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## **Becoming Abject**

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## **Becoming Abject - Rape as a Weapon of War**

**By Bülent Diken & Carsten Bagge Laustsen**

Testicles are a national symbol, a trademark of the race; other peoples have luck, tradition, erudition, history, reason – but we alone have balls. (Danilo Kis quoted in Bracewell 2000: p.57)

### **1. Rape and warfare**

Although organized rape has been an integral aspect of warfare for centuries, it is strikingly absent from the classics on strategy and warfare; these works have predominantly been concerned with theorizing “regular” warfare, that is, the situations in which one army confronts another in a battle for the conquest or defence of a territory. Recently, however, much attention has been paid to asymmetric warfare and accordingly to phenomena such as guerrilla tactics, terrorism, hostage taking, and a series of other aspects that evolves around the importance of identity, be it religious fundamentalism and holy war, ethnic cleansing, or war rape (Kaldor 1998). War rape might in fact be taken as the best example of an asymmetric strategy. In war rape, the enemy soldier attacks a civilian (not a combatant), a woman (not another male soldier), and only indirectly with the aim of holding or taking a territory. The prime aim of war rape is to inflict traumas and thus to destroy family ties and group solidarity within the enemy camp.

War rape encompasses a range of topics usually avoided in the literature on warfare: the body, gender, religion and the psych. This paper investigates how gender differences and religious commitments can be used in war rape as an instrument of traumatizing not just the women in question but also their families and, ultimately, the community in which they live. The analysis is based on materials from the war in Bosnia (1992-1994) but its arguments can be applied to most other cases of war rape. The systematic use of rape as a war strategy has most recently been employed in Yugoslavia (mainly on the soil of Bosnia and later Kosovo) and in civil wars in Rwanda, Liberia and Uganda. In a historical perspective, systematic rape was reported in the war for independence in Bangladesh, in anti-Chinese riots in Indonesia and on a massive scale by Japanese soldiers in China and Korea during

WW2 (Watts & Zimmerman 2002). In Bosnia, war rape was systematically used as a way of traumatizing the Muslim population. Hence, rape cannot be understood as “just” a deplorable side effect of war, as provoked by soldiers’ sexual frustration. Rape was, and is, literally, a weapon of war.

Most studies of war rape focus either on the woman as victim or on the soldier as aggressor. The case of Bosnia, however, presents a more complicated picture. With respect to victimhood, an act of rape can be a complex phenomenon and certainly was so in Bosnia. Family members have been forced to rape one another or to witness a family member being raped. On the side of the aggressor, there is evidence to suggest that rape was used as a rite of initiation. Being forced to rape, soldiers or fellow Serbs were forced into a brotherhood of guilt. Those who refused were humiliated and in some cases castrated or even killed. The rapist can be a victim too. In a multicultural community like that of Bosnia, rape was used to create clear-cut distinctions between Serbs, Muslims and Croats. Even though in many cases a third party enforced the rape, victims and “perpetrator” find it difficult to face each other after the event. Often, the traumatic impact of rape prevents the victim from returning to the site of the crime (Askin 1997: p.292) and thus preventing ethnic groups from mixing.

During the war in Bosnia a considerable number of rapes were reported. A rough estimate is that between 20,000 (European Community figures) and 50,000 (the Sarajevo State Commission for Investigation of War Crimes) rape victims exist (Salzman 1998: p.363, Fisher 1996: p.91, Jones 1994: p.117). During the war the numbers were subject to considerable propaganda efforts. However, most commentators and international organisations agree that war rapes appeared in a systematic way. Some were raped in their own houses, others in brothels, and still others in rape camps. Particularly horrifying is the practice of forced impregnation, which occurred in some camps, since it evidently requires much planning. Rape camps were set up in Brcko, Dboj, Foca, Gorazde, Kalinobik, Vesegrad, Keatern, Luka, Manjaca, Osmarka and Tronopolje (Skejlsbæk 2001: p.220). Women in some camps were continuously raped until a doctor or a gynaecologist established pregnancy (Fisher 1996: p.112) and held in captivity until abortion was no longer possible (Salzman 1998: p.359, Sofos 1996: p.86). Carrying a child that is the product of rape can be seen as an extremely cruel form of torture (Nikolic-Rastanovic 1996: p.202) and even as a part of a strategy of ethnic cleansing.

Salzman defines ethnic cleansing as an act intended to render an area ethnically homogenous by removing members of a given group through the use of concentration camps, torture, sexual violence, mass killings, forced deportations, destruction of private and cultural property, pillage and theft, and the blocking of humanitarian aid (Salzman 1998: p.354). The United Nations General Assembly asserted that the “heinous practice [rape and abuse of women] constitutes a deliberate weapon of war in fulfilling the policy of ethnic cleansing carried out by Serbian forces in Bosnia and Herzegovina” (G.A.Res 49/205, 1995, quoted in Salzman 1998: pp.355-356). Concerning the intention to commit genocide, it is claimed that although camps were set up and controlled by paramilitary forces, it remains a fact that the political leadership in Beograd was secretly condoning it

(Fisher 1996: p.108): the rapes “do not appear to be random, and they indicate at least a policy of encouraging rape supported by the deliberate failure of camp commanders and local authorities to exercise command and control of the personnel under their authority. These patterns strongly suggest that a systematic rape policy existed [...] and] that some level of organization and group activity was required to carry out many of the alleged rapes” (UN, Final Report 1994: p.59).

The physical damage caused by rape can be considerable. However, the traumatism of rape may, for some, be even worse than bodily harm. Rape is strongly tabooed in Islamic cultures. The taboo of rape may even seem close to universal, but that fact, of course, cannot serve as an explanation. Rape dehumanizes, which inversely means that one of the keys to understand rape is to understand what makes us human. Secondly, there is a need to investigate how rape interferes with the social bond (culture, myth, religion). And finally, due importance must be paid to gender differences (which are of course culturally embedded). In the case of rape these three aspects enter into a complex relationship, and what links them together, we argue, is abjection.

We make use of the literature on abjection (Bataille 1993, Douglas 1966, Kristeva 1982) to investigate the traumatism of rape. Abjection has a communal aspect – the rape victim is rejected by neighbours and in some cases even family: she becomes an outcast, a “piece of shit”. Abjection is also felt strongly by the victim. One reason is that bodily integrity is often “translated” into psychic integrity: the act of penetration is thus considered an intrusion into the most intimate, something which makes you dirty. Penetration penetrates not only the body but also the self. The aggressor leaves on the body of the victim a mark, a stigma, which cannot be effaced. In the case of forced pregnancy the child might by some, if not most women, be seen as an abject: as an alien and disgusting object that does not belong to the women in question. The abject is neither fully inside (the child is never hers), nor fully outside (she feels polluted by it). A second crucial step is to explain how this intrusion into the body translates into a threat to society and becomes a taboo. One explanation for the taboo of rape is that it introduces formlessness into the communal fabric. The penetration of the female or male body works as a metaphor for the penetration of enemy lines. The rape victim suffers twice: first by being raped and second by being condemned by a patriarchal community (Kesic 2002: p.316).

## **2. The politics of abjection**

Nationalist rhetoric is often gendered and sexualised. The nation is a motherland giving birth to male soldiers, the state is a father protecting his sons, a nation can be raped by the enemy, an army penetrates into enemy land, et cetera (Bracewell 2000: p.580, Pettman 1996: pp.187-188, Milic 1993). Gender (and thus rape) is a powerful signifier that resonates with the imagination of most people. To understand how rape became a crucial signifier in the Bosnian war, we need to go back to the conflict over Kosovo during the 1980’s. One of the first cases of “rape” that had political consequences was the reported rape of Djordje Martinovic. Martinovic was received in the hospital in Kosovo with splinters of glass in his anus. He claimed that Albanian men had raped him with a bottle (Bracewell 2000: p.563).

This was not true; he made the unfortunate sexual experiment himself. The false story was, however, quickly used for propaganda purposes. A petition signed by Serbian intellectuals thus read: “the case of Djordje Martinovic has become that of the entire Serb nation in Kosovo” (petition on Djordje Martinovic in Bracewell 2000: p.571). As Martinovic was, allegedly, raped, so was the Serbian nation. Serbs could no longer feel safe; they were treated like enemies in their own land (Kosovo is in Serb mythology considered as the cradle of Serbia).

As early as in 1981, Serbian clergy accused Albanian Kosovars of having raped Serbian nuns (Ramet 1995: p.111). Serbs were described as incarnations of purity itself (like nuns) while an abnormal sexual drive was attributed to the Kosovars (of which the high Albanian birth rate was often cited as proof). However, the fact was that rapes across ethnic lines were extremely rare; in fact, the Kosova police had previously received only one report of interethnic rape (Kesic 2002: p.315). The accusations had an unfortunate effect: they taught Serbian women to fear Albanian men and Albanian men to avoid Serbian women for fear of being accused of rape (Bracewell 2000: p.583). Hence two clearly demarcated camps were created: a Serb and an Albanian. This lesson was later reapplied in Bosnia, with the focus however shifting from propaganda to actual war – a war of words that paved way for a war of bodies. And in contrast to the case of Kosovo, the war did not stand between two parts – it created two parts, essentialized groups and gave their boundaries a rigidity never seen before.

Before the outbreak of the war, Serbs were warned that Muslim men planned to force their women into harems to breed soldiers for the jihad (Kressel 1996: p.39). The rhetoric used in Kosovo was given a rerun and, as an act of pre-emption, roles were reversed. A war, which included acts of rape, was waged against the Muslims to prevent them from degrading Serb women: aggressor and victim swapped places. Scenes of rape were even shown on Serbian TV. The scenes depicted Muslim women being raped but an overdubbing of the voices made people believe that these victims were Serbs (Salzman 1998: p.353, Goldstein 2001: p.354). The general atmosphere was well captured in Milovan Milutinovic text “Laying Violent hands on the Serbian Woman”, which appeared during the war:

By order of the Islamic fundamentalists from Sarajevo, healthy Serbian women from 17 to 40 years of age are being separated out and subjected to special treatment. According to their sick plans going back many years, these women have to be impregnated by orthodox Islamic seeds in order to raise a generation of janissaries on the territories they surely consider to be theirs, the Islamic republic. In other words, a fourfold crime is to be committed against the Serbian woman: to remove her from her own family, to impregnate her by undesirable seeds, to make her bear a stranger and then to take even him away from her. (Milovan Milutinovic in Gutman 1993: p.x)

To fully understand this quote the genetic myth underlying Milutinovic's text must be emphasised. In the Balkans, the family name follows that of the father regardless of his religion or ethnicity. If an Albanian male rapes a Serb woman who then becomes pregnant and gives birth, then the child would be considered Albanian, even though genetically

speaking it is “half Serb” (Sofos 1996: p.86. Women are thus reduced to incubators, ensuring the reproduction of male genes (Salzman 1998: p.365). This patriarchal ideology played a crucial role when rape was turned into a weapon against “the Muslims”. It made the belief that one was forcing Muslim women to give birth to “Chetnik” babies, who would later kill them (Salzman 1998: p.359, Fischer 1996: pp.111-113). The implantation of seed (male sperm) served a two-fold purpose: it traumatized the Bosnian population forcing it to migrate, and changed the demographic balance in favour of the Serbs (the Albanian and Bosnian population was growing more rapidly than the Serb population). Muslim women were forced to give birth to “Serb” babies and by occupying their uterus they were prevented from giving birth to Muslims. This strategy is only successful if the victim shares the patriarchal ideology mentioned above. The fact that Catholic and Muslim women refer to their foetuses as “filth”, as “that thing”, or the “it” seems to indicate that this was in fact the case (Salzman 1998: p.365): “I knew it wasn’t my kid. I knew what I went through. It wasn’t a child born of love or from a respectable marriage. If anyone had tried to show it to me after it was born, I’d have strangled them and the baby too [...] If I’d ever had any chance to kill the kid inside me, I’d have done it” (testimony quoted in Stigelmeyer 1994: p.133). The child is not considered to belong to the mother. It is something alien: a “kid inside me.” The victim treats their foetuses as an unwished and horrifying matter, that is, as an abject.

It is thus fully justified that the practice of war rape is included in the genocide convention. War rape, in Bosnia and elsewhere, had as its purpose to destroy an ethnic group by killing it, to prevent its reproduction or to disorganize it removing it from its home soil. In the Bosnian case, the only “guilt” of raped women (and men) was that they were considered to be Muslim and hence responsible for centuries’ acts and deeds attributed to an Islamic nation. The RAM-plan from 1991 is often taken to be the manual for the ethnic cleansing of Bosnia. General Blaqoje Adzic (a former chief in the Yugoslav army, JNA, and later chief of military security under Milosevic), major general Milan Guero, major Cedo Knezevic, lieutenant-colonel Radenko Radinovic and general Alexander Vasilievic (Adzic’s successor), all high ranking officers from the Serb army, are believed to have drawn up the plan. The plan recommends that the army strike “where the religious and social structure is most fragile”, that is, against women, especially adolescents and children. If one aims to destroy an ethnic group, women are good targets due to their position in the family structure (Seifert 1994: pp.62-63). A traditional Muslim aphorism states: “as our women are, so also is our community” (Zalihic-Kaurin 1994: p.171). The attacks on women were a way of attacking the Bosnian community itself. Raped women should stand as a metaphor for a defeated community. The full quote reads:

Our analysis of the behaviour of the Muslim communities demonstrates that the morale, will, and bellicose nature of their groups can be undermined only if we aim our action at the point where the religious and social structure is most fragile. We refer to women, especially adolescents, and to the children. Decisive intervention on the social figures would spread confusion among the communities, thus causing first of all fear and then panic, leading to a probable [Muslim] retreat from the territories involved in war activity. In this case, we must add a wide propaganda campaign to our well-organized, incisive actions so that panic will

increase. We have determined that the coordination between decisive interventions and a well-planned information campaign can provoke the spontaneous flight of many communities. (quoted in Allen 1996: p.57)

Rape was a strategy aimed “to intervene in social figures”, that is, in the ethnic composition of communities. To understand this strategy, we need to investigate the way rape and abjection link together. How is the “kid inside me”, the “it”, the “thing” or the “filth” produced by enemy penetration to be understood? What is abjection and is the concept suitable for describing the impurity felt by victims?

Basically, the abject is an object that provokes disgust. The smell and sight of a decaying corpse repels. Is there any smell more horrible than that of putrefaction? Contact with menstrual blood pollutes and is to be avoided, just as excreta and other kinds of corporeal waste threaten our bodily and spiritual purity. These reactions towards abjected matter are all guided by a distinction between purity and impurity. We avoid filth and anything else falling under the category of impurity. However, it is documented that seemingly impure objects are not avoided in all cultures, that some objects are considered impure only when they appear as being out of place (the soup in the beard or the hair in the soup), and that in some traditions filth can be elevated into a sign of spiritual purity as is the case for the hermit. We know that nothing is filthy by nature but still we insist on treating impurity as a natural property. Abjected matter provokes corporal responses of a bodily and reflex like character. Why?

The abject is a sign of a prior animal existence continuously threatening our identity as humans (Bataille 1993: p.23) (it is here worth to note that animals do not feel disgust and are not ashamed of their nature, Miller 1997: p.12, Bataille 1993: p.62). Man cannot stand his own animal nature, or in the words of Saint Augustine: *inter faeces et urinam nascimur*: can stand that he is born between feces and urine (Bataille 1993: p.62). If you eat meat from a pig, you become, according to Jiddish and Muslim faith, one yourself. The prohibition against eating meat from a pig thus upholds a distinction between the animalistic and the human. Humans achieve form in distancing themselves from animal immanence. The distinction between purity and impurity is thus secondary. The most basic attribute of the abject is not its impurity but formlessness. Those uncanny objects, or abjects, are both human and inhuman, both interior and exterior, both repelling and fascinating. Without form, and hence dangerous and taboo. The indistinct abject undermines our well-established distinctions, our culture, and our identity (Kristeva 1982: p.69). And inversely, the practice of avoiding the abject serves to uphold a culture and a tradition. We have form on one side and the lack of it on the other: “Defilement is what is jettisoned from the ‘*symbolic system*.’ It is what escapes that social rationality, that logical order on which a social aggregate is based, which then becomes differentiated from a temporary agglomeration of individuals and, in short, constitutes a *classification system* or a *structure*” (Kristeva 1982: p.65). On the one side distinction, on the other indistinction.

Meat from a pig decays quickly in the Mediterranean heat, but still the presence of such danger cannot explain the intensity of the prohibition and the culturally given sanctions attached to it. To take a more difficult case: why is menstrual blood taboo? Certainly not out of concern for health. A better but still partial answer could be dealing with pig meat or menstrual blood as the object of an “inversed” desire. The object of desire and the abject are both materials for psychic and cultural investments. In themselves they are nothing; only when they are *posited* as objects or objects of desire they achieve their extraordinary status: “Apprehensive, desire turns aside; sickened, it rejects” (Kristeva 1982: p.1). Here, it finds the abject. In Freud’s vocabulary, the object is totem and the abject taboo. Jacques-Alain Miller (1989) has coined the concept “extimity” to describe objects of desire and it is equally useful in describing abjects. Being wanted but not possessed, the object of desire belongs to an external reality. However, as something desired, it also belongs to the interior. Objects of desire are thus given by the logic of a lack to be filled. The abject is to the contrary always in surplus, there is “always too much” of the abject. The urge is therefore to get rid of it, which is precisely as impossible as obtaining *the* object of desire.

Cultures, traditions and communities are as much given by what they reject as by what they elevate. Rites of pollution uphold and support a social structure. The most obvious example is of course the prohibition against incest. Although this prescription is close to universal, it is, however, still applied differently in different cultural contexts, a difference which can be explained by variations in family or tribe structure (Bataille 1993: pp.29-50). Rites of pollution supplement a law, which is too weak (Kristeva 1992: p.64). They make sure that borders and boundaries are not crossed (Miller 1997: p.50). “Disgust is there to prevent the activation of unconscious desire, or, more precisely, disgust is part of the very process of repression that makes such desires unconscious” (Miller 1997: p.109). Consequently, the stronger the burden of a law is felt, the less is the need for rites of pollution. Pollution rites are there to make us reject what we otherwise would want. It is a small wonder that pollution rites pop up within the domain of sexuality. The sexual urge is perhaps the most difficult urge to suppress and thus the need to add pollution rites to cultural prescriptions against e.g. incest and polygamy.

Rape pollution aims to strengthen a patriarchal structure (see Salzman 1998: p.367). In traditional cultures, wives and unmarried women are often considered as wealth in need of protection. Etymologically speaking rape is derived from the Latin “rapere” which means “to steal, seize or carry away” (Macnamara 2002: p.2). The rapist steals wealth that belongs to another man. All rites of pollution thus have a positive counterpart transforming the object under threat into wealth (Bataille 1993: p.46, Kristeva 1982: p.65). In keeping with this argument, war rape aims to devaluate the women and thus the wealth of the men. A precious object is turned into an abject.

In all the ancient civilizations of the West (and in many others) women were the property of their fathers and later in life of their husband. Marriage was often a monetary transaction, with the suitor or his family paying the “bride-price” to the father/owner. [...]. The woman literally belonged to her husband; damage to his property was a direct offence against the husband. If an unmarried woman was raped, her bride price was lower, for she was



“damaged goods.” Thus in some ancient societies, rapists paid the traditional bride price or some variation of it to the father, whose economic interest was harmed by the rape. (Macnamara 2002: p.2)

Which is also to say that rape attacks not only the victim but also aims to dissolve the social structure of the attacked group. Rape destroys communities by transforming women into objects. It taints its ethnic stock. In Islamic culture, like that of Bosnia, virginity and chastity before marriage is cherished so that the act of rape makes the victim unsuitable for marriage or motherhood (Fisher 1996: pp.123-124). “Many women still will not allow themselves to be seen naked even by their husband. One can imagine the attitude towards a woman who has been raped by many men, daily, for months. And her despair” (Askin 1997: p.270, n. 891). Many husbands do, of course, help their companion through the severe crisis. However, many of the female rape victims interviewed by Human Rights Watch and similar organizations report that they are afraid that their husband would reject them if they told him about the abuse (Stigelmayer 1994: p.137). Some even feared being killed. The act of rape humiliates the husband and may cause a desperate “acting out” through which the victim is punished (Salzman 1998: p.371). In traditional cultures, financial compensation or revenge by killing have been a way of re-establishing family honour (the honour of the victim being secondary), but such action is hardly possible in the case of Bosnia.

In war, the abuse of the enemy's women is considered to be the ultimate humiliation, a stamp of total conquest (Goldstein 2001: p.362). It is a castrating experience aiming to illustrate the impotence of the enemy: “The body of a raped woman becomes a ceremonial battlefield; a parade ground for the victor’s trooping of the colours. The act that is played out upon her is a message passed between men – vivid proof of victory for one and loss and defeat for the other” (Brownmiller 1988: p.38). In some cases, family members, inhabitants of her town or detainees were forced to watch or carry out the act of rape (Salzman 1998: p.359, Pettman 1996: p.190, Askin 1997: p.271 n.893) – all this to assure the humiliation of the men. The setting created a twofold feeling of impotence: the act of rape demonstrated that the Serbs were sexually superior, that the women preferred them. They might resist but secretly they were enjoying it... Along the same lines the enemy men were described as pussies, homosexuals and forced to wear a woman’s dress (Goldstein 2001: p.357). In several cases men were literally castrated (Goldstein 2001: p.357, Askin 1997: p.271 n.893). The aim of the acts was to demonstrate the opponent’s lack of sexual power. Secondly, the setting should create a situation in which the enemy men were incapable of proving their manhood in protecting their women (Salzman 1998: p.365). Having investigated the intersection of abjection and politics let us now proceed and investigate how religion and abjection intertwine.

### **3. Religion and abjection**

We have already seen how the object is articulated within a hygienic discourse as dirt or filth. In religious discourse something similar seems to be the case. The distinction between holiness and fallenness intertwines with a distinction between purity and impurity. To get at deeper understanding of the traumatism of rape, we need to investigate how and why these

two discourses intertwine. Bataille's anthropology is again a good place to begin. For Bataille, human existence is given against the background of two constitutive negations. We already mentioned the first; it concerns the distinction between animality and humanity: through the objectification of nature, animal existence is overcome. The use of tools and the existence of laws (most importantly against incest, cannibalism, and murder) compel us to resist drives and impulses, that is, to distance ourselves from our inner nature. There is, however, always an animal remainder that must be rejected (the secondary negation). The anxiety caused by confrontation with abjected matter shows that we are unwilling to accept our animal origin. The primary negation (of nature) shows itself through a secondary (fear of the abject). "In the matter of smell, animals do not show repugnance. Man appears to be the only animal to be *ashamed* of that nature whence he comes, and from which he does not cease to have departed" (Bataille 1993: p.62). To be human is continuously to obliterate the traces of one own animal origin.

This animal remainder, i.e. the abject, belongs to the "heterogeneous realm." The concept is coined by Bataille to designate that which transcends the realm of the ordinary. Abjection is, however, not the only way to transcend the homogeneous realm. Religion, along with war and eroticism, is another way of achieving the same. Religion is given by a drive to become like "water in water" (Bataille 1992: p.18), or less poetically characterized by a striving for immanence. Animal immanence is forever lost and this striving thus has to find a different form, that of a negation of the primary negation. Instead of returning to nature, religion negates the symbols of man's objectification of nature, e.g. in sacrificing parts of the harvest. Through sacrifice one aims to fuse with the God(s) (Bataille 1989).

Thus, the lowest (animalism) and the highest (religion) are both characterized by immanence. Manhood, the middle term, relates to both: to animalism by repulsion and to religion by conviction and sacrifice. The distinction between purity and impurity applies differently in these two situations. Animal immanence is associated with impurity while religious immanence designates purity and dignity. In religion, man is seen as a mediation of these two kinds of immanence. Man can either fall into animalism (that is, become abject) or he can rise above the human realm towards the Gods. The religious distinction between the fallen and the risen (the believer) is thus recoded as one between impurity and purity. Dirt, filth and blood indicate remoteness to the divine realm. It is expressed most clearly in the Hindi caste system that differentiates people according to the degree of their purity: lowest is the one who deals with human waste, corpses and other kinds of abjected matter, highest is the holy man. Bataille again:

The line of development from taboos on incest or menstrual blood to the religions of purity and of the soul's immortality is quite clear: it is always a matter of denying the human being's dependence on the natural given, of setting our dignity, our spiritual nature, our detachment against animal avidity. (Bataille 1993: p.91)

A literary example is helpful here. In Dostoevski's *The Kamarazov Brothers* (1958: pp.383-395) we meet Starets Zosima, a hermit capable of healing the needy and curing the sick, thus one of the most holy men in the monastery. He is treated with great respect and when

he dies a *lit de parade* and a mass is given in his honour. However, during the mass his corpse begins to smell. The monks are confused: spirituality and holiness goes along with purity and thus a saint's corpse should not smell. The monks stick to the ritual until the smell gets too gross and someone finally has to open a window. Stories then develop: some claim that this holy man drank sweet tea, that he took for himself liberties, cheated with the rituals, etc. Zosima's spiritual aura quickly evaporates, as his corpse turns into a rotting abject.

Another illuminating example regarding the link between religion and abjection could be St. Catherine of Siena's life (c. 1370). St. Catherine was a nun working as a nurse. One of her patients was a sick nun who had breast cancer, which caused such an awful stench that none except Catherine could attend her. The first time she had to wash the sick nun's breast she felt overwhelmed by the smell and vomited. Taking this as a sign of lack of faith in God she first held her nose over the sick breast until she got accustomed to the smell and later she stirred up the filth and drank it (Miller 1997: p.158). This is seemingly the inverse case of Starets Zosima, but only on the surface. Filth is also for Catherine a sign of impurity but it is precisely in going for "the lowest" that she shows her fidelity to God. Self-defilement is turned into a sign of faith (Miller 1997: 161).

Apart from the anecdotic examples just given, the link between a religious and hygienic discourse can be illuminated through an interrogation of religious texts. The theory of abjection (as developed by Douglas and Kristeva) is in fact based on a reading of the Bible. In abstracting ideal types from this reading, we hope that our findings will also be relevant in an Islamic context. Julia Kristeva distinguishes in her now classic study of abjection (*Powers of Horror. An Essay on Abjection*, 1982: p.71) between three kinds of abjected objects as mentioned in a biblical context: abdominal food, excremental matter and menstrual blood. Excrements and equivalents (decay, infection, disease, corpse, etc.) are dangers to identity coming from the outside, while menstrual blood is a danger coming from within. The distinction between abjection from the outside and from the inside overlaps with the portrait of abjection found in the *The Old Testament* and *The New Testament* respectively.

*The Old Testament* gives a number of prescriptions on what to consider pure or impure. Simply to avoid abjected matter is of course the easiest way to retain purity, and if pollution should occur a vast number of cleansing rites are to be found; of these sacrifice is the most common. Abjection is described as pollution or contamination, that is, seen as something that does not affect the subject in any fundamental way. In *The New Testament* the distinction between purity and impurity is reversed. Sin is attributed to all believers. Instead of holiness gained through a constant avoidance of abjected matter, we find in *The New Testament* the importance of confessions through which sin (abjection) is elevated into a sign of faith. Abjection is internalized. It comes no longer from the outside but from within (Kristeva 1982: p.114). "Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man" (Matthew 15:p.11, in Kristeva 1982: p.114).

Let us shortly consider how rape pollution relates to these two forms of abjection. Certainly, rape is to be understood as pollution from without; an enemy penetrates the body of the victim. However, no corresponding rite for purification presents itself here, which is usually the case regarding pollution from without. Rape is a kind of pollution, which cannot be rinsed away as easily as dirt can. On the other hand, the feeling of shame indicates that rape also follows the second type of abjection (sin). Rape is thought of as an attribute that denigrates the person in question (otherwise the victims would not feel ashamed). But only partly: rape cannot be elevated to a sign of faith through confession. Rape pollution resists conversion into language: “When they left, my sons came out and found me in a complete mess. They asked me what happened: “What’d they do to you?” they said, “Nothing.” I couldn’t tell them about it, I really couldn’t tell them about it. I’d rather die than to have them find out about it” (Stigelmeyer 1994: p.101). Rape is a hybrid of the two forms of abjection. Although this is a crucial insight, we have still not answered our initial question concerning the linkage between the religious and hygienic discourses and how this linkage matters in the case of rape.

One of the puzzles in *The Old Testament* is the abominations of Leviticus. We are told that one should not eat any abominable things: “You may eat the ox, the sheep, the goat, the hart, the gazelle, the roe-buck, the wild goat [...]” “Every animal that parts the hoof and has the hoof cloven in two, and chews the cud you may eat” which excludes the camel, the rock badger and the hare (do not have cloven hooves) and the pig (does not chew the cud). “Whatever has fins and scales you may eat. And whatever does not have fins and scales you shall not eat it. It is unclean for you.” “You may eat all clean birds. But these are the ones which you shall not eat: the eagle, the vulture, the osprey...” And so it goes on: long lists of what you may eat and what you should avoid (Douglas 1966: pp.42-58).

Several interpretations can be offered to grasp the underlying system that designates objects as pure or impure. We have already, along functionalist lines, mentioned the role of pollution rites in upholding a community and in protecting health. Another explanation is that prescriptions are, in fact, arbitrary or do not follow a single principle: some animals are, due to their repulsive look, considered impure, others because they allegorically signal laziness, as reptiles wriggling their belly, or lack of self-control, as the “fish” without fins and scales (Douglas 1966: p.48). Still other animals might be banned as food due to their religious function such as the serpent in Arabia (Douglas 1966: p.46). Mary Douglas herself offers a more convincing explanation arguing that prescriptions against pollution have to be understood in their totality. We should forget hygiene, aesthetics, morals and instinctive revulsion and take the texts’ preface literally. This preface commands people to be holy. The mere avoidance of an object X serves as a sign of conviction and thus the X could be anything. What matters is the establishment of a *practice* of faith.

Kristeva goes even further. To her, food only appears as a source of pollution in so far as it crosses the boundary of the self’s clean and proper body: “Food becomes abject only if it is a border between two distinct entities or territories. A boundary between nature and culture, between the human and the non-human” (Kristeva 1982: p.75). Hence Kristeva’s important

contribution: the abject is an indistinct, formless object. Just as excrement, food passes the border between the self's interior and its exterior. "Abjection is, above all, ambiguity" (Kristeva 1982: p.9). It is the in-between, the neither-nor, the both-included-and-excluded object. As such it disturbs all systems and distinctions:

It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite. The traitor, the liar, the criminal with a good conscience, the shameless rapist, the killer who claims he is a savior. (Kristeva 1982: p.4)

We have already briefly mentioned the case of forced impregnations in Bosnia and how these were used to destroy a community structure, that is: to disturb "identity, system and order". One of the most striking things to be found in the interviews with impregnated rape victims is that they always talk about the child they are carrying in neutral, depersonalized and un-gendered terms. The abject is, as previously described, the indefinable "it": the in-between: belonging to both her and the rapist. Rape can, here, usefully be compared to the instances of ritualistic torture seen during wars. Allen reports that amputations were widely used by regular as well as irregular fighters on both the Serb and Croatian side. "The most common form of amputation is to cut off the ring finger and the little finger of the victim's right hand, thus leaving that hand in an enduring Serb salute (the Orthodox manner of signing the cross is to use three fingers; this salute looks like a straight-arm Nazi salute with thumb and first two fingers extended)" (Allen 1996: p.79). Another form of torture was to carve Serbian crosses on the skin of victims (Stigelmeyer 1994: p.129). In both cases the obvious effect is to place the victim in an abject position of neither being Muslim nor Serb.

Returning to the case of rape concluded in pregnancy, the use of the word "it" also testifies to the fact that the act of rape resists language. This act is too horrible. Victims feel ashamed and thus choose not to speak. This feeling is at odds with the concept of abjection found in *The Old Testament*. Abjection is here conceptualized as coming from outside, and as something that can be warded off through rites of purification. In the case of ritualistic torture, evidently that is not possible: Amputations are final, a "stitch" on the body that cannot be effaced. To understand the feeling of shame, we must move to *The New Testament*.

In monotheistic religions, rites of pollution generally drift toward secondary forms as transgressions of the law. In *The New Testament* abjection is totalized and subsumed under the category of sin. This also changes the status of the religious subject. Faith is no more demonstrated through the avoidance of abjected matter but by acknowledging one's status as abject, as a sinner, as someone who is unworthy of God's blessing. The rites of sacrifice aimed at pleasing the gods are thus in the context of *The New Testament* replaced by rites of confession. Both acts have an acknowledgment of impurity as their basis, but whereas sacrifice and similar practices work to reinstall purity in the context of *The Old Testament*, the acknowledgment of impurity is, in the context of *The New Testament*, elevated to a sign of faith. The relative importance of primary and secondary forms of pollution vary between religions. Within Protestantism they are mostly based on secondary prescriptions, and

within Hinduism, Islam and Judaism, mostly on primary prescriptions. We must understand these two kinds of prescriptions as varying in form and not necessarily in context. The command not to kill is found within both types, but whereas in its primary form it is literally about pollution, it is in its secondary form about the transgression of a law.

So far, we have discussed pollution in its primary (pollution/ contamination) and secondary (sin) forms and understood shame and trauma as an ambivalent hybrid of the two. From pollution, rape takes the idea of contamination from an external environment (however a rite for cleansing the body is lacking) and from sin, rape takes the idea of the abject as an attribute of a person (which, however, cannot be converted into language and work as a sign of faith). We are thus dealing with two pairs of distinctions: one between pollution/contamination and sin (abjection as found in *The Old Testament* and *The New Testament* respectively), and another subdivision of sin into either a form of abjection that can be elevated into a sign of faith (which we will from now on call sin) and a form which cannot (which we will call shame).

Guilt involves the belief that one has done something “wrong” or “bad”. Although an individual’s experience of guilt may include momentary thoughts that he or she is a bad person, the focus remains on a specific behaviour and his or her self-concept and identity remain intact. Thus, guilt may be less painful than shame and often leads an individual to make amends. In contrast, shame is conceived of as a more devastating and painful emotion in which the entire self, not just the behaviour, is negatively evaluated. Shame theoretically involves painful self-scrutiny, and feelings of worthlessness and powerlessness.” (Leskela, Dieperink & Thuras 2002: pp.223-224)

Our next move is to use the second distinction, that between sin and shame/trauma, to understand the practice of the perpetrator and the victim respectively. On the side of the perpetrator, the act of rape might serve as an act of initiation and as the sign of one’s fidelity towards certain goals of a gang, an army or a nation. On the side of the victim, the same act often resists translation into language and thus cannot serve as the basis of the formation of a social bond. We begin by discussing rape and shame and move to focus on the way the act of rape can serve as a rite of initiation.

#### **4. The advent of shame**

The metaphorical overlapping of the bodily and psychic interiors must be at the core if one wishes to understand the traumatic impact of rape. The body’s interiority is seen, at least in a Western culture, as its most private and intimate part. “The vagina is a gateway inside, the gate to the woman’s soul by which act of entry property in her body is claimed” (Miller 1997: p.102). At the same time, however, everything that leaves this interior is considered filthy (with tears being the exception). Why this ambivalence? The question overlooks that substances are not impure in themselves but become so in passing the border between inside and outside (food can be impure because it passes through the mouth, excrement through the anus, menstrual blood through the vagina, etc). No abject without a blurred distinction.

The argument applies to the case of rape as well: rape is traumatic because it invades our innermost intimacy (Seifert 1994: p.55). It is the border crossing practice *per se*. It transforms the secret kernel of our inner being into an abject. In Lacanian psychoanalysis, the interior is purely residual: it is the unconscious. The unconscious is what remains when all symbolical attachments are removed: I am always more than my job, more than the kind of sport I do, more than my family ties, my nationality, etc. Remove the unconscious and you have a puppet. The interior of the body metaphorically stands for that which is always more. One of the most horrible things one can do is thus to evade the interior, to fill it. In the interior everything becomes abject, because nothing properly belongs there. Shame is accordingly not provoked by a lack of being but inversely by a being's incapacity to move away from itself. "If we experience shame in nudity, it is because we cannot hide what we would like to remove from the field of vision; it is because the unrestrainable impulse to flee from oneself is confronted by an equally certain impossibility of evasion (Agamben 1999: p.105). Shame provokes trauma in breaking down the protective barrier between the self and its surroundings.

A reflective twist is called for here. The inside is always *symbolized* as that which is private and intimate. We perceive some thoughts as private and intimate fantasies, and others as public and shared opinions. The realm of fantasies is a kind of shock absorber against the pressure from the outside, an image of something that escapes social forming. Fantasies are scenes of excess and transgression of social roles, norms, and laws. Fantasies can be "positive" or "negative" (wishing to be raped, fearing being raped), but in general they reproduce widespread cultural schemes. One common fantasy is that of a dominant male taking a woman by force. The taking and the resisting are however considered to be a part of a game: she wants to be taken. A reason for the traumatism of rape might be that it realizes the secret fantasies of the victim. It sounds outrageous, but the fact that victims often feel ashamed indicates that there might be some truth in the argument. The worst thing is to realize other people's fantasies and thus show that one is capable of penetrating the victims most secret thoughts. A more "positive" version of the argument is that people feel traumatized because the act of rape realizes what they fear. Again, the victim's fantasy space is violated not in being denied but in being realized (Žižek 1991). A literary example might be useful: When does the Party in George Orwell's *1984* (1990) succeed in breaking Winston's resistance? The answer is the moment when they, in the process of torturing him, show that they know his utmost fear, that of rats. It is not the rats as such which breaks down Winston's resistance, but the knowledge that the party knows/penetrates everything, even his most private thoughts.

Shame is produced through an act of which the subject works as the agent of its own desubjectivation, its own oblivion as a subject (Agamben 1999: p.106 ff). Shame thus directly links to the concept of sin. Sin (and guilt) is internalized pollution, something one is responsible for affecting one being in depth. However, unlike sin, shame resists verbalization, it cannot be elevated into a sign of faith or belonging. Let us give a literary example. In *Sophie's Choice*, the protagonist undergoes a process of desubjectivation. She is forced to choose between her two kids; one will be sent to the gas chambers and the other

will for the moment being survive. Although she is at the mercy of the guards – they will kill both her children if she refuses to choose between them – she feels responsible for the decision. A forced choice like Sofie’s makes ethical purity impossible. She enters into a grey zone between the guilty and the not guilty, a threshold between the human and the non-human.

“The grey zone” is a concept coined by Primo Levi, one of the survivors from the Nazi extermination camps. It was applied to the Sonderkommando who worked to make the crematories run. In the grey zone victims became executioners and executioners victims. Each became equally ignoble (Agamben 1999: p.17). Conceiving and organizing the squads was for Primo Levi National Socialism’s “most demonic crime” (Levi 1989: p.53). “In the camps one was forced, day after day, for years, to watch the destruction of others, feeling – against one’s better judgment – that one should have intervened, feeling guilty for having often felt glad that it was not oneself who perished” (Bettelheim 1979: pp.297-298). This feeling of being responsible for an enforced act is, as we will later see, shared by many rape victims.

It is here useful to compare *Sophie* with the *Muselmann* known from the concentration camps. These *Muselmänner*, who could just as well be women, were a kind of living dead, that is, people reduced to animal existence. When attacked by the guards they did not even defend themselves, because they have nothing to defend. They had lost their sense of selfhood and their power to narrate (Agamben 1999). The *Muselmänner* lived like zombies and if they have had the power to imagine the difference between living and being dead, they would have chosen the last option.

The *Muselmann* embodies the anthropological meaning of absolute power in an especially radical form. Power abrogates itself in the act of killing. The death of the other puts an end to the social relationship. But by starving the other, it gains time. It erects a third realm, a limbo between life and death. Like the pile of corpses, the *Muselmänner* document the total triumph of power over the human being. Although still nominally alive, they are nameless hulks. (Sofsky 1997: p.294)

Shame is not a concept that applies to the *Muselmann*: numb as he is, he is not feeling anything. He is not as *Sophie*, and the rape victims, witnessing his own desubjectivation. However, it might be that shame evoked through rape produces a state similar to that of the *Muselmann*. The traumatized rape victim has, as the *Muselmann*, lost the power to narrate. Selfhood is undermined. In both cases, one should ask if a more total power exists than the one that kills. The concentration camp was, as Arendt claimed, laboratories in total domination (Arendt 1994: p.240, p.304). The *Muselmann* was reduced to “an always constant collection of reactions and reflexes” (Arendt 1994: p.304), and the rape victim condemned to repeat the act of rape as trauma. In both cases the grip of power seems without an end.

The sexualised violence against Bosnian, and to a lesser extent towards Serb and Croat civilians, aimed to force them into a grey zone. Victims were forced to transgress



constitutive prohibitions marking their identity as human beings, for example the prohibition against murder or incest. A father was forced to rape his daughter or a son his mother. The victim should be active in denigrating himself, family members or friends. The best examples of being subject for one's own desubjectivation is perhaps the case of sexual violence against men. The violations are innumerable but all shares the emphasis on self-denigration. Brothers were forced to have sexual intercourse or a father with a son or a son with a mother. Prisoners were forced to perform oral sex on each other; internees were forced to bite off each other's testicles, et cetera (Human Rights Watch 1993: pp.216-219, p.339, Askin 1997: p.271, n. 893).

In all these cases, the victims have to execute a perverse ritual aiming to destroy their dignity and feeling of moral worth. The victim was actively doing something: penetrating another body with his penis, biting, hitting, shooting etc. What about the female victim of rape then? If shame is linked to an image of an active subject (forced or not), it is not obvious why rape provokes shame. The rape victim is forced into total passivity, reduced into an object of penetration and in the case of successful impregnation to an incubator for enemy seed. Agamben (1999: p.110) writes: "For there is certainly nothing shameful in a human being who suffers on account of sexual violence; but if he takes pleasure in his suffering violence, if he is moved by his passivity – if, that is, auto-affection is produced – only then can one speak of shame". The task is not to investigate how women enjoy being raped – we assume they do not – but to investigate how the myth of female auto-affection provokes a feeling of shame. Although phrased in an unfortunate essentialist vocabulary, the orientalized (s)expert, Hirschfeld, unknowingly provides an important insight:

For the women, the brutality and aggressiveness of the man is, to a certain degree, accompanied by pleasure. The reasons for this are obvious. The conquest of woman and the act of copulation, presupposes, on the men's part, a definite joy in attacking. The woman who, in the act of love, is the one that gives herself, reacts to this with passion. The normal woman desires to be conquered by the man, to be forced; and only one step separates her from the female masochist who wishes, not only to be overwhelmed, but also to be raped and brutalized. Though the science of sex psychology is young, this point is ancient, for as far back as two thousand years ago, the great teacher of love, Ovid mentioned this matter to his disciples. (Hirschfeld in Blelic & Cole 2002: p.284)

The distinction between the active and the passive is of outmost importance in the case of rape. Even though the victim through rape is forced into passivity, women are, in accordance with the above mentioned "myth", blamed for inviting the act. They inflame male desires by the way they dress, by their smile, by flirting... They encourage rape.

She agonizes over her past actions, reviewing her role in the scenario, taking inventory of her movements, attitudes, gestures, speech, makeup, and dress, with a view to self-incrimination. In her reconstruction of the circumstances that led to rape she tries to justify her belief, whether true or false in fact, that she is to blame for being raped. [...] Passing through the victim's mind is a series of "if only's." If only I had done this, or not said that, or not worn that skirt, or not walked down that street, or not been so trusting, the rape would not have happened. (Snow 1994: p.397)

Men are inversely portrayed as the victims of their lust. They cannot help it: they are men. There is a biological argument as well: the nature of the male's sexual organ is believed to give the male the role of the active part (penetration) and the women the passive (penetrated) (Miller 1997: p.104). As we have seen, women are, however, at the same time considered to be seducers (active) and men objects of seduction (passive). Linking the two cultural schemes, violence is easily legitimised. The "fact" that men have to be active implies that it is the attitude of the women that decides if the act is sex or violence. The woman is thus placed in a vulnerable position; she can be accused of lying: "She seduced the man, but afterwards she accused him of rape." Although the male possesses superior physical strength, he is considered vulnerable to feminine attraction.

This opens the discussion of rape in Islamic discourse. The Qur'an does not address the issue of rape extensively, which is, Salzman argues, due to the presumption that women are to be accompanied by men in public. Rapes are considered infrequent, and only occur when a woman is unaccompanied by a male guardian, that is, "on the make", looking for a sexual encounter. If a woman accuses a man of rape, the case goes to the religious court. The punishment for rape is severe: death by stoning or a life long sentence in jail. Such a sentence is, however, rarely carried out due to the fact that the women in question need four respectable Muslims to testify which, of course, is unlikely to happen, and even if such witnesses were produced, the woman would still have to prove that she had lived a chaste life.<sup>1</sup> The most likely result of a trial is thus that the woman is accused of *zina*-sex, sex outside marriage, and sent to jail (Salzman 1998: pp.367-368). The system Salzman describes is one based on Islamic law. An extreme case for sure and quite different from the way Islam is practiced in Bosnia. However, the belief that raped women were "asking for it" is widespread. In addition, a distinction between rape and premarital or extramarital sexual relationship rarely exist (Salzman 1998: p.367). Premarital sex is taboo and virginity is taken to be a proof of the purity of a woman. How her virginity is lost is secondary. Concerning Bosnia, Salzman makes the following observation:

Also, women sometimes feel responsible in some way for the rape, and this misconception can be reinforced by attitudes and comments from peers. Especially in cultures where women raped in peacetime are frequently blamed for the attack, whether because of the clothes they were wearing or being out alone in public, in a wartime situation women may internalize these speculations. (Salzman 1998: p.370)

The myth of the willing rape victim blocks the attempts to verbalize the act. Women prefer to remain silent rather than to become an outcast condemned by family and community. "What happened to me, happened to many, but the women keep it secret. It is shameful.

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<sup>1</sup> It is worth noting that female virginity is much more cherished than male virginity (Miller 1997: p.105). Why? The answer is the working of the sexual organs: "The metaphor of penetration is in a way a desperate male defence against the male fear of being engulfed [...]. Since penises penetrate, they, like knives, do much less damage to themselves than they do to the other. And the belief is that they clean up more easily, it being easier to clean the outside of the penetrating instrument than the inside of the penetrated "victim" (Miller 1997: p.104).

Thus, the mother conceals if it happened to her daughter so she can marry and if it happened to an older woman, she wants to protect her marriage” (Allen 1996: p.94). Perhaps even more important the victim loses her feeling of selfhood and her power to narrate and thus “share” the event.

Shame is to be consigned to something that cannot be assumed. “To be ashamed means to be consigned to something that cannot be assumed” (Agamben 1999: p.105). This phrasing links shame and trauma. Trauma arises from an act that cannot be forgotten, and what cannot be forgotten are the things we are ashamed of: “That’s something you never forget. I still carry it around with me in my heart, in my soul. I think of it when I go to bed and I think of it when I get up. It does not let you go” (testimony quoted in Stigelmeyer 1994: p.92). “After all these months,” she said, “I cannot get rid of a feeling of carrying some kind of visible stamp, of being dirty, physically dirty, and guilty” (testimony quoted in Draculic 1993: p.119).

We will now move on and investigate how the logic of abjection works on the side of the perpetrator. How, and why, can this act be transformed into a sign of manhood and/or of one’s fidelity to a cause? To answer this question we need to link our analysis of abjection with one of sovereignty.

## 5. Brotherhood in guilt

For Agamben, the *homo sacer* and the sovereign are two symmetrical figures: “the sovereign is the one with respect to whom all men are potentially *homininess sacri*, and *homo sacer* is the one with respect to whom all men act as sovereigns” (Agamben 1998: p.84). The *homo sacer* belongs neither to the human nor to the divine, or to be more precise: the life of the *homo sacer* belongs to humans in so far as it cannot be sacrificed and does not belong to it in so far as it can be killed without committing homicide (Agamben 1998: pp.71-74, 81-85). One of the *homo sacer*’s first instantiations was the werewolf: neither a beast nor a man, dwelling within both, belonging to either. The werewolf was an outlaw that could be killed without the executioner facing any legal sanctions (Agamben 1998: pp.104-105). Banned and excluded from the city, the werewolf was forced to survive in the forest. “The transformation into a werewolf corresponds perfectly to the state of exception, during which (necessarily limited) time the city is dissolved and men enter into a zone in which they are no longer distinct from beast” (Agamben 1998: p.107).

It is not difficult to see that the abjected victim of rape and the *homo sacer* share something. The rape victim too, is banned from human existence. As the *homo sacer* she is situated in a threshold of being both included and excluded from the realm of power (Agamben 1998: pp.71-74). She is an outcast whose presence nevertheless is perceived as a threat obstructing communal order. In one of the few interviews with perpetrators available, it is striking that the rapists describe their victims in depersonalized terms. For Borislav Herak, a Serb rapist, they are always “tall, dark haired, and between twenty and twenty-five years of age” (Stiglmayer 1992: p.155). To understand the victim as a “naked” body is thus apt. The

encounter between the rapist and the victim is not an encounter between two persons, but between a person and a body.

Let us, however, focus not on the *homo sacer* but the inverse figure, the sovereign. The sovereign and the *homo sacer* are, as previously mentioned, produced in one and the same stroke (Agamben 1998: p.84), which is to say that sovereignty is not a legal or a state-centric concept. Sovereignty is performed, but can be so by other entities than the state. Sovereign is the criminal who takes the life of another man, sovereign is the terrorist crashing a plane into the World Trade center, sovereign is the rapist. In Bosnia everybody could become sovereign and certainly the rapists did.

Under normal circumstances the right to take life belongs to the state (due to its monopoly on the use of violence). More extreme situations, however, show that sovereignty “belongs” to the one who decides on the state of exception (Agamben 1998: pp.15-16). The sovereign can rise above the laws, e.g. by killing even though his own laws explicitly forbid it. This act of emergency is declared when the state attempts to defend its statehood by all possible means. The situation in Bosnia was different. The order of law was suspended but not for the purpose of producing state sovereignty, or at least only indirectly so. Instead of intervening in society through still more strict measures, everybody was set free. Everybody, or at least the paramilitary groups, was given the opportunity to rise to the status of a sovereign.

[T]he West which perceives Milosovic as a kind of tyrant doesn't see the perverse, liberating aspect of Milosevic. What Milosevic did was to open up what even Tijanac calls a “permanent carnival”: nothing functions in Serbia! Everyone can steal! Everyone can cheat! You can go on TV and spit on Western leaders! You can kill! You can smuggle! Again, we are back at Bakhtin. All Serbia is an eternal carnival now. This is the crucial thing people do not get here; it's not simply some kind of “dark terror,” but a kind of false, explosive liberation. (Žižek & Hanlon 2001: p.19)

The war lifted all prohibitions and allowed soldiers to enter an erotic paradise. The young men were given an irresistible charge in holding lethal power in their hands (Ignatieff 1993: pp.140-141). Milosevic made this festival possible and thus indirectly commissioned rape, burglary and other crimes (perhaps even directly so if there is substance to the RAM-plan). Bataille's festival, like Bakhtin's carnival, captures something essential about the behaviour of Serb paramilitary troops in Bosnia. The festival is a state of exception: it is sacrifice, lawful crime and sovereignty established (Bataille 1993: p.124). One of Bataille's examples is the Hawaiian islands where the death of the king signalled a period in which all prohibitions were lifted: “No sooner is the event announced than men rush in from all quarters, killing everything in front of them, raping and pillage to beat the devil” (Bataille 1993: p.89). It all lasted until the king's body turned into a hard and incorruptible skeleton. Then a new king was introduced and order restored (Bataille 1993: p.89). Bataille's example allows us to grasp an important “detail”. The festival did not threaten royal power. On the contrary. It served as an outlet, allowing people to partake in it. The festival is a reactionary state of exception, an attempt to strengthen and legitimise royal power. “Even

the “festival of the king’s death,” in spite of the formless aspect it assumes, is still in a sense lawful: the rule authorizes it by the *regular* suspension of its effects, during the time when the king’s corpse is rotting (Bataille 1993: p.129). It can be compared to the *Kristalnacht* where ordinary people were allowed to steal, destroy and kill. An act like this is not spontaneous in the strict sense of the word, and neither was it in Bosnia. Milosevic allowed the paramilitary groups to share his power, his pejoratives, in return of unlimited “love” and loyalty. And the same logic was repeated at lower levels. After having forced the soldiers to transgress a taboo, they became like clay in the hands of their leader. This transgressive act is, however, only possible against the backdrop of law. Rephrased in Bataille’s writing:

It is the festival, it is of course, for a moment the cessation of work, the unrestrained consumption of its products and the deliberate violation of the most hallowed laws, but the excess consecrates and completes an order of things based on rules; it goes against that order only temporarily. Moreover, we should not be misled by the appearance of a return by man to nature. It is such a return, no doubt, but only in one sense. Since man has uprooted himself from nature, that being who returns to it is still uprooted, he is an uprooted being who suddenly goes back toward that from which he is uprooted, from which he has not ceased to uproot himself. The first uprooting is not obliterated: when men, in the course of the festival, give free play to the impulses they refuse in profane times, these impulses have a meaning in the context of the human world: they are meaningful only in that context. In any case, these impulses cannot be mistaken for those of animals (Bataille 1993: p.90)

Acts of rape, burglary and killing fascinate because they are not allowed. Rules and norms are not missing, only lifted/suspended. Abjection thus works on both sides. On the side of the victim, abjection has a destructive impact because it cannot be verbalized; it is like a bone stuck in the throat, and on the side of the offender, it works to create a strong symbolic bond, a brotherhood in abjection or in guilt to use the more common term. There can be a brotherhood in guilt, but never a sisterhood in shame. The first kind of abjection produces shame, the second, “sin” (guilt). The distinction between sin and shame however easily dissolves. What, within a closed community of soldiers, is understood as guilt (as a transgression which proves one’s manhood and loyalty) is transformed into shame as soon as the soldier leaves this community – which is why he does not and why the officers force soldiers to break taboos. This also explains the frequent use of gang rape. By sharing the crime, a brotherhood in guilt was established.

By forcing individuals to transgress norms, at the same time they were forced to choose sides. Either they were Serbs, Croats or Muslims. No other option existed. Some neighbours even became enemies overnight. “[P]aramilitary groups are using rapes “to build up a kind of solidarity” among the rapists, to teach “who is ‘good’ and who is ‘contemptible,’ “ and to destroy bonds of friendship that had existed between former neighbours” (Card 1996: p.10). This also explains why knives were a favourite weapon. By forcing unwilling soldiers to use a knife against their opponent (neighbour or friend), the act was intensified and personalized in a way which would not have been the case if a machinegun had been used. The act of rape was used as a rite of initiation, which made men true Serbs (implying the rejection of multiculturalism in any form). Soldiers were not just soiled in blood but also

baptised in it. Inside Serbia, the paramilitary groups were heroes, outside they were stigmatised as perverts.

White Eagles have made rape a gesture of group solidarity. A man who refuses to join the others in rape is regarded as a traitor to the unit, and to his Serbian blood. Sometimes, that impulse to bond with the male group becomes a kind of perverse inflaming energy inciting to rape. Lust is only a subsidiary drive. And sometimes, young men in war may commit rape in order to please their elders, their officers, and win a sort of father-to-son approval. The rape is proof of commitment to the units fierceness. A young man willing to do hideous things has subordinated his individual conscience in order to fuse with the uncompromising purpose of the group. A man seals his allegiance in atrocity. (Morrow 1993)

The story of twenty-three-year-old Cvijetin Maksimovie from Lukavac near Brcko in the northern part of Bosnia follows Morrow's description neatly. He was forcibly mobilized into Serbian troops at the beginning of the war, and served in the Luka internment camp where more than 3000 Muslims were killed. His story:

It was outside the camp area – there was a sentry box there where we used to hang out, and two men came to get me. They were called Dino and Colo; they were either Arkan or Seselj soldiers, I'm not sure which. [...] They came to get me to butcher three men. They led them outside and gave me a knife. I said I'd never done anything like that, and I couldn't do it. I said up until then I hadn't even butchered a calf, let alone people. Then this Dino, I think it was Dino, he took my hand and put the knife into it and said, "then I'll show you how you butcher," and then we did it together. Three other guys held the man down. He was about forty years old and not too tall. I looked at him while I was killing him. It was very hard for me to do it, I was afraid because of all the soldiers who were watching, and I was unhappy to have to do it. The soldiers were laughing and talking together. I don't know what they said; I was completely ... I felt terrible. Then they cursed my mother and my father: "What kind of a Serb are you anyway? We travelled four or five hundred kilometres to fight here in Bosnia, and you're not even a real Serb!" Then I had to kill the other two. They said, "If you don't butcher them, we'll butcher you." I never thought I would ever do such a thing. I don't know what the other two men looked like, they were in a bad way, they looked like they'd been beaten, and the things they had on were torn. And then I killed them; they died quickly. The other soldiers said I wasn't a real Chetnik, not a real butcher. "Let's go get eighty of them so we can see if he can at least kill them with a gun." They gave me a machine gun, and eighty people had to go stand in a row; some of them were women. And so I shot them. With a few rounds in the chest. It took one or two minutes. Later on after they led me away I heard some more shots, probably some of them were only wounded. They said I wasn't a real Chetnik and now I would have to prove to them if I was at least a real man. They led me into a room in the camp halls. [...] "Here are twelve broads for you." The women were already there when I got there, and five or six soldiers came in too. I was supposed to rape the women. [...] "At the end they said they'd forgive me this time, but not next time. And then they let me go. (Stigelmeyer 1994: pp.156-157)

Cvijetin Maksimovie did rape the women and afterwards killed some of them. Was he guilty? Let us leave that question open. It is hard to answer. Just as the rape victim, he entered a grey zone. If he had refused, he might have been killed as some were (Askin 1997:

p.293: n 923; Stigelmeyer 1994: p.120), sent to the front line, or jailed (Stiglmayer 1994: pp.147-151). Many were forced into situations that they could not control, as are soldiers everywhere. It is difficult to be harsh on Cvijetin. This is, however, not the case in dealing with his superiors and those who killed and raped out of free will.

## **6. Pharmakonic warfare**

We have in our analysis of rape war shown that our bodily margins cannot be understood in isolation from other margins (Douglas 1966: p.122). As land is penetrated by enemy troops, so is the body and *vice versa*: The concern for the unity and order of the body politics, is mimetically reproduced in the preoccupations about the purity and impurity of the physical body (Douglas 1966: p.128). That national discourses are indebted to gendered and sexualized metaphors is well known. A vast literature exists on the nature and importance of borders, on the othering of the other, and in more general terms on the importance of difference. In constructing our argument, we have tried not to reproduce the way of reasoning. Instead of borders, distinctions, othering and exclusion, we have focused on formlessness, indistinctions, abjection and abandonment - all concepts designating the blurring of an inside/outside divide. This also allowed us to illuminate some important aspects of contemporary “post-modern” warfare: the importance of asymmetry, the paradoxes of identity formation, and finally some preliminaries on the way gender, body and the psychic can be used in inflicting traumas.

What, at a surface level, appears as a primitive barbaric act is in fact complicated, and more advanced than conventional warfare. A knife can be a high tech weapon. The war in Bosnia was not an echo from a long forgotten past. It is rather what lies ahead of us. The practice of rape war was well planned and informed by modern scientific knowledge. Virilio once wrote that every technology is defined by the catastrophe it makes possible. The techniques to help those who suffer from trauma can also be used against them. Our last quote is the one which made the deepest impression, and it concerns precisely this point.

Some of the local Serbs wore black stockings on their head to disguise their faces because they didn't want to be recognized. (Nevertheless) I recognized many of them. (They were) colleagues – doctors with whom I worked. The first (man) who raped me was a Serbian doctor named Jodic. He knew I recognized him. He saw my name on the list and called it out. I had known Jodic for ten years. We worked in the same hospital. I would see him every day in the employees' cafeteria. We spoke generally, “Hi, how are you.” He was a very polite, nice man. Another doctor whom I had previously known also raped me: (his name was) Obrad Filipovic. I wasn't allowed to say anything. Before he raped me he said, “Now you know who we are. You will remember forever.” I was so surprised; he was a doctor! (Human Rights Watch 1993: pp.216-219)

War rape is a double-edged sword. On the one hand it aimed to create grave traumas. On the other hand it created a brotherhood in guilt (Card 1996: p.7). We feel justified in labelling this new kind of war pharmakotic. War is as the pharmakon “poisonous, medical and addictive”. It is “a contagious disease of the body politic and an addictive drug with a unique capacity to temporarily restore political health.” It destroys the enemy's body politic

and constitutes ours. War is also pharmakotic in a second sense. The pharmakon is, in its Latin use, not just a remedy or a poison, but also a scapegoat. The pharmakos is typically a stranger, which, symbolically speaking, can be linked to a perceived threat towards a community (George 2002: pp.169-170). By sacrificing the pharmakos, by expelling or killing him or her, the polis was cleansed or purged of disorders and dissenters (George 2002: p.164). Obviously, the pharmakos is referring to that which, later on in Roman law, became *homo sacer*. “Pharmakotic wars create political power out of that aspect of the collective unconscious that is structured, not as in Lacan’s formulation, like a language, but rather, as in the words of Phillippe Sollers, like a lynching” (George 2002: p.165).



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