

## GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE DURING THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE

An Inclusive Perspective

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**Abstract** This paper analyses atrocities during the Armenian genocide through a gendered lens. Asking to what extent men and women have been differently affected by gender-based violence, Carpenter's framework is applied that specifically recognises men's often-overlooked victimisation of gender-based violence. The application concludes that men were, just like women, victims of gender-based violence during the Armenian genocide, but that the rationales behind the targeting of women and men greatly differed. It follows that, while Carpenter is right in arguing that gender-based violence against women and men cannot be prevented separately from each other, as the gender roles naturalising the violence depend on one another, the mainstreaming of gender in atrocity-prevention and treatment should still safeguard female-tailored sexual violence prevention and treatments, given their remaining higher victimisation and the additional underlying rationales for their victimisation that do not apply to men.

**Keywords:** *Armenian genocide, Atrocity-prevention, Gender-based violence.*

## I Introduction

Recently, a Foreign Policy article argued for the need to analyse genocide through a gendered lens to improve its prevention (Prey & Rosenberg, 2021). Prey and Rosenberg (2021) emphasise that contrary to misperception, “a gendered analysis is not synonymous with crimes against women, nor is it only concerned with acts of sexual violence” (para.2), it seeks to understand how gender roles inform the different victimisations between women and men.

To follow this call for a gender-inclusive analysis, this paper draws on the framework by Carpenter (2006) on gender-based violence in conflict that specifically recognises men as targets and applies it to the Armenian genocide. This paper, therefore, aims at lending support to Carpenter’s framework while filling the academic gap on gender-based violence against males during the genocide. The research question asks: *To what extent have women and men during the Armenian genocide been differently affected by gender-based violence, and how does this influence Carpenter’s implications for preventing atrocities?* Given the paper’s limited scope and the extensive coverage of female victimisation during the genocide, this paper analyses only two types of gender-based violence against women: rape and forced marriages. After outlining Carpenter’s framework, it will be applied to the Armenian genocide to analyse and compare men’s and women’s victimisation on the individual level and its instrumentalization on the macro level. I conclude that men were, just like women, victims of gender-based violence during the Armenian genocide, but that the rationales behind the targeting of women and men greatly differed. As the victimisation of each gender is informed by gender roles that are relational to the other gender, Carpenter’s (2006) claim that the analysis of gender-based violence against men and women in conflict for prevention purposes is ‘inseparable’ (p.83) is supported.

## 2 Theoretical Framework

Concerned by the neglect of gender-based violence against male civilians during conflict, Carpenter (2006) defines gender-based violence inclusively. Gender-based violence is “violence that is targeted at women or men because of their sex and/or their socially constructed gender roles” (p.83). Socially attributed gender roles motivate certain violent acts against one gender rather than against the other, as they provide justification for their use and naturalise the act. While Carpenter (2006) proposes several forms of male-directed gender-based violence, this paper focuses on sex-selective massacres and sexual violence.

Sex-selective massacres are, in Carpenter's (2006) perspective, gender-based violence. Across conflicts, adult men make up the greatest proportion of deadly atrocities. Carpenter explains the singling out of adult men for execution across conflicts on two accounts. First, men are socially constructed as potential combatants. Not only does this lead to men being primarily targeted if a group feels threatened, but this conceptualisation also justifies their targeting as legitimate. Second, the gendered hierarchy between men as the head of the family and women as the property of men explains sex-selective massacres. If one aims at eliminating a specific group, men need to be eliminated as the basis for destroying the group's cohesion while women are regarded as passive. Related to this is the socially constructed understanding that only men are the carriers of ethnicity while women are metaphorically compared to 'vessels' (p.89) who can reproduce any ethnicity that they are implanted with.

Carpenter (2006) outlines types of sexual violence that target men. In doing so, she pioneers the work of a group of scholars, like Jones (2006), Sivakumaran (2007), Linos (2009), and Christian et al. (2011), that aims to theorise the male victimisation of sexual violence in conflict, in contrast to the dominant academic focus on female victimisation. Carpenter aims at differentiating the impact of sexual violence against men. First, men fall victim to rape and sexual mutilation. Citing forms of sexual mutilation, anal rape, and forced sexual services to guards in detention camps during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Carpenter shows that sexual violence is not exclusive to women during conflict. These acts, in Carpenter's, but also Linos' (2009) view, aim at feminising the victim and thereby humiliating conquered men. Second, men are secondarily sexually victimised by being forced to witness sexual violence performed on female relatives. One rightfully needs to analyse this as an intrusion into women's bodily integrity instead of the violation of men's property, however, only focusing on women's affectedness risks neglecting the psychological trauma it can impose on men. Acknowledging that this secondary victimisation is strategically used as a psycho-social attack on men of a group, she argues that "addressing the psycho-social consequences could undermine the utility of rape as a strategy of war and thus serve as a prevention mechanism" (Carpenter, p.97).

The main implication for the prevention of gender-based violence in Carpenter's (2006) view is that gender-based violence against women cannot be addressed separately from the forms that men are targeted by. She calls for a full mainstreaming of gender to optimise the prevention of gender-based violence.

### 3 Analysis

During the Armenian genocide, the Young Turk dictatorship almost entirely cleansed the Ottoman Empire of Armenians with 1 to 1.5 million being killed (Bjørnlund, 2009). Generally, the Armenian genocide comprised two stages. The first entailed the specific targeting of men, starting with the disarmament of Armenian soldiers in the Ottoman military in early 1915 (Derderian, 2015), their execution (Dadrian, 1994), the selective massacres of men in villages, and the arrest and massacre of Armenian intellectuals (Bloxham, 2003). The second stage comprised of deportations. With many men already having been killed, women and children in particular suffered from dehydration, starvation, disease, rape, and other direct forms of violence during the ‘death marches’ to concentration camps in the Syrian desert, leading to only approximately one-fourth of deportees having survived (Adalian, 2012).

The identification of two stages by Bjørnlund (2009), which affected disproportionately one gender each, already implies that men were victims of gender-based violence. Referring to Carpenter’s conceptualisation of sex-selective massacres, their realisation during the Armenian genocide is unquestionable. Dadrian (1994) verifies the systematic encircling and massacres of Armenian soldiers in the Ottoman military in more than four provinces under the pretext of having been selected for work on battalions and road constructions. Overall, approximately 200,000 Armenian soldiers were killed this way (Bjørnlund, 2009). The deliberate massacres of men specifically in the first stage prove that they were targeted for being men. The primary selection of soldiers supports the first rationale as cited by Carpenter (2006), namely the elimination of potential combatants to eliminate the threat. The disarming of soldiers and the search for weapons in Armenian villages (Holslag, 2015) highlights the apprehension stemming from the perceived potential for resistance among Armenian men. Their social construction as more combat-able than women thus rendered them more vulnerable to violence in the form of massacres.

During the genocide, the second rationale arguably played an important role: Men were understood as the carriers of the Armenian ethnicity. This social belief was long enshrined in Ottoman law which ‘protected’ Turk ethnicity, as Armenian men were not allowed to marry Muslim women, while Muslim men could marry women of any ethnicity (Ekmekçioğlu, 2015). With the elimination of the Armenian ethnicity as the goal, the Young Turk government aimed primarily at killing men capable of its reproduction. This rationale is reflected in other systemic patterns. During searches of villages, civilian men were separated from their families and murdered (Harrelson, 2009). During deportations, males

above the age of twelve who had yet survived were separated from the deportees and shot (Maksudyan, 2018). The fact that the revealed ten commandments secretly drafted by the government required all males under 50 to be exterminated as a fifth agenda point, while girls and children should be Islamised (Dadrian, 1994), leaves no doubt that men's perceived capacity to transcend ethnicity was the reason for their selective massacres. Thus, their selective execution was seen as essential in pushing the genocidal agenda and rendering the rest of the Armenian population more vulnerable to Turk perpetration.

But males were also sexually victimised. Analysing sexualised killings within Carpenter's framework of sexual mutilation, male corpses were put on display revealing their sexual organs cut off (Holslag, 2015). Red-hot skewers were run through males' genitals to kill them (Bjørnlund, 2009). As these acts were performed during their killing, one can argue that they served perpetrators in humiliating and demonstrating their omnipotence over Armenian men while Armenians were made impotent. Holslag (2015) further argues that it is a way to strip men from their identity because especially in patriarchal societies like the Armenian and the Turk, identities were strongly attached to one's masculinity.

Next to direct sexual violence, men were widely forced to witness their female relatives' rapes before and during deportations (Ekmekcioglu, 2013). As Carpenter depicts this as a psycho-social attack on men, she complements Derderian (2005) in arguing that these acts destroy men's confidence as protectors of their families. While no accounts of traumatic consequences for males were recorded, the fact that these acts were shortly followed by execution suggests that the acts did not aim at traumatising, but at committing the last act of dominance over men, by dominating 'their' women.

Having examined the male victimisation of gender-based violence during the genocide, it is important to also assess female victimisation. This comparison will allow for a comprehensive understanding and provide insights into the implications of Carpenter's (2006) framework. Overall, gender-based violence was committed against women in many forms, but rape was recognised as one of the most systematic ones (Gzoyan & Galustyan, 2021). Rape is defined as 'a physical invasion of a sexual nature, committed on a person under [coercive] circumstances' (Harrelson, 2009, p.171). While Armenian women and girls were raped before the deportations, its perpetration became most systematic during the deportations, as deportees' guards became their constant abusers, while Kurdish populations were notified of the deportees' arrivals in advance for them to rob and rape women and girls (Harrelson, 2009). Why were Armenian women systemically raped? It is often argued that women's rape is a message symbolising the powerlessness of the community's men in protecting 'their' women and

therefore contributes to communal destruction (Derderian, 2005). However, this was not the primary rationale, given that most men were already dead and hence no longer receptive to such messaging.

Instead, this paper would argue that the use of rape against women was two-fold. First, women were regarded as inferior beings who could be used by perpetrators, now that they belonged to an ‘infidel’ ethnicity as propagated by the government (Sanasarian, 1989). This rationale is further illustrated in the case of forced marriages. Second, through rape, female Armenians could be put to death both collectively and individually which was not socially possible in other ways. The government had specifically ordered to kill women through starvation, abuse, and exhaustion (Bjørnlund, 2009). Because women are understood as inferior, their direct murder is unacceptable while more indirect ways are. The use of sexual violence is also more justifiable before the frontline perpetrators as they can better rationalise their acts given the sexualised gender roles of women, which prevents resistance within their ranks. Rape indeed caused the death of thousands of female deportees (Bjørnlund, 2009). However, on the collective level, rape inflicts such physical and emotional trauma which by itself prevents women from procreating (Harrelson, 2009). In combination with the attached social stigma to rape especially in patriarchal societies like the Armenian (Kennedy, 2017), rape became another tool of the genocide of the Armenian ethnicity and culture.

Forced marriages of Armenian women and girls were also widely perpetrated. Not primarily recognised as sexual violence but rather as an infringement on females’ physical and moral integrity, it still includes sexual crimes, like regular sexual intercourse and forced pregnancy (Gzoyan & Galustyan, 2021). The forced marriage of 200,000 Armenian women and girls to Muslims Turks, Kurds, and Arabs, through auctions, abductions, and systematic distributions (Nabti, 2016) showcases another gender-based vulnerability of women: because women are seen as vessels (Carpenter, 2006), the genocide of Armenians could also be realised by marrying off Armenian women, making them procreate with Muslims, and Islamise themselves. This ranged from their Armenian husbands’ murders or their rapists to Turks viewing themselves as their rescuers becoming their husbands (Gzoyan & Galustyan, 2021). Thus, such kind of horror, being taken by the group that eradicated your community, being stripped of one’s identity, and being forced to procreate with strangers is a form of gender-based violence that men will not face in ethnicity-motivated conflicts.

When one compares the forms of gender-based violence that targeted women and men during the genocide, one notices that men are targeted due to their perceived agency, while women are for their lack thereof. The perception of men

as combat-able agents and representatives of the community and family makes them especially vulnerable as first victims. Women, however, are victimised due to their inferiority. Their lack of agency leads to them rather being used instead of being targeted for their person. Their blood being seen as incapable of ‘polluting’ Muslim blood (Ekmekcioglu, 2013), women could be used to eliminate the Armenian ethnicity and reproduce the perpetrators’ ethnicity instead. Furthermore, women were instrumentalised as sexual objects as in the widely reported singling out of women for forced marriages, abductions, and sexual slavery based on who was most ‘good-looking’ (Derderian, 2005, p.15). Women’s rape to send messages to men as the community or family leaders also emphasises how women are instrumentalised to actually target and humiliate men.

Thus, as both genders are targeted for their differing gender roles, especially in patriarchal societies like the Turk and Armenian, their forms and implications differ enormously. Arguably, the socially constructed greater ‘use’ in women as well as the unacceptability of using direct violence against them as inferior beings leads to a greater variety of gender-based violence that women are vulnerable to. These include especially non-lethal methods, like rape, forced marriages, and other forms of sexual and gender-based violence of alarming potential for trauma. Men, on the other hand, are likely to fall victim to the same kind of gender-based violence especially targeted at their perceived danger as resisting agents and heads of the community. Methods used against them will hence mostly aim to eradicate their agency of resistance and procreation and are hence more likely lethal. Therefore, Carpenter’s (2006) call to acknowledge men’s increased vulnerability to sex-selective massacres should be endorsed. However, her statement that treating male trauma after second victimisation could prevent future rape as a weapon of war is highly contestable, given the cited use of rape of women in other ways, like the purpose of eradicating a cultural and ethnic identity, like the Armenian.

Carpenter’s (2006) conclusion that women’s and men’s victimisation of gender-based violence cannot be prevented separately from each other is valid, given that the gender roles motivating specific violence are relational to one another. Thus, gender mainstreaming in humanitarian assistance and prevention should indeed be pursued. Nevertheless, the call for mainstreaming gender for prevention purposes should not lead to understanding the implications of gender-specific violence to be equal between both genders. The above analysis has indeed shown that men fall victim to sexual violence during conflict and can derive significant traumatic experiences from that, which deserves recognition and treatment. Yet, their prevalence is significantly lower while the victimising acts’ intention tends to be male intimidation and demobilisation. For women, this not only



also fully applies, but they are also more often victimised and victimised for an additional reason, namely the eradication of their identity. This additional burden should require another angle in treatment and care (Kennedy, 2017). Hence, both women and men require and deserve gender-tailored treatment, but women arguably require an even more multifaceted form of assistance tailored to their specific needs.

## 4 Conclusion

Analysing genocide and other atrocities through gender is crucial, as it reveals the rationales behind atrocities. Carpenter's (2006) inclusive gender-based violence conceptualisation enabled an even deeper analysis of the specific types of violence against both men and women. The analysis of the Armenian genocide reiterated the widely shared understanding that men tend to be victimised during conflict because of their gender, especially related to neutralising their agency and combat ability. This rightfully calls for the recognition of especially their vulnerability to sex-selective massacres for atrocity prevention. Nevertheless, women's gender role of inferiority leaves women more vulnerable to a variety of gender-based violence, particularly sexual violence, illustrated by the sheer extent of victimisation during the genocide. While Carpenter is right in arguing that gender-based violence against women and men cannot be prevented separately from each other, as the gender roles naturalising the violence depend on one another, the mainstreaming of gender in atrocity-prevention and treatment efforts should still safeguard some prevention and treatment efforts that are tailored to women specifically, at least in very patriarchal societies. Especially the prevention and treatment of sexual violence, like rape, in context of genocide should arguably be tailor-made for female victims because female victimisation is not only more frequent, but the underlying rationale for it is even more multifaceted. As a result, victimisation has a greater impact on different psychological and social levels for women than is applicable for male victimisation.



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