

The Weaponization of Sexual Violence



September 2024


Colonial Sexual Violence

Sexual violence is considered one of the most prominent weapons and tools used by colonial and occupying powers during wars and armed conflicts to achieve political and social goals that serve the interests and agendas of those powers. Sexual violence includes various practices such as rape, harassment, forced stripping, and other coercive acts that are against the will of the victim. **Essentially, these practices aim to destroy and dismantle society in the long term by targeting and breaking the individual victims.** For this reason, perpetrators of sexually violent crimes have not been prosecuted in international courts as individual sexual crimes but rather as war crimes or crimes against humanity, as they represent an attack on the entire society, which will suffer in the long term from social effects such as trauma and shame.




What is Sexual Violence?

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines sexual violence as: any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, or any other act directed against a person's sexuality using coercion by a person, regardless of the setting of the assault or the relationship between the perpetrator and the victim.



Sexual Violence In Wars & Colonial Practices

Sexual assaults in all their forms—whether committed in the context of wars and international or internal conflicts, or against colonized peoples—**aim to instill fear within the targeted community (target group), humiliate the other (the opposition/resistance/colonized people), break the collective will, and entrench a sense of helplessness to solidify submission.** This is achieved by targeting individuals with organized sexual violence that is deliberately spread to create widespread terror and defeat, while also satisfying the perpetrator's ill desires, such as revenge and dominance. Although sexual assaults may appear similar on the surface, the motives behind these acts and their impacts differ based on the nature of the conflict, the cultural contexts of the colonized societies, and the immediate political and social objectives of the perpetrators.



📍 Rwanda

Hutu militias committed systematic and widespread rape against Tutsi women with **the aim of ethnically cleansing the society and eliminating them by altering the lineage of the Tutsi community**. Testimonies revealed that the mass rapes of women were intended to result in "forced pregnancies" to change the community's lineage, as the child inherits the perpetrator's identity.

📍 Bosnia

The sexual violence committed by Serbs against Bosnians was motivated by the Islamic background of Bosnian society, **aiming to dismantle the community, humiliate the men, and highlight their inability to protect the women**. Men were forced to witness the sexual assaults and rapes of their female family members, and many testimonies documented women and girls being raped in front of their husbands and fathers.

📍 Algeria

French colonizers used sexual violence as a means to impose cultural and racial dominance. It served as a tool to humiliate them, strip them of their humanity, and **reinforce the superiority of the colonizer and the inferiority and subjugation of the colonized**. Additionally, it aimed to destroy the social fabric and familial bonds of Algerian society.





Palestine

In connection with the Zionist-Israeli colonial project in Palestine, which required the displacement of the Palestinian people from their lands, **sexual violence was employed during the Nakba to instill fear among Palestinians and force them to leave their homes.** Numerous testimonies recount the rape of women before they were killed in Deir Yassin and other Palestinian villages.

During the ongoing genocide in the Gaza Strip, numerous sexual assaults against Palestinian prisoners, both male and female, have been documented. These assaults include rape, forced stripping, sexual harassment, and other forms of humiliation and abuse. In addition to the testimonies of the prisoners, Israel has released videos depicting various forms of sexual assault, particularly against male prisoners. These actions are aimed at undermining the values and foundations upon which Palestinian society is built.

Sexual Violence as a

Repressive Military Political Tactic

One of the tactics used by French colonizers in Algeria and Italian colonizers in Libya was to assault women to provoke anger among freedom fighters, aiming to lure them out of the mountains and force those hiding among the people to reveal themselves.

In contrast, French military leaders in Syria reached a different conclusion and opposed using this tactic, as it led to increased resistance and widespread protests.

During the Nakba, Zionist forces used the threat of sexual assault and rape, exploiting Palestinian values pertaining to the concepts of honor and shame.



**Intensification of Sexual Violence and
deliberately broadcasting them during**

Israel's Genocide on the Gaza Strip

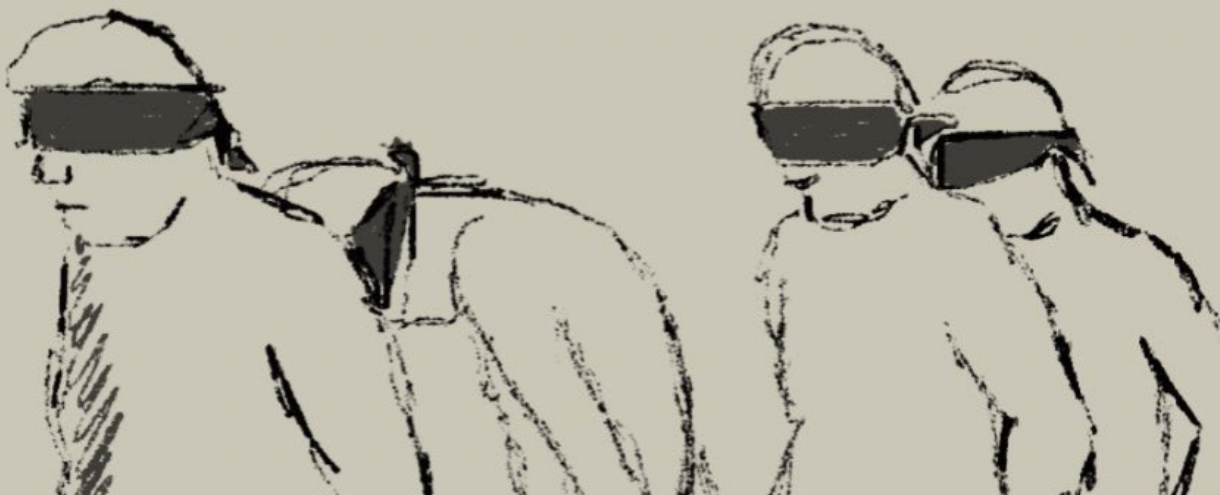
In the current genocide, Israel deliberately targets Palestinian male prisoners, with the aim of destroying and fracturing Palestinian society and undermining its collective will. Israel deliberately broadcasted some of the assaults and humiliating acts in order to:

- **On the
Palestinian Level**

to punish the resistance, marginalize them from their community, destroy the freedom fighter's image, and exploit the state of terror, shock, and fear of "shame" to reinforce submission and surrender.

- **On the
Israeli Level**

to erase the image of defeat and restore the perception of an invincible army, and reinforce the sense of superiority and absolute dominance



The Role of Society and Resistance

Survivors of sexual violence, regardless of their gender, often face difficulty discussing their experiences or seeking support due to fear of social repercussions, primarily the stigma associated with the violation of honor or bodily purity. This fear leads them to remain silent and isolate themselves; and, confront psychological, emotional, and physical consequences alone, without any support or assistance. Historically, **many victims have isolated themselves from society and faced their fate individually, which served the objectives of the colonizers/perpetrators by dismantling the community, suppressing resistance, and reinforcing defeat.**

In the Palestinian context,

the issue of Israeli sexual assaults on Palestinians, whether male or female, should be addressed as a political and societal matter, in addition to supporting victims. As a political and societal issue linked to colonial repression policies affecting individuals and society, similar to assassinations or the use of extreme force and repression, it requires a collective and resistant response that negates the intended effect. There should be no isolation or degradation of the victim; instead, there should be support, recognition of their struggle, and pride in their resilience. While the colonized society may not be able to prevent the sexual violence of the colonizer, a community-based resistance consciousness can render sexual assaults an ineffective tactic and a stimulus for resistance and struggle.





Colonial sexual violence against the colonized is a repressive act that does not bring shame upon the victims.

The honor of colonized people lies in their resistance.

