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ARTICLE

# Strategies, Symbols, and Subjectivities: The Continuities between War Rape and Lesbo-Phobic Rape

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**Abstract**

Research into war rape has shown that rape is not incidental to the general violence of war but is instead an integral part of war strategies. Such research makes it clear that in the context of war, rape serves to injure women on an individual level, but has the more strategic effect of fracturing communal bonds. Similarly, the growing body of research investigating the reasons for, and consequences of, the rape of lesbian women, indicates that these rapes have far-reaching consequences for lesbian communities and serves to reinforce patriarchal heteronormativity. While there is much research around both war and lesbo-phobic rape, the aim of this paper is to bring this research together in order examine lesbo-phobic rape through the lens of war rape theory. This paper aims to show how both "forms" of rape appear to hinge on the meanings assigned to women during peacetime and how both lead to the destruction of individual victims and their communities, while bolstering the subjectivities of the perpetrators and increasing the bonds of those complicit in such violence. The use of the theoretical understandings of war rape thus enriches the understandings of lesbo-phobic rape and shows that there are many continuities between the two.

## Understanding lesbo-phobic rape through the lens of war rape theory

Over the past decade there has been an increased focus on the strategic use of rape carried out during war. The use of rape as a politically and socially motivated strategy was brought to light particularly after the International Criminal Tribunals for Yugoslavia (ICTY) and Rwanda (ICTR) declared war rape a crime against humanity (Bergoffen 2009). These landmark rulings recognized that war rape, rather than being merely incidental to the general violence of war, carries a specific intention and purpose. According to these rulings, war rape should be understood as part of the genocidal motives of war, where it is used to damage communal bonds and, as such, affects communities on an intergenerational level. Consequently, war rape goes beyond an individual harm to one that also harms the community on a larger scale. For this reason and

due to the way in which such rapes are carried out, war rape is understood as an integral part of war strategies more generally.

Another "form" of rape which has become the focus of much attention is "corrective rape." The terminology used for such rape has come under scrutiny as it appears to reinforce the logic that there is something pathological with lesbian women that needs correcting or that is deserving of punishment. I will not provide an extensive discussion of this problematic language, suffice to say that I will use the term *lesbo-phobic rape* to refer to this phenomenon, as this arguably focuses on the irrational fear and hatred of lesbian women that leads to this "form" of rape. It is also important to bear in mind that women who are *presumed* to be lesbian based on their behavior or appearance, but who do not actually identify as lesbian, are also targeted for such violence. This indicates that such violence clearly stems from gendered norms and the belief that women should look and act in certain ways, and if they do not, they will be "punished" for such "transgressions." Lesbo-phobic rape, while prevalent in many countries including, amongst others, Jamaica, Zimbabwe, and Ecuador (Asokan 2012), is often associated with South Africa specifically. This is presumably because of the high rates of lesbo-phobic rapes that are committed within South Africa as well as due to some high-profile cases which have garnered media attention on both national and international stages (such as that of Banyana Banyana player, Eudy Simelane). In addition, the often brutal and purposefully public nature of these rapes has led to increased visibility and awareness of such rapes within South Africa and globally. An example of this is the case of Sizakele Sigasa and Salome Masooa, who were raped, murdered, and their bodies left on display on a football field. Another case saw the body of a lesbian woman displayed publicly with a glass bottle protruding from her vagina and her breasts removed (Dana 2012).

The statistics related to the number of lesbo-phobic rapes are tentative since, as with rape *simpliciter*, many women do not report their rapes to the police, and when women do, they do not necessarily disclose their sexuality. However, some statistics, gathered primarily by NGOs and rights organizations, assert that there are approximately ten cases of *lesbo-phobic* rape per week in South Africa (ActionAid 2009), while others claim that it is instead 10 cases per week in Cape Town alone (Masemola 2017). While the statistics might not give an accurate account of the number of lesbo-phobic rapes, clearly such rape is prevalent in South Africa. It might seem that lesbo-phobic rape is just one manifestation of violence within a country that experiences a prevalence of violence in its many guises. However, on closer inspection, as with war rape, lesbo-phobic rape appears to be underpinned by strategic motives and thus serves a specific purpose within the developing nation. Similarly, while sexual violence and gender-based violence are features of most, if not all societies, including those in the Global North, South Africa offers an interesting and useful perspective from which to examine such violence due to its postcolonial context, the seemingly liberal nature of its Constitution, and the colonial and apartheid ideologies that continue to influence the developing democratic national identity.

Based on the levels of violence within South Africa, it could perhaps be considered a kind of conflict setting rather than a nation at peace. Violence and, particularly, gender-based and sexual violence are considered common features of a nation undergoing political and social transformation (Moffett 2006, 131), and these have arguably become hallmarks of South African society. The latest statistics released by the South African Police Service (SAPS 2021) indicate that during the three-month period of 1 July to 30 September 2021, nearly 10,000 people (primarily women) were raped; an increase

of 7.1 percent from the previous reporting period. Similarly, the Institute for Security Studies (ISS 2021) claims that the murder rate has increased by over 20 percent since 2011/12, with approximately 57 murders every day in 2017. However, it is important to remain cognizant of the fact that violence was an important aspect of colonial and apartheid control. As such, it could be argued that the violence which seems characteristic of the democratic nation stems from the violent undercurrents of the pre-democratic regimes.

Despite the levels of violent crimes, a study by the BBC (drawing on statistics from the International Institute for Strategic Studies and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime) has indicated that the "level of killing [in South Africa] is lower than in all the conflict-affected countries considered [including, Somalia, Afghanistan, Syria, Yemen, and Iraq], even without taking into account non-conflict related murders in those countries" (BBC News 2018). In addition, despite the history of colonialism and apartheid in South Africa, the fact that the actual transition to democracy was a relatively peaceful one, in that it did not lead to a civil war, has been noted by various authors (e.g., Thomas et al. 2013, 522). However, the levels of violence, while not as high as any of the noted conflict settings, are not entirely dissimilar either. It could, therefore, be argued that South Africa is in a state of negative peace. Negative peace is a state in which something negative has ended (such as apartheid), possibly through violent means, but in which unrest/violence might still occur. Additionally, the absence or reduction of violence related to negative peace does not necessarily ensure the existence of ongoing positive efforts to bring about or maintain peace (Dijkema 2007). Conversely, positive peace encompasses the absences of violence and/or war along with positive components such as the "restoration of relationships, the creation of social systems that serve the needs of the whole population and the constructive resolution of conflict" (Dijkema 2007). In other words, while apartheid ended and some measures have been put in place to promote equality, violence persists on both interpersonal and structural levels, conflict is often not dealt with in ways that are constructive or positive, and vast socioeconomic disparities still exist. I will not go into further detail regarding negative peace but, for the purposes of this paper, I will draw on the understanding of South Africa as being in a state of negative peace and not a conflict zone.

While there is extensive research and literature related to both war rape and lesbo-phobic rape, there has yet to be a discussion around the continuities between the two. Understanding lesbo-phobic rape through the lens developed by war rape research is useful in that it helps to illuminate the underlying social and political contexts that lead to lesbo-phobic rape. As mentioned above, the classification of war rape as a crime against humanity and an act of genocide has been vital in illuminating the collective effects of such rape. There are also various studies relating to lesbo-phobic rape, but these have not as yet focused on the communal, collective, or intergenerational effects of lesbo-phobic rape. Similarly, many have not yet considered the systematic and strategic nature of lesbo-phobic rape. War rape research provides a useful framework from which to better and more thoroughly understand the socio-symbolic reasons for lesbo-phobic rape and its intended effects.

Drawing from war rape theorizing, this paper will argue that lesbo-phobic rape should be understood as having socially and politically motivated strategic underpinnings that serve to uphold and reinforce heteronormative patriarchy. To do this, the paper will explore the ways in which war and lesbo-phobic rape are similar in terms of their strategic foundations as well as their similarities in terms of community building and destroying. As mentioned above, this paper will focus specifically on lesbo-

phobic rape within the South African context. Again, while lesbo-phobic rape occurs globally, South Africa offers an interesting and valuable context from which to explore it, particularly considering the exemplary (but contested) Constitutional and legal rights and protections afforded to lesbian women in the country. This exemplifies the fact that, while there is seemingly an acceptance of lesbian women, at least vertically and legally, the socio-symbolic foundation of South Africa rests upon the exclusion of, and violence against, those who do not conform to its heteropatriarchal logic.

## Women as symbols of and threats to the nation

As with gender-based violence, and violence committed against women more generally, both lesbo-phobic rape and war rape arguably stem from the gendered conceptions of masculinity and femininity that prevail within the contexts of the socio-cultural (patriarchal) societies in which they occur. In this vein, Kirby (2012, 811) argues that "sexual violence [is] shaped by cultural idioms, embodied in a *habitus* of masculinity or the expression of long-standing schemas of the body and gender." However, while the gendered nature of societies underpins violence against women, this violence concurrently shapes and reinforces particular identities, ideologies, and cultural practices. Ultimately, violence, and particularly sexual violence, becomes instrumental in the maintenance and upholding of patriarchal norms and ideologies. Rape can, thus, be understood as an identity-producing practice (Kirby 2012, 811), one through which communities and individual subjectivities are both created and damaged.

Rape serves to determine the "skin of the community" (Ahmed 2005, 104). In other words, rape delineates who falls within the borders of the community's "skin" as well as who falls outside of it. In so doing, rape determines who is a legitimate member of a community, thereby creating the community, while at the same time unmaking the communities of those who do not fall within the hegemonic community's borders. Kirby (2012, 811) argues, then, that rapists are "performers of socio-cultural rituals"; however, these rituals are those deemed appropriate by the social context in which they occur. For this reason, rape is best understood on a collective, rather than an individual level, because it is the social collective (May and Strikwerda 1994, 137) that deems rape appropriate (whether consciously or unconsciously) as a way to delimit the borders of the legitimate community. Within heteropatriarchal societies, there are generally very clear norms that determine whether one can be "allowed" into the hegemonic community or not, and these are often based on literal and symbolic identities and practices assigned to both men and women.

To further understand how and why it is that rape can become instrumentalized in the service of hegemonic heteropatriarchy, it is necessary to understand the symbolic positioning of women, particularly heterosexual women, within society. Within patriarchal conceptions of the nation, women stand at the core; they are the symbolic bearers of the nation (Lake 2014, 71) both literally and figuratively. Women's life-giving capacities are an important symbol for the future of the nation, in that women give birth to the symbolic Child who stands as guarantor for the nation's future (Rademeyer 2012, 272–73). However, the symbolic Child is implicitly dependent on a heterosexual family that produces a heterosexual child. Clearly, within heteropatriarchal social orders, the value assigned to women lies in their reproductive capacities and rests firmly on their compliance with heteronormative ideologies. Within this same logic, women are symbolically positioned as the interior of the community in that they are often seen "as the symbolic and material centers of their collectives" (Sjoberg 2013, 200).

Women become central to the imagined survival and continuation of their communities. In the same way that women are assigned values and roles within these gendered social orders, so are men. Men's roles are arguably centrally located in the idea that they are the protectors of women, and thus the guardians of the nation.

The symbolic positioning of women as the interior and future of their communities, and men as their protectors, becomes a central reason for the prevalence of rape during war. Raped women,[1] as metaphors for their community, symbolize not only the defeat and punishment of their community (Buss 2009, 148; Kirby 2012, 811) but also the failure of the enemy men. Bergoffen (2009, 317) succinctly argues that:

> In war time rape the gendered body is essential to the intended strategic effects. Perpetrators of rape as a weapon of war rely on the fact that there are communities where a woman's body carries the honor of her community. Her raped body shames and humiliates the body politic; for insofar as the honor of the woman's community is carried on/in her body, her honor is both her responsibility and the responsibility of the community's men: she is charged with guaranteeing it, they are charged with protecting it.

Evidently, the symbolic meanings assigned to women and men that arise during times of peace are carried through to times of war and underlie the use of rape as a strategic tool in these contexts. It also appears clear that the meanings assigned to women rely on their compliance with heterosexual norms and ideologies.

Here it might appear that a difference between lesbo-phobic rape and war rape comes to the fore. However, if both "forms" of rape are understood as stemming from the ways in which heteropatriarchal ideologies position women, then, despite their seeming dissimilarities, it can be seen that they both in fact function in the service of the heteropatriarchy. While war rape relates to (heterosexual) women's symbolic positioning as bearers of the nation and the interior of the community, lesbo-phobic rape arguably relates to lesbian women's refusals to conform to the gendered meanings associated with women and femininity. Lesbian women are clearly not seen as cultural repositories in the same way as are heterosexual women. In fact, they often stand in direct opposition to, and defiance of, the norms and ideologies that position heterosexual women as such. Lesbian women threaten the heteropatriarchal ideologies that position women as the bearers of the nation and undermine the ideological imperative that would have all women available to men, sexually and otherwise. In a nation like South Africa that is still in the process of developing a national identity after an overwhelming history of colonialism and apartheid, the supposed threat that lesbian women pose to the national narrative and its corresponding identity is exacerbated. Therefore, according to Moffett (2006, 139) and Nelson (2005, 166), sexual violence and the pervasive threat of sexual violence can be understood as a socially sanctioned control mechanism which works to keep not only the women who are exposed to the violence, but rather *all* women, compliant within a social structure determined by hegemonic patriarchy. Thomas et al. (2013, 528—29) argue that "sexual violence is used to enforce gender norms about what constitutes masculinity and femininity—including being heterosexual." Consequently, it is evident that, through lesbo-phobic rape, heteronormative ideologies around binary sex and gender models, and normative values around gender performance are reinforced. From this perspective, it can also be seen that violence against lesbian women does not disrupt the socio-political order or governing of a society, it is rather *part* of the governing of society.

Consequently, while war rape is used to send a message to the men to whom the women "belong", lesbo-phobic rape instead sends a message to other lesbian women (along with women *simpliciter* and "non-conforming" men)—a message that they do not "belong" to any men in particular, and since that "belonging" is a defining feature of patriarchal society, they consequently do not "belong" to the society. In this way, lesbo-phobic rape undoubtedly acts as a form of social control. While war rape and lesbo-phobic rape send messages to different communities, they both stem from socially coded gender norms that underlie the socio-historical contexts in which they occur. In other words, the messages might seem different, but in both the aim of rape is to shape and uphold heteropatriarchal values and ideologies. In this sense, war rape and lesbo-phobic rape are both underscored by the strategic motive of subordinating certain individuals while privileging others. As Kirby (2012, 819) asserts, "just as women can function as symbols within a war system, so too can sexual violence serve to reproduce systems of patriarchy." This correlates with May and Strikwerda's (1994, 137) notion that the responsibility for rape should not fall solely on individual perpetrators, but also on the social and militaristic systems that legitimize rape as a weapon against women, communities, and non-heteronormative-conforming individuals.

## The destruction of communal bonds

One of the ways that rape in war and that committed against lesbians serves as a destructive force is through the severing of communal ties and symbolic bonds. It is widely claimed that one of the predominant goals of war rape is genocide or ethnic cleansing (Card 1996; Das 2008; Buss 2009). Salzman (in Diken and Laustsen 2005, 113) explains that ethnic cleansing is "an act intended to render an area ethnically homogenous by removing members of a given group," or as Das (2008, 291) states, it is the "complete annihilation of the other." Ultimately, war rape aims to undermine national identities by destroying the cultural and social bonds within a community (Card 1996, 8). The rape of enemy women is consequently symbolic of the raping of the identity of the community because of the socio-symbolic meanings attached to women.

The violence enacted against women as an act of ethnic cleansing is not purely physical but also leads to a form of socio-symbolic death (Card 2003; Das 2008, 291). This socio-symbolic death aims to dehumanize women and cause a disintegration of social ties, in other words, damaging both women's subjectivities and communal bonds. Card (2003, 63) explains that social death is "a loss of one's identity and consequently a serious loss of meaning for one's existence." That is, social death leads to the loss of social vitality and accordingly the loss of one's connection with one's community, heritage, practices, and institutions. Social death and the loss of subjectivity can be more damaging to a woman than is the physical violence associated with rape, and often has further-reaching implications for the community at large. Socio-symbolic death is an important strategic aspect of war, as it is through this that communities lose their coherence and survivors lose their connection to their communities, and thus, the world around them. This coherence is what ties the community together and contributes to the identity of the nation and its members. Through severing these ties, the community and its members lose their connection to one another and their nation, even on an intergenerational level.

A means through which this severing of social and communal bonds is achieved is by making the friends and family of women complicit in their rapes. For example,

during the Mozambican war, husbands were forced to lie underneath their wives while they were raped (Sideris 2000, 40), while during the Bosnian war and Rwandan genocide, husbands and sons were either made to watch their wives/mothers being raped or were forced to rape them (Diken and Laustsen 2005, 122; Wolfe 2014; Matusitz 2017, 836). In these instances (and many others), the rapes were committed visibly and publicly in order to ensure that they were not only an individual violation but also a violation of familial and communal bonds. Put simply, the rape of enemy women intends to terrorize the community and affect its future social cohesion.

Here another difference between war rape and lesbo-phobic rape seems to surface. Within war rape, family, friends, and community members may be forced to become complicit in rapes, while with lesbo-phobic rape, the rapes are at times willingly committed by family, friends, and "community-at-large"[2] members (Muholi 2004, 119). To understand this, it is important to remember the symbolic meanings attached to women as previously discussed. Enemy (heterosexual) women are seen as bearers of the future and valuable culture repositories of their communities, while lesbian women are, presumably, symbolically seen as the enemy of the nation and their cultures, and a threat to the very future of their nations due to their non-compliance with heteronormative ideologies. Lesbian women are not valued in the same way as are heterosexual women, and because of the symbolic threat they pose to heteronormative ideals, violence against them is often condoned (and arguably even encouraged). The complicity of family and members of the community-at-large in the rape of lesbian women is presumably a way to reinforce gendered norms as well as a way for the perpetrators to protect or bolster their own position within the community-at-large. Consequently, at first glance, these "forms" of rape seem dissimilar, at least in terms of motive, but they, again, stem from the same underlying ideologies that assign women their symbolic significance within a patriarchal gendered order and, so, relate back to the heteropatriarchal ideologies upon which societies are grounded, whether at peace or war. In this way, it can be seen that these "forms" of rape are in fact congruent in their goals of upholding hegemonic norms and ideologies.

As previously mentioned, both war and lesbo-phobic rape are used to send a message to a specific community, and in this way, within both, rape becomes a form of social control. One of the ways through which the rape of both enemy and lesbian women sends a message to their communities is through the very violent, graphic, and public nature of these rapes. During wartime rape, some of the ways that violence has been exacerbated and graphically enacted is, for example, by shooting women's vaginas, the insertion of hot sticks and bayonets into vaginas, and the piercing and padlocking of women's labia after rape (Meger 2010, 126). In terms of lesbo-phobic rape, there have been several cases where lesbian women have been violently raped, murdered, and left on public display, as seen, for example, in the case of Sigasa and Masooa mentioned in the introduction.

The violent nature of such rapes is significant. Arguably, this extreme violence is not merely incidental to the rape or simply part of the assault but is instead used intentionally to terrorize the community (Meger 2010, 126). The violent nature of these rapes, therefore, becomes indicative of a deep disgust or hatred of certain women (Kirby 2012, 809). For lesbian women, the graphic, public nature of these rapes serves as a message that, should they continue to transgress the rules of patriarchal heteronormativity, they too are liable to become the targets of such violence. Thus, it is clear that rape is used as a tool to communicate and control.

As discussed, for the survivors of rape, the harms associated with rape extend beyond the physical (although obviously there is much physical harm associated with rape) and often have a much greater impact on a subjective, psychological level. For war rape and lesbo-phobic rape survivors, a major effect of rape is a socio-symbolic death in which the erasure of the subjectivity, agency, and personhood of the survivor occur, along with an erasure of their future sense of being and belonging (Bergoffen 2009, 312; Du Toit 2009, 80). In this way, lesbo-phobic rape functions similarly to war rape as a kind of genocide or ethnic cleansing. On an individual level, lesbian women are harmed but there is also a fracturing of the lesbian community, leading to fear and mistrust not only on the part of the survivors but also for the lesbian community and perhaps even women more generally. Du Toit (2009, 94–95) explains that, for the individual survivors of rape, the world turns into a hostile place, one in which they are unable to trust others and the world around them. The individual rapes become symbolic of the violence against the lesbian community more broadly. In other words, the rape of one lesbian woman stands as a metaphor for the rape of all lesbian women.

Consequently, lesbian women often develop a deep sense of distrust towards others, specifically stemming from the fear that their sexual identities will make them targets of sexual violence (Tshabalala 2008). Gqola explains that the constant threat of rape that (lesbian) women face, which she terms the "female fear factory" (Gqola 2015, 78), reminds them that their bodies do not completely belong to them and so they are not safe. She (Gqola 2015, 79) states that rape

> is an exercise in power that communicates that the man creating fear has power over the woman who is the target of his attention; it also teaches women who witness it about their vulnerability either through reminding them of their own previous fear or showing them that it could happen to them next.

Therefore, rape is an effective means through which to regulate the behavior of women and even leads to women changing their behavior to avoid violence (Gqola 2015, 79; Judge 2018, 39). Overall, war rape and lesbo-phobic rape, while seemingly different in some regards, function very similarly as ways to terrorize communities, fracture social relations, and control the behavior of women.

## Objectification, shame, and self-blame

Often, for women who have been raped, their bodies are no longer a safe space from which they are able to imagine the possibility of themselves as future beings. Because they do not have the ability to project themselves outward into an imagined future, their subjectivity is damaged and their sense of identity and being in the world is undone. Through rape, women are made into objects in a world where they were once subjects. Du Toit (2009, 98) explains:

> the victim … has her home destroyed in the attack where her home stands for both a safe place and for feeling at home in one's body as well as for the ability to project oneself in the world (to be a subject in the full sense of the word) because one has a secure place to stand from where one can project oneself outwards.

In other words, rape creates a disruption between one's body and one's sense of being (Du Toit 2009, 98). Bergoffen claims that, because one's subjectivity and materiality are

inextricably linked, rape affects the way one is within the world and the way that one connects with the world. She (2009, 312) states:

> Since the values I bring to the world are always articulated through my embodiment; and since they always exist in the materialities of the world, that is, since they are specific expressions of my ambiguity, it is as the embodiment of certain values that I am targeted for bodily abuse. As ambiguous, my body can never be reduced to a mere thing in the world. It is, however, vulnerable to being used by others as a thing. When this happens, my integrity is threatened; for when my body is used as a thing the meanings it brings to the world are destroyed.

Through rape, a woman becomes an object for the use of others, at least temporarily. This means that the way one experiences the world, the meanings one brings to the world, and one's subjectivity as experienced through one's embodied being, is damaged; hence why Du Toit asserts that rape leads to a loss of identity and the harming of one's ability to develop full personhood.

Additionally, many women feel complicit in their own objectification and may experience profound feelings of shame and self-blame[3] (Du Toit 2009, 80). This is one of the predominant consequences of rape *simpliciter*, but of war and lesbo-phobic rape too. These feelings of shame and self-blame exemplify how it is that rape is damaging far beyond the physical—it destroys the victim's[4] coherent worlds (Du Toit 2009, 80). In line with Bergoffen, Du Toit (2008, 147) suggests that raped women become dehumanized, a phenomenon that she (2008, 147) refers to as a "spirit injury." A spirit injury relates to the way that the victim is made passive and her body is "turned into an object for the use, gaze and enjoyment of another" (Du Toit 2009, 81). Even though the victim is forced into her own objectification, she often feels shame as though she were complicit in her desubjectification (Diken and Laustsen 2005, 121) and her sense of feeling out of place in the world. This can be seen in the words of survivors of both war and lesbo-phobic rape:

> I had just finished bathing and saw that military men had arrived at my house. They forced open the door and forced me into the main room. Then the rape started. I wanted to defend myself. I asked why this was happening to me. I was beaten by one while the other raped me. My children cried. The soldiers forced us to be silent and threatened to kill us. I am ashamed and want to die but I also want to protect my children. (Anonymous in Wolfe 2014)

> They said to me, "we'll show you you're a woman" … [sic] I thought maybe by telling my cousin, by saying openly I was a lesbian, I provoked them … [sic] They believe women should be with men. (Puleng in Human Rights Watch 2011, 39)

Here, it is seen how Anonymous felt shame at what had been done to her; she no longer wanted to be in the world but persevered in order to care for her children. Similarly, Puleng felt complicit in her rape; she believed that she provoked men into raping her by openly living as a lesbian woman. It is because of the belief in their own complicity that many victims analyze their behavior and the decisions that they made prior to the rape. In other words, they analyze their own role in the perpetration of the rape (Diken

and Laustsen 2005, 121); a problem that is further compounded by the way that many survivors of rape are treated by their communities-at-large and the justice system.

However, these feelings do not arise out of the ether; instead, they are contingent upon the societal attitudes that render women as inviting rape, even if unconsciously. That is, within patriarchal societies, women are often cast as temptresses or seductresses, while men are cast as "victims of their sexual instincts" (Sideris 2000, 43). Within such belief-systems, women stand complicit in their rapes because they were inviting the rape through their actions, behavior, or just general being, while the rapists were helplessly susceptible to these seductions (Sideris 2000, 43; Diken and Laustsen 2005, 122). These characterizations can cause women to feel shame and self-blame, along with being accused of inviting rapes, leading to them being shunned from their families and communities (Meger 2010, 128).

In the case of war and lesbo-phobic rape, these feelings of self-blame and shame are further exacerbated. For lesbian women, these feelings are intensified because of the societal attitudes around their sexuality. Lesbian women are often made to believe that they are deserving of rape or that they invited rape upon themselves because of their "unruly" sexuality (Padmananabhanunni and Edwards 2013). For women raped during war, these feelings extend beyond their belief in their complicity in their own objectification to their belief that they are responsible for the breakdown of communal ties. Sideris (2000, 43, emphasis added) asserts that "victims respond to the lived experience of a discrete incident of violence *and* to the social destruction of which it is an integral part." That is, not only do victims hold themselves accountable for their own violation, but also for the ways that it damages the community. Bergoffen (2009, 315) explains that it is because of the symbolic meaning assigned to women's sexuality as the site of communal bonding that their sexuality becomes so effective as a weapon, against both men and women, for the destruction of communal bonds and social trust.

Furthermore, Du Toit (2009, 82) notes that this objectification is particularly pertinent within a symbolic order, such as a heteropatriarchal one, that already systematically undermines and devalues women's sexual subjectivity. Such devaluing of women's sexuality results in the belief that a woman's worth is purely related to her role in the fulfillment of male sexual desires and the development of male subjectivity. The use of a woman's body and sexuality, which are integral parts of her being and identity, is an effective means through which to bolster the subjectivity of the rapist (discussed in more detail in the next section) and damage her sense of self and subjectivity. The use of sexuality as a weapon is particularly pertinent as it reminds women of their subordinate position with the patriarchal status quo. Consequently, while shame and self-blame are experienced by survivors of lesbo-phobic and war rape, these feelings evidently arise from the value placed on women's sexuality in society more generally—societies where bodies are weaponized, women's sexuality is devalued, and women are shamed for the crimes committed against them.

While I have focused on the shame, guilt, and subjectivity-damaging nature of rape, it is also important to be aware that, while rape does often lead to women feeling a loss of identity and a loss of their place within the world, that is not to say that they do not also experience resilience, agency, and a renewed sense of identity, usually over time. Thus, while rape is damaging to subjectivities, it does not necessarily lead to the complete loss of self, although it might lead to a changed sense of self and subjectivity. If we look at the words of Mmapaseka Letsike, a lesbian woman who was raped at the age of 15, this is evident. In a series of photographs and captions that she created as

part of a photographic project with Jean Brundrit, titled *Lesbian Story (2006—2008),* we see Letsike's loss of sense of self: "Then life was messed when she was only raped at the age fifteen, then her doors were shut[sic]" (Letsike in Brundrit 2010: 596). From this it could be inferred that Letsike's life took a downward turn after her rape, and while she states that it did take her a long time to deal with the rape and still she had a lot of healing to do (Brundrit 2010, 597), the photographs that follow in the series show that her life was not defined by her rape, she did not become a perpetual victim. However, what is noticeable in the quoted caption is that Letsike uses "she" to refer to herself after her rape, whereas in captions referring to herself prior to the rape she used "I." Consequently, at least for a time, the rape disrupted her sense of self. She became distanced from herself, an Other in her own body. Later in the series, Letsike portrays renewed resilience and sense of self and belonging, stating, "Acceptance and still loving life. Self respect self acceptance [sic]" (Brundrit 2010: 598).

Similarly, through many of the narratives of women who have experienced war rape, it is clear that rape is damaging to the survivors' senses of self and their belonging in the world. However, through many of their life stories, we also see examples of extreme resilience and renewed senses of self and belonging. Schwartz and Takševa (2020, 131) explain that an important act for reclaiming agency for women raped in war, specifically Bosnian women, has been the opportunity to testify at the ICTY hearings. Schwartz and Takševa explain that the hearings afforded survivors the opportunity to rupture "the silence that historically surrounds the wartime rape of women," and so "also contributes to unmasking rape mythologies and victim blaming. Speaking out means using their voices to denounce the crimes they suffered and to participate actively in the creation of the politics of memory" (2020, 131). The ability to participate in this tribunal, to face their perpetrators, and to contribute to a narrative that centered on rape survivors' experiences and voices assisted these survivors to gain a renewed sense of subjectivity and agency. Schwartz and Takševa (2020, 131) further state that:

> Women's agency and resilience is manifested paradoxically through their willingness to name and narrate the experience of their utmost victimization and dehumanization that stripped them at the time of their ability for self-direction and choice, which is the basis of agency. Agency and victimization thus emerge as two sides of their experience of trauma.

Therefore, thinking beyond the trauma and damage rape creates, it is also clear that rape does not necessarily lead to the total annihilation of a woman's self or her subjectivity.

What is also necessary to bear in mind, though, is that in order to move beyond the trauma of rape and to develop a sense of agency, there needs to be access to mental and physical health resources and avenues through which both individual and collective healing can occur. In the case of many lesbian women in South Africa, there are often few resources available to work through trauma. These women also experience revictimization by the police, healthcare workers, and the community-at-large, and there is often little recognition of their lived experiences or individual subjectivities, even prior to rape. This arguably makes it more difficult for such women to move beyond the victim-producing nature of rape and once again to feel safe in their bodies and their societies. However, it is important and necessary to recognize that women who have been raped are more than victims, they are women with agency, whose

subjective lived experiences play out in a multitude of ways that contribute not only to their own personhood but can and do also contribute to collective modes of healing and political mobilization against violence.[5]

## Bolstering male subjectivity and group bonding through rape

A final commonality that I will address relates to the role that both war and lesbo-phobic rape play in bolstering male subjectivity. That is, while rape can act as a source for damaging subjectivities and communal bonds, it is also a source for strengthening these, particularly for men who rape, and even more specifically for men who rape in groups. It is not only the meanings attached to women that contribute to war and lesbo-phobic rape, but also hegemonic notions of masculinity. An important feature of war rape is its relation to the socio-cultural constructions of masculinities, where the mobilization of specific masculine ideals seems to be at the core of the perpetration of war rape. Similarly, conceptions around what constitutes a "real" man, the inability of many men to attain hegemonic masculine ideals (such as political and economic power), and the heterosexist nature of many South African cultures underlie the violence perpetrated against lesbian women.[6]

As with the meanings attached to women and their bodies, conceptions of masculinity do not arise only during conflict but are instead pre-existing conceptions that associate male honor and power with control over women and their sexuality (Meger 2010: 120). During war, this conception of masculinity can be simultaneously diminished, for those who are unable to protect the women of their communities, and bolstered, for those carrying out the violence. Sideris (2000, 44) asserts that "war [either] leaves men with an eroded sense of manhood or with the option of a militarized masculine identity with the attendant legitimization of violence and killing as a way of maintaining a sense of power and control." This could be similar to the diminished sense of masculinity that men face in post-apartheid South Africa.[7] Within both contexts, men are unable to fulfill the traditional roles associated with masculinity, which affects their understanding of themselves and their place in society and can lead to them developing an over-inflated sense of masculinity (often a violent form of masculinity) as a kind of pre-emptive defense mechanism.

Hyper-masculinity can become a way for men to assert their dominance and authority when their masculinity is threatened in other ways. Gqola (2015, 154) explains that hyper-masculinity "is a heightened claim to patriarchal manhood, to aggression, strength and sexuality. It is effectively masculinity on steroids." Within war, hyper-masculinity is expressed through displays of aggression on the battlefield but is also found within private (civilian) realms outside of the battlefield, where it is expressed through sexual violence. Similarly, within South Africa, violent masculinities are manifest through overt displays of aggression and violence in the public realms (for example, during violent protests) and in private realms through gender-based and sexual violence. For Gqola (2015, 152), "violent masculinities create a public consciousness in which violence is not just acceptable and justified, but also natural and desirable." During war this is clearly the case where violence is considered heroic, just, and necessary; however, this is also seen outside of war—such as in the context of lesbo-phobic rape—where violence becomes glamorized and seen as a way through which to deal with subversive behavior and societal transgressions. Whether during times of war or peace, it is conceptions of masculinity, developed and governed by hegemonic, hetero-patriarchal ideologies, that contribute to violence and unhealthy expressions of masculinity.

In relation to this, war rape is used as a fundamental strategic maneuver to humiliate enemy men, emasculate them, and emphasize their impotence (Diken and Laustsen 2005, 118; Borer 2009, 1171). According to Card (1996, 6—7), war rape (as with civilian rape) has two targets: first, a sacrificial victim who is used to send a message to a group, and, secondly, a group at whom the message is aimed. In war rape, the sacrificial victims are the raped enemy women, while the second target is the enemy men who are unable to protect the women. Das explains that the rape of a community's women is such an effective strategy because "women are treated as the property of men so that rape comes to be defined not as an offense against the woman's bodily integrity but as an offence against the property rights of the man who is her guardian" (Das 2008, 291). In other words, the issue of rape lies not in the violation of the women, but in the violation of men's property and the diminishing of men's sense of self as defined through their conceptions of masculinity. Comparably, within lesbo-phobic rape there are also two targets at whom the rape is aimed; there is a sacrificial victim—the individual raped woman—and a group towards whom the message is aimed—the lesbian community. Here we can see that the rape is not used to harm men or diminish their sense of self-worth, but instead aims to do that to lesbian women and their communities (and women and "non-heteronormative" men, more broadly). However, the foundation of both of these forms of rape is the socio-symbolic meanings attached to women and masculinity, particularly related to women's instrumentality in male identity-formation and masculine control.

As mentioned earlier, rape is not only a way to destroy bonds, but is also used to strengthen them. Kirby (2012, 812) asserts that within war the proclivity for rape perpetration amongst soldiers relates to the institutional culture of the military and the socialization that takes place therein. Within this culture, there is a focus on extreme forms of masculinity in order to prove that one is a good soldier and loyal to the nation. This form of masculinity often relates to the despising and overt disapproval of "feminine" values such as care, empathy, and fear, such that the hegemonic form of masculinity becomes associated with violence, aggression, and hostility towards women (Borer 2009, 1170; Meger 2010, 122). Due to the pressure to constantly prove their "manhood" soldiers often engage in overt displays of violence, including rape. For this reason, Matusitz (2017, 837) argues that "war rape is a sexual manifestation of manhood." However, it should be kept in mind that this expression of masculinity is one that is not much different from that which is upheld and reinforced during times of peace.

As already discussed, war rape, as with lesbo-phobic rape, is often best understood as a form of collective violence, rather than as only an individual crime. This is not only because it is often social sanctioning and acceptance of rape that allows for its perpetuation, but also because, very often, war and lesbo-phobic rape are carried out by men in groups. Group rape functions to solidify the bonds of the perpetrators and create a form of symbolic brotherhood in complicity—what has also been termed a brotherhood in guilt (Diken and Laustsen 2005, 124). When rape is carried out within groups it is seen as a rite of initiation and a sign of allegiance to the group (Matusitz 2017: 840).[8] According to Alison (2007, 77) "[group] rape cements a sense of loyalty between men and those who might not rape individually but who *do* rape collectively in a group assertion of masculinity." Within groups, men who might not have committed rape individually are encouraged or coerced into committing rape. Their participation in the act of raping strengthens their standing within the group and, subsequently, the group display of behavior is an important part of the logic of group rape. As Wood (2005, 36) explains "[group] rape is best understood as an 'irrevocable' and brutal

group bonding ritual that is made possible through deeply sexist and discriminatory assumptions about women's sexuality and autonomy that operate in the broader heterosexual culture."

Consequently, it becomes evident why many lesbo-phobic and war rapes are carried out in groups—the men draw on the collective heteropatriarchal ideologies held by the group, they are spurred on to commit the crime by other men, and their complicity in the rape solidifies their bond with the group. In addition, their masculine identities are strengthened through the shared exploitation and objectification of a woman's body. Furthermore, the idea that the rape was a necessary duty in order to protect a specific social order or their nation is affirmed by the group. Thus, while rape serves to damage the world and communal bonds for the victims on a symbolic and, at times, literal level (although at times, also creating new sites of solidarity and forms of subjectivity), it simultaneously serves to create and strengthen the bonds of the male perpetrators. In so doing, it affirms their senses of self and position of dominance. In terms of lesbo-phobic rape, rape is seen as a necessary and legitimate regulating tool, one that is used unashamedly, particularly when other men are involved. If other men are complicit, then it is justifiable. As a result, rape serves to regulate the movement, behavior, and expression of lesbian women.

Overall, then, rape aids in bolstering the subjectivities of men who commit rape by reinforcing their dominant position within either peacetime or wartime contexts. Where masculinities are undermined by socioeconomic contexts and the increasing of rights and visibility of marginalized groups, as is the case in South Africa, rape is a means through which men can bolster their subjectivities by attaining at least one of the ideals of hegemonic masculinity—the control of women and their bodies. This also aids in reinforcing patriarchal ideologies and so cements their position of dominance in the nation, even when such dominance cannot be achieved through means such as political power or economic status. Within war, by raping enemy women, men are asserting their dominance and control not only over women, but also over men, thereby cementing their positions of power. Again, this bolsters masculine subjectivities by aiding in the achieving of the masculine ideals of having power over women and sexual access to women, while simultaneously subordinating the enemy men. In both the contexts of war and lesbo-phobic rape, rape is a means through which men are able to strengthen their sense of self and achieve the hegemonic masculine ideals of control over, and sexual access to, women.

## The strategic nature of war rape and lesbo-phobic rape

To sum up, war rape is a systematic and strategic tool used to send a message to enemy communities, destroy communal bonds—even on an intergenerational level—and symbolically harm a community through its women. The effectiveness of war rape is based on the socio-symbolic meanings assigned to women as the core of the community, as the bearers of the nation's children, and, consequently, as guarantors of the future. The violation of the enemy women's bodies becomes symbolic of the violation and destruction of the community. Similarly, the rape of lesbian women relates to the socio-symbolic meanings attached to heterosexual women, however, lesbo-phobic rape serves to punish lesbian women for transgressing the ideals associated with femininity and the reproductive and sexual roles of women as they relate to men. In other words, while lesbo-phobic rape stems from the socio-symbolic positioning of heterosexual women, it is precisely the challenge that lesbian women pose to the ideologies and male

domination that derive from a patriarchal culture that leads to violence being enacted against them.

With both war- and lesbo-phobic rape, the often public and violent perpetration of the rapes serves to send messages to the communities for which they are intended. As such, these rapes can be seen not just as harmful on an individual level, but as also causing a kind of communal harm. As a result, rape destroys the interior worlds of the victims and violates the individual body-self while also inflicting harm on the body politic more generally. In addition, while rape serves as a destructive force, it simultaneously strengthens and creates the worlds of the perpetrators and their communities, particularly when rapes are carried out in groups.

War and lesbo-phobic rape can, ultimately, be read together as forming part of a more wide-reaching social project that feeds into ideas around nation building (and destroying), patriarchal dominance, and women (in particular, women's sexuality) as cultural repositories and symbols of the nation. While there might be some differences between lesbo-phobic and war rape, these "forms" of rape appear to be more similar than they are different. Both "forms" of rape target the subjectivity of the individual victims, their place in the world, and their ability to interact with themselves, others, and the world around them. In both instances, the violence is rooted in the disgust and hatred of certain women based on their identities and the threat that they, supposedly, pose to the nation and its ideologies. While much of this is true of "ordinary" rape, a difference in these instances might be that war rape and lesbo-phobic rape are, clearly, systematically and strategically used as a form of social control, and thus go beyond being merely incidental to the violence which is characteristic of wartime and South Africa's post-apartheid context.

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## Notes

1 Male rape is a feature of many wars and at times women are complicit in the perpetration of the rape of men. The primary functions of the rape of men and women might be similar—humiliation and emasculation of enemy men, assertions of power, and diminishing of communal bonds; however, as will be discussed, the rape of women has much to do with their socio-symbolic positioning both within times of war and peace. This possibly adds a different meaning to the rape of women. For this reason, I will focus on the rape of women specifically and will not go into the rape of men in detail as it is beyond the scope of this study.

2 I use "community-at-large" to refer to the broader communities in which lesbian women reside. These communities comprise of men, women, and other marginalized individuals. This is contrasted with the more specific use of "lesbian community", which refers to lesbian women within South Africa more collectively. This is obviously not necessarily one all-encompassing, unified, lesbian community but rather lesbian women more generally. To narrow the focus, the lesbian community to which this predominantly applies encompasses lesbian women who are most vulnerable to lesbo-phobic rape, which, in the South African context, is Black lesbian women. This is due to the intersection of various factors including sex, race, and gender, as well as their socioeconomic positioning that resulted from colonialism and apartheid and has continued into democratic South Africa. In addition, this vulnerability is exacerbated by the colonially imported notion that homosexuality is unAfrican and therefore "real" African women are heterosexual. While all lesbian women are vulnerable to lesbo-phobic violence, communities of lesbian women have formed in response to the violence that they may have experienced and/or are particularly vulnerable to due to their symbolic and socioeconomic positioning within their communities-at-large.

3 Women may also experience feelings of rage and disgust towards their rapists. This is becoming particularly evident as more women are speaking out about their experiences of sexual violence. While this is important, in this paper I will focus on shame and self-blame that arise from rape, as these feelings are prevalent among survivors of rape, particularly lesbian women in societies where they are already considered as abject and unworthy of rights and recognition.

4 At times I use the term "victim" to refer to those who have been sexually assaulted or raped. Some authors choose to use the word "survivor" instead of "victim"; however, not all women do survive. I am aware that the term "victim" is problematic as it reinforces the notion of victimhood and is often associated with a kind of "helplessness" or "passiveness" (Gupta 2014). However, Gupta (2014) argues that while the term "survivor" celebrates the individual and her triumph in overcoming violence, the word "victim" is still important in that it "recognises the enormity of the system [women] are up against, and its brutalising potential." In other words, the term "victim", while often associated with negative connotations, also points to the oppressive systems in which women often are not survivors. "Victim" is also a more encompassing term as it includes both those who have and have not survived. Overall, I prefer to use the phrase "women who have been raped" as this focuses more on the act of rape/violence rather than on the women as victims. However, at times, I have found it unavoidable to use this term, and use it with the awareness that it is not ideal.

5 Additionally, speaking out against sexual violence has led to much political mobilization, as seen through various movements, such as the #MeToo movement. As such, as much as rape serves as a tool for community destruction, anti-rape movements can become sites of solidarity and community building. While this is an important aspect of the ways in which community building can occur as the result of solidarity after or around sexual violence, I will not focus on this here.

6 For a more detailed discussion see Gqola 2015; Judge 2018; Westman 2019.

7 See Ratele 2006, 2014; Hamber 2010.

8 At times men are forced into the rape of women for fear of punishment or their own deaths (Diken and Laustsen 2005, 124). In these instances, some men will unwillingly carry out acts of rape. This is important to note, but a detailed discussion is beyond the scope of this paper.

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