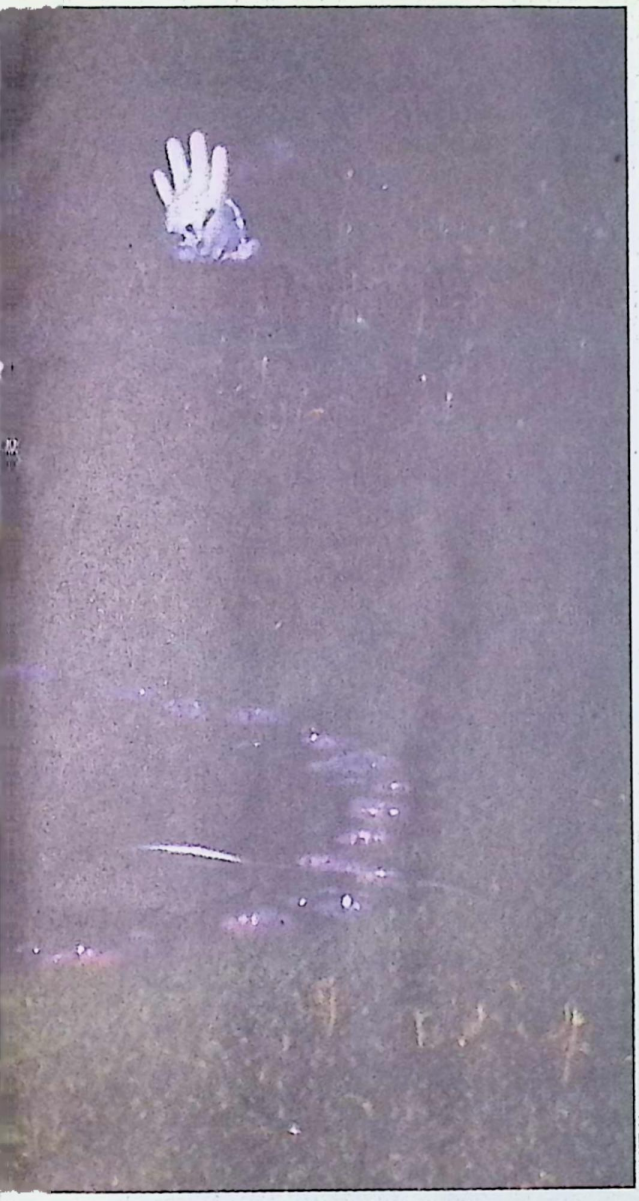


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War as gendered

Throughout history, war has been gendered, having different implications and consequences for women and men. Gender norms are used to shape the war system and vice versa, by which men are the chosen combatants taught to equate "manhood" with toughness under fire and women are given "feminine war support roles". Gender also plays a role in ethnonationalism, where the nation and the state are often gendered female and male respectively, with "women's bodies as symbols of the nation, markers of the in-group, and national 'property' to be defended and protected by men".[1]

During times of war, men and women are injured and die different deaths based on the physical differences between the sexes and the different meanings culturally ascribed to male and female bodies.[2] The immediate aftermath and ultimate legacy of war also plays out differently for the sexes. Women, who are considered to be carriers of culture and their bodies as symbols of the nation to be defended by men, are especially vulnerable in situations of battle, where their very identities as women come under threat. Through the common tactic of rape, women have become weapons of war, where rape has been used as a means of humiliating the enemy and breaking their spirit. It has also been employed as a tool of genetic imperialism and ethnic cleansing by impregnating women to bear the enemy's children, and been a mechanism of genocide, as in the cases of Bangladesh, Rwanda, Yugoslavia and Sudan.

During Bangladesh's independence movement against Pakistan in 1971, this strategy was adopted by the Pakistani army, as a result of which, between 200,000 and 400,000 women were raped and made sex slaves in Pakistani military camps[3]. (It may be mentioned that non-Bengalis in East Pakistan were also said to have been killed and raped, but that is beyond the scope of this article). While the target was said to be largely Hindu women, Bengali women, irrespective of religion, caste or class came under the attack of the West Pakistan military aided by local collaborators, who were being fought by the guerrilla forces, the Mukti Bahini. Women from the ages of seven to seventy-five were raped, gang-raped and either killed or taken away by the military and made to become sex slaves of the officers and soldiers for the duration of the war. Even as the Pakistani forces surrendered in December 1971, some reportedly claimed that they were leaving their "seed" behind in the women they had impregnated through the mass rape.[4]

Women as weapons of war

Historically, the rape of women during times of war has been seen as a " 'by-product of war', a matter of indiscipline, of soldiers revved up by war, needy, and briefly, 'out of control' "[5]. Research over the last several decades, however, has explored the broader issue of sexual violence in wartime and the gendered nature of war. Women have been seen to be targeted in military conflicts, due to misogyny, combined with the fact that they are seen as carriers of culture, and their bodies "as both territory to be conquered and vehicles through which the