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War in Ukraine

Rape as a weapon of war in Ukraine

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On 6 April 2022, a psychologist based in Bucha, a city northwest of Kiev which has been the site of numerous abuses by the Russian military, decided to testify publicly for the first time about the use of rape as a weapon of war by Russian soldiers against the Ukrainian civilian population, mainly against women and children.

The use of rape as a tactic within a set of military and war practices has been recognized since the early 1990s. This systemic practice of repeated, sometimes collective, rape by soldiers of women and children of the people or ethnic group considered as the enemy has been widely documented in the context of the war between Serbia and Bosnia, by Serb soldiers.

A tactic in an imperialist and patriarchal war

These acts of sexual violence are seen as practices of the arsenal of war as such, not as “accidental” by-products of war. They result from a coordinated desire by the military hierarchy to harm the “opposing” population in its body, physical and social. Rapes are often committed in public, in front of the victims’ families or loved ones. In the case of Russian aggression, there are several indications that these acts are the result of direct orders to soldiers from the Russian government.

The reported acts of sexual violence in Bucha, which are probably just the tip of the iceberg, are part of the narrative of rape as a weapon of war. Several Russian soldiers allegedly raped a 14-year-old girl just outside the entrance to her house. An 11-year-old child was raped by two men in front of his mother. Two women were repeatedly raped by several men who had invaded their homes and held them captive.

We know that women, gender minorities or non-white people are victims of armed conflict in a specific way, specific to the systemic oppressions that affect them. The coordinated and repeated use of rape of women and children in the context of the invasion of Ukraine, by male-controlled armed forces, which have ruled an imperialist country for more than 20 years, and which embody in many ways a dominant and violent masculinity, is thus an example of the patriarchal character of armed conflicts.

Internationalist feminist solidarity!

In the face of these war crimes, it is imperative that we work to build internationalist feminist solidarity. This involves support for the armed self-defence of the Ukrainian population, especially women and gender minorities, demanding that these rapes be recognised as war crimes and that material and psychological support be provided to all victims.

It must also involve a profound reflection, within our feminist collectives and political organizations, on how gender violence unfolds in a specific and structuring way in the current global context of a rise of authoritarian neoliberalism and the projects of the fascistic right. This is the case during armed imperialist invasions but also with imperialist extractions of raw materials by multinationals in countries on the periphery of capitalist centres of accumulation, where women who resist the expropriation of their land are also frequently victims of sexual violence.

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In the fight against this gender-based violence, we must absolutely seek to go beyond demands only aimed at the national and international institutions that participate in producing and consolidating this neoliberal offensive, which paves the way for the far right. We must build an autonomous and self-organized feminist response.

2 May 2022

Translated by **International Viewpoint** from [solidaritéS No 405](#).

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