

# MY BODY IS NO BATTLEFIELD

Expert articles on sexualised violence,  
trauma and justice

[www.medicamondiale.org](http://www.medicamondiale.org)



## Our Vision:

“Women and girls are living in a world free of violence. They live in dignity and justice.”

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### Our aims

*medica mondiale* is a feminist women’s rights and aid organisation which for more than 25 years has been working with tenacity and solidarity to benefit women and girls in areas of conflict and war worldwide. Our foremost aim is to bring an end to sexualised wartime violence and other forms of gender-based violence. We are convinced that peace and development are not possible unless we establish gender justice and remove power gaps.

### Our mission

Our work is directed at both causes and consequences of sexualised violence. *medica mondiale* provides professional stress- and trauma-sensitive assistance for women and girls who experienced violence – irrespective of their political, ethnic or religious identity. By providing health-care, psychosocial and legal assistance, as well as measures to help them secure their own livelihood, we help survivors to cope with their traumatic experiences and assume more independence in shaping their own lives. We also work politically in order to push forward with demands for societal change. We give women a voice, reveal breaches of human rights, and call for prosecution of perpetrators. At the local, national and international levels we join with other female activists to campaign for the rights, protection and participation of women.

### Our partners

*medica mondiale* implements projects primarily in cooperation with local women’s organisations, encouraging them to network with each other. By offering training in project and financial management, and in our stress- and trauma-sensitive approach, we empower people and organisations in project countries. This way of working ensures that assistance and support for women and girls is long-term and anchored within their society.

### Our history

Outraged by the reports of mass rapes during the Balkan Wars, the young gynaecologist Monika Hauser set off to Bosnia at the end of 1992 to provide assistance directly in the warzone. Together with local female psychologists and doctors in Zenica she set up the first therapy centre for women who had been raped. One year later she founded *medica mondiale* in Cologne, Germany. Today the association works with local partner organisations to support women and girls in war zones and crisis areas around the world.

🏠 [More at: www.medicamondiale.org/en/what-we-do.html](http://www.medicamondiale.org/en/what-we-do.html)



**Dr. Monika Hauser**  
Founder of *medica mondiale*, Chair of the Board



**Sybille Fezer**  
Executive Member of the Board for Programmes

Images: © Ulla Burghardt / medica mondiale

## Dear Reader,

It was autumn 1992 when the German current affairs magazine “Stern” reported on mass rapes of women during the Bosnia War, putting the issue of wartime rape in prominent public view for the first time.

However, wartime rape is not a recent phenomenon. There always seems to have been a supposed ‘right’ of warring parties to take the women and girls of the enemy as their ‘reward’. Wartime rape has been a component of every military conflict. It has a function and is deployed systematically as a weapon, but for a long time it was nonetheless considered to be inevitable “collateral damage”. These views of wartime rape treat it as something that happens a long way away, having nothing to do with our supposedly safe and secure lives, but actually wartime rape does not ‘simply happen’, occurring in a vacuum. These rapes are the logical extension and one of the most serious consequences of the prevailing patriarchal structures which shape our societies worldwide – not only during war and conflict but also in times of peace. The power differentials and gender stereotypes that go hand-in-hand with these structures have a systemic character and manifest as many different types of sexism and misogyny. Among the most noticeable symptoms are the suggested permanent availability of women (and/or their bodies) and the ubiquitous presence of sexualised violence which is a direct consequence of that.

Misogynist behaviour is also encouraged by the ‘rape myths’ that trivialise, play down or excuse sexualised violence. Those who perpetuate these myths seek to persuade us that victims had an inherent desire to be dominated by the perpetrators or that they were partly guilty because of their choice of clothing or some such matter. They are part of a widespread attitude of blaming the victim. This gives rise to stigmatisation of survivors, impunity for perpetrators, and injustice between genders. Rape myths exacerbate stereotypical gender roles, protect the existing system, and at societal and political levels have an impact on us all.

## Effecting structural changes

Sexualised violence is still one of the most frequent crimes committed against women and girls, even in Germany. Physical violence, rapes and sexual assaults were all treated as private affairs until well into the 1970s, even appearing normal, with hardly any public outrage or discussion about them. It is one of the achievements of the international women’s movement to have identified this form of patriarchal power and to fight against it. Gradually the atmosphere of silent tolerance of violence against women and girls began to change. Current discussions, such as those related to the hashtags #didnotreport, #aufschrei, and most recently #MeToo, lend visibility to everyday sexism, revealing the extent of harassment. They also demonstrate that many women, girls and even men are no longer prepared to accept the status quo. Instead they want to talk about it and change things. The first steps towards effecting structural changes are seeing, acknowledging and naming the injustices.

Taking these steps demands courage, because many reactions will be negative and there is also still the very real risk of being made to look untrustworthy, ridiculous or anti-men. Survivors are told to justify why they are only speaking out now, facing incredulous questions such as “How come you only realise now that you were horribly traumatised?” Their experiences are also ignored, trivialised or dismissed as hysterical. The people who carry out the violence are the people who shape the general public attitude of men being right and superior and women being wrong and submissive. They are also the people who have social dominance within politics, the judiciary, medicine or the media. So it is natural that they, whether consciously or subconsciously, have no interest in changing these dynamics.

As the American author Susan Brownmiller already observed after the Vietnam War,<sup>1</sup> violence against women is generally only taken seriously if it can be instrumentalised for other purposes. This was the case in 2001, for example, when violence committed against women by the Taliban was used as a reason for US troops to intervene in Afghanistan. The real interests were, however, those of the US military-industrial complex and the access to resources for exploitation by neoliberal powers. Later, the sexual enslavement of Yazidi women was useful as part of the efforts to direct attention against the so-called Islamic State as a manifestation of evil in other cultures than our own. Here, attention was deliberately not drawn to the fact that extremist groups emerge partly as a result of the (devastating) consequences of Western foreign and economic policy. Another example was the violence against women during the 2015/16 New Year's Eve celebrations in Cologne, which was exploited by right wing groups and politicians to demonstrate the supposedly superiority of white men over the "dark strangers" who came to rape "our blonde women".

### Trauma-sensitive support and political human rights work

The way we deal with the consequences of this ubiquitous violence is crucial for those affected, but also for society as a whole. Right from the beginning, *medica mondiale* has followed a double strategy of offering direct trauma-sensitive assistance to women and girls and advocating structural change by means of political work. As an organisation actively campaigning against wartime rape and many other diverse forms of gender-specific violence against women and girls, it very soon became clear to us that our work could only be successful if society and government develop an awareness of the extensive consequences and underlying structures of that violence. As a feminist expert organisation, we raise public awareness of the issue, strive to achieve long-term change, and help to ensure that the struggle against sexualised violence is kept on the political agenda and is not swept back under the carpet.

It is due to the tireless commitment of women's rights and peace activists worldwide that resolutions have been passed, international criminal law has been adapted and national action plans have been drawn up.

Since UN Resolution 1820 was adopted in 2008, rape and other forms of sexual violence have been treated in international law as war crimes, crimes against humanity and an obstacle to peace. In 2000, UN Resolution 1325 obligated member states to protect women and girls from sexualised violence during armed conflict and in the post-war period, and to ensure their equal participation in peace processes and reconstruction. In January 2019, Germany commenced its two-year position as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council, declaring women's protection and their participation in peace processes to ensure long-term peacebuilding as a priority.<sup>2</sup>

### Transgenerational consequences of violence

Public awareness of sexualised (wartime) violence also increased with the award of the Nobel Peace Prize in 2018 to the Congolese doctor Denis Mukwege and the Yazidi human rights activist Nadia Murad. However, in spite of this and the above-mentioned political successes, violence against women and girls continues unabated, whether in Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Myanmar and Sudan, or as part of the conflicts in Syria.

It is not enough to name breaches of human rights on paper and to agree treaties or UN resolutions. If we are to become truly aware of, process and put right the stereotypical attitudes and myths we have as individuals and collectives, then we also need to take a look at our own history. Estimates suggest that up to two million women and girls in Germany alone were raped by Allied forces at the end of World War II. Previously, in the areas occupied by the Wehrmacht and SS, massive numbers of women were raped during their resistance against the Nazi regime, as they fled, and during their captivity in concentration camps. The way that German post-war society dealt with the issue consisted mainly of suppressing the pain and silencing or even despising the survivors and their children. Even today, the suffering of the women has not received sufficient public acknowledgement. There are no monuments or days of remembrance for them and there have been no speeches, let alone compensation payments. The absolutely inadequate processing of the trauma from this time has severe effects on society.

1 Susan Brownmiller: *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape*, Simon and Schuster 1975.

2 <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/suche/deutschland-uebernimmt-sitz-im-un-sicherheitsrat-1564610>.



Research has now shown the massive, long-term psychological, physiological and social consequences of sexualised violence on survivors and also on their families and the subsequent generations. Trauma symptoms can be handed down, preventing daughters and sons, and even grandchildren, from growing up freely. Instead it leaves them to deal with the issue. To fully understand the extent of the transgenerational consequences of this violence, we still need more scientific studies. Nonetheless, numerous books<sup>3</sup> and reports, as well as correspondence received by *medica mondiale* over the years from these affected generations, document these consequences. The extreme burden of suffering – and of shame and guilt – which the German post-war society is still carrying today, clearly demonstrates how necessary it is for us to deal with our wounds and emotionally neglected history. Only in this way can healing take place and is it possible to put an end to suppression and transgenerational traumatisation.

### Expertise for those seeking refuge

Among the women and girls who fled to Germany seeking protection are many who experienced gender-specific violence, either in their home countries or while they were fleeing. The five most frequent reasons for women to flee their home country are war, sexualised violence, fear of honour killing, forced marriage and female genital mutilation.<sup>4</sup> However, women and girls often do not find complete safety from sexualised violence when they reach (German) refugee accommodation. If they are to process their traumatic experiences, they require skilled support and long-term assistance. *medica mondiale*, having gained many years of experience and expertise in its international projects, started a competence building programme in Germany in 2016 in order to train full-time and volunteer staff working with refugees. In these courses, participants learn how to apply a stress- and trauma-sensitive approach when they work with affected people, and also to take care of themselves and respect their own limits. Self-help groups are also part of the programme, allowing women with a refugee background to pass on their own experiences. At the political level, *medica mondiale* is demanding minimum standards for refugee facilities in order to ensure that these do not de-

velop into places “beyond the law” and to ensure that the women living there are protected from violence committed by either fellow refugees or staff.

The brochure you have in your hands is intended to present some of the causes and consequences of this ubiquitous violence against women and girls, as well as some selected examples of our work. It is the responsibility of us all to develop an awareness for the social contexts of this violence, to take them seriously and to do what we can to change them. Only then will the cycle of violence be broken and gender justice become possible.

Dr. Monika Hauser  
Sybille Fezer

3 E.g.: “Kriegsenkel: Die Erben der vergessenen Generation” [Grandchildren of war and their inheritance from the forgotten generation], Sabine Bode, Klett-Cotta; “Erebtte Wunden heilen” [Healing inherited wounds], Katharina Drexler, Klett-Cotta.

4 Study on female refugees, Charité Berlin, 2017.

*"I stopped counting  
after the ninth."*

A., 31 years old\*, Bosnia

*"I used to suppress the most  
terrifying time of my life.  
65 years went by until medica  
mondiale helped me find the  
courage to speak out."*

E., 81 years old\*, Berlin

*"The man I was supposed  
to marry was 55 years older  
than me. I ran away, doused  
myself with a canister of petrol  
and set myself alight."*

A., 15 years old\*, Afghanistan

*"Run, run, run!  
We women and children  
kept shouting that to each  
other, over and over."*

E., 42 years old\*, Liberia

*"Every night we had to move  
location in order to get away  
from them. The soldiers raped  
my friend five times."*

S., 42 years old\*, Kosovo

*"Every night I dream  
of them. I hear them  
coming for me. I just  
want this to end!"*

D., 19 years old\*, Sudan

*"He kept me like a slave  
so he could rape me again and  
again. After a year I gave birth to  
twins. Whenever I look at them they  
remind me of that horrible time."*

F., 43 years old\*, DR Congo

*"Seven groups raped me.  
After six months of being pregnant,  
I began to bleed heavily, and I was  
scared I would die in the bush."*

A., 13 years old\*, Uganda



# VOICES OF SURVIVORS



# SEXUALISED WARTIME VIOLENCE – PERCEPTION AND CONSEQUENCES\*

Gabriela Mischkowski and Monika Hauser

When we set up our first project in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1993, there was only one book dealing with the issue of sexualised wartime violence: “Against our Will” by Susan Brownmiller.<sup>1</sup> In the meantime, there is hardly an aspect that has not been highlighted or a war that has not been investigated with regards to this issue. In the 1990s, international criminal law and numerous national legislations added punishable offences relating to sexualised violence. In last 25 years, the UN Security Council, UN General Assembly and EU Parliament have all considered the issue, passing strongly worded resolutions or issuing severe statements and setting up related commissions.

## New Appraisal – Old Unease

Surely we should be satisfied with these developments. Why are we still repeatedly struck by a sense of great unease? The answer is partly due to the obvious fact that sexualised violence continues to exist. For example, according to the Syrian Network for Human Rights, some 14,000 women and girls were tortured and raped in captivity in Syria between 2011 and 2016.<sup>2</sup> In May 2015, Médecins Sans Frontières reported the rape of more than 100 women during one single attack on the Congolese town Kikamba in South Kivu.<sup>3</sup> These are just a few examples - the full list is very long.

There is also another aspect which we find very unsettling. For decades, the prevailing narrative about sexualised wartime violence was dominated by the idea that wartime rape was either a matter of deviant individuals or some form of exceptional collective excess – both of which were ‘collateral damage’ of war and unfortunately not preventable. The current narrative is almost the opposite claim: rape is deliberately used as a wartime strategy and

weapon. The suggestion here is that this is the only, or primary, aspect that should be condemned. What does that mean? Would the lack of a strategy decision make the suffering or the injustice less, if hundreds or thousands of women were raped or sexually enslaved? What function do these narratives fulfil? Do we need narratives that reduce a complex problem such as sexualised violence down to one motivation or one function? Does the focussed spotlight of a narrative such as this serve to blind us to something else?

One possible answer is: Treating sexualised violence during war only as a wartime strategy is a way of distancing ourselves from – and thus refusing to accept responsibility for – something that should be seen as a serious injustice.

So, let us turn off the ‘wartime strategy’ spotlight and instead cast a broader light on the complexity of sexualised wartime violence.

## The Continuum of Sexualised Violence

**First:** Sexualised violence does not stop when the acts of war stop. In particular, the so-called “new wars” may have a discernible start date but rarely have a point when they can be said to end. A cessation of full-blown war generally leads not to peace but to a “twilight zone” with decades of hostilities and power struggles

between former warlords (such as in Afghanistan), a lasting propensity for violence in supposedly “pacified” areas (such as Bosnia and Herzegovina), catastrophic “post-war” economic situations, and factors encouraged by all of these, such as impunity, political corruption and criminal gangs. So it is impossible to speak of peace in any of the aforementioned scenarios, even if many of our politicians have convinced themselves otherwise and insist

*Treating sexualised violence during war as only a wartime strategy is actually a way to distance ourselves from and refuse responsibility for the injustice that happens.*

\* edited and shortened version of the article for the Accompanying Catalogue of the Special Exhibition “Violence and Gender” in the Military History Museum, Dresden, <https://mhmbw.de/sonderausstellungen/gug>.

1 Susan Brownmiller: *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape*, Simon and Schuster, 1975.

2 See Syrian Network for Human Rights: *22,823 Women Killed in Syria since March 2011*, 25.11.2016 (<http://sn4hr.org/blog/2016/11/25/29691/>, accessed on 25.6.2017).

3 See Médecins sans Frontières: *Democratic Republic of Congo: MSF assists more than a hundred women who claimed being sexually abused after an attack in South Kivu province*, 14.5.2015 (<http://www.msf.org/en/article/democratic-republic-congo-msf-assists-more-hundred-women-who-claimed-being-sexually-abused>, accessed on 26.6.2017).



on sending refugees back to supposedly “safe countries of origin” such as Afghanistan. Within this twilight zone, the perpetrators of sexualised violence can be exactly the same people as before, perhaps having swapped their military fatigues for civilian uniforms. Further, the group of perpetrators can also become more diverse, joined by men who like to think of themselves as “protectors”: staff in non-governmental organisations, wardens or security personnel in refugee camps, and UN soldiers.

An example here is north-eastern Nigeria in 2015, where numerous women and girls sought refuge from kidnapping and sexual enslavement by Boko Haram terrorists, only to be blackmailed, sexually exploited or forced into prostitution by wardens or police officers in the refugee camps.<sup>4</sup> In Afghanistan, the Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) reported 2,579 documented cases of gender-specific violence in the first eight months of 2015.<sup>5</sup> In 2012 in Iraq, 46 per cent of married women experience violence from their husband, according to UN sources.<sup>6</sup> And there is no end to the reports of sexual exploitation of women and girls by service personnel sent from various countries on behalf of the UN, who are supposed to be ensuring their security.

**Second:** The continuum of sexualised violence also stretches back in the other direction on the time axis. Even before war breaks out, sexualised violence or its threat is an everyday experience for many women and girls. And looking back to before the hostilities also reveals how much baggage the fighting men take with them into the war: their attitudes towards ‘true masculinity’ or ‘typical women’, or the links between sexuality and aggression. Dominant masculinity is something that is both needed and under threat during war; the tension created by this can lead to the symbol of male virility (the male genitals) needing to be used actively in order to reassure the male of this virility. Soldiers generally carry sexist and misogynist attitudes of a range of severity in their field kit, securely anchored in socio-cultural practices, societal norms, and military training –

none of which allow even the seed of an awareness for the injustices to form.

This aspect of the continuum of sexualised violence brings the whole issue closer to our society. An EU-wide study from 2015 shows that one out of three women in the EU have experienced physical or sexualised violence since their youth. That amounts to some 62 million women. Of these, 5 per cent reported they were raped.<sup>7</sup>

**Third:** The consequences of violence in general and sexualised violence in particular are borne by the affected individuals for the rest of their life, and society as a whole for generations. We know that trauma symptoms frequently become chronic in cases of sexualised violence. In 2015, *medica mondiale* and its Bosnian partner organisation *Medica Zenica* carried out a study on the long-term consequences of sexualised wartime violence.<sup>8</sup> We listened to the experiences of 51 survivors who had made use of the assistance on offer from *Medica Zenica* during and after the war. 70 per cent of them reported that the rapes were still having significant adverse effects on their lives today. Of these, 85 per cent are undergoing regular medical treatment, 57 per cent suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, 65 per cent are regularly taking psychopharmaceutical medicine, and more than 90 per cent have gynaecological complaints. Furthermore, many of their children are exhibiting signs of post-traumatic stress disorder. The transgenerational impacts of violence, and in particular of sexualised wartime violence, have still not been researched sufficiently.



Gabriela Mischkowski: Expert on the history and prosecution of sexualised wartime violence Co-founder of *medica mondiale*.

4 Human Rights Watch: Nigeria: Officials Abusing Displaced Women, Girls, 31.10.2016 (<https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/10/31/nigeria-officials-abusing-displaced-women-girls>, accessed on 25.6.2017).

5 See Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission: Elimination of violence against women 1394, 30.9.2015 (<http://www.aihrc.org.af/home/research-reports/5170>, accessed on 25.6.2017).

6 See United Nations: Women in Iraq, Factsheet, 1.4.2013 ([http://www.uniraq.com/index.php?option=com\\_k2&view=item&id=498:women-in-iraq-factsheet&Itemid=626&lang=en](http://www.uniraq.com/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id=498:women-in-iraq-factsheet&Itemid=626&lang=en), accessed on 16.2.2017).

7 See European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights: Gewalt gegen Frauen: eine EU-weite Erhebung, 2014 (<http://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2014/violence-against-women-eu-wide-survey-main-results-report>, accessed on 9.5.2017). Respondents were more than 42000 women in the 28 EU member states aged between 18 and 74.

8 See *medica mondiale*, *Medica Zenica*: “We are still alive! We have been harmed, but we are brave and strong”. A research study on the long-term consequences of war rape and coping strategies of survivors in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Zenica/Cologne 2014.

The more patriarchal or male-dominated a society is, the more rigid the gender hierarchy manifests, and the more severe is the social exclusion of women and girls who have survived sexualised violence. Above all in communities where the honour of the man, the family, the group or the nation is considered to be situated in the female genitals – and this can vary considerably within any particular country – there is no chance for women who want to talk about what happened. So the trauma of stigmatisation closely follows the trauma of sexual violence. Young women are no longer considered suitable for marriage, and women are cast out, so they become sexual ‘fair game’. A life in poverty and often in prostitution is inevitable.

### Sexualised wartime violence in a range of contexts: patterns, forms and causes<sup>9</sup>

The reality of sexualised violence in wartime includes a wide range of forms, functions, patterns, dynamics and constellations of violence. Only a few excerpts can be illustrated here.

#### Military brothels of conventional armies

Ever since rules were agreed about what is permitted or not during war (later becoming international humanitarian law), rape was included as ‘not permitted’. Military leaders have always had to try and maintain discipline, not least because, as during the first and second world wars, all sides justifiably feared a loss in military power if there was a high incidence of sexually transmitted disease. Strategies ranged from appeals for sexual abstinence to the establishment of military brothels with strict medical checks. The latter proved to be more successful. The aim was to manage the sexuality of the soldiers as well as keep a check on the local prostitutes. However, the boundaries between voluntary prostitution, forced prostitution and sexual enslavement were never distinct.

The best-known example of military brothels has to be the systematic programme of so-called “comfort stations” by the Japanese army during the Second World War. This program was established after some 50,000 Japanese soldiers ran amok in the Chinese city of Nanjing in 1937, committing an unimaginable massacre and innumerable rapes. However, the reaction to this was not to punish the perpetrators or their superiors, but instead to reward them: as a remedy for the supposed “sexual distress” of the soldiers, over 200,000



women from the territories occupied by Japan were forced to work as “comfort women” in brothels near the front lines.

The US military also set up a comprehensive system of “rest and recreation” for its soldiers, initially in Korea and later in Vietnam. A major component of this was a widespread network of brothels. War and economic desperation led many young women into prostitution, whether this was in South Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines or South Vietnam. It is completely plausible to argue that the US military bases in these countries were the starting point for the sex industry in south-east Asia at the end of the 1960s, and therefore also of today’s sex tourism and cross-border trafficking in women and girls.

#### Sexual provision in the ‘new wars’

Whereas it was the military leadership on each side which played the role of pimp during conventionally fought wars, in the so-called ‘new wars’ this task falls to the individual leaders of fighting units. In many recent wars, rape has been used as an instrument to spread terror or to force populations to flee. At the same time, however, kidnapping and sexually enslaving girls plays a functional role in the reproduction of the continually mobile rebel groups and militias. The girls, who are mostly young, are forced to marry members of the group. The system of allocation for wives can be subject to strict rules and serve to help maintain group discipline and hierarchy. Or it might be used as a way of rewarding the fighters and maintaining their fighting spirit.

<sup>9</sup> See Gabriela Mischkowski: Sexualisierte Gewalt im Krieg. Eine Chronik [Sexualised Wartime Violence: A Chronicle]. In: *medica mondiale* (Ed.): Sexualisierte Kriegsgewalt und ihre Folgen. Handbuch zur Unterstützung traumatisierter Frauen in verschiedenen Arbeitsfeldern, Frankfurt 2004.



With publicity campaigns, *medica mondiale* raises awareness for the topic of sexualized wartime violence.

during wartime: finding fun in a violent act and achieving sexual arousal merge in the act of sexual dominance. Lust and the power of weapons come together frequently as a characteristic of sexualised violence in general, and during war in particular: “To be clear, nature is nature. [...] You’ve got an M-16. So why do you need to pay for a lady? You just go down to the village and take what you want. [...] A weapon is power. For some of them, carrying a gun around all the time was like having a permanent erection. Every time they pulled the trigger it was like a sexual hit.” (US veteran talking about himself and other US soldiers during the Vietnam War 1964-1975)<sup>13</sup>

### Final Remarks

Rape fulfils the function of a weapon in war and can serve to achieve specific military objectives. However, a purely functional analysis allows us to focus on events and perpetrators as if they have nothing to do with us and our (peacetime) world. We can distance ourselves from it, consider ourselves morally superior and escape any responsibility for it. This image will not change unless we also include the continuum of sexualised violence. Only then do we also see the German soldiers on peacekeeping missions as they visit brothels, or the sexual assaults and sexualised blackmail committed by male security staff in refugee accommodation in modern Germany. And only then do we realise the nature of the baggage fighters carry with them in their field kit. Firstly, there are the sexist and racist attitudes that the politics, culture, social life and economy in our patriarchal societies keep reproducing, partly in order to create suitable concepts of ‘the enemy’. But not only that. There is also a huge packet of fears, insecurities and feelings of powerlessness that grow out of the inner conflict between their emotions, which tend towards vitality, and the external conditions, which in this society tend to be hostile to life or even destructive. This packet remains unopened and hidden, since dealing with its contents would run counter to prevailing male virtues and the demands of being a soldier.

So if we switch on all the spotlights to take a good look at all of this, then we can see sexualised violence as an especially persistent constant in our societies, in times of both war and non-war. It is, however, a constant that is not a force of nature but rather something our society has produced. As such it can be changed. This is why any campaign or initiative is doomed to failure if it seeks to counter only one aspect: such as sexualised violence as a strategy of war. ■

### Male bonding

Group visits to brothels or jointly committed sexual assaults and rape can form part of the comradeship and social life of soldiers, as can be clearly seen in letters written by German soldiers during World War II. Taking part in a rape together with a superior or a fellow soldier of another race can serve to either overcome or enforce military and racial hierarchies. With their particularly competitive internal dynamic, group rapes can then lead to a cascade of additional violence and often even the death of the victim.<sup>10</sup>

### Sexualised violence in armies and militias

According to figures from the US Defence Department, 19,000 female soldiers in the army were sexually harassed in 2010. Another survey found that 20 per cent of all female veterans indicated they had been raped by fellow soldiers or superiors in their time as recruits or active soldiers.<sup>11</sup> Despite massive campaigns to counter this, the US Army has not been able to stem this flow of sexual harassment in its own ranks.

Sexualised violence also occurs within rebel groups in Latin America or Africa. For women, and especially for female child soldiers, often the only ways to escape the high number of sexual attacks from their male colleagues are to become more brutal than them in order to become high-ranking themselves, or to seek out a superior and become his exclusive sexual property.<sup>12</sup>

“This is my rifle, this is my gun. This is for fighting, this is for fun.” The unfortunately well-known rhyme from the US Army points to a further aspect of sexualised violence

10 See Joanna Bourke: *Rape. A History from 1860 to the Present*, London 2008, pp. 376 ff.

11 See Kirby Dick: *The Invisible War*, 2012 (URL: <http://invisiblewarmovie.com/>, accessed on 25.6.2017); Helen Benedict: *The Lonely Soldier. The Private War of Women Serving in Iraq*, Boston 2009.

12 See China Keitetsi: *Child Soldier*, London 2004.

13 In: Mark Baker: *NAM. The Vietnam War in the Words of the Soldiers Who Fought There*, New York 1981, pp. 187.



# SEXISM AND DESTRUCTIVE SEXUALITY IN MALE-DOMINATED SOCIETIES

Rolf Pohl

In post-modern Western societies in recent decades, even the most hardened gender relations seem to have been shaken up under the influence of advances in gender equality politics. To a large extent however, these changes are superficial and an expression of merely “rhetorical modernisation”<sup>1</sup>, whilst the underlying structures, based on a still asymmetric and hierarchical gender order, remain fundamentally untouched. The persistently recurring public debates around sexism reveal the simultaneous occurrence of progress with public awareness and of the forces of backward-oriented inertia with those of the counter movements. This is also evident in the #MeToo campaign, triggered in 2017 by the sexual harassment committed by Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein.

## Women as prey

These debates often struggle to have any significant sustainable effect because they suffer from several inherent deficiencies. Firstly, there is a noticeable lack of a clear definition of “sexism”. Above all it needs to be clearly distinguished from so-called “flirting” at one end of the spectrum and obvious sexual harassment at the other. To put it more precisely: Sexism that simultaneously desires and despises women has nothing to do with genuine flirting or with mutually respectful erotic play between equals. Here lies the crucial boundary, which in the current debates is either blithely disregarded or mistakenly held responsible for the alleged insecurity that men suffer at the hands of women and feminism. The distinction between sexism and genuine flirting is not blurred. There is, however, a fluid transition between everyday sexism and manifest sexual or sexualised violence. It must be understood that the definition of sexism encompasses much more than just the social construction and valuing of sexual differences between people and the standards and behaviours derived from these. Sexism is first and foremost an umbrella term for all varieties of sexual aggression against girls and women, who in male-dominated socie-

ties (hegemonies) are still considered, represented and perceived as property and prey for male apportionment. The gradations in the manifestation of sexism range from suggestive idioms, sexual advances, harassment and groping, through to destructive assault by rape. This means that it is untenable to maintain the widespread and reassuring false belief that while sexism is perhaps not nice, it is harmless and has absolutely nothing to do with sexual forms of violence.

## Downplaying everyday sexism

In this regard, a further deficiency of the sexism debate becomes clear: the motives of sexually predatory men are reduced to pure issues of power. But it is not exclusively an exploitation of power. It is also and more specifically about the prevailing configurations of heteronormative male sexuality in male-dominated societies, which are already fundamentally charged with aggression and antagonism.<sup>2</sup> This is currently widely disregarded, even in many feminist discussions, or misjudged as unchangeable biology. It is sometimes even embraced positively. One example of this can be seen in the heavy criticism of the #MeToo campaign in January 2018 by a group of prominent French women led by actress Catherine Deneuve. Theirs is a widespread and persistently repeated opinion that tends towards naturalising gender relations by explaining away sexual and sexualised violence as unavoidable. Articulating this regularly leads to the implied failure of these gender debates. If we follow the assumption of the French authors, that “sexual instincts are inherently offensive and wild”, its argumentation for saving the manly art of seduction suggests that male aggression is “indispensable to sexual freedom”.<sup>3</sup> This point of view does not only downplay everyday sexism: with its justification of male sexual aggression, it also aligns conveniently with widespread complaints about the insecurity of men and the associated claim that for biological reasons the man must regain his traditional place in the gender hierarchy.

1 Angelika Wetterer: Rhetorische Modernisierung. Das Verschwinden der Ungleichheit aus dem zeitgenössischen Differenzwissen. [Rhetorical modernisation. The disappearance of inequality from contemporary awareness of difference.] In: Knapp, Gudrun-Axeli/Wetterer, Angelika (Ed.), *Achsen der Differenz. Gesellschaftstheorie und feministische Kritik II*. Münster 2003, 286–319.

2 Rolf Pohl: *Feindbild Frau. Sexualität, Gewalt und die Abwehr des Weiblichen* [Women as the enemy. Sexuality, violence and the defence of the feminine], Hannover 2004.

3 Stefan Simons: Sexismusdebatte in Frankreich. #moiaussi [The Sexism Debate in France. #metoo], 2018 (URL: <http://www.spiegel.de/kultur/gesellschaft/metoo-in-frankreich-auf-welchem-stand-ist-die-sexismus-debatte-in-frankreich-a-1187155.html>, accessed on: 15.6.2018).

## Maleness as the norm

Despite all modernisations in gender relations, this attitude conceals and denies that the current “spiritual and moral supremacy of male value and order systems” is connected with the “production of a hierarchical culture of two genders”. It demonstrates the fundamental core value that “maleness is the norm and is superior to the female”<sup>4</sup>, while the female is subordinate, inferior and of less value. This system of male supremacy is deeply rooted in the cultural (symbolic) arrangement of society and in the widely unconscious perceptions and attitude patterns of individuals (not only men). In male dominated societies, men are still subject to a greater or lesser pressure to emphasise their differences from women, to value these perceptions of difference and not only to “position” themselves as different but also as the “more important” and superior gender and to actively prove or enact this self-positing “if necessary”. As a cultural and psychosocial construct, masculinity is considered against this background as a fragile and crisis-prone condition. When conflicts arise, these are always also experienced as a crisis of masculinity, meaning that this masculinity has to be “repaired” or even completely reconstructed. This means that this view of an intact and autonomous but repeatedly threatened masculinity is central to the identity of a culture built on hierarchical gender contrasts.

## The desire for autonomy and the fear of dependence

This threat is evident in particular in the field of sexuality because his male desire, subject to the norms of heterosexuality and oriented towards women, makes the man highly dependent: he is dependent on his own desire and, with this fixation, he is simultaneously dependent on the women towards whom his sexuality remains programmed. Under no other conditions is the man weaker and (seemingly) more subject to outside control than in the field of sexuality. Normative heterosexual orientation therefore subjects the man to an un-



Image: © Isabelle Hannemann

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solvable but inescapable dilemma: an conflict of a compulsive desire for autonomy and a deeply-rooted fear of dependence. The consequence is the development of a combat-ready defensiveness for any cases of crisis, the unconscious core of which is an ambivalent attitude to all threats that is characterised by fear, lust and hate. Threats become seen as weakness, as unmanly, or as associated with and/or derived from women and femininity; these are then externalised to be fought off strongly in “self-defence”. Psychologically, this is one of the most important sources of all forms of everyday sexism right through to manifest sexual and sexualised violence in civilian, military and wartime life.<sup>5</sup> In the identity of the supposed autonomous and superior gender, the people who are the source of desire and lust are at the same time the greatest source of aversion and fear. In fact, they are the source of fear precisely because they are the source of lust. So sexual violence subconsciously allows two things to be achieved: firstly it is gratification without loss of control; and secondly it punishes women for the desire they (supposedly) trigger in men. All manifestations of sexism concern not only male power but also (specifically) a dominant sexual lust, in which hostility and violence are already fundamentally and structurally embedded. ■

4 Sylka Scholz: “Hegemoniale Männlichkeit” – Innovatives Konzept oder Leerformel? [“Hegemonial masculinity” – Innovative concept or empty formula?], 2003, p. 8f. (URL: [https://www.fk12.tu-dortmund.de/cms/ISO/Medienpool/Archiv-Alte-Dateien/arbeitsbereiche/soziologie\\_der\\_geschlechterverhaeltnisse/Medienpool/AIM\\_Beitraege\\_dritte\\_Tagung/sylka\\_scholz.pdf](https://www.fk12.tu-dortmund.de/cms/ISO/Medienpool/Archiv-Alte-Dateien/arbeitsbereiche/soziologie_der_geschlechterverhaeltnisse/Medienpool/AIM_Beitraege_dritte_Tagung/sylka_scholz.pdf), accessed on: 15.06.2018).

5 Rolf Pohl: Die Zerstörung der Frau als Subjekt. Macht und Sexualität als Antriebskräfte männlicher Vergewaltigungsstrategien im Krieg. [The destruction of the woman as a subject. Power and sexuality as the driving forces for male rape strategies in war.] In: Gender Initiativkolleg (Ed.): Gewalt und Handlungsmacht. Queer\_Feministische Perspektiven. Frankfurt am Main 2012, p. 113-124.

# GENDER STEREOTYPES AND EVERYDAY SEXISM

Antje Schrupp

Gender pay gap, pink-blue divide, #MeToo and more: Gender stereotypes remain as common as ever, even in emancipated Western societies. Why do they persist so stubbornly, despite all good intentions (or declarations thereof)?

A glimpse into the past is helpful here. All too often it seemed that “women’s problems” were solved, only for them to come to the fore once again. When women first had the vote a hundred years ago, many people thought that would settle the matter, since as voters women would be able to assert their interests politically. But as we now know, this is not how things worked out. Simone de Beauvoir’s thorough analysis of the reasons for this suggests that clichés and stereotypes of femininity and masculinity are too deeply anchored in our culture to be removed with just a few formal measures.

Later, the “second” women’s movement sought to bring about more fundamental changes - a revolution even. In the 1970s, feminists discussed new types of family, new working relationships and new forms of sexuality. It was clear that formal emancipation was not enough; real efforts had to be undertaken to anchor these changes. So in the following years, concepts to improve the situation of women and Equal Opportunities Officers sprang up everywhere. Discriminatory laws were abolished, rape within marriage was made prosecutable, and unequal pay for the same work was prohibited.

## Subtle power relationships

Once again, many thought that the “gender problem” was solved, and this time for real. But again it proved to be a false conclusion. Today, another wave of the feminist debate has surfaced with labels such as #aufschrei and #metoo. It is no longer just about criminal behaviour such as rape or open discrimination but rather the full range of subtle and structural power relationships.

These, however, are not as easy to grasp because many things that make the coexistence of men and women difficult play out on the level of everyday culture. Silly jokes, casual harassment and subtle ascriptions are not things that can be resolved at a legal level. This is also true for the sexualised representation of women in the media, sexist advertising campaigns,



male-dominated platforms, the use of masculine forms of language as the “normal” ones, and so on.

Frequently, feminists who criticise these are accused of wanting to prohibit everything: flirting, artistic freedom, open discussion. But this accusation totally misses the point. After the first phase (fighting for the vote) and the second phase (attempting to achieve real equality by means of laws and rules), we are now in a third phase: negotiating to agree on acceptable behaviour. So we are deciding together how we want to coexist, beyond mere laws and regulations.

When a woman is disrespected in everyday life, this is normally not something she can bring before a court. There is certainly the option of just tackling this as an individual, without making a big fuss about it. At least, most of the time and for most women. But the crucial point is that we simply no longer want to, and many have never wanted to. Regardless of whether we could defend ourselves or not, we just do not want to be put in these situations in the first place. Not because we then feel like victims, but because we just do not want to live in a world like that.

## Action without justification

We do not necessarily want to prohibit all silly, sexist advertising. But we are really sick and tired of it. We might not want the state to ensure that all platforms in this world have a balanced voice. But we find all these talk shows and podiums full of men to be simply uninter-



esting and irritating. And it should be possible to point that out. And, of course we do not want to stop old men writing poems about how much they admire women and flowers! But in the realms we live and work in, we do not want anyone putting them up on the walls.

This new feminist movement is a consequence of the fact that equality and emancipation have been a matter of course for many women since they were very small. Many also have professional influence; although women are still lacking at the head of institutions, they are numerous on the second and third rungs in editorial offices, associations, authorities, universities and so on. They are convinced that no disadvantage can be allowed to arise from being a woman, and they behave accordingly.

It is precisely this that makes many on the right and some old newspaper columnists so angry: these women today simply do what they think is right without justifying themselves or asking anyone for permission. It is no accident – not only in Germany and Europe, but all over the world – that old nationalistic patriarchs and right-wing populists have picked on feminism as their primary opponent. The revolutionary aspect of this new women's politics is not that they are introducing further analysis here or a new theory there. It is that they are eroding the sovereignty of opinion of the "old men": those who patriarchal logic deems to be the ultimate authority.

### Varied women's movement

Our logic, however, sees the old patriarch as just one of many. He cannot simply end the discussion with a "That's enough", but instead needs to justify and communicate his perspectives just like everyone else. He must allow himself to be criticised publicly, and by people whom he traditionally does not recognise as his peers. This really is a historical change, the scope of which is nowhere near to being completely understood. The women's movement is linking up with other social, post-colonial, anti-capitalist movements because other people who have not been viewed as peers are now also raising their voices – regardless of what the traditional authorities think about this.

Previously, the women's movement was part of the left but today it is the other way around: the left



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is part of the women's movement. Admittedly not the traditional women's movement, which contented itself with the aim of making women equal to men, but with the autonomous, varied and intersectional women's movement, which might have arisen because of gender differences but is no longer content to stop there: its focus is now the entire world. It still draws attention to the situation of women there but emphasises the whole situation and the relationships that should be quite fundamentally different.

Different in what ways? This question must remain unanswered. Women do not have common goals just because they are women. They are free to choose their own goals. Previously the aim of feminism appeared to be fixed: fighting for the vote or implementing gender equality. But today there is no single clear aim. The Italian feminist Luisa Muraro offers this short description: "Imagine a race and a female athlete who is running. Is she running towards the finish line? Yes, but where is the finish line? For those who stand still, it appears fixed and unalterable, but for the woman running there is track beyond the line. She does not stop at the finish line: she runs through it, she breaks through the line. This is the character of women's politics." ■

# IN ACTION AROUND THE WORLD

The women's rights and aid organisation *medica mondiale* has been actively committed to supporting women and girls in war zones and crisis areas for 25 years. Together with a network of local partner organisations, we support survivors of sexualised violence and we advocate politically for social change, gender justice and an end to the violence.

## We are partners

*medica mondiale* has been working together for many years in war and post-war regions with activists and organisations who provide assistance to women and girls affected by sexualised violence and who work to protect them from violence. Many of these local women's organisations formed out of self-help initiatives or projects funded and supported by *medica mondiale*. We provide financial assistance and advice on setting up and running the organisation. The joint political work and expert exchange are further core elements of these partnerships.

The Grant Program at *medica mondiale* was set up in 2004 to support projects at local women's organisations with smaller-scale, fixed-term funding. These include projects to provide medical and psychosocial care, training, income-generation measures, or legal assistance, as well as political advocacy for women's and human rights or public awareness work. Successful small projects can later lead to long-term partnerships that make it possible to implement joint projects over several years with a broader scope.

## We empower and train locally

Organisational development and the building up of local expertise are high priorities for our international project work. In many project countries there is an almost complete lack of expertise regarding trauma or psychosocial counselling. *medica mondiale* can offer training courses and sessions on the stress- and trauma-sensitive approach to its partner organisations and also to state institutions and non-governmental organisations. Another competence-building priority is organisational development. For example, we train our partners in financial and human resource management, which assists them in the planning and implementation of their projects.

## Regional focus

Armed conflict generally does not stop at borders but instead affects whole regions, so we deliberately seek to develop regional concepts in our international work. In order to enable effective and long-term changes, each project needs to take into account the whole sphere of conflict and its context, including knowledge of all the key local stakeholders. Cooperating with several organisations in each region makes it possible to create synergies and use the limited resources together in complementary ways. In this way, *medica mondiale* is able to react more quickly to political developments and ensure sustainable impact from its support. For this



## 25 YEARS OF ACTION AROUND THE WORLD

Since **1993** *medica mondiale* has been providing support to women and girls in many war and crisis areas and performing political advocacy for their rights, so they can live in dignity and justice.

Together with over **30 partner organisations** worldwide, *medica mondiale* has provided support to more than **150,000 women and girls** in war and crisis zones since 1993, including psychosocial, legal and medical counselling and assistance for women to secure their own livelihood.

Our all-female team in the Cologne main office currently numbers **60 employees** and **placement students**, efficiently providing administration, quality assurance and information.

Since the organisation was set up, we have secured **58.4 million euros** of funding to benefit women and girls around the world. This has enabled us to fund **114 projects** and set up long-term structures in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Europe.



Image: © Ulla Burghardt/medica mondiale

reason, we concentrate our resources and assistance in the following priority regions:

- » Southeast Europe: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Serbia, Croatia
- » Afghanistan and Iraq
- » Western Africa: Liberia, Ivory Coast, Sierra Leone
- » African Great Lakes Region: Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Uganda

### We carry out our own programs and projects

Where a tangible need exists but there are no local partner organisations who support women affected by violence, *medica mondiale* will carry out its own projects to a limited extent. Carrying out this direct assistance in a spirit of feminist solidarity is part of our identity and offers opportunities to continue developing our expert approach.

Enhancing the capacity of healthcare professionals to deal with the issues “stress, trauma and gender-based violence”. Staff from *medica mondiale* and international projects met in Bonn in 2018 for a training course on this topic.

### We work in networks

Networking is necessary to overcome the isolation of women in the context of sexualised wartime violence, to enhance mutual solidarity, and to exert pressure together on politicians and the public. This is why we deliberately work together in regional and specialist networks and support the networking efforts of our partner organisations. Networks offer us all the chance to learn from each other and share our expertise on the issue of sexualised violence.

The aims and underlying principles of our worldwide commitment are laid down in the International Strategy of *medica mondiale*. ■

More at: <https://www.medicamondiale.org/en/what-we-do/strategy-for-international-programme-work.html>

These include **20** in **Southeastern Europe**; **54** in **Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria**; **18** in **Western Africa** and **20** in the **African Great Lakes Region**.

Currently we are assisting projects in Afghanistan, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Burundi, Croatia, El Salvador, DR Congo, Iraq, Ivory Coast, Kosovo, Liberia, Rwanda, Serbia, Sierra Leone and Uganda.

More than **62,244 women** and **men** have helped our work since 1993 by making donations and carrying out **2,450 solidarity activities**.

In some 120 training courses held since 2006, we have trained more than **1,600 specialists** and **volunteers** in Germany to adopt our stress- and trauma-sensitive approach for dealing with traumatised people.



# OUR AREAS OF WORK IN THE INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMMES

The work of *medica mondiale* is directed at both the causes and consequences of gender-based violence, and in particular sexualised wartime violence. Direct individual support for women and girls in war and crisis zones as well as public awareness work and political advocacy in order to secure changes in the political and statutory conditions are woven closely together within our double strategy.

## In order to support women affected by violence,

*medica mondiale* has developed a stress- and trauma-sensitive approach that is applied in all areas of its work. The aim here is to empower and stabilise women and girls after their experiences of violence, while also protecting them from additional stress and any possible retraumatisation. Together with our partner organisations we provide integrated support in the form of medical care, psychosocial counselling, legal assistance and support to help the women secure their economic independence. Here we specifically emphasise community-based approaches and the establishment of solidarity structures that contribute to protecting the women from renewed violence.

For women who have experienced or are threatened by sexualised violence in war and crisis regions, it is generally difficult to find sufficient and appropriate support. One reason is that the social infrastructure in war and post-war regions is frequently inadequate and run-down. And another is the lack of resources which affected people generally have for their travel to healthcare facilities or to pay for the services available there. In the institutions which do exist, such as clinics, police stations or courts, survivors then often experience stigmatising or humiliating behaviour and attitudes from the staff. *medica mondiale* is working to ensure that women have access to stress- and trauma-sensitive healthcare, psychosocial support, legal advice and assistance in generating their own livelihoods.



### Stress- and trauma-sensitive psychosocial work

Psychosocial work includes direct counselling and support for women and girls. The stress- and trauma-sensitive approach to psychosocial assistance by trained counsellors makes a significant contribution to processing psychological wounds, stabilising survivors and protecting them from further stress. Furthermore, psychosocial work uses public awareness-raising and sensitisation in communities and society to improve their collective capacity to deal with the consequences of wartime violence and traumatisation. Solidarity-based support for women and girls affected by violence in and from their communities helps

to prevent isolation or exclusion and renewed violence, opening up access for the women to offers of assistance and opportunities for participation. Mediation at family and community levels also helps in dealing with conflicts in a constructive manner. Advanced training and specialist advice for participants such as teachers, religious authority figures, government workers and NGO staff also contribute to the ability of women in post-war and conflict areas to find skilled help on a long-term basis.



### Stress- and trauma-sensitive healthcare work

Sexualised and other forms of violence against women and girls often result in life-threatening injuries and severe, sometimes chronic disease. Low-threshold and safe access to medical treatment and advice is very important if those affected are to survive. In this regard, the attitude and reactions of doctors, nursing staff and midwives can determine whether women in the healthcare facilities find the skilled consultations they need and are protected from renewed traumatisation. This requires the healthcare staff to have empathy and adopt a stress- and trauma-sensitive way of working.

Our aim is to make it possible for women and girls to gain access to sufficient medical treatment and advice, as well as related offers of support. Healthcare advice at a community level can play an important role here. This is why we strengthen the expertise of nursing and healthcare staff in dealing with women who are traumatised and/or affected by violence. It is also why we train trainers and other 'multipliers' in the state and non-governmental health care sector.



### Stress- and trauma-sensitive legal assistance

Wartime rape is a severe violation of human rights. However, in spite of an improvement in the opportunities to pursue international prosecution and the passing of UN Resolutions 1325 and 1820, perpetrators still generally enjoy impunity. And even after the war ends, large numbers of women are affected by gender-based and intra-family ('domestic') violence, which also usually goes unpunished. Progressive laws to protect women are frequently not enforced. In some

countries, such as Afghanistan, women and girls are even criminalised if they flee their homes to escape their spouse's violence or forced marriage. And then they are frequently subjected to renewed violence by the police, in court or in prison.

Our mission is to ensure that women and girls affected by violence know their rights and receive legal counselling and representation at national and international levels. *medica mondiale* and its partners provide legal counselling and accompany women to court. For example, if women want to take legal action to bring about changes in their lives and seek a divorce after experiencing violence in the family. Parallel to this, we provide training courses for police, lawyers and court staff on the stress- and trauma-sensitive approach to dealing with women affected by violence. Furthermore, *medica mondiale* funds locally adapted approaches outside of the official court system which make it possible for women to experience justice: these include symbolic tribunals, reparations funds or women's courts. At the same time, we support partner organisations in their efforts to document human rights violations against women, in order to counteract the prevailing taboos and impunity surrounding this issue.



### Advocacy work for women's rights

In order to bring about sustainable positive changes in social structures that discriminate against women in war and crisis regions, it is necessary to push through women's rights at a political level and anchor them in law. A very significant factor here is the implementation of UN Security Council Resolutions on Women, Peace and Security. Another important role is played by advocacy work. This advocacy aims at improving local healthcare provision for women and girls affected by violence. We are also supporting our partner organisations to further develop their capacity and expertise in advocacy work for women's rights and their ability to implement a human rights-based approach.



### Establishment and strengthening of independent women's organisations

*medica mondiale* wants to ensure that women who have been affected by violence in conflict and post-war situations receive support that is long-term, adapted to the local context and based on the principle of solidarity. So funding and capacity building for local partner organisations is an important aim of our international work. For this we offer our partners organisational development, based on feminist and emancipatory principles. We also train them in management skills, financial management, resource



Image: © Steffi Meyer/ *medica mondiale*

In order to create long-term self-help structures, *medica mondiale* funds and trains its partner organisations, such as here in Afghanistan.

procurement, advocacy and psychosocial counselling. In addition, we offer selected partner organisations institutional funding, as well as assistance to network regionally, nationally, and internationally. In regions where there are insufficient support structures, we also conduct our own programmes which often then become independent local women's organisations.



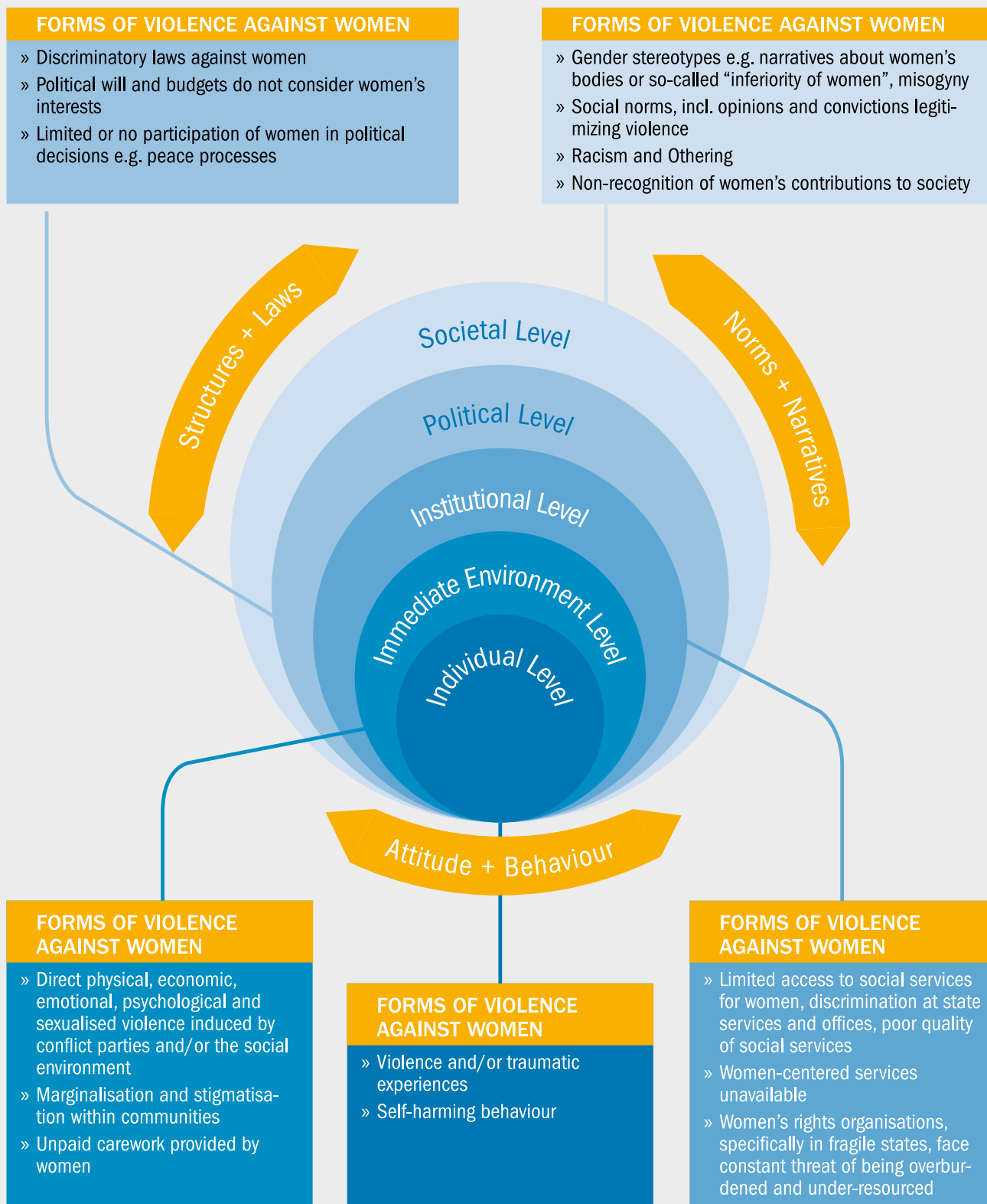
### Additional field of work: Measures to ensure livelihood

The health-related, social, and economic consequences of wars and conflicts coupled with structural handicaps usually put women in economically extremely precarious living conditions. Many women who have experienced sexualised violence are subsequently thrown out or rejected by their families. Others are just left alone to try and survive with their family. Dire economic straits mean women often end up in dependent and violent relationships in which sexual exploitation and forced prostitution are not uncommon. If women are to stabilise themselves or gain access to psychosocial services for dealing with violent experiences, a basic level of material security is essential. Women can be provided with access to other aid services and enabled to become self-sufficient by participation in basic and advanced vocational training and through measures for securing a livelihood, as well as active referral to competent cooperation partners and partner organisations. Carrying out wide-ranging economic programmes is not a work priority for *medica mondiale*. Nevertheless we do provide some assistance to women in our target group to help them secure their livelihoods, or we work together with other organisations who specialise in income-generation and related measures. ■

# Multi-level approach for the prevention of and response to violence against women

Practiced by *medica mondiale* and its partner organisations

Underlying direct forms of violence are other more pervasive forms of violence that are often unseen and unrecognized, such as: structural violence, through which people are unequally treated or deprived of their fundamental human rights, and symbolic violence, which legitimizes direct and structural violence e.g. through discriminatory narratives. All three forms of violence are the bases for conflict-related sexualised violence. The graph shows how *medica mondiale* acts against it.





## ACTIONS – PREVENTING AND RESPONDING TO CONFLICT-RELATED SEXUALISED AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE (SGBV)

## IMPACT (EXAMPLES)

### Societal level

- » Campaigns and public outreach against sexism and gender stereotypes
- » Raising awareness on conflict-related sexualised and gender-based-violence (S)GBV and the long term impacts of trauma

- » Knowledge and awareness in the general public raised
- » Taboo of (S)GBV broken
- » Gender stereotypes are questioned and challenged by general public

### Political level

- » Building political alliances and government monitoring
- » Human rights activism concerning laws and resolutions that address (S)GBV and the participation of women in peace processes
- » Sensitising key political actors on the impact of conflict-related (S)GBV on individual and societal levels

- » Conflict-related (S)GBV is recognised as one cause for the continuous destabilisation of countries and as a barrier for peace
- » Compensation laws recognise the status of war victim for survivors of (S)GBV
- » National Action Plans to implement UNSCR 1325 are initiated

### Institutional level

- » Cross-institutional networking for the establishment of multi-disciplinary response mechanisms and referral systems
- » Qualification of police, courts, health staff, and administrations to adopt the STA – stress- and trauma-sensitive approach®
- » Capacity development and financial support for women's rights organisations
- » Strengthening the capacities of female leaders
- » Stress- and traumasensitive self- and staffcare

- » State institutions at provincial and local levels implement cooperation agreements about joint measures responding to and preventing gender-based violence
- » Health and social services staff, security and judiciary employees are sensitised
- » Feminist organisations in conflict affected countries are more stable and sustainable

### Immediate environment level

- » Establishing family-oriented psychosocial services such as family counselling and mediation
- » Establishing community-based referral systems and protection networks
- » Establishing women's fora, community fora, youth clubs
- » Sensitisation, information sharing and engagement of local authorities
- » Public awareness raising about women's rights via radio, marketplace campaigns, and theatre

- » Family members recognise injustice and violence against women and identify them as such
- » Solidarity and mutual empowerment emerges
- » Community members sustainably engage in prevention and protection
- » Local authorities are aware of women's rights to legal claims and due processes
- » Reduction of violence in women's social environment

### Individual level

- » Stress- and trauma-sensitive support to affected women and girls: psychosocial counselling, health care, legal support services, and income generating activities

- » Survivors are able to cope with experiences of violence, gain inner stability and self-help strategies and are empowered to act
- » Women are strengthened and develop the capacity to engage in relationships they participate in and negotiate their needs with their social environment

# SUPPORTING SURVIVORS OF VIOLENCE WITH A MULTI-SECTORAL, SOLIDARITY-BASED, STRESS- AND TRAUMA-SENSITIVE APPROACH IN VARIOUS FIELDS OF WORK\*

Karin Griese, Alena Mehlaue, Maria Zemp

Based on many years' experience working in war and post-conflict regions, the women's rights organisation *medica mondiale* has worked together with fellow specialists in Germany and local partners to develop the STA – Stress- and Trauma-sensitive Approach® for supporting people affected by violence.<sup>1</sup>

The STA is one component of the multi-level approach (see p. 20) practiced by *medica mondiale* to deal with and prevent gender-based experiences of violence. This is adapted to each specific working context.

Guiding the work of *medica mondiale* is an attitude of solidarity and sensitivity towards both trauma- and stress-affected persons. This approach has an empowering and relieving effect on survivors of violence, activists, specialist staff and organisations. *medica mondiale* does not reduce violence-related psychological trauma to the individual level, but considers it inextricably embedded within the societal and political context. For this reason, even a multi-sectoral approach to supporting individuals affected by violence cannot stand alone: it must go hand-in-hand with measures to bring about change in political conditions, societal structures and public awareness.

## Psychological trauma as a survival response

In areas of war and conflict, people are confronted with a number of different burdensome experiences and stressors that present an existential threat to their physical and psychological integrity. For each individual affected, the experience is one of extreme helplessness and powerlessness. Traumatic experiences do not necessarily have long-term consequences for the person affected. Many people process their experience of a traffic accident or a natural disaster without feeling persistently burdened by it in the long term. Yet, it is documented that in a conflict-related context, one in two survivors of torture, ongoing intimate partner violence, or sexualised violence suffer from distinct, long-term psychological, physical and social consequences. These include a lack of motivation and a tendency to withdraw from social life, as well as chronic physiological illness or severe sleep disturbances. Many survivors also report chronic stress reactions with concentration difficulties, anxiety or irritability.

The severity and persistence of these problems not only depend on the severity of the traumatic events, but also

largely on the experiences which follow them. In war and post-conflict regions, the ongoing insecurity, endangerment and poverty, plus – in the case of rape – stigmatisation or social exclusion can all exacerbate traumatic stress reactions. Individuals, families or whole regions being repeatedly subjected to traumatic events, often experience fundamental, structural consequences: personality and identity, values, regulation of relationships and social cohesion are all affected.

## Lack of appropriate support

Particularly women and girls in war and post-conflict contexts frequently experience gender-based violence. This includes: exploitation, oppression, rape, sexual enslavement and forced marriage. Many of these experiences lead to trauma reactions, depression or psychosomatic illness. Even after the conflict, the extent of everyday violence against women and girls generally remains high and the human rights violations they have experienced is not recognized by their societies. Often, women are even made responsible for what happened to them and are denied any form of solidarity or sup-

\* Published by Karin Griese and Alena Mehlaue in Trauma, Zeitschrift für Psychotraumatologie und ihre Anwendungen 1/2016 [Trauma: Journal for Psychotraumatology and its Applications], ed. Monika Reif-Huelsen, pp. 60–74, shortened and adapted.

<sup>1</sup> Specialists in the Trauma Work department at *medica mondiale* and two freelance expert advisors, Maria Zemp and Simone Lindorfer, contributed significantly to the development of the "STA - stress- and trauma-sensitive approach®".



Image: © Anna Verena Mueller/medica mondiale

#### Karin Griese

Head of the Trauma Work Department at *medica mondiale*, Specialist trauma consultant, Systemic therapist.



Image: © Alena Mehlau

#### Alena Hannah Mehlau

Systemic counsellor and trauma therapist. Consultant specialist for trauma work at *medica mondiale*.



Image: © Reindel/Heude/medica mondiale

#### Maria Zemp

Consultant specialist for the Trauma Work Department at *medica mondiale*, consultant, [www.beratung-mariazemp.de](http://www.beratung-mariazemp.de)

port. Additionally, even during peacetime, political and societal conditions often encourage violence instead of contributing to the prevention of gender-based violence. These conditions include unequal distribution of power between genders, insufficient legislation, and political and societal taboos.

Where survivors of violence are able to find the strength and courage to seek help – perhaps from their community elders, in hospitals, at counselling points or in court – they often end up with inappropriate treatment or support. Experiences of discrimination are unfortunately commonplace due to their history of violence or the psychological challenges resulting from it. One factor here is the general lack of available assistance in war-torn or post-conflict regions; but another equally important factor is that many support people, specialists and activists simply lack basic knowledge of psychological trauma and its consequences for the survivors as well as for their families and their social surrounding. In addition, both sexualised violence and psychological suffering are often subject to taboo and stigma. Therefore, those in need of assistance often find that their available support persons – both personal and professional – are overwhelmed, judgemental or even hostile. In order to prevent further violence and make appropriate assistance possible, education, awareness raising and dismantling societal taboos around sexualised violence are necessary, as well as a stress- and trauma-sensitive approach among specialists and activists.

### Empowering women in a stress- and trauma-sensitive way

Trauma-sensitivity is especially important when it comes to promoting gender-equal participation of wom-

en in the development of society in war or post-conflict regions. Frequently, women and girls are haunted by the feeling of powerlessness they experienced during traumatic events. Consequently, their feelings of self-efficacy and self-esteem are often very low, or they suffer from perceived helplessness. These conditions make it difficult for them to involve themselves in social contexts, to actively assert their rights or to take steps to improve their living conditions.

However, experiencing acceptance from others alongside the painful things that happened to them can have an empowering effect on the affected women and girls. Trauma-sensitivity therefore also includes implementing development and human rights work in a way that recognises the injustice committed as a breach of human rights and the courage of those who talk about their experiences. If survivors of sexual and gender-based violence can be given the opportunity to give their pain a meaningful form of expression by actively contributing to their communities through projects, solidarity and support work with other people – especially other survivors – they can overcome their feelings of powerlessness and isolation. The experience of solidarity can have long-term positive effects on a survivor's resilience, which, in the context of women's empowerment, can also be understood as the power to take a stand with others against injustice and violence.

### Stress- and trauma-sensitivity as a fundamental attitude

Violence in the context of war and conflict has consequences at a range of different levels. In particular, people in war and post-conflict areas will seek support and assistance at social, economic and legal levels as



well as with regard to psychological and physical health. The stress- and trauma-sensitive approach (STA) can be applied at these different levels without it becoming a clinical intervention where the diagnostic and therapy of the actual traumatic experience would be the focus. The emphasis should rather be put on the staff of the support systems to develop an expertise in empowering and stabilizing survivors of traumatic events, based on the knowledge of how destructive the consequences of violence and other violations of human rights can be. In contexts of war and conflict, teams and support organisations may also be affected by trauma dynamics, so applying a stress- and trauma-sensitive approach is just as important within the work environment when dealing with colleagues and staff, as it is when working directly with survivors of violence. Trauma-sensitivity can also play a role in ensuring that teams can work together constructively over a longer period, preventing destabilisation of an organisation due to destructive dynamics which might otherwise arise, such as splitting into factions or frequent and rapid escalation of conflicts.

### Basic principles of stress- and trauma-sensitivity

The basic principles of stress- and trauma-sensitivity provide a general orientation and guideline for support-

ing survivors of gender-based violence. They help to counteract destructive and stressful psychological and social dynamics, triggered by existentially threatening traumatic experiences:<sup>2</sup>

#### Safety

- » Reduce fear and stress in the face of threats
- » Convey a sense of safety and security in the face of existential insecurity
- » Establish trust and confidence in contrast to the loss of confidence in self or others

#### Empowerment

- » Amplify a sense of self-efficacy in light of experiences of extreme helplessness
- » Strengthen self-esteem in light of gender-specific denigration

#### Solidarity and connection

- » Acknowledge the suffering in light of feelings of shame and guilt
- » Convey an experience of solidarity, connection and social participation in light of isolation and discrimination
- » Adopt an integrated, holistic view of the affected person in their social environment in light of complex post-traumatic reactions including dissociation and distrust of others

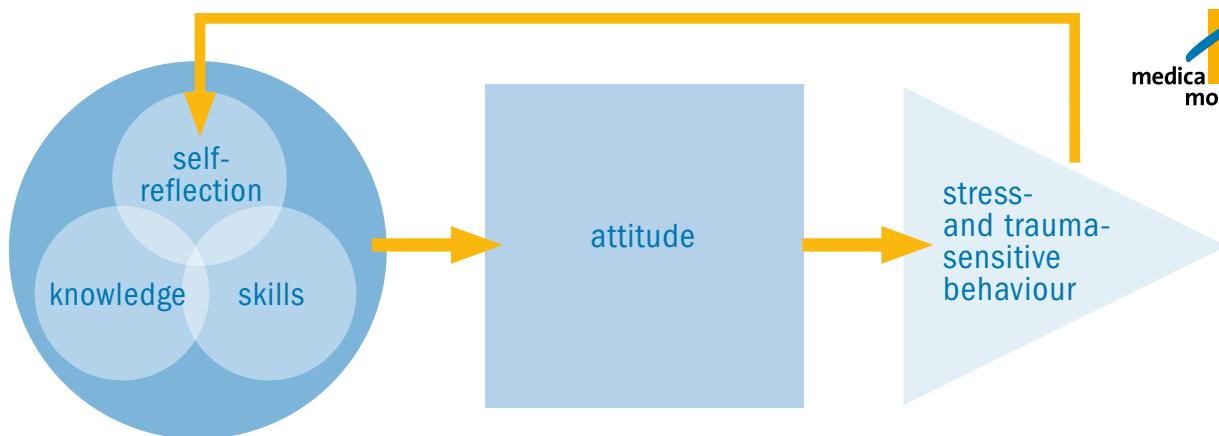
An attitude based on solidarity and trauma-sensitivity facilitates working with people affected by violence.



Image: © Rendel Freude/medica mondiale

<sup>2</sup> Inge Joachim: Grundlagen(wissen) für die Arbeit mit sexualisierter Gewalt. In: *medica mondiale* e.V./Karin Griese (eds.): *Sexualisierte Kriegsgewalt und ihre Folgen. Handbuch zur Unterstützung traumatisierter Frauen in verschiedenen Arbeitsfeldern [Sexualised Wartime Violence and its Consequences. A manual on how to support traumatised women in a range of fields]*, 2nd edition. Frankfurt/Main 2006.

## STA – STRESS- AND TRAUMA-SENSITIVE APPROACH®



### 4 BASIC PRINCIPLES

SAFETY

EMPOWERMENT

SOLIDARITY AND  
CONNECTION

MINDFUL ORGANISATIONAL  
CULTURE® AND SELF-CARE

#### Mindful Organisational Culture®\*<sup>3</sup> and Self-care

- » Application of STA principles individually and at the organisation level
- » Promotion of competencies to deal with stress in light of heightened exposure to stress
- » Awareness of re-enactment of trauma dynamics in groups when faced with systemic trauma, such as splitting and conflict
- » Mindfulness when faced with the risks of indirect traumatisation and burnout
- » Enhancing resilience when dealing with existential crises

**\* Mindful Organisational Culture®** In order to shift the cycle of stress and trauma dynamics, an organisational culture characterised by mindfulness is important. Mindfulness of the staff members is not only directed towards their own stress response patterns, but also on structural problems; for example, safety management, information flow within the organisation. These can all exacerbate stress or trauma dynamics. It includes the introduction and practice of stress- and trauma-sensitive communication. If all staff members learn to adopt appropriate communication strategies suitable for everyday working life, this enhances problem-solving and constructive cooperation within teams, which can counter or reverse trauma dynamics.

#### A stress- and trauma-sensitive attitude – the core element of the approach

This attitude is helpful for anyone involved in supporting people affected by violence. After an introductory training they can apply basic elements during their work, such as the four Basic Principles above. In order to sustainably apply the approach within their specific field of work over time, longer training courses as well as external and internal supervision can be offered.

Even the design of the training courses, the facilities, the contents and the method of training are oriented towards the four basic principles, and always

cover the areas of self-reflection, knowledge transfer, and practical skills.

#### Knowledge transfer

The course contents are adapted to the specific working area (such as police officers or healthcare professionals), providing participants with fundamental knowledge about the impact of stress and traumatic stress reactions on the people affected and on their environment. Understanding this helps them to realise why people and social environments react the way they do. They learn about the arguments for a socio-political understanding of trauma and the consequences of the continuum of sexualised violence.

#### Self-reflection

It is essential for people to realise how they themselves have been affected by violence and trauma, and whether this has left them with sensitivities to particular issues. This helps to protect both them and the survivors they are helping from transference reactions. Instead of lapsing into 'helper syndrome', specialists learn how to be empathic whilst respecting their own boundaries. Having taken an informed look at the power structures inherent in the position of 'helpers', they will avoid seeing the clients as 'victims' who need rescuing, or from unintentionally responding in other harmful or disempowering ways.

#### Practicing skills

The result of the self-reflection and knowledge transfer will be the development of skills that specialists can apply to their context in a trauma-sensitive way.

# A good example of **APPLYING** the STA

## *Medica Afghanistan: Mediation Centre in Kabul*

Mariam, a social worker, and Laila, a lawyer, are on their way to work at the Mediation Centre run by *Medica Afghanistan*, which is located within the court compound in Kabul. They know this morning will certainly be very demanding. Mostly, their clients are accompanied by their fathers, mothers or brothers. They come seeking support and legal assistance for cases of divorce and psychological or physical violence within the family. The central court area is highly secured, so Mariam and Laila have to pass numerous checkpoints, undergoing body searches, before they reach the container that houses their counselling centre. The risk of terrorist attacks is not the only danger they face: it is more likely that the parties to the dispute will try to assert their supposed rights by force of arms. In addition, there is a very real risk that a husband who does not agree with his wife seeking a divorce will attack the counselling centre. Therefore, the counsellors know they have to be prepared.

Building trust and a feeling of safety. -----

Lawyers and social workers mediate between daughter and father.



Image: © Elissa Bogos/*medica mondiale*

### **Creating a feeling of inner security:**

Mariam and Laila use their journey to work to prepare themselves. In silence, each of them takes a moment to look inside and check how they feel physically this morning: whether they are tired or well rested. As a next step, they observe their emotions and mood and find that these can be very diverse. Besides the worries, there are also reasons to be happy: the eldest daughter wrote a good essay at school; the atmosphere in the office is good, after all, a few days ago they received a very positive evaluation report about their work. In their training, Mariam and Laila learnt that they themselves can decide to refresh good moods and feelings at different times during the day in order to avoid being trapped by their own or clients' despair or hardships. "Please remind me later not to forget this confidence that I feel inside me," says Mariam to Laila. Laila agrees and responds: "And you please remind me of the gratitude I feel when I think about my strong, clever daughter". When they arrive at the counselling centre, there are already many women and their family members waiting at the door. Mariam and Laila ask those waiting to give them a moment to settle in, prepare the rooms and make tea before beginning their first counselling session.

### **Establishing physical security:**

Firstly, they make sure that their mobile phones are charged so they can call for help at any time. It is also important to ensure that no female staff member of *Medica*

*Afghanistan* is ever alone here. In order to ensure a safer environment for the women seeking advice, they have also hung a thick curtain in front of the internal door. This is the only way of ensuring that no one can listen to the conversations. Additionally, the curtain has another practical function: in winter, it protects the room against the cold and in summer, it keeps at least a little of the heat outside.

**Empowerment:** The first woman this morning, Aayla, is someone they know already: the procedure for her divorce application should reach its conclusion today. She decided to take this step because not only her but also her children are suffering from the yellings and outbursts of violence at home. They were not sleeping well, had difficulty concentrating and their performance at school has deteriorated severely. Laila had informed Aayla about her rights and she will represent her at the trial. Today, they want to continue preparing for this. In addition to the legal argumentation, it is important for Aayla to know as much as possible about the course of





Image: © Medica Afghanistan

the trial, since there is a real risk that she will go silent when describing the violent attacks she faced. She has a tendency to drift away in stressful moments and she would not even hear the questions anymore. That is why Mariam has practiced certain techniques with Aayla so that she is able to “bring herself back into the moment”. She clasps her hands tightly, pressing them together, and immediately notices that she is getting more alert and realises what is happening and being said around her. Then she grasps her thigh firmly while moving her toes: having practised this before she now automatically breathes more deeply, which also leads to her voice becoming a little more powerful.

They agree that during the hearing she will repeatedly make eye contact with Mariam and copy any gestures that she is making to help Aayla get through any moments where she is feeling under pressure. If she notices that Mariam is putting her hands together or firmly gripping her thigh, then this is a sign for Aayla to do the same.

**Solidarity and connection:** Laila had to learn that even lawyers are allowed to be empathetic. In fact, it has proven to be necessary in order to give a convincing presentation to the court describing the situation of women affected by violence. During her legal training, she was taught that a lawyer has to

remain factual and objective in court in order to represent the client in a legally correct way. However, during her later training on the stress- and trauma-sensitive approach, she learnt that objectivity and empathy are not mutually exclusive.

**Mindful Organisational Culture® and Self-care:** The work that Mariam and Laila do is extremely demanding. Continuously they try to get in touch with their own emotional challenges, especially when they are not successful in court or when they have to watch helplessly how a mother is able to escape the violent relationship, but pays the price by losing the custody of her children. Mariam and Laila receive support to help them gain clarity of their own feelings and in finding a way to deal with their sadness and feelings of helplessness. They meet once a week with their colleagues from the Psychosocial Team at *Medica Afghanistan*. In addition to the relieving conversations, they also jointly perform physical and mindfulness exercises in order to refresh and reactivate their self-care strategies. ■

# “A SPANNER IN THE WORKS INSTEAD OF GREASE FOR THE WHEELS”

A commentary on short-term therapies from the perspective of feminist and political trauma work

Simone Lindorfer

Since the late 1980s, trauma projects have become part and parcel of the international humanitarian aid scene alongside the distribution of food and the provision of basic medical services. How did this “trauma boom” arise? While it is welcome, as it suggests a new quality of humanitarian contemplation, there are also some very questionable reasons for the attractiveness of trauma projects, as Bracken and Petty have pointed out. Trauma projects are not especially capital-intensive and the majority of the required funding generally flows back into the accounts of foreign trauma experts. It also does away with the tiresome questions asked in development cooperation about the sustainability of a project, as there is a convenient end to the financing with the “healing” of the trauma.<sup>1</sup> Viewed globally, a critical approach to trauma work suggests apolitical trauma programmes partly relieve foreign donor governments from asking or answering awkward questions about international entanglement in “modern” wars in the same way that general humanitarian work does. Derek Summerfield calls this the “bread and counselling” approach, which Western governments can use to hide their various motives vis-a-vis the causes of wars and how they deal with aggressors.<sup>2</sup>

A particularly persistent criticism of the *content* of trauma projects concerns the narrowly defined concept of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and the underlying individualistic conception of person and emotions, which was eventually shown to be of doubtful value in non-Western cultures. In reality, traumatisation processes are highly complex and in families they often trigger systemic or multi-generational effects that are not reflected in the classical descriptions of the symptoms of PTSD. Furthermore, any discussion of trauma that is narrowly focussed on post-traumatic stress disorder will also be closely related to the idea that rapid intervention – i.e. as soon as possible after the traumatic event – is important because otherwise the trauma could trigger some kind of endemic effect in the population.

The reality for traumatised people, and specifically those in *medica mondiale* projects, is certainly very different: they generally show more varied clinical pictures, with problems such as depression and anxiety disorders, alcohol issues, loss of self-esteem and suicidal tendencies, due to feelings of futility and shame. Experiences of loss and grief, the destruction of social and cultural resources, familial violence, precarious living conditions and ongoing uncertainty and violence in a system where impunity prevails all also play a significant role in the women’s narratives. These are the problems, rather than the explicit stress of post-traumatic stress symptoms, that bring survivors to psychosocial frontline services in the first place. It also goes without saying that it is absurd to consider the ongoing stigmatisation of women who are affected by sexualised and gender-based violence as “post-” as in the term “post-traumatic”: the trauma continues. Hans Keilson’s concept of sequential trauma<sup>3</sup> fittingly reflects this: trauma is not over when the event is over, and what comes “afterwards” is just as crucial.

These critical ideas on a trauma concept make it clear that from the point of view of feminists, and hence from the systemic and political view of trauma as a consequence of violence and of human rights violations, the diagnosis of “post-traumatic stress disorder” is highly problematic because it directs our focus to the dysfunctional reaction of the “victim”. It pathologises them while ignoring the social and political CAUSES of the suffering. Suffering is depoliticised and privatised: we are told we need to “process” the psychological consequences rather than the reasons for the trauma.

Evident here are two fundamentally different perceptions of and approaches to trauma and we see these in our work in the field every day. They are also reflected indirectly in the international standards for psychosocial support and psychological health set out by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC).<sup>4</sup> One is a *medical/psychiatric* approach focused on the treatment of

1 See P.J. Bracken and C. Petty: Introduction. In: P.J. Bracken and C. Petty (Eds.), *Rethinking the Trauma of War* (p.1-8), London and New York 1998.

2 See Summerfield: *The Social Experience of War and Some Issues for the Humanitarian Field*. In: P.J. Bracken and C. Petty (Eds.), *Rethinking the Trauma of War* (p. 9-37), London and New York 1998, p.32.

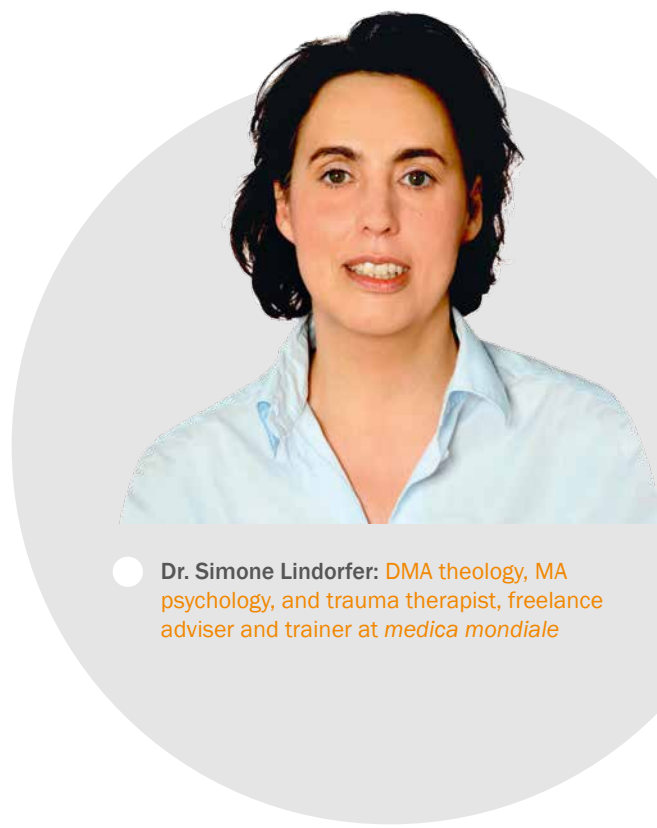
3 Hans Keilson: *Sequentielle Traumatisierung bei Kindern. Deskriptiv-klinische und quantifizierend-statistische follow-up Untersuchung zum Schicksal der jüdischen Kriegswaisen in den Niederlanden* [Sequential traumatisation in children: descriptive-clinical and quantifying-statistical follow-up investigation into the fate of Jewish war orphans in the Netherlands], Stuttgart 1979.

4 See IASC: “Thus, mental health and psychosocial problems in emergencies encompass far more than the experience of PTSD”, 2007. (IASC: 8) In its guidelines, the committee calls for a comprehensively broader view when planning and conceptualising projects.

post-traumatic symptoms. “Treatment” here consists of overcoming dysfunctional anxieties through exposure, i.e. confronting the experience within a therapeutic setting. The other, more holistic, approach could be described as more *relationship-oriented* and *political*: the traumatic reactions of survivors are classified and labelled as normal consequences of unbearable and abnormal experiences. In the case of human-made disasters, the reactions are a consequence of human rights violations. In this approach, the consequences of traumatic experiences are conceptualised as significantly broader than the usual post-traumatic symptoms. The Stress- and Trauma-sensitive Approach (STA) developed by *medica mondiale* clearly belongs to the latter. It considers the overall reality of the person affected by violence, their social and economic fragility and their psychological and physical problems. The helping relationship is then characterised by an attitude of solidarity and alliance.

In times when budgets are tight and the world is full of crisis and conflict, short-term therapy concepts for traumatised people are often attractive to donors. Short-duration treatments that focus on symptoms seem to be a cost-effective solution for the countless people affected by violence, whose suffering, along with its grave long-term consequences, has been made public everywhere by the trauma debate.

Various factors in these short-term concepts play a role in making them attractive to donors: positive evidence-based research data; treatment methods that can be implemented by non-professionals who can be trained in a relatively short time; and the healing of many traumatised people can be achieved in just a few sessions. However, there are severe consequences of advocating concepts like this, which cannot work within the complex realities of most affected people. In the refugee sector in Germany for example, long-term therapy is necessary because of the complexity of problems the people suffer from, but these projects are no longer



● Dr. Simone Lindorfer: DMA theology, MA psychology, and trauma therapist, freelance adviser and trainer at *medica mondiale*

Image: © Simone Lindorfer

financed due to the impression that there are workable ‘discount’ therapy options to treat traumatised people more cost-effectively. In fact, one of the ultimate purposes appears to be getting them fit for deportation more quickly. The argument that severely affected people living in ongoing conflicts in countries of the Global South need well-founded, holistic, psychosocial care is difficult to maintain when practitioners appear to offer evidence that there are other, cheaper methods.

This debate is about much more the most efficient therapeutic approach; it is a political positioning which should aim to demonstrate the suffering of survivors in its complexity and chronicity, and then to stand side by side in solidarity with them. The objective should be to throw a spanner in the works rather than to grease the wheels of a system that exploits trauma work to divert attention from the political causes of violence by propagandising quick solutions for severe suffering. Short-term concepts are not only scientifically questionable; they must also be questioned if we are to maintain our position of solidarity. ■



# INHERITED STORIES – TRANSGENERATIONAL TRAUMA

For many years, *medica mondiale* has been addressing the historically taboo issue of the rapes committed during World War II and raising public awareness of the effects of unprocessed trauma. It is not only the individuals involved whose lives are affected by their traumatic experiences: subsequent generations often suffer as well.

Estimates suggest that up to two million women and girls in Germany alone were raped at the end of World War II. And this number does not include the widespread rapes of women and girls in the areas occupied by the German Wehrmacht and SS, the rape of Jewish and Roma women during their persecution and in the concentration camps, or the rapes of female members of the resistance against the National Socialist regime. Studies show that about half of those affected by sexualised violence – whether in times of peace or war – suffer long-lasting symptoms such as insomnia, uncontrollable flashbacks and anxiety.<sup>1</sup> Traumatization caused by human violence also frequently leads to a profound loss of trust in other people and in oneself. Symptoms of trauma can be transferred within a family and to future generations in the form of excessive irritability or separation anxiety. Negative thought patterns

such as “I’m to blame” can also adversely affect the development of intimacy within a family. The persistent presence of these (unconscious) traumas can lead to difficulties in relationships with people close to us, such as emotional exploitation and psychological issues. This means that the next generation does not grow up ‘free’ of these trauma, even though they have no direct connection to them: daughters and sons take on this inheritance from their mothers (and fathers). If we are to be aware of the trauma while living and acting in the here and now, and not pass on the burdens of unprocessed trauma to the next generation, it is important to reflect on and deal with our own previous, challenging experiences and the wounds and stories of the generations that came before us. This can provide relief, encourage maturity and, ultimately, inspire personal growth.

*The truth that we seek includes becoming psychologically closer to whatever happened – an understanding of victim and perpetrator that we can live with.*

Ruth Klüger<sup>2</sup>

1 R. C. Kessler, A. Sonnega, E. Bromet, M. Hughes and C. B. Nelson: Posttraumatic Stress Disorder in the National Comorbidity Survey. In: Archives of General Psychiatry 52/1995, pp. 1048-1060 (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/7492257>, accessed on 11.09.2018).

2 Ruth Klueger: Was ist wahr? [What is true?]. In: Die Zeit 38, 12 September 1997.

# MOURNING THE PAST

Reflections on the long-term effects of sexualised wartime violence and transgenerational trauma

*Luise Reddemann*

## Introduction

When we talk of “passing on war trauma to subsequent generations”, it is unfortunately a topic that has affected us for decades: aspects of transgenerational trauma transmission were evident even after World War I. Just twenty years later, young men were being drawn with enthusiasm into World War II, wanting to help bring their nation absolute victory. National Socialist ideologues took full advantage of this. It has been suggested that it was his experience in World War I that led Hitler to hate the Jews and to call for the extermination of the Jewish people. We should not play down the evil that the majority of Germans inflicted upon Jews and other unwelcome yet innocent fellow citizens before and especially during World War II, nor that some women played their part in this, too.<sup>1</sup> To take responsibility today, we need knowledge, experience and intuition as well as a precise appreciation of the collective and historical conditions in personal histories.

In recent years there has been a sharp increase in the amount of material available on World War I, on the Nazi period, on World War II and on the post-war period to 1968, so I can select only a few examples to mention here.

Today more than ever, it is our responsibility to ensure a culture of remembrance, since our society allows itself to believe it is no longer always necessary to make efforts to remember. When it does, many do not protest when facts are played down or even misrepresented.<sup>2</sup> Our primary concern needs to be our responsibility for future generations: by recognising transgenerational entanglements it is actually possible to relieve their burdens, as well as enhance how the present is viewed. My hypothesis is that taking responsibility for the next generation can be significantly hampered when we fail to acknowledge our personal history and its entanglement in the collective history, and when no grieving takes place where grief is necessary. Unprocessed stress and unmourned events can prevent us from accompanying the next generation into their lives in an appropriate manner. The past continues to be



Image: © Stefan Blume

Prof. Luise Reddemann: Medical doctor specialising in psychotherapeutic medicine; Psychoanalyst

lived unconsciously, as the present: this burdens the next generation with the issues from the past that we did not deal with ourselves.

Transgenerational transference can be defined as the passing on of experiences from one generation to the next, when “certain memories and (especially unconscious) bodies of experience, as well as certain ideologies, attitudes, values and standards, or a certain habitual manner as an element of a mentality, a behavioural issue and/or a way of thinking and living is ‘transferred’ from one generation to the next in the same ways as an ‘inheritance’”.<sup>3</sup> The term “generation” thus includes both the generational succession within a family and that of members of an age group who demonstrate similar processing and reaction mechanisms, orientation and behaviour patterns because of “the same historical and current problematics”.<sup>4</sup> Nowadays, the task at hand should be neither justifying nor sugar-coating the crimes of earlier generations, nor simply complaining about them: instead, we can find a deeper understanding. This should primarily be about what has been done to women and any parts of this that could have an effect on us, whether consciously or unconsciously. Empathy does not mean sugar-coating or looking the other way: we can mourn the fact that it was how it was, that the past cannot be changed, and

1 Wendy Lower: *Hitlers Helferinnen. Deutsche Frauen im Holocaust* [Hitler's female helpers. German women in the Holocaust], Munich 2014.

2 See Stein and Zimmermann. In: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 17.4.2018, p.9.

3 Bettina Voelter: *Generationsforschung und „transgenerationale Weitergabe“ aus biographischer Sicht.* [Generational research and “transgenerational transference” from a biographical perspective.] In: H. Radebold, W. Bohleber, J. Zinnecker (Ed.): *Transgenerationale Weitergabe kriegsbelasteter Kindheiten. Interdisziplinäre Studien zur Nachhaltigkeit historischer Erfahrungen über vier Generationen* (p. 95–106), Weinheim 2008, p. 101.

4 Nina Leonhard: *Politik- und Geschichtsbewusstsein im Wandel. Die politische Bedeutung der nationalsozialistischen Vergangenheit im Verlauf von drei Generationen in Ost- und Westdeutschland* [Political and historical consciousness in transformation. The political significance of the National Socialist past through three generations in East and West Germany], Münster 2002, p. 544.

## MOURNING THE PAST (continuation)

that this lack of power must be borne. If nothing else, it means committing ourselves to a more hopeful present and future, and taking responsibility to bring those about. In particular, this needs to be applied to the impacts of the rapes of women at the end of World War II.

Some families did accept the need to take a careful look at the consequences of World War II, but in general the raping of mothers, grandmothers and even young girls has been almost completely concealed or hushed up. Even worse: Sometimes it was trivialised, and this harmed women yet again. I remember very well how people spoke of “vergewohtätigen” [an invented word combining the German words for “rape” and “benevolent act”], and as a child, I felt clearly that I was not allowed to ask about this. The respondents in a survey of the Munich War Child Project seem to have only vague concepts of the suffering experienced by many people, including their mothers. According to Project Leaders Michael Ermann and Christa Müller, these war children do not even seem to have asked about these experiences.<sup>5</sup> However, for years Monika Hauser has been asking directly about the effects of the rapes of women at the end of World War II. She asks about the daughters and sons of the second generation, who grew up with family secrets and guilt. And she asks about the consequences of repressing and not processing these experiences: these include physical and psychological illnesses, drug abuse and suicide attempts as well as new violence and incest. She receives many letters from women who write that they have always lived by proxy, with their mothers’ trauma overshadowing their whole lives.<sup>6</sup>

Among the consequences of violence against women, the WHO lists depression and alcohol problems. Raped women are 1.5 times more frequently infected with sexually transmitted diseases than other women and the probability they have an abortion is twice as high. Raped German women suffered all of these difficulties, as well as others, at the end of World War II. Furthermore, another aspect in Germany in 1945 was more or less the same as Bosnia in 1995: women had to conceal these things so as not to be cast out. Marriages and relationships, including those with their own children, suffered because of the experience of rape. Commitment was seldom possible for these women and they dissociated during sexual contact.



Their self-confidence was incredibly low and they judged themselves harshly rather than being able to deal with themselves kindly. As a young doctor with little understanding of the underlying problems, it felt wrong to me that women who reported sexual problems would very frequently blame themselves. Meanwhile, it can no longer be overlooked that many affected women suffer from depression, panic attacks, nightmares or flashbacks. These women felt forced to escape into denial, trivialising or repression, as well as terrible but usually unconscious shame. For daughters and even some sons, these mechanisms still play a role. There is, however, an observation that awareness of their shame seems to be more frequent from the second generation. Mothers’ silence also led their children to internalise this taboo.

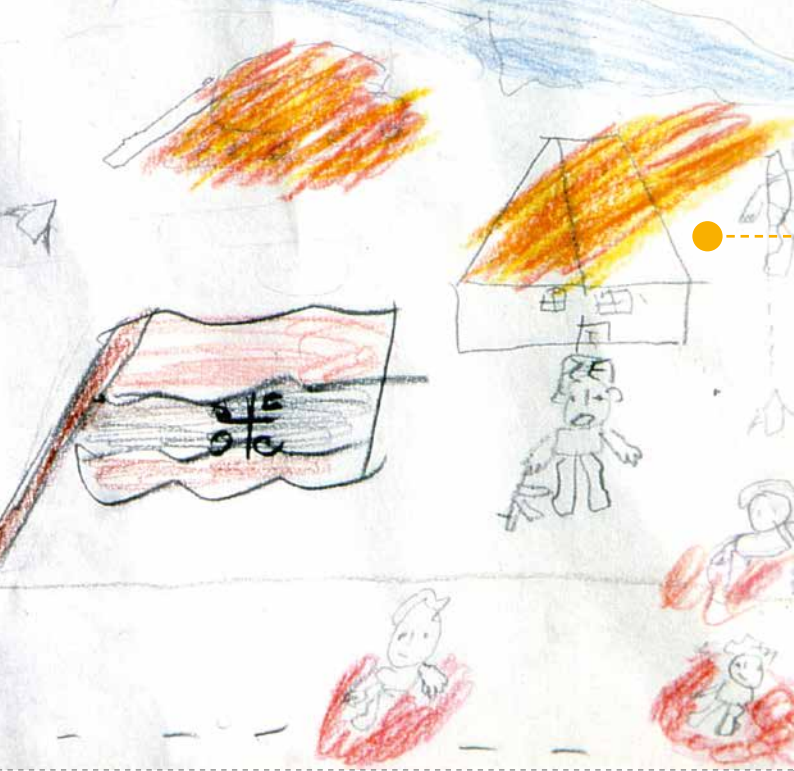
In a research project at the University of Greifswald, 36 women who were victims of one or more rapes at the end of the war were interviewed by Philipp Kuwert and his team.<sup>7</sup> The surveyed women had suffered symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as well as depression, nightmares or hyperarousal, which manifested as racing heart, tremors or sleep disruption. For some these were still occurring at the time of the interview. They described lifelong difficulties with sex. At the Clinic for Psychosomatic Medicine and Psychotherapy in Bielefeld, we were already hearing similar things time and again some 30 years ago. Sometimes we were able to see how relieved women were when they realised they could confide in us. However, we were and are not able to spare them the grief of a “lost life”, of the lack of happiness or of an unsatisfactory sex life.

5 M. Ermann and C. Müller: Not und Notwendigkeit des Erinnerns – Kann und soll man die Kriegskindheit nach 60 Jahren noch erforschen? [Distress and the need to remember – can and should we research war childhoods after 60 years?] In: L. Janus (Ed): Geboren im Krieg: Kindheitserfahrungen im 2. Weltkrieg und ihre Auswirkungen, Giessen 2006, p. 61-68.

6 Monika Hauser et al., Letter to the editor about article by H.Radebold: “Kriegskinder im Alter”: Bei Diagnose historisch denken, unter der Überschrift “Frauen ausgeklammert” [“War children in old age”: Thinking historically when diagnosing, under the heading “Women disregarded”]. In: Deutsches Ärzteblatt 11/2004, p. 513.

7 Svenja Eichhorn and Philipp Kuwert: Das Geheimnis unserer Großmütter. Eine empirische Studie über sexualisierte Kriegsgewalt um 1945 [The secret of our grandmothers. An empirical study of sexualised wartime violence around 1945], Giessen 2011.





Child's drawing, Bosnia-Herzegovina, 1993

Frequently, daughters, sons and even daughters-in-law, as members of this war child generation, told us in the context of the research project how severely their mother's experiences had affected them. They were also affected by her attempts to deal with the situation, which mostly meant silence. One daughter said, "Unfortunately my parents were not in a position to deal with what had happened by talking openly to each other, even with therapeutic assistance."

"We have many enquiries from daughters who have big issues with their relationships," says researcher Maria Böttche. "Often, they cannot allow themselves any intimacy. This is because they have no experience of intimacy between their parents and also because they did not receive it from their traumatised mother. And often as children they blamed themselves for their mothers' coldness."<sup>8</sup> It is becoming clear to these daughters that they have adopted this inheritance from their traumatised mothers, who were condemned to silence. For millennia, women have had to learn, sometimes painfully, sometimes strategically, to resist the patriarchy and all its terrible consequences. This can be observed clearly after World War II. Through the commitment of women in the 1968 protests and the women's movement, a great deal has changed for the better. "I would say that the role of 1968 in the sexual revolution and in the process of coming to terms with the National Socialist past is generally overestimated, whereas the revolts against the patriarchy are underestimated... I believe that right at the start, women first had to ... struggle for their freedom. Initially, they typed the flyers and made the coffee, until it occurred to them that something wasn't

right there." For her book "Das andere Achtundsechzig" [The Other Sixty-Eight], Christina von Hodenberg analysed long-forgotten sound recordings from the 1960s. Women and men of all classes talked about their lives, sometimes in quite a different way from the familiar clichés. In particular, when talking of changes in everyday life, it becomes clear how important women were for this social awakening. "When we revolutionise the private sphere and when this includes revolutionising the couple relationship or child-rearing, this becomes something that has a long-lasting and very profound cultural effect," says von Hodenberg.<sup>9</sup>

This process should be continued. It includes dealing with our entire history, including that of women. History books that contain no word of women should be dispensed with and historians who never dealt with these issues should be met with healthy distrust: we learn too little from these. Time and again there are regressions, but there is also progress, as the "#metoo" initiative shows. Women are gaining more awareness of their own value and are prepared to speak up for themselves. It is important that we become more open to hearing the histories of countless traumatic experiences, but we should also ask about the resilience of those directly affected, as well as of their children and grandchildren. Even though suffering continues to be passed on, now to the third generation, women have found and continue to find coping mechanisms. For me, the awakening of women in the years around 1968, the women's movement and the commitment of *medica mondiale* and other initiatives are important reactions to the oppression of women and their sexualised exploitation during and after World War II and unfortunately in many subsequent wars and genocides.

Around the world today, thought is given to how we can make the psychological suffering caused by wars and genocides more manageable by sharing it as widely as possible. In other countries with similar experiences to Germany, e.g. in Cambodia or Rwanda, this path is trodden more frequently than it is here. Many people there are prepared to work together to confront the unthinkable and to do all that is humanly possible, on both the victim and the perpetrator sides. The experience of togetherness brings strength to deal with things and to make a new beginning. ■

<sup>8</sup> All citations in Ch. Louis: Das vererbte Trauma. [The inherited trauma.] In: EMMA, 1 April 2010.

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.welt.de/kultur/literarischewelt/article173235192/Christina-von-Hodenberg-Das-andere-Achtundsechzig.html> (accessed on 6.5.2018).

# PEACE AND JUSTICE - WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IS NECESSARY

For over 25 years, *medica mondiale* has been working at a political level to ensure women's rights are respected and beneficial social change is achieved. Unless we manage to eradicate the misogynist structures underlying sexualised violence and create gender justice in their place, women and girls will never be able to live in dignity and free of violence. A peaceful society can only develop if women are involved in shaping that society. Studies have shown that when women are sitting at the table in peace negotiations, there is a higher probability of sustainable peace agreements as a result. Another equally important factor is an effective prosecution of crimes to ensure that those affected receive justice and compensation. In a series of resolutions and accords, the international community has promised to protect women from violence and strengthen their rights. However, the political will is still lacking to actually fulfil these promises and implement these agreements.

## Political instruments against sexualised violence

### CEDAW

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) was passed by the UN in December 1979. It is the most important human rights instrument in international law for women, obliging the signatory states to ensure legal and real equality for women in all areas of life, and also to engage in an active political process to eliminate discrimination against women.

### UN Resolution 1325

Passed in October 2000, UN Resolution 1325 "Women, Peace and Security" obligates member states to protect women and girls from sexualised violence during armed conflict and in the post-war period, and to ensure their equal participation in peace processes and reconstruction. This is because, as the Resolution states, these are significant contributory factors to the preservation and promotion of world peace and international security.

Networking meeting on UN Resolution 1325 at the German Federal Foreign Office in Berlin, April 2018



Image: © Xander Heini | phototothek.net

### UN Resolution 1820

This resolution, passed in June 2008, is regarded by many as an important step in the struggle against sexualised wartime violence. The UN Security Council declares in this agreement that "rape and other forms of sexual violence can constitute war crimes, crimes against humanity or a constitutive act with respect to genocide". At the same time, the Council declared that sexualised violence against civilians can impede the establishment of international peace and security and re-affirmed its readiness to adopt appropriate steps to address the issue.

### International Criminal Court

The basis for the International Criminal Court (ICC), which started work in The Hague in 2002, is the Rome Statute of 1998. The ICC adjudicates on genocide, severe war crimes and crimes against humanity. The aspect of its work that is particularly relevant for *medica mondiale* is that wartime rape can be brought to the ICC as a war crime and also a crime against humanity.

### Istanbul Convention

The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence is the most recent of the protection treaties, having been opened for signature in 2011. In 2014, the Convention entered into force. Known as the "Istanbul Convention", it aims to protect women from any form of gender-specific violence, prevent this violence and, should it occur, to bring perpetrators to justice. Furthermore, it also addresses the provision of services to support victims of rape and sexualised violence. The provisions in the convention apply to fields ranging from violence within marriage and partnerships, through forced marriage and female genital mutilation, to violence in public spaces. ■

# WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY: UN RESOLUTION 1325\*

Jeannette Böhme

On October 31, 2000, the United Nations Security Council unanimously passed Resolution 1325 on “Women, Peace and Security”. This was the first time that this high-level UN body had explicitly considered the situation of women and girls in the context of war. It agreed that “an understanding of the impact of armed conflict on women and girls, effective institutional arrangements to guarantee their protection and full participation in the peace process can significantly contribute to the maintenance and promotion of international peace and security”.<sup>1</sup>

Campaigners around the world were justified in celebrating Resolution 1325 as a milestone in the struggle to achieve recognition for the rights of women and girls during armed conflicts.<sup>2</sup> In contrast to classical security concepts, Resolution 1325 does not put the state at the centre of security policy but rather the women and girls, their protection, and their core role as peacebuilders.<sup>3</sup> In doing so, it reflects the concept of Human Security<sup>4</sup> – a paradigm shift that was achieved largely due to the tireless commitment of women’s rights and peace activists.

## Women secure peace

Empirical evidence demonstrates the connection between women, security and gender justice. Where women had a direct influence in peace negotiations, either as observers, signatories, mediators or negotiators, there is a 20% higher likelihood of peace agreements lasting two years,



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rising to 35% more likely for 15 years.<sup>5</sup> In addition to the qualitative participation of women in negotiations, it is also decisive whether their interests are covered by the provisions of the peace agreement. One example is the Dayton Agreement, which did not include any provision for coming to terms with the mass rapes that had taken place during the Bosnian War. This led to continued stigmatisation of the affected women by society and government. A study commissioned by the women’s rights organisation *medica mondiale* even provides evidence of transgenerational traumatisation of the children of survivors.<sup>6</sup> Preventive measures in this regard could have a significant impact on peace-building.

On the 15th anniversary of Resolution 1325, UN Women published a global study and came to the conclusion that the implementation of the Agenda “Women, Peace and Security” is still not accepted practice, but occurs as a supplementary or minor consideration. So the challenges

\* Updated excerpt from “Die Einbindung von Frauen in Friedensprozesse” [Including Women in Peace Processes] by Jeannette Böhme, published in: “VEREINTE NATIONEN Volume 6/2017”

1 See S/RES/1325 (2000) (United Nations Security Council (2000): Resolution 1325).

2 Jessica Mosbahi: Vom Schattendasein einer Sicherheitsratsresolution. Die Umsetzung der VN-Resolution 1325 durch die internationale Staatengemeinschaft am Beispiel Afghanistans [The Shadowy Existence of a Security Council Resolution. Implementation of UN Resolution 1325 by the International Community, Using the Example of Afghanistan]. In: Zeitschrift für Menschenrechte, Nr. 1/2015, p. 108-121, here: p. 108.

3 Sanam Naraghi Anderlini: Die Bedeutung der Resolution 1325 für die Europäische Friedens- und Sicherheitspolitik – ein kleiner Schritt für den Sicherheitsrat, ein großer Schritt für die Menschheit [The Significance of Resolution 1325 for European Peace and Security Policy]. In: Gunda-Werner-Institut (eds.). Hoffnungsträger 1325. Resolution für eine geschlechtergerechte Friedens- und Sicherheitspolitik in Europa, Berlin 2008, p. 10-34, here: p. 20.

4 Human Security is a term used to refer to an expanded notion of security that places the protection of individuals in the centre of its considerations. This political concept brings together the viewpoints of human rights, human development, peacekeeping and conflict prevention. See UNDP (1994): Human Development Report, New York.

5 See Stone 2014. See also Inclusive Peace & Transition Initiative und UN Women: Making Women Count - Not Just Counting Women: Assessing Women’s Inclusion and Influence on Peace Negotiations, Geneva 2016.

6 *medica mondiale*: We are still alive. A study on the long-term consequences of wartime rape and the coping strategies of survivors in Bosnia-Herzegovina, 2015. Summary available at: <http://www.medicamondiale.org/service/mediathek.html>, p. 12-13.



## WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY: UN RESOLUTION 1325\* (continuation)

faced in all fields of action are not diminished: perpetrators of sexualised violence generally escape punishment; and participation rates for women in peace negotiations are anything but satisfactory at 9 per cent.<sup>7</sup>

In order to improve the state of progress for the agenda “Women, Peace and Security”, the authors of the study recommend measures such as directing more attention to prevention of armed conflict. This would include gender-sensitive early warning systems and consistent arms control or disarmament. Perpetrators of violence also finally need to be brought before courts in order to deter potential future aggressors and to give women a sense of justice. Here, justice needs to be designed in a transformative way. This involves more than just punitive sentences for the individuals who committed a crime against the woman: tangible steps also need to be ordered to address the underlying inequalities between genders.

### The German Government and the Agenda “Women, Peace and Security”

In 2004, the UN Security Council was calling on the member states to step up their implementation of Resolution 1325 at national level and develop plans of action.<sup>8</sup> In spite of several appeals of this nature, for a long time the German government appeared reluctant to take the issue of women, peace and security seriously. It was only in December 2012 that the Federal Cabinet agreed a cross-sector National Action Plan on implementation of the resolution, covering the period 2013-16. The aim of this Plan (NAP 1325) was to achieve a strategic orientation for the country’s international commitments in the foreign, development and security sectors.<sup>9</sup> However, the Action Plan had no independent budget, no formulations of smart objectives, and no indicators to measure the achievement of target, so could hardly be said to be oriented towards real impacts.<sup>10</sup> Between 2013 and 2016, the German government did fund numerous projects to promote women’s

rights in areas of armed conflict.<sup>11</sup> However, Resolution 1325 has still to be anchored coherently in the relevant policy areas.<sup>12</sup>

Nevertheless, the existence of the Action Plan has helped to put the issue of women, peace and security onto the political agenda, even if much remains to be done. More and more high-ranking decision makers are making their position on this issue clear – German politics has not seen that happen before.

Another fact which indicates the raised level of political awareness is the subsequent plan of action passed by the Federal Government in January 2017. In it the government commits itself to a range of tangible, evaluable measures.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, it states its intention to work more strongly at international level for the issue of women, peace and security. And it pledged to make the implementation of Resolution 1325 a focal point of its candidacy for a non-permanent seat on the Security Council (2019-20).

Consequently, in April 2019 the German government brought Resolution 2467 to the Security Council. This was intended to anchor the ‘survivor-centred approach’ in UN policy, prioritising the rights, interests and needs of survivors, as well as integrated support for them. Although the term ‘survivor-centred approach’ is still used in the final Resolution, it lost all of its political and substantive meaning during the negotiations between members of the Security Council. Bowing to pressure from the USA, the German government struck out all mentions of some crucial services in the area of sexual and reproductive health, including emergency contraception and safe abortion. This is a fatal political signal to send out. It reinforces the approach of the Trump administration and weakens the UN Agenda “Women, Peace and Security”. The German government would have done better to abandon the negotiations. It now needs to make use of the remaining time to ensure progress is made with gender mainstreaming in the Security Council.<sup>14</sup> ■

7 See UN Women: Preventing conflict, transforming justice, securing the peace. A global study on the implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, 2015 (<http://wps.unwomen.org/>, accessed on 31.10.2017).

8 See S/PRST/2004/40 (United Nations Security Council (2004): Presidential Statement. S/PRST/2004/40).

9 See Federal German Government: Plan of Action of the German government on the Implementation of Resolution 1325 of the Security Council of the United Nations for the period 2013-2016, Berlin 2012.

10 The OSCE analysed 27 plans and determined the following criteria for impact-oriented NAPs: cooperation with civil society; determining the country’s specific needs, starting with a baseline study; setting relevant SMART goals and priorities; provision of resources needed; clear responsibilities, budgets and accounting. See OSCE: Study on National Action Plans on the Implementation of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, 2014 (<http://www.osce.org/secretariat/125727>, accessed on 31.10.2017).

11 See Federal German Government: Implementation Report on Plan of Action of the German government on the Implementation of Resolution 1325 of the Security Council of the United Nations for the period 2013-2016, Berlin 2017.

12 VENRO: Standpunkt. Mehr Schutz für Frauen in bewaffneten Konflikten [Viewpoint. More protection for women during armed conflicts], 2016 (<http://venro.org/publikationen>, accessed on 31.10.2017), p. 1.

13 For example: “Appropriate protection for witnesses at national and international criminal courts and psychological guidance in the preparation for trial of victims appearing as witnesses.” Federal German Government: Plan of Action of the German government on the Implementation of Resolution 1325 of the Security Council of the United Nations for the period 2017-2020, Berlin 2017, p. 23.

14 See Jeannette Böhme: Sexualized war violence. New resolution diminishes survivors’ rights, 2019. (<https://www.medicamondiale.org/en/nc/latest/sexualized-war-violence-new-resolution-diminishes-survivors-rights-1.html>, accessed on 3.7.2019).

# WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN PEACE PROCESSES – THE EXAMPLE OF LIBERIA

Anusanthee Pillay

During the civil wars that raged in Liberia in the last 20 years the warring parties carried out harrowing atrocities on both men and women. The latter were subjected to sexualised violence and torture, but these forms of violence against women were not only a consequence of the war. They were actually directly connected to the violence that had been present in the lives of women even beforehand. As was documented in the report by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in Liberia in 2008, women at all levels of Liberian society traditionally have a very limited position. Because of their gender, as well as the ethnicity and the class they belong to, the lives of Liberian women have been determined for decades by oppressive, patriarchal controls surrounding reproduction, mobility and participation in public life.

Angeline's story and the stories of countless other women confirm this. While I was working for the TRC after the war I met Angeline and was very impressed by her resilience and the quiet strength that she radiated in spite of the wartime atrocities she had experienced.

When Angeline was 5 years old, she was given to relatives by her parents so they could leave and build a better life for themselves in the USA. It was the dream of every Liberian to emigrate to the USA because the Liberian elite consists of descendants of former slaves from the USA. Despite the promises to send her to school and look after her, Angeline had to work very hard even when she was very young. As a girl, she was expected to complete her household duties before she was allowed to go to school. At the age of 8, her violent relatives poured boiling hot soup over her because of a small mistake. She needed treatment in the hospital for many months. Her parents heard about this "mis-hap" but when Angeline tried to explain that it was not an accident, they did not believe her and continued to entrust her to the same relatives. Eventually, she could take it no more, and she took things into her own hands: in a fit of anger, she poured boiling water over her sleeping aunt. Finally, she was removed from the family's house, but Angeline's life did not change for the better: war broke out and rebels stormed the house where she lived, raping her brutally. "Everyone in my school and community knew about my rape. The Liberian community is a very close network. I felt pushed out and no longer able take part in community activities – I just wanted to die. Also, my fiancé thought



Anusanthee Pillay: Gender Expert for humanitarian issues, transitional justice and development. Director of the *medica mondiale* Liberia programme from January 2010 to January 2012.

that I should have put up more of a fight. I told him that it had been impossible to defend myself as my hands were tied and the rebels were armed. Then I realised I was pregnant. I was convinced it was my fiancé's baby but he thought it was a consequence of the rape and he wanted to force me to have an abortion. I refused and my daughter survived. In the end we did get married but our marriage failed because my husband still blamed me for the rape."

Angeline developed a fervent desire to help other women and girls who shared her fate and were still struggling, so she worked tirelessly, attending legal courses alongside her menial employment. She could provide women with paralegal services via non-governmental organisations and advocated for women who had been discriminated against, raped and mistreated both before and long after the war. With a bittersweet grin, she recalls the conspicuous absence of women in negotiations and procedures: during the peace process they had campaigned side by side with men. "Why," she asks, "are we excluded from all decisions that influence our lives – regardless of how we suffer, how committed we are and how badly we are needed?"

I thought about her words and asked myself whether we are really still looking for an answer to this question? After all, we have actually moved far beyond this question, since we know only too well that excluding women

## WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN PEACE PROCESSES – THE EXAMPLE OF LIBERIA (*continuation*)

is short-sighted and senseless: it does not matter 'why' it happens. We simply have to start including women as we work to achieve a transformed society where men and women in all their differences can live with one another in peace and harmony.

On this basis, the TRC Liberia made a notable attempt to include more women in the truth-finding process. Their brutal stories of murder, torture, sexualised violence and abuse were heard with compassion here. They shared their experiences of having to watch as their young daughters were raped to death, pregnant women were cut open, babies were beaten to death and husbands were dismembered. Many of these women were victims of multiple rapes and some enslaved as so-called "bush wives" to serve the rebels. Members of the Commission listened in horror to their stories and asked them what should happen to ensure these things never happen again. To counteract the impression that women are only victims and survivors, it was very important to recognise that women had played many different roles during the conflict. The TRC heard for example from Ellen, who joined the army at the age of 16 after she was raped by the same men who murdered her parents before her very eyes. For many women it was the question "kill or be killed?" that prompted them to become soldiers. "I wanted to be part of the rebellion. I thought if my brother could do it, then so could I. As a child you want to do everything like an adult. As a girl you want to do everything just like a boy," says one of the women.

In the hope of laying a foundation stone for a society that views women as equal citizens and adopts measures to prevent any form of violence against women, whether in peacetime, wartime or subsequently, a group of women worked for months to compile a comprehensive report for the TRC. Unfortunately, the TRC report was disregarded by the government at that time because it criticised President Ellen Sirleaf too heavily; only a little of their momentum and a few recommendations could have any impact.

The women's stories show how violence against women can begin right from birth: war, conflicts and unrest in society worsen it, but they are not the root cause. The truth of this for women worldwide has been documented extensively. So the resulting question is: "What do we need to do in post-war periods, when there are opportunities for change, to avoid re-establishing a system that turns women and girls into victims of violence and discrimination?"



Although the fight to put an end to violence against women still continues, the example of Liberia is a good model. The international community recognised that the conflict would not have come to an end for a long time without the participation and the involvement of women: the female President and one of the woman activists who took part in the peace campaign were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Although women were not present in the formal procedures during the peace negotiations, they still played an important role. It was this readiness to include women that led to the election of the first female President in Africa. Furthermore, Liberia made every effort to implement a National Action Plan, in order to incorporate women sensibly in the continuing promotion of peace and in the prevention programmes of the conflict initiatives. However, the economic implications of the measures and persistent resistance from some parts of society mean these initiatives still have a long way to go.

Liberia's example can help us to learn that we have to recognise the different roles of women: such as fighters, supporters, resistance fighters, victims and/or survivors. This remains a very neglected area that needs far more of our attention. In order for the peace process to be sustainable and relevant to all, women and girls must take part in all discussions, negotiations and decision-making. Reconstruction is at risk without the necessary investment of time and money. The TRC should continue its outreach to the most remote regions in the country and listen to the stories of the women and girls there. This is the only way we can find out directly about their misfortunes and ask them what they need for their future lives. Asking women for comprehensive recommendations and recording their experiences, perspectives and ideas is actually a way of enabling their recognition and their full participation in society. ■



# SEEKING **JUSTICE** – SEXUALISED WARTIME VIOLENCE IN COURT

Jessica Mosbahi, Monika Hauser

*To testify... is more than simply to report a fact... it means to commit the narrative to others; to take responsibility – in speech – for history or for the truth of an occurrence, for something which, by definition, goes beyond the personal, in having general (nonpersonal) validity and consequences.*

Shoshana Felman, „The Return of the Voice: Claude Lanzmann’s Shoah“

*medica mondiale* campaigns on many levels to force governments, society and perpetrators to take responsibility for the injustice of the sexualised violence that is visited on women and girls (and on men and boys) during war. As Shoshana Felman writes, it is about ensuring that consequences follow from each and every crime – from every individual war rape – so that these crimes are never repeated. Our work has shown us how important it is for survivors of sexualised violence to find justice. Alongside appropriate health- and psychosocial care, societal recognition of the injustice plays a crucial role in re-establishing a sense of dignity for the affected person and in ensuring that they have a real opportunity to find their way back to a good life.

The women themselves have different ideas about what justice could mean for them. Some consider financial compensation to be appropriate, such as the payments to women in Bosnia and Herzegovina and



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Kosovo who were raped during the wars. This has since taken the form of a monthly war pension. Others want some kind of settlement from the perpetrator, although this would not necessarily be monetary in nature. Reparation payments in the form of a goat, for example, are often seen as helpful since they are a long-lasting contribution to livelihood. For some survivors it is important to see the crimes processed before a court. The idea that a court represents the global public and recognises their suffering, punishing the perpetrator, is still closely connected with the concept of justice.

We also share the attitude that a functioning legal system must ensure that severe human rights violations like war rapes are recognised as crimes and that the guilt of perpetrators is judged in a fair trial. Women must have the opportunity to bring charges against those who have committed crimes against them. There is, however, still a lack of legal process worldwide. We identify this and the accompanying impunity as one reason why sexualised wartime violence is still so widespread.

Although tenacious advocacy work by women’s rights activists, including *medica mondiale*, has succeeded in establishing sexualised wartime violence as an international crime both in the statutes of the ad hoc criminal tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda and in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC), prosecution is still proceeding in

a more than hesitant fashion. Ratification of the ICC treaty obligates both the ICC and a member country's national courts to conduct this prosecution. Courts in particular could also contribute to breaking the still existing taboo surrounding sexualised violence and to ending the stigmatisation of victims. The issue is not necessarily for every trial to culminate in the conviction of a perpetrator: it is actually much more important as a way of showing respect to the survivors. It is also important that knowledge about the causes and consequences of sexualised war violence is generated from the suffering of women and that this forms a basis that triggers political and social change.

However, the reality looks rather different. Women who resolve to tell their stories before an international court often receive neither justice nor a just treatment. Instead, they are more likely to be humiliated, re-traumatised and not taken seriously in the courtroom. In recent years the ICC has developed legal regulations to support witnesses, again because of pressure from activists. Nevertheless, there are still very few charges of sexualised war violence, never mind convictions. National courts that hear international crimes are still miles away from appropriate and respectful approaches to treat survivors as witnesses. This was shown very clearly in the trial of two leaders of the Rwandan militia "Forces Démocratiques de Libération du Rwanda" (FDLR) before the Higher Regional Court in Stuttgart.<sup>1</sup>

Prejudices and ignorance on the part of the responsible legal experts – and also on the part of society and politics – continue to obstruct the prosecution of war rapes. The prosecution of sex offences still depends too often on the individual readiness of the prosecuting attorney to charge these crimes. Despite the creation of legal norms for sex offences as war crimes and crimes against humanity, their actual implementation remains uncertain.<sup>2</sup> The most difficult hurdles in this regard are very often said to be that there are rarely eye-witnesses for these crimes, that it is difficult to uncover the command structure behind these crimes, or that the survivors are not prepared to talk about their experiences before a court. At least this last argument can be quickly refuted. Bosnian women in particular campaigned hard to have the crimes dealt with in court

and to give testimony in a trial. The very existence of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia owes a great deal to their courage and tenacity.

Historically speaking, this was very unusual; because of the social stigma associated with rape and other forms of sexualised violence, women very often fear for their lives if they speak openly about their experiences. The consequence is that most women stay silent. However, the Bosnian experience shows that there are women who want to speak up and that it is possible to have sexualised violence crimes tried before a court. This is also confirmed by the study "... and that it does not happen to anyone anywhere in the world"<sup>3</sup> commissioned by *medica mondiale* and carried out by Gabriela Mischkowski in 2009. The study makes clear that many surviving women have an urgent need to speak about their experiences before a court; it also shows how successful trials can be for all participants when the surviving witnesses are dealt with respectfully and with appreciation.

The severity of the crimes means that there is a political and legal obligation to ensure that an appropriate process exists for coming to terms with them. This also includes a readiness to develop a prosecution strategy for the different forms and patterns of sexualised violence in war, to take on board knowledge about the ubiquitous and endemic prevalence of these forms of violence and also to provide legal staff with sufficient background knowledge on the causes and consequences of sexualised violence. However, the role of a survivor as witness has to change fundamentally if these aspects of trial strategy are to be successful in terms of ensuring a case is conducted justly – which means in the interests of the women. Even if the accused perpetrators are the focus of a criminal trial, any court case can be made a part of the overall process of justice if it fully respects all witness rights and if there is a willingness to consider each single court case as one step on the path of coming to terms with the crimes against humanity that were committed. Witnesses should be able to demand as much control as possible over proceedings.

Without naming all the necessary witness rights at this point, one thing is clear: the witness will not have

1 See also press release "War crimes trial: No justice for raped women", 29.09.2015, at [www.medicamondiale.org](http://www.medicamondiale.org).

2 See also the article by Silke Studzinsky on pp. 42-43.

3 The study and a summary of its results can be found in our Media Centre at [www.medicamondiale.org](http://www.medicamondiale.org).

this control if she is re-traumatised and is reduced to being nothing more than a walking piece of evidence. Real control is only possible if she is given the space to reveal the significance of what has happened to her and to communicate the significance that she herself ascribes to what happened. In accordance with the quote from Shoshana Felman, this means that a woman who bears witness to sexual humiliation is concurrently a victim, a witness to her victimhood and someone who calls upon society to prevent these acts

of violence now and forever. She speaks not only for herself but also for those who can no longer speak for themselves. Or for those whom she wants to save from the suffering that she endured. This is why it is so important to open the courtroom doors so that other women hear this calling and are likewise emboldened to demand justice for themselves. ■

The Kenyan women's rights activist Rebecca Lolosoli at the 2008 *medica mondiale* conference on "Law and Justice".





# END TO IMPUNITY – VICTIM-FOCUSSED PROSECUTION\*

*Silke Studzinsky*

In July 2002 in Germany, the Code of Crimes against International Law (Völkerstrafgesetzbuch) came into force, designed to enact the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court within national criminal law. With this, Germany made it clear that the country is not a safe hide-out for war criminals. The code allows for serious crimes against international law committed in other countries to be brought before a court in Germany, at least in cases where either the victim or the perpetrator is in Germany. This ends one area of impunity for this types of crime.

Unfortunately, it then took almost ten years before the first court case was actually conducted under this code of law; the scene of the crime in this case was the Democratic Republic of Congo. It is still the only case where the defendants were also accused of sexualised criminal acts, yet in the end, there was no judgement or sentence for these crimes, since this set of charges was dismissed during trial. So, it will still take a long time until sexualised violence in the context of armed conflict actually leads to accountability.

There are numerous factors influencing investigations and eventually accountability of this type of crimes. One overarching aspect is that sexualised violence related to and in the context of armed conflict is being treated differently to other crimes. Not all the factors apply to all cases and situations, but in combination they lead to the lack of success we see in the prosecution of sexualised violence in the context of armed conflict.

Some of these factors are:

- » Some persons affected by sexualised violence are hesitating to make witness statements, or do not want to because of the circumstances of shame or exclusion from society.
- » Evidence for this type of crime consists to a large extent only of witness statements, with much less 'hard evidence' such as documents, photographic or video evidence. Since the violence is generally committed behind 'closed doors', there are often no witnesses or evidence that is immediately taken.

- » Before the case even begins, state prosecutors frequently assume there will be insufficient evidence for sexualised violence in a particular conflict.
- » The chain of command is difficult or impossible to prove; in general no specific order is given to commit the act of a sexual crime; it is difficult to prove that the higher-ranking responsible officers knew about the crime or had tangible indications that their subordinates had committed such crimes; and, therefore, it is difficult to show their neglect in undertaking anything to prevent these types of crimes.
- » The investigating authorities generally consider the charges or crimes as a type of hierarchy, with sexualised violence near the bottom of the scale; this leads to low priority being assigned to investigating sexualised violence; this strategical thinking at the start of a case is conducted by prosecutors who are generally male.
- » There is a frequent yet false assumption that cases of sexualised violence can only be pursued if they are part of a widespread and/or systematic attack on the civilian population.

There is no comprehensive prosecutor's strategy that places a priority on prosecuting sexualised violence, with unreserved commitment to pursuing this until a successful conclusion. Even if sexual crimes are initially investigated, there are then other reasons why they get 'stuck' somewhere along the line. These other reasons could be:

- » The investigators are not trained or do not have expertise in the appropriate manner of questioning those who were subjected to sexualised violence. The affected people are not informed of their rights and the opportunities they have (here, under this German criminal code) in a manner which they can understand and act upon. Failing to fulfil these duties of information is not subject to any sanctions and therefore has no consequences.

\* Excerpt from a lecture held during the colloquium "Sexualised wartime violence since World War II. Conditions and consequences", 31.01.2018, Heinrich Böll Foundation.

- » All of the participants, including the court staff and judges, are lacking in the necessary intercultural and discourse competencies, so communication is inadequate and leads to misunderstandings. Communication problems are not noticed or reflected upon.
- » Questioning takes place subject to strict time quotas, which leads to time pressure being applied. Comprehensive questioning is not possible. Psychological assistance for those affected is not guaranteed.
- » Witnesses are presented anonymously and without the chance to be questioned comprehensively by the court or the defence; this raises the distinct possibility that the court will find it difficult to pass judgement (solely) on their evidence. This anonymisation is justified as 'witness protection', although actual witness protection in a third country is not guaranteed.
- » Additionally, the witnesses are obstructed in the exercise of their rights as a civil party, meaning they have no legal representation and are unable to participate in the process as a whole.
- » The sex offences are subsumed into the overall charges and become little more than 'bargaining chips' to be sacrificed at a strategic point in the negotiations.
- » There is no systematic training or assessment in how to conduct cases involving sexualised violence.

An end to impunity is still not in sight. So, what could the first steps be which would deal successfully with the challenges these cases present? Including criminal cases where the scene of the crime and the witnesses are generally outside of Europe?

- » Priority should be accorded to investigating sexualised violence in conflicts as part of the strategy pursued by public prosecutors. The frequent hierarchisation of crimes should no longer be an option. Sexualised violence can no longer automatically be dismissed as a crime that is more difficult to investigate than other crimes.

- » The necessary expertise to prosecute these sex offences needs to be acquired and regularly assessed.
- » Myths and false assumptions have to be identified, admitted, analysed and cleared up. Interdisciplinary expertise also needs to be incorporated.
- » An infrastructure of legal, psychological and social work support needs to be established or identified in the country where the crime was committed, and these providers need to be involved during and after the court procedures in order to provide the witnesses with skilled support.
- » Even if the case is conducted in an ideal manner, the legal proceedings alone are not sufficient to ensure the survivor of a sexualised crime of violence becomes stronger or more empowered. They always also need social and societal support, as well as an enhancement of their general life situation: a real and economic improvement in their life.
- » In order to fully identify the diverse causes of inadequate investigations and conduct of court cases, and to develop solutions for these, a Round Table of experts from all relevant professions needs to be created. ■



● **Silke Studzinsky:** Since 2016 Head of the Victims' Participation Office at the Kosovo Specialist Chambers; 2013-2015 Legal Adviser to the Trust Fund for Victims at the International Criminal Court in The Hague; 2008-2012 International Lawyer for Civil Parties at the Khmer Rouge Tribunal in Cambodia.

# TRAUMA AND DISPLACEMENT – BEST PRACTICE FOR PEER-TO-PEER SUPPORT IN GERMANY

Millions of people are forced to leave their homes due to conflicts, persecution and natural disasters. Since 2015, an increased number of refugees fled to Germany seeking protection – amongst them there are many women and girls who experienced rape, forced and survival prostitution, forced marriage, torture and other forms of gender-specific violence before and during their flight. Some of them even experience sexualised and gender-based violence (SGBV) within refugee accommodations in Germany. In order to process these experiences, they need secure surroundings, empowering social connections, and support from people who know how to work in a stress- and trauma-sensitive way. The training program STAR (Stress- and Trauma-sensitive Approach to promote Resilience)<sup>1</sup> was introduced by *medica mondiale*<sup>2</sup> in 2016 for staff working with people who have experienced displacement, such as healthcare workers, security staff and volunteers. By establishing a physically and psychologically safe environment, the program helps to stabilise survivors of sexualised and gender-based violence. It gives survivors access to specialist support services and supports staff-members to become aware of their own stress limits.

Having worked with survivors of violence for over 25 years in conflict and crisis-related areas, *medica mondiale* also knows that people who have been through traumatic events can experience stabilising and empowering effects when they have the opportunity to meet with other people who share similar experiences. Support and funding for self-help structures in the form of empowering group courses and activities is a core part of this program. Previously displaced women who have lived in Germany for some time can use their experiences to provide support in the 'peer-to-peer groups'. Solidarity with and from others with similar experiences can be especially stabilising for women who have experienced interpersonal traumatisations.

## What potential does the peer-to-peer approach have in the context of displacement and trauma?

A peer is someone with the 'same background or status', so sharing experiences with peers can help us to empower each other and pass on useful information. This can be done in organised group meetings or in one-to-one support. Peer-to-peer groups offer a strengthening and empowering supplement to psychosocial counselling and therapy and should not be seen as cheap alternatives.

## Why is the peer-to-peer approach suitable for the context of trauma and displacement?

Existential stress, old re-enacted traumatisations and discriminations, as well as shame can lead to social

isolation. Women with a history of displacement, but who have lived in Germany for a while may still carry some burdens, but they also have successful coping strategies. These women are a living example for newly arrived women and can encourage and empower them through their own experiences. This type of peer counselling can have significant stabilising effects.

## How does peer-to-peer support work in practice?

Refugee (or former refugee) women with similar experiences and histories of violence meet together in a safe space, characterised by mutual respect and confidentiality. In order to avert stress and trauma dynamics in the group, we recommend a team of at least two group leaders: one trauma expert and one expert by experience (formerly displaced woman) who is now stable enough to share her experiences with others.

## What conditions are needed for this approach?

The group meetings should always have the same schedule and structure. This gives the participants a sense of security while they participate and share with each other. All of the women need to be involved in the group discussions to share their particular strengths and abilities. The external conditions such as the room, any necessary translations, childcare and long-term funding are also important if the group is to be successful. ■

1 Stress- und traumasensibler Ansatz zur Resilienzförderung von Zufluchtsuchenden und Helfenden in NRW, funded by the Ministry of Health, Equalities, Care and Ageing of the federal state of Nordrhein-Westfalen.

2 More information on our training programs in Germany can be found at: <https://www.medicamondiale.org/fortbildungen.html>.



# Women Seeking Refuge – the Continuum of Violence



**Refugee women in Germany**



**What are the reasons for women to flee their home country?**

- 1 Life in danger
- 2 War
- 3 Terror
- 4 Torture
- 5 *Violence experienced as woman\**
- 6 *Fear of sexualised violence\**
- 7 *Fear of honour killing\**
- 8 *Fear of forced marriage\**
- 9 *Fear of female genital mutilation\**
- 10 Fear of kidnap

\*gender-specific causes of flight



**In country of origin**

War and violence cause women to flee their home country.

**While in transit**

Costs of traffickers, obtaining travel documents and negotiating border crossings all force women into prostitution.

**In destination country**

In refugee accommodation, many women experience discrimination.

Sadness **40 %**

Anxiety **26 %**

Sleep disturbances **23 %**

Back pains **21 %**

Headaches **19 %**

Suicidal thoughts **5 %**

**Physiological and psychological consequences of fleeing and of violence**

# ACTIVIST FOR REFUGEE WOMEN

Hélène Batemona-Abeke has trained specialists on behalf of *medica mondiale* since 2016. She came to Germany in the mid-1990s and her professional focus is now trauma-related empowerment, as well as other work with and for refugees.

Now 47 years old, Helene's story began growing up in Kenya: "As a child I was already aware that women suffer disadvantages." She was lucky, however, and her father supported her, so in spite of the prevailing patriarchal structures she was able to follow her path and study.

In 1995 she took part in the UN World Conference on Women in Beijing. Then, after graduating, she came to Germany. "I experienced the same things many people experience when they arrive in a new country: emergency accommodation, social welfare, running from one authority to another, and even violence. As to the equality of women in Germany: I didn't notice it at all."

It was only when she joined the newly forming "No Human is Illegal" initiative that she discovered the Allerweltshaus (House of the World) in Cologne and became politically and interculturally active. At that time Hélène became an activist, demonstrating in front of the state parliament in Düsseldorf even though she had no secure residence status. "It wasn't easy," says Hélène, looking back, "but I discovered new networks and met new people, which made me stronger."

Now the Cologne resident is a self-employed Diversity Trainer, systemic family support worker, and expert advisor on psychotraumatology for *medica mondiale*. She also works directly with women who have come to Germany seeking refuge. Many of them, she says, are not able to live a life of equality here in Germany: "The women arrive with nothing, without any residence title, threatened by traffickers or other family members, often with small children – and some of those were conceived during rape." They are often very insecure and intimidated, and therefore very grateful for Hélène's low-threshold offer of a conversation and advice.

An approach of 'empowerment' can help to improve the women's situation, even when they are under pressure: "The women can learn to say NO. I encourage them to take steps to improve their employment chances, to

lead their own lives, get to know new people and ensure they have an active social life," explains Hélène. She tells of one woman: "People threatened to torture her family in her country of origin if she didn't do what they wanted. I tried to empower the woman. At some point she was able to stand up and defend herself. She showed defiance and from then on, she found a new outlook on life. Now she has a training placement and her children are doing well, too."

When Hélène speaks about the women and her work, it is easy to understand the meaning of 'empowerment': helping people to find strength and motivation, activating the power to take their life in their own hands. As an authentic blend of good friend, professional coach and role model, Hélène manages to help women to believe in themselves and find ways out of difficult situations, since they begin to really believe they can do it.

Sometimes men perceive Hélène as a threat because of her vitality and independence: "Some men don't want me to speak to their wives. I wake the women up, but the men would prefer it if they remained asleep," she says. However, there are different types of men. Some of them approach Hélène and ask her to speak to or help their wives. Helene and her partner live out a modern version of family: when Hélène is away running seminars, he looks after the children and after her last pregnancy he took parental leave.

"You carried our child for 9 months," he said, "now I will carry it for the next 9 months."

"Change begins with the way we bring up our daughters and sons," explains Hélène. "Macho men were once boys, too, weren't they?"

Hélène has many plans for the future. She is now offering her training on mental health and psychosocial support to people internationally working in crisis areas and with refugees: locations so far include Turkey, Morocco and near the Syrian border. ■

*I experienced the same things many people experience when they arrive in a new country: emergency accommodation, social welfare, running from one authority to another, and even violence. As to the equality of women in Germany: I didn't notice it at all.*

Hélène Batemona-Abeke







# ZERO TOLERANCE FOR VIOLENCE

## SIX DEMANDS TO PROTECT WOMEN AND GIRLS IN REFUGEE ACCOMMODATION\*

Many women and girls who arrive as refugees in Germany have fled countries such as Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Iran or Eritrea, where war and displacement have dominated lives for years and violence is a daily occurrence. So, many of these women and girls bring with them experiences of different types of violence: these are not limited to physical and sexualised violence, but also include psychological, structural and cultural violence, as well as multiple combinations of these.

Given the conflict situations and the autocratic or patriarchal power structures in their countries of origin, many of these women have never had access to a functional legal system and they often have little knowledge of the rights they are entitled to. For many women from places where various forms of violence were an everyday affair, if they once again experience violence when they are in the refugee accommodation in Germany, it will not be something they even question, let alone resist or report. Further, if they do consider complaining, many will be concerned it might adversely affect their asylum procedure, jeopardising their chance

Civilians fleeing out of Musharrifah in Mosul.



Image: © Kainoa Little

\* Excerpt from the joint Position Paper by *medica mondiale* e. V. and Kölner Flüchtlingsrat e. V. (Cologne Refugee Council) on protecting women and girls from violence in refugee accommodation run by the Bundesland Nordrhein-Westfalen: [https://www.medicamondiale.org/fileadmin/redaktion/5\\_Service/Mediathek/Dokumente/Deutsch/Positionspapere\\_offene-Briefe/medica\\_mondiale\\_Positionspapier\\_Frauen\\_Gewaltschutz\\_Flucht.pdf](https://www.medicamondiale.org/fileadmin/redaktion/5_Service/Mediathek/Dokumente/Deutsch/Positionspapere_offene-Briefe/medica_mondiale_Positionspapier_Frauen_Gewaltschutz_Flucht.pdf).





Refugee camp in northern Iraq

of getting refugee status or even running the risk of incurring sanctions. These fears can often be traced back to negative experiences with the security authorities in their country of origin.

### Needs of refugee women should determine provision

So first of all it is essential to build up the understanding of and confidence in the German constitutional state. Additionally, these women are in an unfamiliar country where they know neither the language nor the customs. As well as their daily efforts to cope with losing relatives or friends and their memories of the traumatic experiences during the conflict or their flight, the women are now confronted with numerous bureaucratic demands being made of them. If they are to find their feet in Germany and to be offered genuine security, it is essential for both regional refugee facilities and local refugee accommodation to develop a comprehensive violence prevention concept that is genuinely built around the needs of female refugees. And, of course, this concept needs to be implemented by all of the responsible persons.

It is shocking and shameful if a supposedly safe and progressive third country like Germany exposes people to renewed (sexualised) violence when they have come here to flee the violence of war and conflict. At the same time, our long years of experience have shown us that sexualised violence is a widespread phenomenon that routinely and systematically targets women, especially when they are in precarious situations. These contexts

reinforce relationships of dependency and further sexual exploitation. Since acts of sexualised violence are generally acts to exercise power over others, there is a particularly high risk of refugee facilities becoming places where hidden power structures manifest themselves in the form of violence. After all, the people living there have been put in a very insecure situation, with language problems and without established social and support structures. A range of dependencies are certain to arise. It is for this reason that any effective violence protection in these facilities should not only aim to protect the refugees from other refugees, but also from any exercising of violence by in-house or contracted staff, especially security personnel. Structures that exacerbate tendencies for violence are particularly likely to arise where operators and funders lack awareness of the relevance of violence protection guidelines or where staff training and HR policies are inadequate. Furthermore, it also has to be realised that violence and harassment are closely related to stressful conditions in the accommodation.

### Trained staff in refugee facilities

Another factor to consider is that refugee women in accommodation facilities are hardly able to leave and escape violence there. Laws such as an obligation to live in a specific facility or a ban on travelling further than a certain distance from it mean that they cannot simply make their own decision to leave where they are living. Instead, they first have to draw attention to themselves and trust third parties, without being certain that their plea will be heard. Unless staff have received training,

their reaction is often not actually a helpful one. Responsible authorities also have to be willing and capable of reacting quickly and flexibly to ensure perpetrator and victim are separated (i.e. rehoused) in order to put an end to the violence. All in all, the violent situation often cannot be escaped unless a great deal of personal conviction and time is invested. In the worst case, the woman's life continues to be at risk during this time.

### Breaking the cycles of violence

Currently, there has been a complete, or almost complete, lack of violence protection concepts for the various types of facility, and only inadequate controls have been put in place for operators, security contractors and commissioning authorities or organisations. This has led to a situation of near lawlessness and unhindered continuation of the cycle of violence for women, who are sometimes severely traumatised. Any policies that seriously claim to represent the interests of refugee women and girls would have to describe and implement measures to break through these spirals of violence as early as possible, or not even let them arise in the first place.

The following standards need to be upheld if refugee facilities are not to be beyond the law and if the women living there are to be protected from violence committed by either fellow refugees or staff:

#### 1. Security and privacy

Women and girls need to be accommodated as securely as possible. This includes having locks on all sleeping areas. Women travelling alone should be put in women-only facilities and, as soon as possible, allocated decentralised accommodation. At no point should an accommodation facility house both single men and single women.

#### 2. Safe spaces

Every accommodation facility, especially those with group dormitories and shared living spaces, should offer women and girls a chance to retreat to a place of peace and quiet. In order to ensure this, every facility needs to set up at least one space that is exclusively accessible to women and girls and can offer safety and security in cases of need.

#### 3. Access to information and rights

A low-threshold way of informing women and girls of their rights needs to be carried out and they need to be offered support in asserting those rights. Both oral and written offers of information need to be made available in protected spaces, such as women-only cafe areas. At the same time, strategies need to be developed

that are flexible and adapted to the needs of women in order to ensure that these information offers reach as many refugee women as possible. Furthermore, independent women's protection officers need to be named and given official responsibility for these issues. Selected staff at each facility need to be identified and named as contact persons for this issue, and they should be empowered to support the women's protection officer to implement her strategies.

#### 4. Zero tolerance policy in each facility

Violence in any form needs to be expressly and publicly denounced by the operators, funders, commissioning authorities and security contractors. In the German federal state of Nordrhein-Westfalen (NRW), every accommodation facility is obliged by the Protection Against Violence Law to draft a policy on violence prevention and ensure it is suitable for the circumstances of their facility. The staff need to know who they can and should turn to in the case of any form of harassment or violence. Any unacceptable behaviour by staff or any violence from third parties should be dealt with according to the severity of the offence and appropriate employment law. Violence committed by staff members should result in dismissal.

#### 5. Ensuring a stabilising and empowering environment

Social connections in the form of family and friends should be considered, if requested, when rehousing refugees. Being part of a larger social network plays an essential role in the stabilisation of people affected by violence, and also in the prevention of violence. There should be a change in current legislation which obliges women and families from so-called safe countries of origin to remain living in facilities run by the federal state until they leave or are deported, excluding the possibility of reassigning them to a local authority. Refugee women need to be involved in the drawing up of free-time activity offers and should also be included as contact persons in cases of violence – on the condition that they themselves are psychologically stable enough for this role.

#### 6. Monitoring and evaluation of a violence prevention concept

The implementation of any concept has to be documented and then evaluated one year after implementation. Best Practice examples should be collected. Deficits in the implementation need to be corrected. Measures are to be supplemented and adapted where the evaluation finds this to be necessary. The Interior Ministry of NRW should host an expert exchange for all facilities run by the federal state in order to facilitate sharing and learning from each other, as well as the development of NRW-wide standards. ■

# My body is no battlefield!

For 25 years, survivors of sexualised wartime violence and their needs have been the focus of our work. We want to counteract the terrors of war with offers of safety and solidarity. Together with local women's organisations we help those affected to resume full lives by offering them medical, psychosocial and legal support.

However, the violence will not end unless there are changes in society and politics as well. So we call on those with political responsibility to protect women and girls from violence during armed conflict and involve them in peace processes. As part of our actions and events, we invited women and men to add their voice to our demands, along with the voices of prominent supporters.

Join us and share our message with your friends and acquaintances. So women and girls around the world can live in dignity and justice, free of violence.

## WE SAY

### ■ Rape is a violation of human rights.

Women and girls have the right to a life without violence or repression.

### ■ Women are not to blame for being raped – ever.

Raped women are entitled to recognition for the injustice they suffered. Society and government have to assume responsibility and provide appropriate support to those affected.

### ■ Survivors of sexualised violence have a right to justice.

We are calling for consistent prosecution of perpetrators. War crimes cases, court processes and asylum procedures all need to be conducted in a trauma-sensitive way. Refugee women need



expert support, secure accommodation and real prospects.

### ■ Peace can only be achieved together with women.

Political decision-makers are called upon to ensure effective protection for women against sexualised wartime violence. Women have to be involved in peace negotiations, with the chance to participate in the future of their countries.

### ■ Together for a world free of violence.

Only by working together can we put an end to sexualised violence and discrimination and bring about gender justice.

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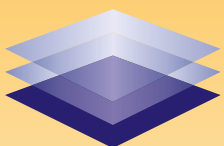


As of: August 2019

Our vision:

“Women and girls are living in a world free of violence.  
They live in dignity and justice.”

[www.medicamondiale.org](http://www.medicamondiale.org)



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