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in Paris

David Wingeate Pike
Editor

Women's Issues

Crimes
Against
Woman

NOVA

WOMEN'S ISSUES

CRIMES AGAINST WOMEN

DAVID WINGEATE PIKE

EDITOR



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DEDICATION

To all women who suffer from the cruelty of mankind.

Today, far too many women are subjected to violence and made to feel shame. The real shame belongs to a world that often blames women for the crimes committed against them, and allows such widespread violence to continue.

Thoraya Ahmed Obaid, Executive Director, UNFPA, 2006

Enlighten the people, generally, and tyranny and oppressions of body and mind will vanish like spirits at the dawn of day.

Thomas Jefferson

PREFACE

The idea for this collective work originated in early 2006, at the time that the American Graduate School of International Relations and Diplomacy (AGSIRD) founded its Research Center. It was decided to select a theme from within feminism, using the term feminism in its widest context.

Look around the world and nine-tenths of all the world's suffering is borne by women. A large part of the male half of the world is perfectly happy to see it remain so, and to keep in place the laws that leave half the world barely inside the human race, so that women find themselves not merely abused but at the mercy of customs and laws in whose formation they had no hand, and over which they have no influence.

The project at hand, once announced, quickly caught on. It required an absolute minimum of advertising. A single announcement was enough to attract the forty contributors who responded. Among the dozen whom we lost by the wayside was Fadela Amara, founder of the French movement *Ni Putes ni Soumises*; her reason for withdrawing was her appointment by President Nicholas Sarkozy in 2007 to the Ministry of Urban Affairs. Ideally, in our presentation of the essays, we would have liked to strike a perfect geographical balance, with every continent equally represented, and every country with the worst abuses included. We are conscious of the lacunae to be found here. We have in no sense covered the world, and we know it. But no work of this length could claim to be comprehensive, and a project such as this has to compromise or it never sees the light of day.

In my sixth Circular Letter to Contributors, I urged them not only to uncover crimes and evoke pity for the victims but to do whatever possible to stir the human conscience (or more precisely, the male conscience) to stand up against the abuses that mock our claims to the irresistible march of progress. This project will have achieved its real purpose only when a future work dedicated to the suffering of women is written, unlike this one, by a large majority of men.

It has not been possible to publish all the essays that we received, reviewed and edited. We nevertheless hope to produce a second volume of *Crimes against Women* in which these essays can find their place.

The book owes much to the assistance of five AGSIRD students who joined the project in the closing year: Anthoula Parianos, who helped in the often nerve-wracking work of correspondence; Irina Massovets, who helped Anthoula in trimming the Abstracts and the CVs, who brought order to the Endnotes, and who helped in researching the Introduction; Nicolette Bundy, who gave general assistance; and to Tammy Lee Fortier and Yasmeen R. Hussain, who gave the work a final tweaking. To all assistants I offer my thanks, but especially to Anthoula Parianos.

David Wingeate Pike
Director of Research, AGSIRD

Paris, 9 July 2009

FOREWORD

Taslima Nasrin

Winner of the 2004 UNESCO-Madanjeet Singh Prize
for the Promotion of Tolerance and Non-Violence

Women—whether they are rich or poor, beautiful or ugly, black or brown or white or yellow, married or unmarried, illiterate or literate—all suffer oppression because of religion, tradition, culture and customs devised by men.

I come from a country where, for a married couple, the worst thing is to give birth to a female baby. It is not uncommon for such a wife to be divorced, or to spend the rest of her life in disgrace.

In my country it is the destiny of a woman to be ruled by her father in childhood, by her husband while in youth and middle-age, and by her son when she is old.

Far too many women are the victims of slavery, human trafficking, and all kinds of discrimination. Men throw acid on their bodies, burn their faces, smash their noses, gouge their eyes, and walk away happy. Women are beaten, flogged, stoned to death. If they are raped, they are accused of having allowed the rape, and the rapists are set free.

Violence against women is not considered a crime in my country. Let me give you the example of fifteen-year-old Yasmin. Employed as a maid, she was raped by her master. She fled from the master's home and was observed by the police as she walked toward her parents' house. The police told her it was not safe for a girl to be walking on the road at night. They offered her a ride home in their van, and then what happened? Six policemen raped her, killed her, and threw her body into the bushes. When news of Yasmin's murder broke, villagers demonstrated against the police. The police shot at them, killing seven. The government then issued a statement that Yasmin was a girl of bad character, a prostitute, and that the police had every right to treat her as they did. Such a tragic event is not a rarity in Bangladesh, and I know that it happens in other countries as well.

Crimes Against Women, in my opinion, is one of the most important books on the question of the oppression of women. Its essays, written by activists and academics, cover all forms of violence occurring worldwide. It is surprising that many countries that proudly call themselves democracies have still not ratified several clauses of the United Nations "Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women." And many

countries that have ratified the clauses of the Convention do not implement it and remain reluctant to take action against the perpetrators of crime against women.

So long as women are considered inferior human beings, crimes against women will not be considered as crimes against humanity. The problem cannot be solved simply by women's achieving economic freedom and education. The problem can be solved only by exposing, and then changing, cultural traditions, customs and religious practices that harm humanity by debasing women.

When men are tortured, it is considered a crime. When women are tortured, it is dismissed as a custom, a part of the tradition. Millions of people literally believe in the propriety of throwing live women onto their husband's funeral pyre, or mutilating female genitals, since it is accepted as tradition and has formed part of the culture. This sick mentality of the past must end. We now live in the 21st century. Men as well as women that believe that women's rights are human rights must continue to fight without compromise against all such inequalities and injustices.

There are laws against crimes committed against women, but they must be implemented. Children must be taught in school about equality between men and women, which is difficult for children to understand when they see adults around them treating women as slaves, sexual objects, and child-bearing machines. It will be difficult to achieve justice without a true revolution of ideas.

I congratulate David Pike for editing a book that truly raises our consciousness concerning the many problems that exist and the need to resolve these problems as quickly as possible.

Taslima Nasrin
Winner of the 2004 Unesco Prize

INTRODUCTION: CRIME WITHOUT PUNISHMENT

David Wingeate Pike

‘There is no blanket approach to fighting violence against women. What works in one country may not lead to desired results in another. Each nation must devise its own strategy. But there is one universal truth, applicable to all countries, cultures and communities: violence against women is never acceptable, never excusable, never tolerable....

We must unite. Violence against women cannot be tolerated, in any form, in any context, in any circumstance, by any political leader or by any government.

The time to change is now. Only by standing together and speaking out can we make a difference.’¹

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, 2009

Crimes committed by men, under laws written by men to protect men, leading at times to trials, trials conducted by men, with juries composed of men, responding to male judges who hand down verdicts that favour men. Everywhere the oppressor’s wrong, the law’s delay, the insolence of office, ...

Can any particular factor be singled out as most responsible for the wrongs inflicted on women? Ingrid Betancourt, the Franco-Colombian woman held captive for six years by Colombia’s insurgent movement FARC, would never consider herself the worst abused woman of our time, but in an interview on French television after her liberation in July 2008 she summed up what might be called the basic problem. After describing the abysmal conditions of living as a prisoner of the FARC, being chained perennially to a post, exposed to the insects, deprived of vegetables and fruit, refused all medical treatment, she summed it all up: ‘The worst was the wickedness of men’ [*Le pire, c’était la méchanceté des hommes.*]²

‘*La méchanceté des hommes.*’ Can it be that one gender is preternaturally more disposed to cruelty than the other? If so, is it a psychological condition that can be cured?

¹ See UN Secretary-General’s campaign on End Violence against Women: <http://endviolence.un.org/> and UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon’s remarks on International Women’s Day in New York, 5 March 2009: <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2009/sgsm12127.doc.htm>.

² Ingrid Betancourt, interviewed on French television (TF1) by Claire Chazal, 4 July 2008.

The legal battle in defence of women was first joined in 18th century England, before male feminists such as Goethe or George Bernard Shaw threw their hat into the ring. In London in the 1750s, three fashionable hostesses took stock of the male-chauvinist society in which they lived and saw in it a repressive attitude that condemned even the brightest women to positions of inferiority. The circle that they formed, and which took its name from the blue worsted stockings that they favoured, was far from focused, for they had little idea where they were headed. What gave the movement its impetus was the French Revolution, on which its most famous member, Mary Wollstonecraft, quickly pounced, launching a pamphlet in 1790 entitled *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*, and another in 1792 under the title *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, which made her famous overnight.

The next century came and went with no perceptible change anywhere in the status of women. Even the proclamation of 8 March as Women's Day was uneven in its adoption, though the date commemorated two early events in the women's struggle: the strike in 1857 by textile workers in New York which was brutally suppressed by the police, and the fire in 1909, again in New York, when 140 women, most of them young, were burnt to death in a factory. It was not until 1975, when the United Nations proclaimed it so, that 8 March became International Women's Day. The UN followed up on 1979 with a Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). The treaty was duly signed in 1980 by US President Jimmy Carter, but it has languished in the US Senate ever since. A series of World Conferences on Women organized by the UN was notable in 1995 for the attendance in Beijing of 40,000 women.³ The culmination of international efforts to bring women's rights to the foreground of collective action came on 17 December 1999, when the UN General Assembly, in its resolution 54/134, designated 25 November as International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. The date chosen commemorates the brutal assassination in 1960 of the three Mirabal sisters, political activists in the Dominican Republic, on orders of Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo (1930–1961).⁴ The date coincides with the opening of an annual campaign, launched in 1991 and known as Sixteen Days of Activism against Gender Violence, whose closing day (10 December) marks the day already designated in 1950 as International Human Rights Day.

Another milestone came with the creation in 1969 of the UN Population Fund (originally known as the UN Fund for Population Activities, or UNFPA), an organization that does for women what Unicef does for children. It advocates for their health and protection. Its present director Thoraya Obaid rails against the widespread impunity of crimes 'that not only encourages further abuses and suffering but also sends the signal that male violence against women is acceptable or normal.'⁵ In November 2006 the UN Population Fund (UNPF) issued a report documenting horrific gender violence in countries around the planet, sometimes perpetrated under the protective rubric of 'traditional cultural practices' or religious customs.

³ The rights of women in China received an unexpected exposure in the middle of the 2008 Olympiad held in Beijing. The Chinese government had announced that the Chinese people had the right to demonstrate, provided only that they apply to the authorities for permission. Two Chinese women in their late 70s wanted to protest the inadequate compensation they felt they had received when the government, years earlier, had seized their homes for urban development. When they responded to the invitation, they were promptly arrested and sentenced to 're-education through labour.'

⁴ 'International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women,' the United Nations: <http://www.un.org/depts/dhl/violence/index.html> The Mirabal sisters, born into an upper-class family who had lost most of their fortune, had formed an opposition to the Trujillo regime known as the Movement of the Fourteenth of June.

⁵ 'Violence against women,' unsigned editorial, *The Boston Globe*, 8 December 2006.

The problems are widespread, multifaceted and deeply rooted, and the list provided by the UNPF is not inclusive of all the forms of crimes committed:

- the systematic disappearance and murder of women;
- rape as a routine weapon of war;
- traumatic fistula: (a debilitating side effect of violent rape or unsafe childbirth);
- mutilation of women, including breast-ironing, a form of mutilation performed in parts of Africa by mothers on their own daughters in a desperate attempt to make them unattractive to violent, predatory men;
- forced marriage or bride-kidnapping: 80 millions girls are forcibly married before their 18th birthday, many before they are 12, despite the fact that pregnancy is the leading cause of teenage death; bride-kidnapping, described as a ‘tradition’ in Kyrgyzstan and other central Asian countries, amounts to little more than rape and enslavement.⁶

In January 2008, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) published a *Handbook on the Protection of Women and Girls* which pointed up another danger facing women in war-torn areas. ‘Upon return and reintegration, women and girls are frequently excluded from the peace processes... [and] often suffer continued violence and discrimination in reconstruction and rehabilitation activities. In the absence of male relatives, especially following conflict, women and girls may assume non-traditional roles and face discrimination and prejudice as a result.’

In February of that year 2008, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon launched his campaign “UNite to End Violence against Women,” calling for immediate change. Violence against women, he made clear, poses a serious threat to the achievement of internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals. Stretching from 2008 to 2015, the campaign calls on all governments, civil society, women’s organizations, young people, the private sector, the media and the entire UN system to join forces in addressing the global pandemic of violence against women and girls.⁷ In furtherance of this, on 14 November of the same year, Ban designated the South African-born actress Charlize Theron as a UN Messenger of Peace, with a focus on ending violence against women. Theron, the tenth celebrity to be named to the position,⁸ was already a women’s rights activist and animal rights activist. In 2006, in partnership with the Entertainment Industry Foundation, she had founded the Charlize Theron Africa Outreach Project to work to improve the life of South Africa’s impoverished, especially those suffering from HIV/AIDS. Theron also filmed a series of public service announcements in support of the Cape Town Rape Crisis Centre, urging no tolerance for rape or domestic violence.

Amid so many crimes, so many fields of crime, to give pride of place (or shame of place) to any particular field is open to argument, but Women Missing and the Slave Trade are logical places to start.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ See UN Secretary-General’s campaign on End Violence against Women: <http://endviolence.un.org/>.

⁸ See United Nations Messengers of Peace: <http://www.un.org/sg/mop/>.

1. WOMEN MISSING

The number of women around the world who are demographically “missing” was recently estimated by the United Nations at between 113 million and 200 million. Every year, said its report, from 1.5 million to 3 million women and girls lose their lives as a result of gender-based violence or neglect. Ayaan Hirsi Ali, a Somali-born Dutch legislator who was living in Amsterdam under 24-hour protection because of death threats against her by Islamic radicals,⁹ was undismayed by the danger she faced and called for a tribunal such as the Court of Justice in The Hague to investigate the disappearance of these 100-200 million women. ‘The victims scream their suffering,’ she wrote. ‘It is not so much that the world does not hear them; it is that fellow human beings choose not to pay attention.’ Focusing on a particular group whom she considers largely responsible for women’s suffering, she added: ‘Islamists are engaged in reviving and spreading a brutal and retrograde body of laws. Wherever the Islamists implement Shariah, or Islamic law, women are hounded from the public arena, denied education and forced into a life of domestic slavery. Cultural and moral relativists sap our sense of moral outrage by claiming that human rights are a Western invention.’¹⁰

Shariah law, nevertheless, is not monolithic. Much of Muslim law was codified many centuries after the prophet died, by male jurists who came up with laws that met the needs of their time, resulting in a variety of Sunni and Shiite schools of thought, but leaving no such thing as a consensus that could provide a single version of Shariah.¹¹

2. THE SLAVE TRADE, RENAMED HUMAN TRAFFICKING

One of the distinctions of Islam is that it shares with Christianity the ignominy of running the African slave trade, albeit thriving long before the arrival of any non-African. While the Christian churches have for long called slavery the greatest single blight on Western

⁹ Ayaan Hirsi Ali, a former member of the Dutch Parliament, wrote the screenplay of the film *Submission*, with scenes of abused women with Koranic texts written on their flesh. In 2004, Hirsi Ali collaborated with Theo van Gogh on the film *Submission*, and subsequently published her book *Infidel* (New York: Free Press, 2007). In autumn of that year, Van Gogh was murdered in Amsterdam by Mohamed Bouyeri (Dutch-born of Moroccan parents) who slit his throat as he would an animal, leaving a five-page death threat against Hirsi Ali pinned to his body with a knife.

¹⁰ Ayaan Hirsi Ali, ‘Women go “missing” by the millions,’ 31 March 2006; Stephen Castle, ‘Target of threats, writer asks EU to pay for security,’ *International Herald Tribune* (Paris), 15 February 2008.

¹¹ For this reason, Muslims are not unanimous on the question of enforcing the wearing of the headscarf. Australia’s senior Muslim cleric, Sheikh Taj el-Din al-Hilali, described women who do not wear head scarves as ‘uncovered meat’ who invite rape (‘Muslim cleric’s remarks denounced by [Australian Prime Minister John] Howard’), Associated Press, *International Herald Tribune*, 27 April 2006). Aqsa Pervez was a 16-year-old Pakistani-Canadian in Ontario who removed her headscarf, at which point her father strangled her and then called the police to confess. Those who sympathized with the father called her death an ‘honour killing,’ suggesting that every Muslim father was entitled to murder his daughter for taking off a headscarf. Others insisted that it was just a case of domestic violence, as though religion and culture had nothing to do with the murder. A case in Berlin in January 2008 received wider coverage. A 23-year-old Turkish girl named Hatun Sürücü became the sixth Muslim woman in as many months to be murdered by a relative in that city for being ‘too Western’ (Mona Eltahawy, ‘Caught in the clash of civilizations’ *International Herald Tribune*, 19 January 2008). Sürücü, according to another source, was ‘living like a German,’ a crime, in her family’s opinion, that only her death could expiate. The killing was entrusted to her youngest brother, who shot her several times, point blank, at a Berlin bus stop. Only the killer was charged, and because he was underage, he received a reduced sentence. The family left the courtroom in high spirits, and the father rewarded the convicted boy with a watch (‘German justice failures,’ *Spiegel Online*, 29 March 2007).

civilisation, Islam has been less outright in its self-denunciations. ‘The Koran,’ writes Alice Whealey, an eminent American scholar of the era, ‘most certainly condones treating women and slaves (of any race) as social and political inferiors, and it positively enjoins treating non-Muslims as enemies to be fought militarily and either killed (as polytheists) or treated as inferiors (non-Muslim monotheists); cf. Koran 9:29).’¹² More commonly, non-Muslims are dismissed as non-believers (in Arabic, *takfir*).

What has certainly not disappeared from the world is enslavement. The slave trade was abolished in the British Empire by the British Parliament’s Slave Trade Act of 1807, and in the United States in 1865 by the 13th amendment to the Constitution. In recent times, international laws have been introduced to put an end to slavery’s modern forms. Among these laws is the UN Protocol Against Trafficking in Persons, making trafficking an international crime. The protocol was ratified in 2003 and has been signed by 117 countries, but that leaves two-fifths of the UN membership uncommitted. What is missing is political will, of the kind that two centuries ago inspired men like Granville Sharp and William Wilberforce to devote their whole lives to the cause of anti-slavery.

In March 2007, Antonio Maria Costa, executive director of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, described contemporary slavery as ‘a booming international trade that involves several million people a year being trafficked in bondage,’ and launched a global initiative to end the traffic. The International Labour Organization estimated in the same month that there are 12.3 million people across the globe in forced work, unpaid and under threat of violence. The U.S. government reported in 2008 that every year between 600,000 and 800,000 people are being shipped like commodities across international borders to serve as slave labour. Of these, 80 per cent are female and 50 percent are children, with the majority of them forced into the commercial sex trade. Traffickers lure women with promises of jobs as nannies or restaurant workers in countries supposedly offering them a better life. Often the women, in a desperate attempt to escape extreme poverty or dangerous living conditions, pay significant sums of money for their passage.

In Europe the most common destination of the traffic, according to a UN report, is Germany, Italy, Belgium and Greece. In the United States, the best estimates indicate that 40,000 to 50,000 people are held in slavery at any given time, with about 17,000 people brought into the country every year and forced to work for nothing. New York being one of the top cities for trafficking, the city’s chapter of the National Organization of Women (NOW), under its president Sonia Ossorio, opened an aggressive campaign called ‘Ending the Business of Trafficking.’ Its purpose was to introduce a state law that would recognize trafficking as a crime, and by June 2007 they had succeeded.¹³

¹² Alice Whealey, ‘Religion: Islamic colonization and Christian missionaries,’ World Association of International Scholars (WAIS), Stanford, 20 June 2007.

¹³ Elizabeth Rosenthal, ‘UN fund set to combat human trafficking,’ *International Herald Tribune*, 27 March 2007; Melody Drnach, Acting Vice President, National Organization for Women, ‘Stop the sale of women: combat trafficking in the U.S.,’ *International Herald Tribune*, 19 September 2007; Richard Bernstein, ‘Good intentions: putting antislavery fight at risk,’ *International Herald Tribune*, 10 April 2008. Bernstein refers to the recent work of E. Benjamin Skinner, *A Crime so Monstrous: Face to Face with Modern-Day Slavery* (New York: Free Press, 2008). Cf. the published memoir of the young Cambodian crusader Somaly Mam, *Le Silence de l’innocence* (Paris: Anne Carrière, 2005).

3. RAPE IN WAR, AND PROGRAMMED RAPE

‘Throughout history,’ wrote Irene Kahn, secretary general of Amnesty International, ‘women’s bodies have been considered the legitimate booty of victorious armies. Custom, culture and religion built an image of women as bearing the “honour” of their communities, so that destroying a woman’s physical integrity became a means by which to terrorize, demean and defeat entire populations, as well as to punish, intimidate and humiliate women.’¹⁴ Although prohibited under international law, rape and other gender-based violence in the course of armed conflict are rarely prosecuted because of the difficulty of establishing any system of justice. What gave impetus to the cry for greater accountability was the new variety of motives behind the act of rape in time of war.

Rape in the context of war has been legendary since the rape of the Sabine Women (which was in fact merely abduction), but programmed rape is a modern phenomenon. It could be said that the rape of 2 million German women by the Red Army in 1945 fitted this mould, because the orders given out by political commissars were ‘to break the pride of the German women.’¹⁵ What followed in the Balkan Wars brought added refinement, as armies set out to demoralize their adversaries either by degrading their women or by impregnating them with the seed of their enemies, and hence repopulating entire areas.

‘Rape in war has been going on since time immemorial,’ remarked Stephen Lewis, a former Canadian ambassador now in Africa as UN envoy for AIDS, to Nicholas Kristof of the *New York Times*, ‘but it has taken a new twist as commanders have used it as a strategy of war.’ The world woke up to this phenomenon in 1993, after discovering that Serbian forces had set up a network of ‘rape camps’ in which women and girls, some as young as 12, were held as slaves. Since then, similar patterns of systematic rape have been seen in many countries, and it has become clear that mass rape is not just a by-product of war but also sometimes a deliberate weapon. Kristof writes:

There are two reasons for this. First, mass rape is very effective militarily. From the viewpoint of a militia, getting into a fire-fight is risky, so it is preferable to terrorize civilians sympathetic to a rival group and drive them away, depriving the rivals of support. Secondly, mass rape attracts less international scrutiny than piles of bodies, because the issue is indelicate and the victims are usually too ashamed to speak up. In Sudan, the government has turned Darfur into a rape camp. The first person to alert me to this was Zahra Abdelkarim, who had been kidnapped, gang-raped, mutilated—slashed with a sword on her leg—and then left naked and bleeding to wander back to her Zaghawa tribe. In effect, she had become a message to her people: Flee, or else. Since then, this practice of ‘marking’ the Darfur rape victims has become widespread: typically, the women are scarred or branded, or occasionally

¹⁴ Irene Khan, secretary general of Amnesty International, ‘Justice for the unacknowledged casualties of war’, *International Herald Tribune*, 18 December 2004.

¹⁵ Cf. Manfred Wille, ‘Eastern Germany under the Soviets,’ in: David Wingeate Pike, ed. *The Closing of the Second World War: Twilight of a Totalitarianism* (New York and Frankfurt am Main: 2001). The American sociologist J. Robert Lilly examined a quite different dimension, the rape of French and German women by US Army troops in the Allied advance from Normandy to the Elbe. His book *Taken by Force: Rape and American GIs in Europe during WWII* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) became a widely distributed film documentary in which some of the released violators as well as their victims were interviewed. A number of the violators had been hanged.

have their ears cut off. This is often done by police officers or soldiers, in uniform, as part of a coordinated government policy.¹⁶

While rape is always humiliating, it was the humiliation itself that had become the centrepiece in the crime. Speaking out often requires great courage. In 1996, at an international conference that I co-organized at Stanford University under the title ‘War Crimes and War Criminals,’ the participants included the French psychiatrist Catherine Bonnet who spoke of the problems of disclosure (‘Particularités du dévoilement des viols’). The keynote speaker was the South African jurist Richard Goldstone, Chief Prosecutor at the International Criminal Court, who displayed a new brand of toughness. Two years later the ICC introduced its Rome Statute, which defined a broad spectrum of sexualized violence as crimes against humanity and war crimes that included, apart from rape and sexual slavery, such violations as forced pregnancy and sterilization. In the case of Iraq, writes Diane King, rape is frequently used as a weapon of sectarian conflict:

When a Shiite militiaman rapes a Sunni woman, for example, he is seen as potentially implanting a Shiite into her womb. He is causing her to suffer dual humiliations: she is sexually violated, with all of the personal implications that that would carry in any culture. But the rape further serves like a Trojan horse: thereafter an offspring bearing the rapist’s identity may well be hidden inside her body, an enemy who will emerge in nine months. Cross-sectarian rape as a weapon of political conflict can thus force a woman to nurture her own enemy. But in actual practice, this rarely happens. Rather, the tragedy of rape is compounded when a member of that woman’s group eliminates her and any enemy offspring through an ‘honour killing’ or an ‘honour suicide’.¹⁷

The mass rape of Muslim women in Bosnia resulted ultimately in the UN Security Council, on 20 June 2008, unanimously approving a resolution classifying rape as a weapon of war. Already on 22 February 2001, Florence Mumbal, a judge from Zambia sitting on the International Criminal Tribunal, gave her verdict in the case of three Serbs who, in the Bosnian city of Foca in 1992, had imprisoned young Muslim girls whom they raped, tortured and enslaved. The three men were the first in European legal history to be sentenced for crimes against humanity, but the argument was lost on the accused who did not understand why they were standing trial. ‘I could have killed them, but I saved their lives. Rape? What kind of a crime is that compared with killing people?’¹⁸

A new danger confronting women emerged with the increased dispatch of American women soldiers to war zones. Women currently make up some 15 percent of the U.S. active-duty forces, and 11 percent of the soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan. More than 191,500 women who have served in the Middle East since 2001 have returned home, and in 2008 the newly established U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs was facing a pressing crisis: women traumatized not only by combat but also by sexual assault and harassment from their fellow service members. Nearly a third of female veterans say they were sexually assaulted or raped while in the military, and 71 percent to 90 percent say they were sexually harassed by men

¹⁶ Nicholas D. Kristof, ‘The weapon of rape,’ *International Herald Tribune*, 17 June 2008.

¹⁷ Diane King, ‘Using rape as a weapon,’ *International Herald Tribune*, 9 June 2007.

¹⁸ Slavenka Drakulic, ‘Rape as a weapon of war,’ *International Herald Tribune*, 27 June 2008. Drakulic, a Croatian journalist, is a contributing editor for the New York weekly *The Nation*.

with whom they served. The report mentioned that rape can lead to other medical crises, including diabetes, asthma, chronic pelvic pain, eating disorders, miscarriages and hypertension.¹⁹

4. FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION

Female genital mutilation, a traditional initiation ceremony involving partial or total removal of the external female genitalia for cultural or religious reasons, is practised, according to the World Health Organization, in 28 African countries, many of them in West Africa.²⁰ Jessica Neuwirth, president of the international women's rights organization Equality Now, has said: 'Everyone who's been cut knows someone who died from cutting. They die from bleeding, or later from infection, or sometime later in life they suffer from enormous health problems.'²¹ In Darfur, where many girls, as part of female circumcision rites, have their vaginas sewn shut with a wild thorn, the effects of rape are tragically enhanced.²²

The first full-scale medical study of female genital mutilation, conducted in 2006, revealed what health workers had long known. 'Female genital mutilation,' declared Adrienne German, president of the International Women's Health Coalition based in New York, 'is a health issue, a killer of women and children, as well as a human rights issue.' More than 100 million women worldwide have undergone genital mutilation, most of them in childhood, often without anaesthesia or sterile technique. The procedure varies in severity, from a full excision of the clitoris and labia to a lesser procedure in which only the former is removed. Pain, bleeding and infection are immediate consequences. The procedure's mortal dangers, it was also found, extend to childbirth, rising by more than 50 percent the likelihood that the woman or her baby would not survive. Doctors suspect that the procedure is also linked to a later risk of urinary infections. In the country-by-country study, rates of genital mutilation ranged from a high of 83 percent in Sudan to a low of about 40 percent in Ghana. One country involved in the study, Senegal, had outlawed the more extensive form of the procedure in 1998. Elsewhere, the procedure thrives on the myth, in a number of African cultures, that genital mutilation is part of a coming-of-age ceremony, and defenders of the custom continue to contend that it is a cultural practice, no different from male circumcision in the Jewish religion, with few, if any, proven long-term health consequences.²³

¹⁹ Helen Benedict, 'America's women warriors,' *International Herald Tribune*, 27 May 2008. Benedict, a professor of journalism at Columbia University, is the author of the novel *The Opposite of Love; Half Black, Half White in a Black-and-White World* (New York: Penguin, Viking 2007) and the forthcoming *The Lonely Soldier: The Private War of Women Serving in Iraq*.

²⁰ 'West Africans fight female genital mutilation in France,' IRIN, Paris, 23 June 2008.

²¹ Bob Herbert, 'Punished for being female,' *International Herald Tribune*, 3 November 2006.

²² Nicolas D. Kristof, 'Ministry of Rape,' *International Herald Tribune*, 23 November 2005.

²³ Elisabeth Rosenthal, 'Genital cutting's deadly legacy,' *International Herald Tribune*, 2 June 2006.