

## How is rape a weapon of war?: feminist international relations, modes of critical explanation and the study of wartime sexual violence

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***How Is Rape A Weapon Of War?:  
Feminist International Relations, Modes of Critical  
Explanation and the Study of Wartime Sexual Violence***

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Paul Kirby  
Department of International Relations  
London School of Economics & Political Science  
Houghton Street  
London  
WC2A 2AE

[p.kirby@lse.ac.uk](mailto:p.kirby@lse.ac.uk)

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**Abstract**

Rape is a weapon of war. Establishing this now common claim has been an achievement of feminist scholarship and activism and reveals wartime sexual violence as a social act marked by gendered power. But the consensus that rape is a weapon of war obscures important, and frequently unacknowledged, differences in ways of understanding and explaining it. This article opens these differences to analysis. Drawing on recent debates regarding the philosophy of social science in IR and social theory, it interprets feminist accounts of wartime sexual violence in terms of *modes of critical explanation* – expansive styles of reasoning that foreground particular actors, mechanisms, reasons and stories in the formulation of research. The idea of a mode of critical explanation is expanded upon through a discussion of the role of three elements (analytical wagers, narrative scripts and normative orientations) which accomplish the theoretical work of modes. Substantive feminist accounts of wartime sexual violence are then differentiated in terms of three modes – of instrumentality, unreason and mythology – which implicitly structure different understandings of how rape might be a weapon of war. These modes shape political and ethical projects and so impact not only on questions of scholarly content but also on the ways in which we attempt to mitigate and abolish war rape. Thinking in terms of feminist modes of critical explanation consequently encourages further work in an unfolding research agenda. It clarifies the ways in which an apparent commonality of position can conceal meaningful disagreements about human action. Exposing these disagreements opens up new possibilities for the analysis of war rape.

**Keywords**

Wartime sexual violence, rape, war, feminism, explanation, social theory, philosophy of social science

I'm sure you have reasons  
A rational defence  
Weapons and motives  
Bloody fingerprints  
But I can't help thinking  
It's still all disease.

Fugazi, 'Argument' (2001)

'Weapon of War' could be many explanations and I'm not sure of any of them.

UNHCR official, Goma, Democratic Republic of Congo, June 2010<sup>i</sup>

### **Introduction: 'Lootpillageandrape'<sup>iii</sup>**

Rape is a weapon of war. Such is the refrain of practically all contemporary academic research, political advocacy and media reporting on wartime sexual violence. Once considered firmly outside the remit of foreign policy, rape is today labelled as a 'tactic of war' by US Secretaries of State who pledge to eradicate it (Clinton, 2009) and acknowledged as a war crime and constituent act of genocide at the highest levels of international law and global governance, a development which for some amounts to the 'international criminalization of rape' (Engle, 2005:784; see also Bergoffen, 2009; Buss, 2009). Discussions of wartime sexual violence thus increasingly inflect high politics itself, leading in recent years to attention from the UN Security Council, which condemned sexual violence as 'widespread and systematic' and 'a tactic of war' (United Nations, 2008).

But the consensus that rape is a weapon of war obscures important, and frequently unacknowledged, differences in our ways of understanding and explaining it. This article argues that attention to the substantive accounts of wartime sexual violence provided by feminist scholarship in International Relations (IR) reveals these differences. Although there are many ways to interpret the production of academic and political knowledge, the approach adopted here analyses feminist accounts of rape as a weapon of war in terms of three different *modes of critical explanation* – of instrumentality, unreason and mythology – which implicitly structure them and which provide the constitutive grammar for their diagnoses. Modes shape explanatory content by setting the objects and parameters of

analysis and by connecting analysis to ethics and politics. Although not simply exclusive or exhaustive (an important caveat), they are distinct and coherent ways of approaching the social world. As forms of reasoning they generate contrasting and sometimes competing ways of telling stories about wartime sexual violence and of framing the ethical and political projects intended to abolish it.

These different modes are exposed to critical scrutiny through several layers of argument. First, in terms of *existent work on feminist theory and its treatment of wartime sexual violence*, I argue that current subdivisions of feminist scholarship in terms of epistemology, ontology or methodology capture only some pertinent dynamics, allowing for an alternative framework of analysis.

Second, engaging with debates in the *philosophy of social science*, I assess the place of explanation in non- and post-positivist theory and suggest that diverse feminist claims about the use of rape in war can be analysed in terms of their different forms of reasoning. Despite the widespread framing of feminist IR as opposed to explanatory or causal analysis, accounts of wartime sexual violence can indeed be read as modes of critical explanation, accounts constructed through the linking of analytical wagers, narrative scripts and normative orientations.

Third, at a more fine-grained level, I *explicate the three substantive modes of instrumentality, unreason and mythology themselves* and show how they structure assumptions and claims about the causes and character of wartime sexual violence. Drawing on a wide range of established analysis, I set out the constraints, connections and articulations of these modes in terms of how they use wagers, scripts and orientations to tell particular social scientific stories (Tilly, 2006) about the subjects and objects of rape in war.

Fourth and finally, I *consider how the different modes matter*, both to the politics of ending sexual violence and to the politics and sociology of knowledge itself. Together, these layers amount to an argument that there are important differences of analysis, politics and ethics in what is

meant by 'weapon of war', ambiguities best uncovered by a closer reading of the differences within feminist IR scholarship than is possible via more commonly-cited distinctions.

These sedimented layers exist in a productive tension between inquiring into our ways of narrating wartime sexual violence and the events we are trying to narrate themselves. For some this may amount to an excessively introverted research problem. For others, it will suggest an unsustainable epistemological and ontological separation of realms. Although I make no attempt to resolve the meta-theoretical character of these disputes, the substance of this account is intended to clarify some of those difficulties as they relate to the analysis of wartime sexual violence. Talk of stories, grammars, wagers, narratives and normative orientations may also cause readers some concern. This terminology should not be taken to mean that the accounts analysed are *fictions*. Instead, it expresses a view of them as necessarily assembled and produced from the matter of existing discourse, social scientific tradition, ethico-political debates and experiences in 'the field' and elsewhere.

In short, my argument is both *about* feminist accounts of wartime sexual violence and also *a contribution to* them. Although there are non-feminist ways of studying wartime sexual violence and gender, the scholarship explored in what follows remains within the political, affective and analytical lineages and networks of feminism.<sup>iii</sup> This is a feminist story because it politicises sexual violence as an act related to social power; because it takes as an analytical baseline the embeddedness of gender practices within a historically-located hierarchical system of differentiation which privileges those defined as masculine at the expense of those defined as feminine; and because it connects analysis with politics and ethics at a fundamental level (see Zalewski, 1995; Tickner, 1997; and Hutchings, 2000).<sup>iv</sup>

## **War Rape in the Feminist Imaginary**

### *The Politicisation of Wartime Sexual Violence*

The idea of rape as a weapon of war has a distinctly feminist heritage. Opposed to the historical placement of gendered violence within the hidden realm of the private, feminist scholarship was the first to draw out the connections between sexual violence and the history

of war, just as feminists fought to make rape in times of nominal peace a matter for public concern (Brownmiller, 1975; Bourke, 2007). The prevalence of 'weapon of war' understandings of sexual violence owes much to this legacy, and the phrase itself crystallises the feminist claim that rape is a political form of aggression, what Eisenstein calls "a form of war in yet another inhumane form; an *integral form of war* rather than an effect" (2007:28, emphasis added). Feminist academics have, then, pioneered a view of sexual violence as a form of social power characterised by the operations and dynamics of gender. Sexual violence under feminist inquiry is thus *politicised*, and forced into the public sphere (Harrington, 2010; Elshtain, 1995; Enloe, 1996; Owens, 2008).

This work of politicisation has gone hand-in-hand with an awareness of differences within feminism and of the multiple theoretical perspectives that could be brought to bear on war rape. Most prominently, Inger Skjelsbæk (2001) has argued that feminist accounts can be divided into three epistemologies depending on who they conceptualise as the victims of wartime sexual violence: essentialists (who see all women as victims through a focus on the militarised expression of underlying masculinity); structuralists (who see only some women as under threat and work from a group-based perspective); and social constructionists (who allow that both men and women may be victims and understand femininity and masculinity as malleable categories that could conceivably be applied to anyone within conflict contexts) (see the similar analysis provide by Leatherman 2011:11-20).

Others have differentiated feminist accounts in terms of their empirical and political claims. For example, Karen Engle (2005) has identified two feminist camps of analysis in relation to the Bosnian mass rapes, one identifying sexual violence as specifically genocidal and another seeing it as of a piece with 'everyday' rape in war. More recently, Donna Pankhurst has set out a preliminary typology exploring multiple hypotheses in feminist IR. Her five options outline rape as either a weapon of war; a reward for troops; the result of a breakdown in social constraints; the consequence of a 'root cause' of masculinity; or the expression of frustration-aggression and male trauma (Pankhurst, 2010:152-156).

Despite providing a number of useful distinctions, these schemata of feminist analysis have been introductory or have reproduced familiar stories about the historical differentiation of waves of feminists (on which see Hemmings, 2005). Where apparently significant disparities between different feminist accounts have been identified, they have remained under-elaborated. Most crucially, it has not been obvious at which level the conflict between alternative theoretical accounts lies. Skjelsbæk's analysis of texts brings out a number of pertinent distinctions, but traces them to putatively *epistemological* differences when they could just as well be explained by variation at a more mundane level of theory construction. For example, the apparent dispute between an account of wartime sexual violence in which all women are targeted and one in which men *and* women are targeted may tell us much more about *contingent historical factors* (different wars and differing contexts may display different patterns of rape) or *analytical distinctions* (between acts that are essential to a strategy and those that are peripheral to it) than they do about the philosophical foundations of research. Moreover, an account which attributes rape to the ideas of gender and nation held by perpetrators is not synonymous with the epistemological claim that our access to knowledge about the world is 'socially constructed' (Jackson, 2010:204-207). Similarly, if the tension between identifying the Bosnian rape camps as genocidal or as part of a continuum with 'peacetime' violence was primarily due to disagreements about how best to agitate for the political *visibility* of rape, then there may be no analytical or explanatory questions at stake at all.

Despite a general concern with multiple feminisms, then, in the case of wartime sexual violence it has generally seemed more important to distinguish feminist from non-feminist analysis and to make the case for war rape as a legitimate *topic* for the attention of IR scholars (Enloe, 2000; Hansen, 2001) than it has been to open up the varieties of feminist analyses to scrutiny. Consequently, the rhetorical placement of feminist accounts has often been in opposition to other theoretical tendencies in IR (whether realist, statist or merely mainstream/malestream) rather than in terms of *which* feminist account best explicates sexualised brutality. These theoretical moves are not evidence of faulty reasoning. Instead, they reflect the history and politics of the discipline over the last decades, replete with manoeuvres of co-option, marginalisation and misunderstanding (Hutchings, 2008; Hooper,

1999; Tickner, 1997). The point is not that epistemological disputes among feminists are irrelevant, only they are not the sole lens through which to examine feminist accounts. There are other aspects of social inquiry which are in many ways more salient, and it is they which are obscured in the restaging of a contest between successive waves of feminist theory or between a monolithic feminism and the IR mainstream.

*Renegade Knowledge<sup>v</sup>: Feminist Theory as Critical Explanation*

The substance of feminist accounts of war rape reveal the ways in which theoretical claims are linked to empirical examples and made coherent as general explanations.<sup>vi</sup> 'Explanation' itself has become a problematic term in IR (as well as outside it) and is consistently associated with a particular (and particularly reductive) way of doing social science. In the hands of Hollis and Smith (1990), explanation is that kind of social science story which looks in from outside and attempts to unify phenomena under some regularity, usually lawlike. Despite their caution that this is only ever half the story, explanation is still generally advocated or opposed in terms of a specific variant embodied by positivism, neo-positivism and mathematically-enthralled programmes of overt hyper-rationalism (see Jackson, 2010: 63-69 and Humphreys, 2011 for enlightening discussions).

This disciplinary association of explanation per se with some kind of positivism (or what is typically understood as positivism) is less and less sustainable in the face of increasingly sophisticated critiques. Most crucially, to the extent that explanation is considered synonymous with causal analysis, there are many possible ways of invoking explanation without simultaneously establishing criteria of observability, determinism, necessity or strict regularity (Kurki, 2008). Self-consciously reflexivist and postpositivist scholars *do* engage in causal explanation, but evince an 'inadvertent Humeanism' when they assume that all causal accounts require covering laws and empirical regularities in the positivist vein, while they continue to engage in implicitly causal analysis when outlining constitutive forces, beliefs or structures as important to understanding social life (Kurki, 2008:138; see also Vucetic, 2011; Suganami, 2008; Suganami, 2011).



Methodological choices are also now less associated with definitive philosophical approaches previously considered necessary to sustain them (Jackson, 2010). In the case of feminism, methodological debates have opened up a range of options for techniques and philosophical assumptions that might be considered appropriate elements of academic feminist practice (Caprioli, 2004; Ackerly and True, 2006). Moreover, to speak of patriarchy, misogyny and sexism as processes shaping wartime sexual violence is to engage in 'common-sensical' causal description (see Kurki, 2008:139). Indeed, when viewed in light of more expansive definitions of explanation, feminism “depends on making some causal claims about the nature of patriarchal societies and global structures” (Kurki, 2008:142).

It is against this background that different forms of explanation can be understood as *modes*. Like other ways of talking about the world (perspectives, paradigms, ideal types, logics, discourses or conducts of inquiry), modes frame and name causal or constitutive relations and mark them as involving a pattern of process or outcome, a way of distinguishing explanations which gives rise to claims about the underlying reasons for behaviours, events and social phenomena. If explanation is one purpose and sub-set of the larger enterprise called 'theory', modes are packages of explanations united by common themes and assumptions, differentiated from other modes by the distinctive way in which they assemble and cohere accounts of the social world. In this sense modes are close to *styles of reasoning*: “the grammar of assumptions and concepts that informs a particular approach to the social world: a way of formulating problems, addressing them, and then evaluating the answers that have been produced” (Glynos and Howarth, 2007:8).<sup>vii</sup>

This way of understanding explanatory modes does not necessitate the kinds of ontological foundations commonly taken as positivist, rationalist or realist in orientation. By moving away from inquiry emulating a certain conception of natural science and the methods of verification or falsification, modes of critical explanation can accommodate relational understandings of social life and explore patterns based on an understanding of 'the social' as made up of the self-interpretations and understandings of subjects (Glynos and Howarth, 2007:49-82, 140; cf. Winch, 2008).

A feminist mode of critical explanation is thus a particular way of understanding social phenomena that depends on conditions that are distinctly feminist in character. Following the discussion above, these conditions can be specified in their broadest form as: i) the category of gender; and ii) the connection of an analysis of the category of gender with a normative project of emancipation, primarily for those understood as subordinated in gender relations. Different feminist modes will supplement these conditions with further layers of analytical, political and normative content. A feminist mode of accounting for wartime sexual violence is, then, a distinct form of feminist critical explanation applied to the phenomena of war rape, transferring or developing further arguments from the perspective of a particular grammar of assumptions or style of reasoning. The claim that there are multiple feminist modes in the study of wartime sexual violence attempts to show how these forms of critical explanation are differentiated from each other and how their respective assumptions give rise to particular kinds of stories about rape in war.

These modes are *critical* explanations because in describing and explaining social relations, they also allow for a political engagement through their stress on the “non-necessary character of social relations” (Glynos and Howarth, 2007:153). This is itself part of the politicising character of feminist research: in none of the literature examined below is it suggested that wartime sexual violence is just a permanent pattern of behaviour unrelated to our attempts to conceive of and abolish it. In this sense, feminism can be read as critical theory, centrally concerned with both reflexivity and normative categories, but not absent 'cognitive content' (meaningful knowledge) because of that (see Geuss, 1981). So feminist analysis advances *both* an account of current conditions and a critique of them.<sup>viii</sup>

This dual character of feminism as critical explanation inevitably involves a doubled way of speaking. Wartime sexual violence is a practice, but so is accounting for wartime sexual violence. Different epistemological traditions demand different standards of fit between these two kinds of activity, but all approaches which seek to clarify, explicate, understand, explain or diagnose wartime sexual violence will deploy implicit or explicit criteria for what makes a set of claims persuasive. Modes are ways of assembling the social world in theory, of sorting through the mess of evidence and experience by foregrounding certain realities while

ignoring or suppressing others (cf. Glynos and Howarth, 2007:133-137, cf: Law, 2004; Hacking, 2002:1-26; 99-114). Identifying and naming modes is thus an interpretive and ideal-typifying act. Modes are arrived at by extrapolating from themes and patterns found in our articulations of research and our analytical claims.

Feminist modes of critical explanation explicitly address such issues as the harm done by wartime sexual violence; the importance of recognising it as a political phenomena; the gendered tropes and justifications that exist around rape in context; the empirical evidence for certain forms of brutality and wrongdoing (rape camps, mutilation, specific groups of perpetrators and victims and/or a lack of intervention by given agencies); the depiction of rape in the media; and the need for collaboration to end rape. But they usually only implicitly address questions around the appropriate grounds for certain kinds of explanation; the possible debates and disputes over ideas of agency or cause; the relation of feminist explanations to explanations in social theory more broadly; and the impact of these issues on interventions designed to prevent or end sexual violence. These are the questions opened up by an investigation of particular modes and the ways in which they do theoretical work.

### *Three Elements for Modes of Critical Explanation*

While modes are ways of generating explanations for social phenomena, this still leaves many different ways in which we could give an account of particular events through them. For example, we may re-describe the Waltzian typology of causes of war (Waltz, 2001) in terms of modes: a human nature mode (first image), a domestic order mode (second image), and an international anarchy mode (third image).<sup>ix</sup> While these distinctions will certainly aid a general sorting of theories, they cannot tell us what the *substantive* content of any particular theory is. Two scholars might agree that domestic order is the cause of war but disagree on a range of specifics: whether the important factors are economic or political, whether 'domestic order' primarily means state elites, multiple interest groups or the public will; whether the appropriate response is wholesale national reform or a sense of tragic inevitability, and so on.

Modes are not mere collections of formal hypotheses, but instead combine different forms of intellectual practice. To understand individual examples of modes thus demands a more fine-grained account, setting out the conceptual *elements* which are assembled together and which secure the coherence of a mode. These are the micro-foundations for modes of critical explanation: their a) analytical wagers; b) narrative scripts; and c) normative orientations.

*Analytical wagers* are those commitments within modes to certain claims or assumptions. They may be explicit or implicit and are the basic axioms at the core of the modes. They are organising concepts and frame the possibilities for theorising. To take the most relevant example, gender is an analytical wager of this kind, as are such common predicates as rationality, desire and identity. Feminist scholarship in its broadest sense is based on the wager of gender, and could not function in the absence of it as a category (although of course feminism is *more* than the claim that gender matters). The analytical wager of gender may be specified many different ways, but its inclusion in our conceptual and explanatory vocabulary generates certain forms of explanation (e.g. Cockburn, 2010). Wagers combine and relate in ways which select objects of inquiry and connect them to a line of explanation: “Wagers constitute worlds, in that they quite literally set the stage for the kinds of empirical and theoretical puzzles and challenges that a scholar takes to be meaningful and important” (Jackson, 2010:34).

*Narrative scripts* are both the set of scholarly commitments enacted in the process of elaborating a mode (as in the idea of oneself as 'doing' anthropology) and, more importantly for this analysis, the stories told about objects of inquiry (as in the idea that someone chooses to rape to advance progress towards a particular aim). They convert wagers into a plot located in space and time, peopled by a determinate cast of actors. Where analytical wagers provide the key parameters of an explanation, narrative scripts set them to a story and a process which becomes sensible to us. So if gender frames an explanation, and if 'military' designates a crucial component of the social, then narrative scripts will provide stories about how and why people join and stay loyal to the military, and how that lived experience leads to the actions which a particular account is interested in. This most literal dimension of

social science as a kind of story-telling draws on imagination, empathy and chronology to flesh out the abstractions of wagers in a communicable human drama.

*Normative orientations* are the ideas of responsibility, blame and possible political action implicated in the wagers and scripts that characterise a particular mode. Where wagers and scripts construct agents as motivated by ends or moved by imperatives, orientations add the quality of judgement, often by seeking explanation in terms of right and just conduct (Suganami, 2011). They might indicate which institutions or practices we may appeal to as solutions to wartime sexual violence, or they might challenge whether we can even apply such normative categories to a social situation of such complexity at all. As the normative content of modes, orientations are particularly important to the political aspects of theorising and are directed towards imperatives of action, whether in terms of consciousness-raising, global campaigns, state action or military and cultural reform. In the case of an individual involved in the military as a site for the operation of gender, normative orientations will render judgement, for example by attributing blame not to individual soldiers but to an institution or society guilty of inculcating gendered norms in those individuals.

The separation of these elements, like the separation of modes, is ideal-typical. They are conceptually distinct in that claims for one element do not automatically or deterministically trigger parallel claims in others. But elements are closely connected in that modes require a coherence between wagers, scripts and orientations, either in setting out their claims or in responding to challenges.

Different elements are related by ontological politics, which are the kinds of politics generated by the deep structure of analytical wagers, the *under-determined but pervasive* ways in which constructing a particular kind of subject through analysis also implicates political claims and judgements (Law and Urry, 2004; Kurki, 2009). Political inflections *emerge from* wagers but also exist at a more fundamental level by identifying objects of analysis. This connection between elements gives rise to what has been called 'scientific ontology': the "catalog of objects, processes, and factors that a given line of scientific research expects to

exist or has evidence of the existence of: ontology as bestiary, so to speak” (Jackson, 2010:28). For example, taking the military to be a bounded site for the operation of gender sets it as an actor in explanations in a way that will shape political commitments, not least in making the reform or abolition of the military a key question for feminists.

We can, and frequently do, contest some elements by reference to others. For example, we might say that a particular set of assumptions about agents in IR leads to an overly narrow focus on individuals as evil (Ainley, 2008). This is a way of saying that an analytical wager (individualism) has given rise to a focus on isolated actors (the ontological bestiary) and thus to a narrative script (atrocities are committed at the behest of individuals) which bequeaths us an impoverished normative orientation and restricted view of politically-meaningful subjects (combating atrocity means prosecuting evil individuals in international tribunals). An alternate set of wagers and scripts will lead us to challenge international law as an adequate forum for prevention and deterrence and draw our attention back to the underlying claims implicated by given modes of explanation.

Modes constrain the range of ways in which we might 'fill in' the elements, but do not determine them. More than one mode may see international legal institutions as the appropriate ethical-political space for challenging wartime sexual violence. More than one mode may make claims across elements based on an understanding of action as individualistic. Taking gender as an analytical wager and the military as a site of its power does not require that a *particular* story about soldiers be told, only that there is a space, even a pressure, set by the analytical wagers for *some* story about how the category of gender in the military is experienced over time. A different narrative gap would exist if our account focused on a culture or civilization instead of an institution. We would then have to tell stories about particular peoples and societies, rather than about particular people in particular organisational contexts.

Elements cohere together as composite forms to provide the substance of a critical explanation. Conceptualising how we study wartime sexual violence (or other phenomena) in this way better reflects the processes involved than a neat division of different feminist

epistemologies or ontologies. Again, this is not to say that epistemology and ontology as usually understood are irrelevant. The analysis of modes cannot but become embroiled in established debates around the character of knowledge and the ways in which claims can or should be justified. But we can discover something important about the modes taken by feminist accounts of war rape by looking at them through the lens of modes and their elements, and we may be better able to understand their contributions and lacunae by doing so.

### **The Cunning of Reasons: Instrumentality, Unreason, and Mythology**

Existing accounts of rape as a weapon of war have privileged *instrumentality*, *unreason* or *mythology* as modes of wartime sexual violence. Each mode carries its own analytical style in its elements, articulated through a focus on particular empirical regularities and a corresponding characterisation of instances of sexual violence. All have a plausibility when dealing with particular examples. However, the shifting nature of both the modes and of the phenomena under analysis resists any easy preference for one mode over others or reduction of them to three separate and wholly incommensurate hypotheses of sexual violence. The modes are coherent but not in the sense of being directly competing paradigms. They are partly overlapping, and ambiguous at the margins, but also apparently contradictory on a range of key analytical problems.

Where instrumentality trades in incentives, interests, dispossession and accumulation, unreason speaks of desire, bonding, esteem and sexuality and mythology conjures symbols, imaginaries and collective identities. These are not only different registers, but also differing ways of conceiving of power and the channels through which it manifests in the social, whether as political economy, libidinal economy or symbolic economy. Crudely put, patriarchy is made solid for instrumentality through the material benefits accrued to men by the subordination of women; for unreason through the persistence of a gender aggression either closely approximating sexual difference or unconsciously repeated in the processes of psychic cohesion; and for mythology through the perpetuation in cultural and social systems of norms and rituals of behaviour. The victims of rape thus appear as instrumentalised *objects* (used and discarded in the pursuit of other ends); the *object* bodies of unreason (defiled

as sources of deep and disgust for rapists) or mythologised *subjects* (others with an imagined group identity antagonistically opposed to that of the perpetrators).

Table 1: Some Examples of Modes of Critical Explanation, Elements and their Thematic and Empirical Foci

<i>Mode of Critical Explanation</i>	<b>Instrumentality</b>	<b>Unreason</b>	<b>Mythology</b>
<i>Analytical Wagers</i>	Rationality Materialism Individualism	Affect Psychology Sexuality	Symbolism Identity Collectivism
<i>Narrative Scripts</i>	Calculating Soldier-Strategist Victims as Objects	Aggressive Soldier-Sadist Victims as Abject	Habitual Soldier-Ritualist Victims as Subjects
<i>Normative Orientations</i>	Self-Interest Incentives and Disincentives	Trauma and Emotion Therapy	Beliefs Communal Reform
<i>Primary Thematic Foci</i>	Material Scarcity Greed Accumulation	Expressive Trauma Desire The Unconscious	Symbolic Difference Inter-Subjectivity Meaning
<i>Examples of Relevant Actors</i>	Military Units Political Class Businessmen	Individual Soldiers The Family Psychopaths and Opportunists	Militarised Discourses Socio-Cultural Institutions National Communities



## *Instrumentality*

Instrumentality signifies self-conscious means-ends reasoning at its purest. Put directly, rape is cheaper than bullets.<sup>x</sup> Such an approach is certainly feminist in the sense suggested above, namely in its uncovering of forms of violence previously excluded from the subject proper of international politics. Yet in many ways, it replicates the stress in much mainstream IR on rational individuals as maximising calculators. It recalls, within a gendered register, the 'Machiavelli Theorem' of one economist – that “no one will ever pass up an opportunity to gain a one-sided advantage by exploiting another party” (Hirshleifer, 1994:3). Its fundamental analytical wager is that of means-ends rationality, although this is frequently combined with an economic materialism and individualism. This is rationality as more than the idea that humans are conscious and respond to their environment in deliberative form. Instead, it places rationality as the mechanism of pursuing self-interested aims at the heart of explanation.<sup>xi</sup> Instrumentalist accounts converge on themes of scarcity, greed and accumulation, and so tend to summon groups coordinated to attain the attendant benefits, for example in the idea of military battalions carrying out sexual violence as part of a strategy to seize valuable minerals. Its narrative scripts are of calculating soldier-strategists who self-consciously *choose* to rape, and its normative orientation envisions agents unconstrained by ethical boundaries, and thus susceptible only to direct disincentives. For instrumentality, rape is a weapon of war because it is in the direct interests of perpetrators to use it for other ends. So wartime sexual violence becomes an extension of politics in the sense that it is one tool among many adopted by self-interested actors.

The view of sexual violence as instrument is strongest in accounts which foreground the material benefits of war rape. Given reigning ideas of rape as a private sexual act it is perhaps not surprising that much feminist research has stressed how it facilitates material appropriation through terror. Doing so establishes the analytical and political connections between violent sexual politics and the processes of military strategy, economic interest and political domination more conventionally placed within the field of high politics. A great deal of feminist work has taken an instrumentalist approach in the sense of identifying sexual violence as central, rather than tangential, in the practice of war, as having a

functional or intentional component (see Buss, 2009:148-149; Tickner, 1997:626). Rape thus defined is a rational technique and a calculated tool: “Torturers are trained – in military doctrine, chain of command, social psychology, and anatomies” (Enloe, 2000:129).

Empirical support for the material benefits thesis is drawn from the kinds of plans that embody a certain idea of masculine ruthlessness. In Liberia, reports of mass rape appear to have been sufficient to instil fear throughout local populations. Rape may even be a 'shrewder military tactic' than others since it is hard to prove and seldom prosecuted in war crimes tribunals (Cain, 1999:284; Sharlach, 2000:90). Military documents from Bosnia-Herzegovina appear to show a conscious military calculation of means and ends, stating for example that “[Muslim] morale, desire for battle, and will could be crushed more easily by raping women, especially minors and even children” (quoted in Salzman, 1998:35; see also Kaldor, 2007:58-59). Certainly, the cheapness of wartime sexual violence for an economic strategy of resource accumulation in the DRC is central for campaigners like Eve Ensler, who has commented that “rape is a very cheap method of warfare. You don't have to buy scud missiles or hand grenades” (National Public Radio, 2009; see also Ensler, 2009). The importance of military objectives and economic goods in the narrative scripts of why men rape brings these claims close to ideas of 'greed' as the fuel for civil war, with sexual violence the weapon of choice in the struggle for diamonds or coltan (see Collier, 2000; Cramer 2002; Berdal, 2005).<sup>xii</sup>

Rape is a weapon of war in an instrumentalist mode because it is the most effective tool for the aims pursued. Accordingly, instrumentalism can accommodate a number of possible ends which rape serves (Card, 1996). What it maintains is the idea of a conscious and goal-directed tactic (a short-term policy related to a particular circumstance) or strategy (a more sustained mode of fighting directed towards a more final goal). In practice, this almost always means an economic end. This may amount to a claim that individual soldiers rape for money and so fit the kind of model common in rational choice economics, with 'private goods' extracted by individual agents with a regularity “robust to the passage of time and to cultural and ideological variance” (Butler, Gluch and Mitchell, 2007:671). But instrumentality is also conducive to thinking in terms of the class basis of sexual violence,

with men acting in more collective economic interests to extract wealth or to maintain unequal economic relationships over particular groups of women understood as a productive resource (see Hartsock, 2004). Rape thus becomes a weapon for the maintenance of a particular kind of material power, with other dimensions being secondary, if visible at all.

Talking about rape in instrumentalist terms has certain limiting effects for the interpretation of what it means for sexual violence to be a tool of organised violence (Buss, 2009:160). It establishes certain understandings of how social action is carried out, of who the relevant sides are in a situation of war and/or genocide, and who gets to count as an audible or legible witness. For example, structuring explanation around the aim to acquire material benefits would seem to involve an idea of exteriority in that it is particular situations which create incentives, which in turn shape behaviour. An interior space remains, but this scripts the subject as a calculator, a mechanism for interpreting the data of the world, rather than the source of affective charge. The accompanying materialism posits actors driven by imperatives of accumulation and so invokes a normative orientation towards males as primarily or overwhelmingly rational beings who may respond more readily to military force, the threat of prosecution or institutional constraints than to education about the experience of rape and its long-term effects on survivors.

### *Unreason*

Unreason signifies that which lies outside the realm of the self-conscious sovereign individual and his coherently-plotted, goal-directed action. It can imply irrationality in the sense of actions that do not benefit, or even harm, an actor, but it is not chaotic or random. Instead, it suggests the dimensions of behaviour that escape self-reflection and which defy incentives. Sexual violence in these accounts takes the form of a drive or a bond, biological or social psychological. Unreason's analytical wagers are those of emotional and expressive being and of variegated and contested internal mental states. This gives rise to a focus on themes of trauma, affect and the (perhaps collective) unconscious. The relevant actors thus become not so much institutions or organisations as individuals led to certain acts by a confluence of events and internal urges. Its narrative scripts revolve around a psyche opaque

to itself. Consequently war rapists often appear to unreason as confused, frustrated or angry. Unreason's normative orientation addresses the conditions that perpetuate such psychological states. At the limit, this implies that rape cannot be changed by policy but must be accepted as a kind of persistent eruption. This can include essentialist views of male desire which come close to some non-feminist explanations for rape, although most accounts from unreason establish a more subtle interpretation of psychology and its link to biology. For unreason, rape is a weapon of war because it is the result of desire and fear faced by perpetrators in brutalising situations of affect and trauma. Wartime sexual violence is here politicised in the sense of combating a divide between apparently 'private' desires (such as lust) and 'public' events (the systematic destruction wrought by war) and in seeing emotions as causes and consequences of political processes.

Unreason is purest in work which stresses the expressive role of sexual violence. This is rape as an over-flowing of frustration. Among its motifs is the idea of sexual abuse as an act of group cohesion among men (Bourgois, 2003; Goldstein, 2001:365-366). It notes the frequent presence of alcohol in rape as well as racist abuse, all "typically conducted in a hands-on orgy of bloodletting" (Boose, 2002:74, see also Ehrenreich, 1997:11-12). Related justifications based on the logic of inevitable expressive unreason ('this is just what soldiers do') have been critiqued by Susan Brownmiller but have also been implicated in her much-quoted view that rape is "one of the satisfactions of conquest, like a boot in the face" (Brownmiller, 1994:181). The most brutal and shocking acts associated with wartime sexual violence – the severing of body parts, mutilation and 'extra insults' in addition to rape (Bjørnlund, 2008:18-26; Bourke, 1999:188-190; Sharlach, 2000:95) – seem to fit with the mode of unreason, especially where they are accompanied by evidence of pleasurable release for perpetrators. Practices of sexual defilement suggest a deep disgust and horror motivating rapists (Diken and Laustsen, 2005), details which evoke rape as carnivalesque 'laboratories in total domination' (Bjørnlund, 2009:24). Unreason assembles narratives of celebratory and transgressive violence, psychopathology, perverse homo-sociality and the kind of criminal opportunism that can find no justification in a financial reward.

Unreason also resonates particularly with common views of rape in 'peacetime' contexts. Although there is an overlap with mythological explanations in the sense that such behaviour is supported by cultural beliefs and rape myths (Bourke, 2007:21-88), unreason promotes a narrative script of the rapist as a certain type of individual, one empowered to sexual violence by elements of their personality, including entitlement, violence, control and anger (Rozée and Koss, 2001:299-301). The sexed body and its affective states are centre-stage, as are the emotional transitions which escape the calculating logic of instrumentality, for example in diagnosing violence as the result of grief mobilised as rage (Ehrenreich, 1997:139). Although the mode of unreason need not imply any trans-historical sexual essence, it does invoke a particular view of rape as related to sex and sexuality, as in the claim that “[r]apists possess a subconscious knowledge about human vulnerability acquired through the centrality of our sexuality to our personhood” (du Toit, 2009:298).

This aggression and sadism may be a directed heterosexuality (lust as an efficient cause of rape) or a more amorphous homosociality (the production of masculine sexuality through processes of male bonding). Both are implicated in Catharine MacKinnon's well-known argument that the saturation of Yugoslavia with pornography before the outbreak of war meant that “a whole population of men [was] primed to dehumanize women and to enjoy inflicting assault sexually” (MacKinnon, 1994:77). This is a script of almost automated mimesis, in which watching pornography produces rapists through a psychic infection, passed on celluloid and video tape (see also MacKinnon, 1989; Schauer, 1987:764-767).

In the case of unreason, sexual violence can be a tool, and a weapon in and of war, *without* it serving instrumentalist ends:

“When a victorious army rapes, the sheer *intoxication of the triumph* is only part of the act. After the fact, the rape may be viewed as part of a recognizable pattern of national terror and subjugation. I say 'after the fact' because the *original impulse to rape* does not need a sophisticated political motivation beyond a general disregard for the bodily integrity of women” (Brownmiller, 1975:37, emphasis added).

So sexual violence remains political, collective and fundamentally linked to war as a practice, but the apparently instrumental benefits are now rendered not as causes, but as consequences and afterthoughts. Rape is still about power, but now in a sense which includes the dimension of sexuality and its attendant taboos in a much clearer way.

In contrast to the exteriority of instrumentality, unreason relies on a fractured interiority. Unreason contains both the joys of war (war as game, war as psychopathy and war as festival) and behaviour in war as trauma or psychological coercion (drugs as an enforced lubricant to sexual violence, the kidnapping and brutalisation of children and the fearful lashing out of men with guns). Consequently, its normative orientation becomes similarly fractured between an outright condemnation and palpable disgust at the pleasure taken by protagonists in sexual violence on the one hand, and a pitying recognition of trauma on the other, directing us to move away from a model in which the actors themselves feature so prominently to one which asks questions about how any human being could become so damaged as to enact these fantasies on the bodies of others in the first place.

### *Mythology*

In some senses, mythology is a mediating term between instrumentality and unreason, curtailing profit maximisation within socio-cultural bounds and providing a symbolic framework for drives. But it is also much wider, embracing discourses, collective belief systems and ideologies. It includes not only doctrines and religion, but the background assumptions that are constructed through human communities, even of “rape as an identity-producing practice” (Hansen, 2001:60). This is the view of sexual violence as shaped by cultural idioms, embodied in a *habitus* of masculinity or the expression of long-standing schemas of the body and of gender (Bourdieu, 2001; Taylor, 1999). Mythology's analytical wagers are those of collective identity and the primacy of human communities. Thematically it concentrates on socially meaningful difference and subjectivities grounded in the imperatives and limits of a community or a particular institution, which then become the relevant objects and actors. Narrative scripts here frame rapists not as self-interested or as acting out personal desires, but as performers of socio-cultural ritual. Ethical and political options are thus shaped to suggest solutions in terms of changes made to the communities or

institutions in question, for example through political campaigns contesting collective misogynistic beliefs or transformations in the forms of recruitment and training undergone by soldiers. For mythology, rape is a weapon of war because it is selected as appropriate behaviour by a social group which sets the self-understandings of perpetrators. Wartime sexual violence is a continuation of political power in a more dispersed and collective sense, designating some as legitimate and others as illegitimate depending on their circulation within the rules and norms of the group. Rape is an extension and manifestation of the political unconscious.

Mythology embodies that feminist concern well articulated by Simone de Beauvoir when she argued that the 'othering' of women was not only about economic interest but also 'ontological and moral pretensions': "Once the subject seeks to assert himself, the Other, who limits and denies him, is none the less a necessity to him: he attains himself only through the reality which he is not, which is something other than himself" (de Beauvoir, 1997:171). For Andrea Dworkin, the word 'mythology' itself was central to any dissection of patriarchy: "We are *programmed* by the culture as surely as rats are programmed to make the arduous way through the scientist's maze, and that programming operates at every level of choice and action" (Dworkin, 1974:155, emphasis in original).

The view of wartime sexual violence as a symbolic reflection of masculinist mythology is strongest in those accounts that stress the ways in which women are treated as signs exchanged among men. Just as there is a persistent patriarchal view of women as 'beautiful souls', sexualised aggression can be related not so much to the particular material rewards of the act as to the imaginary role of certain women as representatives of a nation to be destroyed or a community to be punished, and of rape as a violation that only counts as a violation in some collective sense because of patriarchal norms of family and custom (MacKenzie, 2010; Elshtain, 1995; Anand, 2008; Žarkov, 2007). Ruth Seifert, for one, accepts institutional explanations of sexual violence but also introduces culture both as that which rape aims at destroying and as the 'background' to rape orgies, a set of ideas which generate their content. On this account, women may be raped "because they are the objects of a fundamental hatred that characterizes the cultural unconscious and is actualized in

times of crisis” (Seifert, 1994:57-66, 55), bodies on which a particular intersubjectivity acts itself out in carnivalesque form.

Just as women can function as symbols within a war system, so too can sexual violence serve to reproduce systems of patriarchy. As a way of acting that reflects the socially symbolic place of women, rape's fundamental function in this trend of explanation is perpetuate a system of collective being beyond the bounds of mere interest or desire. The mythological mode is, then, distinguished from a material benefits explanation by the role of ideology, which suggests that individuals and communities are targeted not for their resources but *because of their identities*, even if such attacks can result in political or material advantage for perpetrators. A similarly strong way of thinking about wartime sexual violence in mythological terms links it explicitly to culture, where brutalisation mirrors culturally specific tropes, such as impalement and crucifixion in Bosnia or the systematic cutting of tendons and violation of bodily 'flows' in Rwanda (Boose, 2002:75-89; Taylor, 1999).

Mythology need not condemn whole cultures in a way that buttresses retrograde ideas of patriarchal others or inherently misogynistic civilizational constellations. It may just as well refer to specific institutional contexts and the particular practices hegemonic there (as in Cohn, 1987). For example, in the mid-1990s Madeline Morris examined the ‘rape differential’ (the gap between civilian and military crime rates) between the actions of American soldiers in times of peace and in times of war. While she found that rates of military violent crimes were lower than civilian ones in peacetime, the propensity of soldiers to rape in wartime leapt to 260% of the civilian rate (the comparative rate of other crimes remained lower than that of civilians) (Morris, 1996:666). Morris rejected the idea that all-male groups were automatically implicated in higher rape rates and further argued that higher rape rates in wartime conferred no strategic benefit in military terms (Morris, 1996:678, 762), preferring instead to see the higher levels of rape as a consequence of the particular masculinist practices characteristic of the US military. In other words, she decoded military rape as the product not of instrumentality or unreason, but of mythology. The institutional culture, not resource pressures or suppressed lust, inculcated a set of beliefs



that led to heightened levels of wartime sexual violence (see also particularly Eriksson Baaz and Stern, 2009).

In the mode of mythology, rape is again a weapon and a tool, but not one that belongs to individuals or which is used for accumulation or to release sexual frustration. Instead, it is a tool for a particular *community*. It obeys the internal requirements and limits set by a particular socio-symbolic order. Resources matter in sustaining and reproducing a group, but that does not mean that all acts in war are orientated towards that end or even that violence should be understood as an accumulatory strategy in any setting. Indeed, following the norms of a group may be counter-productive in terms of material well-being, and may involve *restrictions* on pleasure as well as the licence to carry out particular socially-sanctioned acts. Rape is a tool of power again, but now in a more variable sense, requiring attention to the legitimacy of certain actors in context and to shared ideas of appropriateness and taboo.

In identifying context-specific belief systems, mythology moves to an ontological politics and set of analytical wagers based on the community (whether political, social or institutional) and the particular practices it legitimates. Consequently, explanation does not rely either on the external situation or the personal traumas of rapists but on the collective and its rules. Mythology's narrative scripts thus focus on symbolic authority, whether in terms of a kind of demand made on actors to enact certain tropes or because it identifies an external community to be destroyed via the example of its feminine embodiments.

### *How Modes Matter*

These differences in feminist accounts of war rape do not directly correspond to debates between positivists and constructivists or between qualitative and quantitative approaches to data. Nor do they merely map onto feminist empiricist, standpoint feminist or feminist postmodernist strands of theory. Given that the conditions for legitimate knowledge have been the subject of major debate ever since feminism's contested entry into the discipline (Keohane, 1989; Weber, 1994; Tickner, 1997; Hutchings 2008) it is not surprising that subsequent diagnosis has returned to these questions. But the contrasts between instrumentality, unreason and mythology operate at another level. As sophisticated analyses

of philosophy of social science within IR have repeatedly stressed, a philosophical position on epistemology, ontology and methodology does not, *and cannot*, give rise to a substantive theory of how and why certain events occur (Jackson, 2010: 26-28, 205-207; Joseph, 2007:345). If its distinguishing features are “asking feminist questions and building knowledge from women's lives” (Tickner, 2005:4; see also Enloe, 1996), then feminist IR itself cannot be defined by a unitary methodological perspective.

Instead, we should look to the *kinds of research questions asked*, the ways in which *the answers are variably constructed* and the *emancipatory political commitments* built into them. There are manifest and latent stories about what feminist analysis does (Soreanu, 2010:383), just as there are manifest and latent stories about how feminism takes on and transforms categories inherited from elsewhere (Harding, 1986; Weigman, 2002). Further, as Mary Caprioli argues (2004:256-257), there is a real risk of feminism being seen – by both proponents and detractors – through the Popperian 'Myth of the Framework', where it is assumed that real differences in approaches are projected 'all the way down', such that there can be no commonality or communication with paradigmatic others.

Claims made by different feminist modes have typically been united under the proposition that rape is a weapon of war. This phraseology, although politically potent, covers for significant ambiguity in the understanding of what a weapon is and how it can be deployed.<sup>xiii</sup> When considered in terms of instrumentality, unreason and mythology, the tensions between different possible explanations are distributed in a new way. In some cases the modes are straightforwardly contradictory and thus force a choice between political options. For example, it has been argued both that rape happens because the militaries in question are extremely hierarchical organisations in which troops obey specific orders to rape (instrumentality) and that sexual violence is opportunistic, occurring because the militaries in question are *insufficiently* hierarchical, leading troops to ignore orders and carry out their own wishes (unreason). In the latter example, efforts to strengthen and train militaries in conflict zones will decrease rape. In the former, such efforts will only increase the effectiveness of the masculinised war machine (see Leiby, 2009).<sup>xiv</sup> And viewing the military as a site of mythology may require neither increases nor decreases in levels of

hierarchy but instead point to the necessity of shifts in institutional culture. More generally, military solutions might decrease sexual violence or increase it, depending on the underlying assumptions of the mode in question.

A plausible instrumentalist account might also suggest that rape is only employed in war in so far as it secures obedience. But if the reason for this compliance is that women are symbols among men, what grounds are there for suspecting that the intended male anguish of defeat will not lead to re-doubled efforts at resistance?<sup>xv</sup> Since observers are so often killed immediately after the spectacle itself (Engle, 2005:788), any strategic 'benefits' of sexual violence would seem to be immediately squandered. Sexual violence may simply be counter-productive in instrumentalist terms, a problem that also affects the study of extreme violence in general (Kalyvas, 2006:144). For example, the atrocities of Nanking do not seem to have been militarily successful but instead galvanised Chinese patriotism and animated worldwide anti-Japanese propaganda (Goldstein, 2001:367; Brownmiller, 1975:41).

More commonly, different modes of critical explanation will not crystallise as distinct policy options. Rather, understanding sexual violence in terms of one or other form of critical explanation will shape the priorities and forms of political intervention adopted. This is Engle's point when she criticises some feminist activism for contributing to an understanding of war rape in terms of ethnicity and sex in a way which diverts attention from wider patterns of gender oppression (Engle, 2005: 814-815). In similar terms, Carol Harrington (2010) traces the adoption of an 'abolitionist' strategy for politicising sexual violence to the consolidation of a technocratic and trauma-based model of humanitarian intervention. In both cases, forms of feminist argument that closely parallel modes of critical explanation as set out here mattered both in their influence over concrete forms of anti-rape politics and in the framing of realistic future options. For Engle, it was an uncritical adoption of mythological explanations (war rape as ethnically-motivated group ideology) which allowed a narrow portrayal of Serbian male identity as the problem. For Harrington, an individualist form of unreason (women as isolated sufferers of trauma) separates out victims of rape from wider patterns of gender inequality and so paradoxically weakens anti-rape politics.

Although distinct, instrumentality, unreason and mythology are not straight-forwardly incompatible. Modes meet at borders of common interest: instrumentality and unreason share an interest in questions of desire, (ir)rationality, interiority and control; unreason and mythology both require an analysis of the psycho-social divide and the complex relations of subjectivity and inter-subjectivity; and mythology and instrumentality recognise the functional and collective aspects of violence. This is at least partly a consequence of the kind of 'rational reconstruction' necessary to set out the three modes as doing unacknowledged work in feminist explanations (see Jackson, 2010:38-39). Moving between the ideal-types of the modes and the specific, detailed accounts of how particular feminists have constructed their work highlights those areas in which elements bind together and those in which overlaps are more complicated.

But the resultant ambiguity is not simply that of an intellectual menu from which aspects can be chosen at whim, since the kinds of amalgamated modes of critical explanation that result differ in politically and analytically consequential ways. The overlapping yet coherent character of modes means that specific examples of rape in war can be made amenable to more than one mode of critical explanation. This poses a problem common to theory, scientific or otherwise, of how to determine which pattern of reasoning provides the most plausible account of sexualised aggression in conflict. This is the problem of the gap between modes of inquiry and modes of action, between discourses of explanation and the behaviours to which they refer, however closely they may be linked in the process of interpretation. Evaluating feminist accounts of wartime sexual violence will thus require further stages of contention and articulation. But this is no more challenging in the case of rape than it is when we discuss the character of the nation-state or the role of democracy in global politics. As in other subfields of IR, determining how things happen and why evades any easy resolution.

Accepting this analysis nevertheless leaves some questions unanswered. First, there is much more to be said about the potential for revisiting and revising existent accounts of wartime sexual violence. We are only now beginning to think seriously about the large variation in the extent and character of rape in war (Wood, 2008). Perhaps the differences in modes

arises as a particular consequence of the case-by-case approach, with those working on Bosnia or Darfur stressing military commands and strategy, while students of the Rwandan genocide are more alive to mythological aspects and accounts of wartime sexual violence quicker to identify the frustration and pleasures taken by individual men as the running theme. If so, this may lead us to abandon any hope of a general account of wartime sexual violence in favour of more specific, historically-located claims, or it might encourage us to trace connective elements across space and time.

Second, attention to the analytical-political character of feminist analysis suggests further exploration of how this tension works in practice. Since this is a constitutive tension, this does not mean abolishing it, but better understanding how the different elements of an approach are linked and the impact they have on each other. In some cases, this may be grounds for revisiting assumptions and re-evaluating them. Can we afford an appeal to law enforcement as disincentive if analysis locates the causes of war rape elsewhere? And how might the political positions involved in feminism provide a standpoint for the reconceptualisation of analytical options?

## **Conclusions**

If agreement that rape is a weapon of war can nevertheless entail radically different ideas of why wartime violence happens, what forms it takes, and what can be done about it, then understanding the character of those different ideas becomes important. Feminist accounts instantiate modes of critical explanation: *modes* because their grammars and styles have a structure and coherence; *explanation* because this coherence is not merely political or descriptive, but provides an analytical account of why certain behaviours occur and how they lead to certain events and not others; and *critical* explanation because they do not assume that the processes identified are deterministic and instead see them as social relations and products amenable, or at least partly open, to critique and change.

Theory, especially feminist and critical theory, has a politics as well as explanatory dimension. Its transformative potential is closely related to the capacity to conjure a world through the work of assemblage. In the case of wartime sexual violence, feminist theory has

advanced a wide and convincing range of understandings of the character, cause and impact of sexualised aggression, especially when viewed in contrast to non-feminist attempts at explanation. It has frequently done so with reference to the idea of rape as a weapon of war, which has been fundamental to preserving the status of wartime sexual violence as *social behaviour*, as structural, persistent and functional. It is “too widespread, too frequent and seemingly too calculated and effective *not* to be part of a larger political scheme and hence a weapon of war” (Skjelsbæk, 2001:115).

But the political has many forms and weapons can serve many purposes. This paper has suggested three such modes of critical explanation – instrumentality, unreason and mythology – through which thinking about wartime sexual violence has been organised. It has set out how the modes differ and why that matters. In doing so, it has developed an account both of the tension between political and analytical critique in feminist IR and of the link between specific problems faced by feminist accounts of wartime sexual violence and any and all attempts to understand social behaviour.

Thinking in terms of feminist modes of critical explanation consequently encourages further work in an unfolding research agenda. Exposing submerged disagreements thus has heuristic as well as explanatory value: it clarifies the ways in which scholars may talk past each other while appearing to speak in common terms.<sup>xvi</sup> Reflecting on the forms taken by our arguments as scholars and activists, and the various commitments concealed within them, allows for a renewed examination of direction and purpose. Sexual violence often seems, in its horror, to conform vividly to Primo Levi 's diagnosis of 'useless violence': “an end in itself, with the sole purpose of creating pain, occasionally having a purpose, yet always redundant, always disproportionate to the purpose itself” (Levi, 1989:83). There may instead be many purposes and ends, and many possible reasons, if no satisfying moral resolutions, beneath our standard accounts of rape as a weapon of war.

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- i Interview with author. See International Alert, 2010.
- ii The phrase is from Enloe, 2000:108.
- iii See Carver, Cochran and Squires, 1998; Carpenter, 2002; Carver, Zalewski, Kinsella and Carpenter, 2003; Squires and Weldes, 2007; and Hutchings, 2008 for the contours of the dispute around the definition of feminist IR.
- iv Terminological boundaries are porous and unstable, which means that some may interpret what follows as insufficiently feminist while others find it excessively so. This is in the nature of contested intellectual projects.
- v The phrase is from Wiegman, 2002:18.
- vi See Law, 2004:42-50 for the distinction between coherence (the way a particular form of understanding hangs together as an assemblage) and consistency (a stronger requirement based on how different elements of a theory work together logically).
- vii Although the quote is from Glynos and Howarth, 'style of reasoning' is Ian Hacking's term. Glynos and Howarth themselves use this background to elaborate an approach to logics of critical analysis. Modes can also be read in this way, but I have chosen not to call them logics at this stage to avoid misunderstandings or complex comparison with the ways in which 'logics' are already discussed in IR (see Müller, 2004; Pouliot, 2008; and Hopf, 2010).
- viii This is a significant and complex point, but one which I do not explore here due to constraints of space. The question of how tensions between feminism as an academic or knowledge practice and as a political project have been extensively rehearsed. See, for example, Brown, 2005 and Wiegman, 2002.
- ix I am indebted to George Lawson for suggesting this analogy.
- x The phrase is from Sydney Morning Herald, 2009 but has also been used by Amnesty International in their campaigns against rape as a weapon of war.
- xi Other modes can be seen as attributing a kind of 'rationality' (for example, in the potential usefulness for commanders of expressive group bonding), but this comes closer to functionalist explanation than instrumentalism. Again, what distinguishes instrumentalism's view of rationality is its *conscious, self-interested and means-ends orientation*. I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for emphasising this point.
- xii This is an important link and one that illustrates the link between the underlying logics of feminist accounts and those discernable in other non-feminist works.
- xiii I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for pushing me to clarify this point.
- xiv Of course, it is possible that both explanations are valid in different situations.
- xv The phrase is from Brownmiller, 1975:38.
- xvi I am grateful to George Lawson for persuading me to re-emphasise this point.