes against humanity or a constitutive act with respect to genocide." Since this has been implemented, President Omar al-Bashir is currently being investigated for international war crimes in regard to rape. In the meantime, the destruction of the African people of Darfur continues on full bore. Rape, among other atrocities, is threatening the core of the African Darfuri society, and it is intentional. Despite the new "genocide" label to the situation in Darfur, the international community

continues to turn its collective head to this tragedy. Omar al-Bashir remains in power in Sudan and is continuing to orchestrate mass-tragedy on the African people of Darfur. This catastrophe must be addressed in a substantial way soon. For each day that the international community remains complacent, five more African Darfuri people are destructively raped and another 150 killed.

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