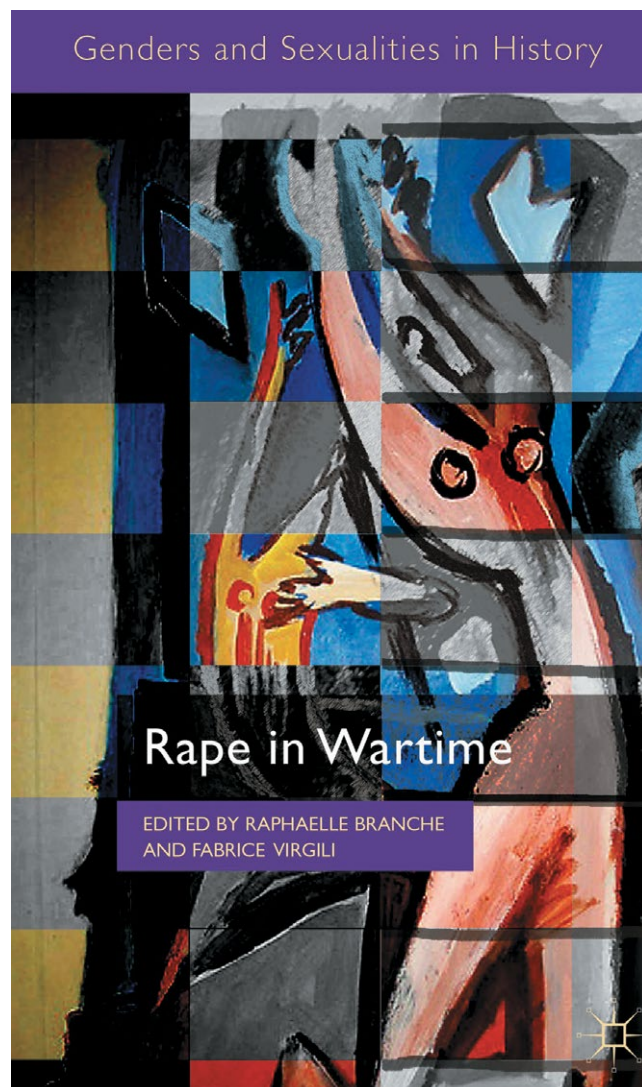


Rape in Wartime

Edited by Raphaëlle Branche and Fabrice Virgili,
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The editors of *Rape in Wartime* and I share the inability to give their impressive collection of essays on this topic the summary it deserves. The U.S. military's highly publicized efforts to prevent sexual assault within its ranks illustrate how intense discussion of this subject can be, even in an army that very rarely rapes civilians and enemy combatants.

There is a pressing need for substance in this increasingly emotional debate. *Rape in Wartime* contributes that substance in a collection of meticulously researched, carefully argued, and painstakingly translated essays from diverse scholars who studied rape globally and historically. It provides a brilliant combination of military history, anthropology, and legal studies that are perfectly balanced by a feminist perspective. This anthology is an ideal work for commissioned and non-commissioned officers who are facing cultural reform regarding gender roles in the military and the integration of women into combat units. *Rape in Wartime* is a substantive, concise, and readable book on women in combat and rape that occurs during wars.

The work casts some indirect criticism on the current policies of the Uniform Code of Military Justice in multiple essays that describe German, Russian, and Belgian military courts that treated rape as problem of conduct, or good order and discipline, managed by commanders. In all three cases (less so with Belgian), rapes went widely unpunished or carried minor internal disciplinary reprimands. It is important to

recognize the similarities between the current Uniform Code of Military Justice and the legal procedures regarding rape that were practiced in both the German and Russian Armies on the Russian front described by Regina Mühlhäuser and Marianna G. Muravyeva. Even the highly professional Wehrmacht had high rates on unpunished sexual assaults, treating rape as “a crime against discipline” rather than a capital crime.

This book also demonstrates how women—both fighters and civilians—often endure the hardships of war. An essay by Norman M. Naimark describes the way that German women on the Russian front endured rape as punishment in response to German military atrocities. They were able to move forward with their lives by recording their experiences in memoirs. Amandine Régamey recounts in her essay how snipers in Chechnya were thought to be exclusively women by the Russian Army. These supposed female soldiers were raped, and then tossed from windows with hand grenades between their legs. These snipers were believed to aim for “the balls” so there was a fear of literal emasculation that fueled these atrocities. *Rape in Wartime* also identifies women paramilitary insurgents and revolutionaries who were raped or sexually assaulted prior to execution because their service in combat usurped patriarchal hierarchy and social order.

Important yet often overlooked is the discussion of the rape or sexual assault of men. Often unreported, male rape is doubly shameful because it represents traumatic experience as well as impotence and a loss of manhood. Nayanika Mooharjee’s essay describes how during the Bangladesh War of 1971 men were commonly checked for circumcisions and subsequently sexually assaulted. This act was the ultimate assault on identity because it was traumatic, emasculating, and an assault on the quality of the victim’s faith in Islam. What made it even worse was that female rape survivors in this conflict were celebrated as war heroines and given the title “birangonas.”

Rape in Wartime illustrates how widespread rape and pillaging have remained a driving force in warfare even in recent times. In Bihar, India, rape was often openly threatened against Maoist guerrillas, and rape has also become an enduring symbol of racist depictions of African soldiers in the Spanish Civil War.

This book demonstrates that regardless of whether rape is real or imagined, it causes great distress because

the pervasive fear of rape is as potentially damaging mentally as rape itself. Like post-traumatic stress disorder resulting from the strain of repeated combat missions, the perceived threat of rape creates similar mental burdens on civilian and combatant women during conflicts like those in India, Colombia, Greece, Chechnya, Nigeria, and on the Russian front. These women, facing the threat of violence in combat and the threat of rape, are exposed to higher levels of fear as well traumatic injuries and death. Recent reports indicate women under these conditions have higher rates of mental illness. *Rape in Warfare*, through substantive analysis, illustrates how warfare always places a mental burden on both genders, whether they serve in uniform or not, but the added threat of sexual assaults increases mental strain for women and men alike.

Two essays in *Rape in Warfare* are particularly useful because they describe the imperfect solutions that nations and cultural groups have used to prevent or reduce stigma in the childbirth that occurred as a result of wartime rape.

Antoine Rivière’s essay describes the French system used during the First World War as a flawed, but elaborate method of safeguarding the children of German rapes from ostracism. Women pregnant as a result of German rapes were placed into special maternity care centers isolated from the public. After the children were born they were placed with families that were provided false information about the children’s origins. Despite all of the efforts to safeguard these children they had a higher infant mortality rate than other French children during the war. This was attributed to the effects of the mothers’ psychological states, brought on by bearing the children of rape by the enemy.

During the Nigerian Civil War there was widespread rape and numerous subsequent studies on its affect on mothers, but even more on how the children’s lives were changed. The careful study of Adediran Daniel Ikuomola provides an example of this by effectively creating a social history of the offspring of wartime rapes. These children were named as war offspring by their culture and this influenced each gender differently. Both women and men created distance from the stigma of their names by adopting nicknames and moving away, but husbands insulted women privately because women were unable to hide their legal names and origins. Because of the patriarchal hierarchy in

Nigeria, married women had significantly higher rates of depression and mental illness than married men: 46 percent versus 11 percent.

Of particular interest and value is Nadine Puechguirbal's article on the reduction of stigma associated with rape in African conflicts. Some African countries follow a policy of comprehensive medical treatment, synchronizing physical and psychological aid. They understand the value of expressing trauma to a qualified listener, providing "listening houses" with trained psychological caregivers. The U.S. military could achieve similar gains by placing similar emphasis on mental illness care.

The most compelling article in the series was also the most unusual. Tal Nitsán's essay describes the moral outrage over her master's thesis on the lack of rape during the Israeli occupation of Palestine. The thesis won awards and was praised by Israeli military leaders—yet morally driven, nationalistic journalists attacked Nitsán. Her work did not argue that the moral superiority of the Israeli people resulted in the lack of rapes. Rather, it looked at institutional culture—how the sense of place and occupation made Israeli soldiers more aware of rape and therefore achieved objectives "not by rape, but by rape avoidance." Awareness rather than morality prevented the rapes; for Israeli nationalists this was an affront to their sense of moral superiority. The author, by the circumstances of getting her

doctorate in Canada and the misspelling of her name in the original press source, was insulated from the highly vitriolic criticism of a thesis that was complimentary of the Israeli military. Some sources went so far as to wish for someone to rape her, even erroneously providing a picture of a different woman, though claiming she was not attractive enough to warrant a rape. Her work on the institutional culture of the Israeli Army, praised by high-ranking military officers, illustrates that the most viable solutions to limit rape in warfare and military units is linking "rape avoidance" to military strategy.

This collection of work by international scholars has little to say about American military culture. However, the work of scholars like John Grenier, who links American attrition strategy to the targeting of civilians during colonial tribal warfare, and Sharon Block, whose monograph on rape in early America recognized the use of rape to punish tribal opposition, show that western—and by extension U.S. military traditions—are more closely aligned to raping and pillaging than celebratory histories proclaim.

The U.S. military must build and maintain the capacity to support and rehabilitate rape survivors. This requires infrastructure, doctrine, and policy changes that can all be informed by the body of work titled *Rape in Wartime*. This volume provides insights to how other generations and nations have addressed such difficult problems. ■