POLITICAL SCIENCE UNDERGRADUATE REVIEW

VOL. 1 ARTICLE 1

Fall 2016

Legacies of Violence: Examining the Relationship Between Gender and Ethnic Cleansing

By Liz Dolcemore

Traditional examinations of genocidal violence tend to focus on ethnic divisions and often fail to consider the impact of gender with respect to conflict. Building from the work that critical gender studies has made in post-conflict peacebuilding, this paper will look at cases that illustrate how targeting women within specific ethnic groups is an effective means of achieving genocidal goals. It will pay particular attention to the well-known events of the Rwandan genocide and draw comparisons to the legacies of the Indigenous genocide in Canada. Moreover, it will argue that the current crisis of murdered and missing Indigenous women in Canada is related to a project of genocide fuelled by settler colonialism.

Violence is an incredibly personal and traumatic experience, which is frequently thought of as occurring between individuals. In many instances, however, violence is committed against entire groups of people delineated along any combination of ethnic, racial, class or gender lines. Traditional examinations of genocidal violence tend to strictly focus on ethnic divisions and often fail to consider relationships between ethnicity and gender. Building from the work that critical gender studies has made in post-conflict peacebuilding, this paper will look at cases that illustrate how targeting women within specific ethnic groups is an effective means of achieving genocidal goals. Both the Rwandan genocide and the Indigenous genocide in Canada will be explored as a means of emphasizing connections between gender and ethnic cleansing. In the case of Rwanda, I will examine how commission of rape against women was used to destroy the social structure of Tutsi communities. In the case of Canada, I will examine how legally erasing Indigenous women's identity works to eradicate Indigenous communities in order to sustain settler colonial dominance. This paper will argue that genocidal violence is inherently gendered and that understanding the relationship between ethnicity and gender

is crucial to addressing the experiences of women who have been, or continue to be, targeted by violence. In doing so, it will challenge sentiments that societies can be rebuilt after mass violence without thoughtful insights on women's experiences.

Rape as a Weapon

In discussing how rape is a weapon for conducting violence in ethnic contexts, it is first important to understand that violence itself is gendered. The political, social and economic consequences of conflict manifest in unique and differing ways for men and women (Bell 2013: 2). Women's experiences of violence in ethnic conflict are greatly influenced by existing systems of subordination and marginalization within a society. Involuntary prostitution, economic instability due to widowhood, increased barriers to employment and education during conflict, and forced immigration are potential aspects that affect women's experiences of violence. Rather than solely being expectable byproducts of conflict, these aspects are deeply rooted in the social and political climates that characterize conflict societies. Thus, instances of wartime and mass rape in ethnic conflicts, often falling under this by-product category, are "systematically implemented for specific political goals" (Hirschauer 2014: 2). This is not to suggest that every instance of rape is meticulously planned beforehand, as any person can commit sexual violence under any motivation, but that patterns exist in when and where it occurs (Buss 2009: 148). As part of genocidal conflict, rape becomes systemic when it targets a specific community of peoples with the intent to destroy them in part or in whole (2009: 150).

This specific targeting is crucial to understanding how rape becomes more than a random individual crime; it is a crime against humanity deeply rooted in ethnic divisions (Hirschauer 2014: 5; Buss 2009: 150). Emphasizing this notion of collectivity is extremely important in addressing the reality of its instrumentalization during conflict. As Sabine Hirschauer argues in her book, The Securitization Of Rape: Women, War And Sexual Violence, rape has consistently fallen to the margins of conflict examination because of beliefs that it is a private act between two individuals (2014: 69; Brouwer et el. 2009: 18). The "unpunished licensing of rape was deeply entrenched in its perceived character, which - even if utilized during war - maintained throughout a distinct domestic feature" (2014: 69). Relying on views of rape as a private act serves to position it as less important in comparison to other forms of genocidal violence, such as torture or murder (2014: 69; Marochkin and Nelaeva 2014: 477). Therefore, it is crucial to highlight connections between acts of rape and ethnic divisions if we are to properly address the scope of genocidal conflict and the realities of communities it targets. Exposing a fuller truth is necessary if any society hopes to rebuild and recover following mass violence (Bijleveld et al. 2009: 209).

Targeting Rwandan Women

As an atrocity that continues to astound people today, much can be learned about the connections between ethnic violence and rape from the Rwandan genocide. Rape is an effective tool that spreads terror, diminishes civilian resistance, emasculates enemy males, and traumatizes or kills enemy women (Bijleveld et al. 2009: 208). Examining how rape specifically targets women to achieve goals of ethnic cleansing illustrates how it is a seminal factor in genocidal conflict. An estimated two hundred and fifty thousand to five hundred thousand women and girls were raped from April to July of 1994, the majority of whom were ethnically Tutsi (Brouwer et al. 2009: 3). Although sexual violence existed prior to the genocide, such staggeringly high rates of rape occurred in a context of intense ethno-national division where Hutus sought to eradicate Tutsis. The conflict between Rwanda's two main ethnic groups was underscored by legacies of social, political and economic division facilitated by colonial forces. Upon their arrival in 1916, Belgian colonists quickly favoured the Tutsi minority over the Hutu majority. Deeming Tutsis as more intelligent, colonists provided Tutsis with greater educational and employment opportunities by establishing segregated school systems (Brouwer et al. 2009: 12). Moreover, Belgians solidified Tutsi superiority by classifying Rwandan citizens based on physical traits, such as height and skin colour, and organized citizens around these ethnic traits through the implementation of identification cards (2009: 12; Bijleveld 2009: 212). Belgian colonists effectively sent the message that Hutus were not only less deserving of power but also less deserving of being treated as human, a division which would later manifest during the genocide (Hirschauer 2014: 142). Indeed, when the violence began, "the ideology of Hutu power was underscored through the dehumanization of Tutsi women" (2009: 11). Once Hutu groups gained control over the government, they worked quickly to dismantle the societal structure of Tutsi communities in order to eradicate them as an ethnic group (Hirschauer 2014: 140). In attempting to achieve an ethnically homogenous area, the Hutu government actively utilized sexual violence. It openly promoted propaganda that Tutsi women looked down on Hutu men and thought they were too good for them, leading to very public occurrences of violence (Brouwer et el. 2009: 15; Hirschauer 2014: 152). Oftentimes, women were raped in schools, churches, and government buildings; if they were killed, their bodies were left in public view "as a reminder of the brutality and power of the genocide's perpetrators" (2009: 17).

Even at the onset of the Rwandan genocide, acts of rape were brutally systematic with victims chosen based on their ethnicity and age (Bijleveld et al. 2009: 213). Gang rape, forced incest, and brutalization of women's corpses were all extremely common (2009: 213; Brouwer et al. 2009: 17). The murderous intent of raping Tutsi women is apparent through the fact that Hutu rapists intentionally tried to infect Tutsi women with HIV/AIDS (Hirschauer 2014: 139). To these men, "inflecting a Tutsi woman with HIV served as an effective means to infect her future sexual partners and any children she bore as well to eventually kill her and leave her dependents without her support" (Bijleveld et al. 2009: 15). Given that close to seventy percent of all rape survivors contracted HIV/AIDS during the genocide, it is undeniable that the trauma experienced by Tutsi women was intended to leave long-lasting scars that would reverberate throughout the entire ethnic community (Hirschauer 2014: 139). As the center of familial and cultural reproduction, women are strategic targets for unraveling the social fabric of a community and weakening people's capacity to resist violence (Mukamana and Brysiewicz 2008: 379). The loss of identity that

many rape victims experience isolates them from their community and hastens ethnic-cleansing processes.

For many female victims in Rwanda, the physical and mental trauma of rape was exasperated by social ideals of womanhood that led to their stigmatization in post-conflict Rwanda. Those dealing with HIV/AIDS were ostracized by their family and peers, and labeled as irreversibly spoiled and damaged (Hirschauer 2014: 140; Mukamana and Brysiewicz 2008: 382). But even those who had not contracted the virus faced social exclusion as "sexual violence survivors were also often portrayed as traitors, having exchanged sex (as sex slaves or 'wives') for life - their survival" (Hirshauer 2014: 140). These attitudes towards female victims significantly impeded the country's ability to recover politically and economically and created lasting effects of social upheaval (2014: 141; Mukamana and Brysiewicz 2008: 383). As the sole survivors of their families in postconflict Rwandan society, women comprised the majority of the population. Those who had been the victims of rape were deemed to be unsuitable for marriage, which significantly undermined their social and economic prospects given the critical source of resources provided by marriage (Hirschauer 2014: 155). Widows were equally affected as they were prohibited from inheriting family property or other financial assets, ensuring that the entire country felt the impacts of women's economic insecurity (2014: 155). By preventing the new majority from rebuilding Rwandan society, "rape was not only an immediate existential threat – but a structurally damaging, prolonged and a lasting one" (2014: 156). Although the genocide ended after one hundred days, the gruesome tactics of ethnic cleansing were successful in shattering Tutsi communities through legacies of trauma experienced by women. Considering these long lasting impacts, it is undeniable that rape serves to tear an ethnic group apart from the inside out.

Setting a New Standard - Indigenous Genocide in Canada

When we hear the word genocide we typically think of cases including and similar to Rwanda; rarely, if ever, do we think of ourselves, Canadians, as implicated in a genocidal past. The selective narratives we are told overlook Canada's identity as a settler colonial nation that systemically destroyed Indigenous nations. Although we presume that there is some sort of threshold that allows conflict to be labeled as a 'true genocide,' closer examination of our violent history against Indigenous groups would illustrate that Canada fits the criteria of committing genocidal violence. Inevitably, by denying Canada's genocidal past we deny that any true reconciliation must be achieved and allow for genocidal violence to persist in contemporary contexts. Similar to the Rwandan case, denying that genocidal violence is gendered creates substantial barriers in our understanding of why this violence occurs and how we may move forward from it. As Ward Churchill argues, "the motives underlying imposition of such radical constraints upon the meaning of genocide have been anything but pure" (2004: 79). This is not to say that Canada is explicitly murdering Indigenous peoples in labour or concentration camps, or outright promoting the extermination of Aboriginals through popular media; more indirectly, our society continues to hold beliefs that Indigenous people are an obstacle that require eradication (Sheehy 2012: 89; Johnson and Santos 2013: 98).

The motivations at the beginning of the Indigenous genocide were largely focused on land acquisition, a motivation that continues in our contemporary society (Simpson 2014). Even if the desire to impose a classification system persists, it is undeniable that the violence committed against Indigenous peoples meets the standard definition as developed by the United Nations. Under this definition, genocide constitutes:

Any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: killing members of the group; causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; [and] forcibly transferring children of the group to another group (United Nations 1).

It is important to note that killing constitutes only one criterion; the other four involve non-lethal actions to achieve genocidal goals (Churchill 2004: 82). To suggest, as others have, that a threshold of a specific type of violence must be met in order to label a conflict as genocidal greatly limits how visible genocidal violence is. Although not every ethnic conflict should be categorized as genocide, we must consider the implications of not labeling a conflict situation, with clear goals of ethnic cleansing, as genocidal. In ignoring this consideration, we run the risk of creating situations similar to Canada's where the state refutes its genocidal past and allows certain groups to continually be victims of violence.

Targeting Native Women

The primary goal of the Canadian state for total land acquisition remains at the root of ethnic conflict between settlers and Indigenous peoples (Simpson 2014). Here too, targeting Aboriginal women serves to tear at the social fabric of Indigenous communities in order to eradicate Indigenous peoples. Although some may argue that the violence Indigenous women experience does not 'count' as genocidal because it is not statesanctioned murder, I argue that the genocidal violence these women experience occurs through lethal legal indifference. Similar to the Rwandan case, Indigenous women's experiences of violence and ethnic conflict intertwines with a history of colonial forces imposing strict ideals of which groups count as 'human.' As an essential indicator of when conflict escalates into genocide, dehumanization constructs particular understandings and values of Indigenous peoples as human or non-human (Sheehy 2012: 88). At the core of Canadian assimilation policies, "to be discernibly Indian was to be other than human; to be human, one could not be discernibly Indian" (Churchill 2004: 87). Within many Indigenous societies, women predominantly uphold the maintenance of culture, language and history (Ralstin-Lewis 2005: 73; Barker 2006: 132). Because of their role in creating new life, Aboriginal women hold immense power over political, economic, social and spiritual decisions within Indigenous political orders (Native Women's Association of Canada 2010: 7; Ralstin-Lewis 2005: 74). This connection between life, spirituality and governance generates a unique relationship between Indigenous women and the land that serves as the antithesis to settler colonial rule that is white supremacist and patriarchal (Simpson 2014). In order to gain unabridged access to the land, Indigenous women, carrying with them the cultural and historical identity of their communities, must disappear (Simpson 2014;

Native Women's Association of Canada 2010: 9; Johnson and Santos 2013: 101). Various legal tactics have been, and continue to be, used by the Canadian state to target Indigenous women over the course of the Indigenous genocide, a select few of which will be discussed in the following sections.

Drawing from Audra Simpson's analysis, the techniques of elimination utilized by the Canadian state exist in legal frameworks. Enacted in 1876, the Indian Act contained a number of marital provisions designed to regulate "Indian status" of Indigenous women by rendering them as property of their husbands (Simpson 2014; Barker 2006: 131; Smulders 2006: 39). Under this legislation, women were not able to pass their status on to their children and would retain the status of their father's band unless they chose to marry, in which case she would assume the status of her husband (Barker 2006: 131). Moreover, if a status woman married a non-status man, she would lose her status entirely and would become a white woman under the law (Simpson 2014). By legally eliminating the identity of Indigenous women, "this move to patrilineal-patriarchal governance in Indian territories was a legal femicide of sorts" (Simpson 2014). The imposition of policies completely opposite from the matriarchal structure of Indigenous societies placed immense strain on social and interpersonal relations within their communities (Barker 2006: 132). Granting privilege to Indigenous men, the act's sexist ideologies has led to a drastic increase in physical and sexual violence against Aboriginal women (Ralstin-Lewis 2005: 74). An alarming statistic from 1996 showed that Indigenous women between the ages of twentyfive and forty-four, with status under the Indian Act, were five times more likely than other women of the same age to die as a result of violence (Barker 2006: 134; Smulders 2006: 48). Numbers such as these indicate that the Indian Act's policies have been successful in undermining collective Indigenous identity by facilitating conflict between Indigenous men and women (Native Women's Association of Canada 2010: 13; Johnson and Santos 2012: 109). For Indigenous societies affected by the Indian Act's policies, "community-based and interracial violence against Indian women indicates a complex social matrix of oppression within and between Indian and non-Indian communities" (Barker 2006: 134).

As I argued previously, eradicating an ethnic group is achievable by tearing at its social fabric and laying the ground work for it to break itself down; it does not require killing explicitly. Establishing these deep gender divisions enabled the Canadian state to halt the transmission of Indigenous language and culture by separating women from their Indigenous identities. This, in turn, disconnected entire generations of Aboriginal children from their heritage since their mothers were separated from their language, traditional cultural practices and community peers (Native Women's Association of Canada 2010: 14). Imposing patriarchal expectations that women should be quiet and reserved, subservient to men and should not assume socio-political leadership positions, Canadian colonial forces worked hard to further undermine Indigenous women's roles as preservers of culture (Native Women's Association of Canada 2012: 14; Stote 2012: 139). Moreover, these gender divisions were also instilled in young Aboriginal children who were forcibly removed from their homes and sent to residential schools. Young Aboriginal girls were socialized to believe that the matriarchal communities they came from were morally repugnant, which served to facilitate their integration into white patriarchal society and deterred them from attempting to reconnect with their original communities (Smulders 2006: 41). Simultaneously cutting off Indigenous women and girls from their traditional roles ensured that attempts to wipe out Indigenous culture would be long lasting and cross-generational.

Of course, Canada has also taken more direct approaches to target Indigenous women, which have been equally 'lawful'. In Alberta, the Sexual Sterilization Act was implemented in 1928 to prevent mentally disabled individuals from having children through forced sterilization (Native Women's Association of Canada 2010: 12; Ralstin-Lewis 2005: 72; Stote 2012: 120). An amendment in 1937 expanded the category of mentally disability to include individuals deemed unfit for intelligent parenthood, and effectively led to an increase of Indigenous women who were forcibly sterilized (Native Women's Association of Canada 2010: 12). Under justifications that they were "savages" with "loose moral character," Indigenous women comprised twenty-five percent of all sterilization cases, of which consent was sought in only seventeen percent (Stote 2012: 121). Moreover, forced sterilization was seen as an economically efficient way to curb the number of people who depended on governmental support programs (Ralstin-Lewis 2005: 77; Stote 2012: 140). Indigenous women who were forced into these procedures not only lost the ability to make decisions regarding their own lives, but must continue to live with the reality that the state took full control over their body and, by extension, over all Aboriginal bodies (Stote 2012: 137; Simpson 2014). Yet, going even further than disconnecting them from their communities,

the break that comes from robbing Aboriginal women of the ability to reproduce cannot be undone, and effectively terminates the legal line of descendants able to claim Aboriginal status, thereby reducing the number of those to whom the federal government has longstanding obligations, whether these are founded in treaties, or are obligations stemming from the occupation of Aboriginal peoples' lands (Stote 2012: 139).

The finality of forced sterilization permits the Canadian state to abandon its responsibilities to compensate Indigenous peoples as a result of land dispossession (Stote 2012). The effects of the act undoubtedly align with Canadian social and economic interests that were first prioritized through the Indian Act. Rather than properly addressing the extreme socio-economic depravity afflicting Indigenous communities, the state could wipe their economic burden, and gain greater land access, by taking full control over Aboriginal women's reproductive choice.

Perhaps the most important contemporary issue that the Canadian public must address is that of Indigenous women that are murdered or missing. Coinciding with arguments of how Canada works to legally erase Indigenous women, the overarching issue of missing and murdered Aboriginal women centers on Canada's gross legal negligence. Both our government and criminal justice system have failed to not only bring justice to these women, but to adequately acknowledge that Indigenous women live under a constant threat of violence. A National Operational Overview put out by the RCMP reveals that, as of 2015, there are 174 missing Indigenous women and 1,100 homicide victims in Canada (RCMP 2014). The majority of victims are under the age of thirty-one, are mothers who have children or grandchildren, and are victimized in urban areas of western provinces (Native Women's Association of Canada 2010: 13; Johnson and Santos 2012: 109). Simply

by ignoring this epidemic of violence, Canada's genocidal intent persists precisely because "states do not always have to kill, its citizens can do that work for it" (Simpson 2014). Throughout their time in power, the Harper Conservatives were adamant that crimes committed against Indigenous women were a result of random individual acts and did not require critical analysis of the historical and socio-political framework they occur in. Yet, Indigenous peoples comprise approximately four percent of Canada's overall population (RCMP 2014); certainly, such high rates of overrepresentation of Indigenous women in murdered and missing categories is not merely due to random individual acts of violence. The Canadian state condones beliefs that Indigenous women's lives do not matter; that they are, in fact, expendable and should be killed. In a settler society that acquires its sovereignty through resource extraction and killing of land, Indigenous women's bodies must be destroyed because of the meanings they carry; they are "conflated with land and are, thus, both disposable and contaminating to a white settler social order" (Simpson 2014). The disappearance and destruction of Indigenous women is not random, then; it is one more part of the Indigenous genocidal process that Canadians are unable to see.

Conclusion

In examining the cases of the Rwandan and Indigenous genocides, this paper depicts how relationships between gender and ethnicity interact and result in women being uniquely targeted by genocidal violence. It has shown how destroying women's bodies, either in part or in whole, and their identities serves to destabilize a particular ethnic group. This destabilization functions to complete aims of ethnic cleansing by undermining social or cultural structures, and illustrates how genocidal violence does not necessary mean killing. By destroying the foundational networks that comprise societal cohesion between individuals of the same ethnic group, an aggressor group can successfully work towards forcing the slow death of the group they wish to eradicate. Whether it is an episode of genocide that leaves residual destruction, similar to Rwanda, or a prolonged genocidal process less visible to the masses, similar to Canada, it is imperative that we avoid a ranking system of genocidal violence. Shifting our thinking away from this ranking system and fully acknowledging the vast, and sometimes indirect, tactics of genocide is vital if appropriate reparations are to be made following instances of mass violence.

Works Cited

- Barker, Joanne. "Gender, Sovereignty, and The Discourse Of Rights In Native Women's Activism." *Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism* 7.1 (2006): 127. *Literature Resource Center*. Web. 24 Nov. 2015.
- Bell, Christine. "Women and Peace Processes, Negotiations, and Agreements: Operational Opportunities and Challenges." *Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre*. Policy Brief. March 2013. Web. 23 Nov. 2014.
- Bijleveld, Catrien, Aafke Morssinkhof and Alette Smeulers. "Rape Victimization During The Rwandan Genocide." *International Criminal Justice Review (Sage Publications)* 19.2 (2009): 208-224. *Criminal Justice Abstracts*. Web. 23 Nov. 2015.
- Brouwer, Anne-Marie de, Sandra Chu, and Samer Muscati. *The Men Who Killed Me: Rwandan Survivors Of Sexual Violence*. Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2009. *University of Alberta Library*. Web. 23 Nov. 2015.
- Buss, Doris E. "Rethinking 'Rape As A Weapon Of War'." Feminist Legal Studies 17.2 (2009): 145-163. Legal Source. Web. 23 Nov. 2015.

- Churchill, Ward. "Genocide by Any Other Name: North American Indian Residential Schools in Context." Genocide, War Crimes and the West: History and Complicity. Ed. Adam Jones. London: Zed Books, 2004. 78-115. EBSCOhost Academic Collection – World Wide. Web. 23 Nov. 2015.
- Hirschauer, Sabine. *The Securitization Of Rape: Women, War And Sexual Violence*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014. *University of Alberta Library*. Web. 23 Nov. 2015.
- Johnson, Shelly and Alessandra Santos. "Redressing Invisibility And Marking Violence Against Indigenous Women In The Americas Through Art, Activism And Advocacy." First Peoples Child & Family Review. 7.2 (2012): 97-111. SocINDEX with Full Text. Web. 24 Nov. 2015.
- Marochkin, Sergey Y. and Galina A. Nelaeva. "Rape And Sexual Violence As Torture And Genocide In The Decisions Of International Tribunals: Transjudicial Networks And The Development Of International Criminal Law." *Human Rights Review* 15.4 (2014): 473-488. *Academic OneFile*. Web. 23 Nov. 2015.
- Mukamana, Donatilla, and Petra Brysiewicz. "The Lived Experience Of Genocide Rape Survivors In Rwanda." *Journal of Nursing Scholarship* 4 (2008): 379. *Academic OneFile*. Web. 23 Nov. 2015.
- Native Women's Association of Canada. *Culturally Relevant Gender-Based Models Of Reconciliation.* Ohsweken: Native Women's Association of Canada, 2010. *University of Alberta Library.* Web. 24 Nov. 2015.
- Ralstin-Lewis, D. Marie. "The Continuing Struggle Against Genocide: Indigenous Women's Reproductive Rights." *Wicazo Sa Review.* 20.1 (2005): 71-95. *Project MUSE*. Web. 24 Nov. 2015.
- Royal Canadian Mounted Police. *Missing And Murdered Aboriginal Women: A National Operational Overview*. Ottawa: Royal Canadian Mounted Police, 2014. *University of Alberta Library*. Web. 24 Nov. 2015.
- Sheehy, Elizabeth A. Sexual Assault In Canada: Law, Legal Practice, And Women's Activism. Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2012. University of Alberta Library. Web. 24 Nov. 2015.
- Simpson, Audra. "The Chiefs Two Bodies: Theresa Spence and the Gender of Settler Sovereignty." *Unsettling Conversations, Unmaking Racisms and Colonialisms.* University of Alberta, Oct 2014. Keynote Address. Web. 23 Nov. 2015.
- Smulders, Sharon. "'A Double Assault': The Victimization Of Aboriginal Women And Children In Search Of April Raintree." *Mosaic.* 39.2 (2006): 37-55. *ProQuest.* Web. 24 Nov. 2015.
- Stote, Karen Ann. "The Coercive Sterilization Of Aboriginal Women In Canada." *American Indian Culture And Research Journal* 36.3 (2012): 117-150. *Arts & Humanities Citation Index*. Web. 24 Nov. 2015.
- United Nations. "Office of the UN Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide: Analysis Framework." *United Nations.* 1-4. Web. 23 Nov. 2015.