



The Political and Social Context and Consequences of Militarized Rape in the Kosovo War (1998-1999)

Researched and Written by Isabella Whitney

Administered by Professor Tanya Domi

Abstract

This project is an examination and analysis of the long-term political and social consequences of militarized rape in the Kosovo War. As these victims face global derision and impunity, this project aims to give them a voice, as well as acknowledge this as a clear example of mass-rape being overlooked in wartime. Through both an analysis of testimony, historical analysis, and second-hand research done during the time period, the similarities between Serbian military rapes in Kosovo and Bosnia became clear: the same torture tactics used in Bosnia were used in Kosovo, with similar aims of culling and terrorizing the native population. This paper argues that the international community has an obligation to hold Serbia accountable, both to provide justice for Kosovar women but also to maintain the precedent that rape in war will be punished.

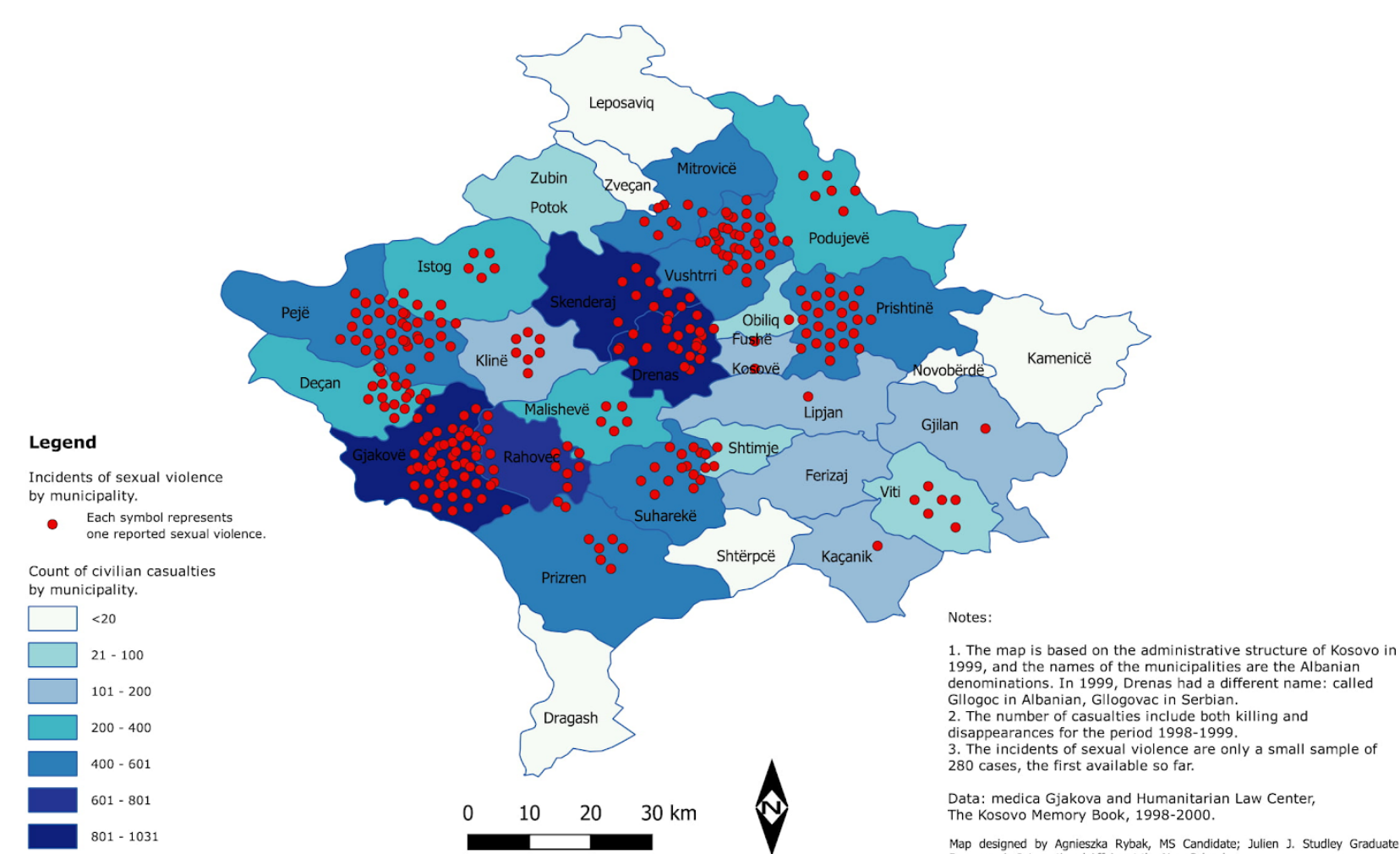
Research Prompts

- What exactly were the rape tactics and strategies employed by Serbian military and paramilitary forces during the Kosovo War?
- How similar were those tactics to those used in Bosnia?
- How has both Serbia's impunity to the war rapes and the lack of international condemnation for them impacted society and political culture in Kosovo?
- What would international condemnation of Serbia for the war rapes look like, and what would its impact be?

Theoretical Context

- The primary theoretical context used for this project comes from Dubravka Žarkov's book *The Body of War. Media, Ethnicity and Gender in the Break-up of Yugoslavia*.
- Written in 2007, the book analyzes the clear manner in which the Serbian propaganda machine, in the leadup to the Yugoslav Wars, promoted images of sexual violence in connection with ethnicity and national pride.
- She also argues that cultural and ethnic divisions, suppressed during Tito's regime, were reignited during the fall of Yugoslavia and that the Serb propaganda machine helped redraw symbolic and cultural boundaries by creating interconnection between ethnicity and sexuality/gender in the collective Serb consciousness.
- Žarkov similarly illustrates how Serb propaganda highlighted the virtuous nature of Serb women as opposed to Kosovar and Bosnian women, who were deemed less feminine.
- She concludes that the Serb propaganda machine created a perceived difference between the women of these respective ethnic groups, and attempted to justify militarized sexual violence.

Incidents of Sexual Violence in the Context of Civilian Casualties During the 1998-1999 Kosovo War.
What a Small Sample of Available Data Tells Us.



Results

- The rape tactics used in Bosnia and Kosovo were both meant to terrorize the native populations, as well as a deliberate strategy used by Serbian military and paramilitary groups.
- After the Bosnian War, fear of sexual violence from Serb paramilitary groups forced many to flee their homes, towns, and cities, causing a refugee crisis.
- Women reported being raped both in their homes during raids, when trying to escape the country, and in detention centers.
- Serbian soldiers also viewed rape in Bosnia and Kosovo as a form of inter-military bonding, and as a way to prove masculine prowess.
- In both Bosnia and Kosovo, soldiers primarily raped Muslim women.
- Part of what made rape such an effective terror strategy in both Bosnia and Kosovo had to do with the similar cultures of misogyny and sexuality that existed. Women from both countries report similar experiences of being afraid to speak out, for fear that their families will turn against them.
- While neither the rapes in Bosnia nor Kosovo have been recognized by Serbia, the ICTY convicted Serbian war criminals of mass rape in Bosnia, but not in Kosovo. Correlatively, there is very little widespread international recognition and commemoration of the sexual assaults during the Kosovo War, while there is more, but still not enough, for those committed in Bosnia.

Discussion

- While militarized rape is a crime recorded in ancient texts and used throughout human history, the first jurisprudence on rape as a weapon of war came from both the wars in Bosnia and Rwanda.
- At both the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR), for the first time in history, rape was recognized as a legally prohibited weapon of war, as oppose conflict's unfortunate but inevitable byproduct.
- In the years following the legal and sociocultural condemnation of militarized rape in Rwanda and Bosnia, its usage has continued, and both regional governments and international bodies have failed to adequately prosecute. From the Yazidi in northern Iraq to the Rohingya in Myanmar, militaries continue to use rape as a form of ethnic cleansing, and if it is not forcibly, profoundly condemned and punished, it will only continue.