Rape stands out, compared with other acts of violence in wartime—even other acts of extreme violence—as it is never officially sanctioned and in theory should always be punished. While it is not an inevitable feature of war, it is nevertheless a persistent problem, as civilian and combatant women have been seen as “sexual booty” for conquering soldiers since time immemorial. Some cases of systematic and/or mass rape have become iconic, often because they are seen to embody the “barbarity” of (former) enemies. In other cases, endemic sexual violence in wartime barely registers on wider public consciousness. The vast theoretical literature on why soldiers rape in wartime contrasts sharply with the scarce, fragmented, and scattered nature of specific accounts of rape that one can find in cursory court cases, passing references in soldiers’ memoirs, and the often hesitantly spoken testimony of victims.

Through the two case studies examined here, the Indonesian War of Independence (1945–1949) and the Algerian War of Independence (1954–1962), we seek to demonstrate the dynamics at play that increase the risk of rape, and at the same time explore how knowledge about rape is silenced, transmitted, or documented. From the outset, it is important to underline that there is little we can quantitatively affirm about the relative occurrence of rape in the two wars. A superficial comparison between available French and Dutch court records might suggest that proportionally more cases of rape and sexual violence were prosecuted through Dutch military courts than through their French counterpart. For a total 220,000 military personnel who served in Indonesia over four years, Dutch Military Justice records that were preserved yield seventy-two cases
in which Dutch military personnel were accused of sexual violence, fifty-three of which cases resulted in guilty verdicts. In the French records, the historian Marius Loris-Rodionoff found thirteen rape cases, out of a total of 636 cases for charges ranging across desertion, manslaughter, theft, and disobedience, that were prosecuted through the Constantine Permanent Tribunal of the Armed Forces. This tribunal was one of three of its type in Algeria that disciplined some of the two million soldiers deployed by the French army in Algeria.

Statistically, this kind of comparison is largely meaningless. Rape has always been underreported and under-prosecuted, both in civilian societies and in theaters of war. In wartime, bystanders, mostly fellow soldiers, rarely break the code of silence about offenses they have witnessed. The silence on the side of the victims can be attributed to societal norms and pressure not to undermine the “honor” of the family. A comparison between the Indonesian and Algerian context becomes meaningful if we focus on the visibility of rape as a form of violence committed by the French and Dutch armies. One of the biggest scandals

FIGURE 5.1 Djamila Boupacha, a member of the FLN and victim of rape during the Algerian War of Independence, visits the Labour Party headquarters in London in the company of other Algerian functionaries, March 14, 1963. (Keystone-France / Gamma-Rapho via Getty Images)
of the Algerian War of Independence was the torture and rape, while in French army custody, of Djamil Boupacha, a member of the Algerian National Liberation Front (FLN). A wide range of French intellectuals, politicians, and artists denounced her treatment, while Spanish artist Pablo Picasso painted her portrait. The scandal became emblematic of the broader treatment of Algerians by the French state. A similar cause célèbre is absent from contemporary accounts of the Indonesian War of Independence a decade earlier. In his war diaries, Indonesian general Abdul Haris Nasution does refer to the rape of Indonesian women by Dutch soldiers, but it features almost in passing. This contrast is mirrored in the historiography: the significant body of literature on sexual violence committed by French troops in Algeria has no equivalent in the Dutch-Indonesian context.

Thinking about the relative visibility/invisibility of rape, and the nature of the sources that we have, and do not have, at our disposal, is central to understanding the dynamics of rape in wartime. Not only does it enable us to examine why rape happens—that is, whether it functions as a weapon of war and how it is facilitated by certain types of warfare—but it also gives us insight into how victims might seek redress and how the act of condemning rape was politically weaponized. This chapter begins by delineating the places and contexts in which Indonesian and Algerian women were especially vulnerable to rape. We quote at some length from sources such as judicial records, contemporary published accounts, memoirs, and oral histories, because their very existence is at the core of the analysis in parts two, three, and four of the chapter, in which we address attributed motivations, politicization, and redress.

**The Dynamics of Rape in Guerrilla Warfare and Counterinsurgency**

Both the Indonesian and the Algerian wars of independence were colonial conflicts conducted through a similar kind of guerrilla/counterinsurgency warfare that created specific contexts which made particular kinds of violence and sexual violence more likely. Compared to each other, both of these conflicts also had their own specificities.

**Rape in the Village**

In both Indonesia and Algeria, a common moment for rapes to be committed was in the aftermaths of “sweeps” or “mopping up” actions, searches meant to comb out villages where—according to (often outdated) intelligence—enemy
forces were active. Defining “enemy forces” was not clear-cut, however, as the spaces in which nationalist combatants and civilians operated were the same. Indeed, the distinction between combatant and civilian was blurred by both guerrillas and conventional European armies. In addition to sweeps, rural populations were subjected to collective punishments, summary executions, and, in the Algerian case, mass population displacement into camps by European armies. Simultaneously the very same armies might sustain a discourse about wanting to protect “the people” from “the outlaws.” Troops involved in sweeps were often strangers to the village (i.e., not locally stationed) and were able to move on after attacks without being easily traceable or identifiable. Rapes could often be part of a series of violent acts directed against civilian populations, including burning down homes, tainting foodstuffs, and stealing. For example, between 2 and 7 April 1949, the special forces of the Dutch colonial army (the “red berets”) committed a series of crimes in the region of Sukabumi in Indonesia. In the course of five days, they raped a twelve-year-old girl and four married women, sexually assaulted twelve other women, killed seventy-seven Indonesian civilians, wounded one, committed 177 acts of theft, and burned down a house.\textsuperscript{10}

Unarmed villagers were extremely vulnerable, as an account documented in a field court-martial following the rape of a child during a patrol in Soekowirjo reveals: “All the men were brought together. The perpetrator took the opportunity and abused K.: M. pointed his gun at 10-year old K., after which he laid it away, and raped her.”\textsuperscript{11} The number of soldiers involved in a case of rape made it even harder for women and girls to fight back, and reduced the likelihood of reporting by fellow soldiers, as they were collectively implicated. A case that did make it into the Dutch military records describes a gang rape in the following terms: “One of the three who deliberately grabbed I. in a violent way, picked her up and brought or rather dragged her to the guard post while she was unwilling and resisted, pulled her to the floor, so that she lay on her back, while the suspect pulled her sarong [cloth used as skirt] off, and held her ankles to the floor, G. held her arms to the floor. When she could no longer defend herself, V., K. and G. raped her.”\textsuperscript{12}

An often-cited description of rape against rural Algerian women comes from a diary entry of Algerian teacher and author Mouloud Feraoun. On 8 January 1957 he describes the systematic mass rape of women in the region of the Ouadhias, in Kabylia. While the men were locked up or shot, “women remained in the villages, at home. They were given orders to leave the doors open and to stay isolated in the different rooms of each house. The village was thus transformed into a populous BMC [military brothel], into which the mountain infantry and other legionnaire companies were unleashed.”\textsuperscript{13}
In Algeria, the process of a search typically began with a series of violations of Algerian social space, which step by step could culminate in rape. First, by entering into the home, as men not related to the women who lived there, soldiers were breaking with the principle of the *horma* (the sacredness of domestic space and of the separation of the sexes outside the family). Second, body searches involved stripping women naked. This was highly sexualized and often based on claimed knowledge about local cultural practices, such as women shaving their pubic hair—which supposedly pointed to their having had recent sexual relations with a husband who was suspected of having joined the rural guerrillas. Women were also considered to have “more places to hide things,” supposedly necessitating searches of the vagina and anus. In a number of women’s accounts, rape is presented—or implied—as the culmination of this incremental process of increasingly exposing and making women’s bodies vulnerable.

In other cases, soldiers stationed in a rural area acted outside of a military operation. A soldier in South Sumatra wrote about a new member of his unit in his diary, a remarkably daunting character, who would “break out, take the car and gun of the desk sergeant, drive to a village, summon the village head to provide him with a woman, and come back the next morning.” In this case, the village head was likely coerced into the position of recruiter; in other cases, women were simply snatched by the military personnel themselves. This is described by a member of an intelligence unit in Central Java, in his covert coverage of how his unit operated: “The members of the intelligence service do not engage in long-lasting sexual relationships with Indonesian women. Yet, according to Tuminah (a woman who operates in this unit) at night sometimes women are taken from the village by force. Apparently, there are sexual needs, but this is not accommodated through assimilation [i.e., by building local relations].”

Whether committed outside or within the context of military operations, rapes often unfolded in similar ways. In the following case, an errand of three Dutch military personnel who left their camp to trade chickens for clothes turned into “a raiding party of a number of villages.” According to the court-martial, “They intruded into a house. S. admitted to having grabbed the lady of the house with the intention of sexually assaulting her, after which the woman began to scream and ran out of the house.”

Similar circumstances are documented by Loris-Rodionoff in his summary of the rare cases of rape that made it to the Constantine Tribunal of the Armed Forces: “These rapes are premeditated, they happen at night, while on leave, sometimes under the influence of alcohol.” A case in point is that of three parachutists charged with rape in 1957, who sneaked out of their camp at night:

They walked until 23.00 [11 p.m.] and arrived at Ben Hamdani. They entered a first gourbi [makeshift home] where they carried out an
identity check. Then they knocked on the door of a second gourbi shouting “Patrol!” The door opened, and they entered. They found a young Algerian woman called KK, her husband MM and the mother of the young woman. The three men made the girl leave and took her into another room. RR and TG “abused her,” in the language of the indictment. They raped her. Then they went into another gourbi without finding any women. They came back to the gourbi of the K family. They made the parents of K, who was 15, leave. They were guarded by RR. TG and CP “tried to abuse her.” They hit her, ripped her clothes, and stripped her naked. They laid her on the ground. The father of the young girl managed to intervene and challenged their behavior. He reminded them that he was a veteran and a former soldier. After this, they gave up.20

The men then left and went on to sexually abuse and rape two other women in the village. What is striking is how they deliberately abuse their authority by presenting themselves as operating as part of a military action (knocking on the door and shouting “Patrol!”), knowing that this is strictly against orders.

The Domestic Context of the Army Barracks—
Typical for Indonesia

One feature of the Dutch army in Indonesia that did not have an equivalent in the French army in Algeria was the figure of the baboe. Baboe is a word of Indonesian origin, used by the Dutch to refer to female domestic cleaners or housekeepers. The presence of subordinate Indonesian women as concubines who were expected to take care of the household and offer comfort and sex to their Dutch masters had been a well-established feature within the colonial civilian and military context. In the post–Second World War military context, with the majority of troops deployed from the Netherlands, it was adopted in a slightly different form. There was approximately one baboe for every five to eight men in the barracks, employed to cook, clean, and wash clothes. This constant presence of Indonesian young women was in some cases the context for durable relationships, but also for harassment and coercion. The opportunities to abuse these women were numerous, as they were present in all the spaces of “intimacy”—the washing rooms, dormitories, and kitchens. In one field court-martial judgment, for example, “soldier T.B. in M. has had intercourse under threat of a weapon [i.e., rape], with a woman of Indonesian origin, named D. The perpetrator has, after getting drunk, and going to bed, soiled his bed, after which he called for a baboe to clean the room, and then grabbed her.”21 For this rapist, sexual relations with the baboe are apparently part of the “services” she provides. In another account,
produced by former members of a Dutch army unit in 1996, one veteran recalls being encouraged by fellow soldiers to have sex with a clearly non-consenting baboe: “At a certain moment, they were getting me drunk or half drunk, and started to offer me one of their many baboes, who luckily said, Tida mau, toean (which means, I don’t want to, sir).” In both these accounts, baboes are not considered individual women with agency, but rather as part of the services of a barracks. In fact, baboes often had the additional informal “task” of providing “sexual relief” to the unit. Local commanders would make such arrangements to prevent their men from contracting venereal diseases when visiting prostitutes (in Algeria, the French army formally created military brothels for the same purpose of “sexual release”). In a diary account, H. van Hoorn describes traveling a long way with a group of men and lodging as guests at an army logistical base in Banjoewangi: “[We] went to town to have some food and went to bed early. We had traveled for 270 miles. At night we were woken by a lot of noise and ado. It turned out to be R. who was after the baboes of our hosts. This is really impolite; one should not behave this way as guest.” This is not to say that all sexual contacts between baboes and Dutch military personnel could be characterized as

![Figure 5.2](image-url) Four “baboes” wash uniforms inside a military encampment in 1949. In Indonesia, unlike in Algeria, such local female workers were common on military bases and smaller posts during colonial times. Dutch military personnel often had intimate relations with these women, but sexual abuse also occurred in this setting. (Collection Netherlands Institute of Military History)
nonconsensual, or even that all came down to exploitation. There is evidence of “love affairs” and caring relationships developing between soldiers and baboes, yet even then we have to keep in mind the structural power difference between Dutch military and Indonesian women. Moreover, relationships between Dutch soldiers and Indonesian women were not static; they could develop over time and transform from a relation of coercion and exploitation into one in which mutual profit and consent was the basis.24

The Prison or “Regrouping” Camp—
Typical for the Algerian Context

Two aspects of the Algerian War of Independence were distinct from its Indonesian counterpart: first, the visibility of women recruited into the FLN and its National Liberation Army (ALN), and, second, the camp de regroupement (“regrouping camp”). The majority of women contributed to the struggle by cooking, healing, and washing for ALN guerrilla units hiding in the countryside, as well as in urban areas. The best-known women, however—foregrounded by both the FLN and the French media—were smaller in number and joined rural guerrilla units, notably as nurses, or became members of urban bomb networks. Accustomed to representations of Algerian women as passive and cloistered from the outside world, the French army was taken by surprise by this new role, but very rapidly Algerian women would be treated in the same way as Algerian men. They were arrested, interrogated, and tortured as suspects. This is in contrast to the Indonesian context. A few Indonesian women’s fighter units were formed, but Indonesian nationalist leaders primarily envisioned a caring role for Indonesian women during the revolution. By joining forces in women’s federations, they were expected to provide first aid and food to male combatants and civil servants, and to support displaced refugee families.25

Just as in the rural setting, the violence committed against Algerian women in custody reveals a pattern. First, they were made to strip, then they were insulted, often in highly sexualized terms, after which they were tortured—again in sexualized ways—with electric shocks applied to the genitals. The final act of degradation was being raped, either with an object and/or by one or more men. The ways in which women use a far less explicit language than this to describe such horrific experiences is illustrated by Djamila Boupacha’s account of her treatment in prison, conveyed to her lawyer Gisèle Halimi. She had been arrested on suspicion of being a member of the Algiers bomb network in 1960:

They spat on me. . . . I was naked, they were spitting the beer that they were drinking. . . . The electrical wires, they stuck them . . . do you know
how? With strips of tape . . . on my nipples . . . on . . . I can’t tell you . . . Everywhere, do you understand? . . . It’s a terrible thing. The bottle, they forced it in . . . My parents don’t know. I mean, they know but they don’t know everything. I didn’t say anything. It’s too serious for us. I don’t know if I’m a young girl [i.e., a virgin]. Do you understand? I fainted, there was blood, when they took me back down to the cell.26

This hesitantly conveyed account became world news. Less well known and publicized is the rape of the Indonesian activist Sitti Hasanah Nu’mang. Based in Pare Pare, South Sulawesi, as a member of an underground organization, she was arrested along with her father and brother in February 1947, had to witness their execution, and was later drugged and raped. This story was told in her memoirs, which were published in 1995.27 The fact that we possess Boupa’cha’s contemporary account prompts reflection. While the vast majority of Algerians were illiterate, a number of those in the ALN’s urban network in Algiers—including Boupa’cha—came from middle-class backgrounds and were educated in French, and therefore able to articulate to European audiences what had happened to them, however difficult this still was. For Boupa’cha’s account then to become public knowledge, it had to be publicized by the team of FLN lawyers and supporters and find resonance in the French press.

The overwhelming majority of women’s stories of rape in Algeria did not reach this level of visibility. Around a third of the Algerian rural population was forcibly displaced into camps de regroupement that were created with the aim of dismantling FLN support networks and were under the control of the army.28 This meant that families were displaced from their homes and uprooted from their usual forms of social organization. These camps differed from internment camps—which existed in both Indonesia and Algeria as a form of preventive detention—in that they specifically targeted civilian populations. Accounts of rape in camps de regroupement only emerged from the 2000s onward. In 2001, Mohamed Garne, born in such a camp in April 1960, won a thirteen-year-long legal battle to be recognized by the French state as a war victim. His sixteen-year-old mother, Kheira Garne, had been gang-raped by French soldiers, and Mohamed’s disabilities were the result of these same soldiers beating the pregnant teenager in a failed attempt to provoke a miscarriage. Mohamed Garne was awarded 30 percent of an invalidity pension for three years as a compensation for his “psychological problems.”29

Prisons or camps could also be improvised. Khedidja Adel has been carrying out painstaking work on the “women’s prison of Tifelfel” in the Aurès Mountains that was set up in 1955 and consisted of two requisitioned houses. Twenty-two women were imprisoned there from August 1955 to October 1956, with their
newborn babies and young children, to isolate them from the male members of their families who had joined the guerrillas. According to memories shared by Adel, women, and notably young women without children, were brutally tortured and frequently subjected to sexual violence and rape by their guards—Algerians, Moroccans, and Frenchmen. At the same time, being imprisoned for more than one year with often the same guards created a certain kind of familiarity. While they explicitly feared particular guards, there were others who expressed sympathy for them, and cried at seeing the violence inflicted on them.

The cases of rape presented here seem to point to two distinct contexts. They are either committed during an operation in the field or an interrogation in custody, or outside a military operation in “leisure” time. But the contrast is only superficial, as both dynamics of rape are the product of guerrilla/counterinsurgency warfare. Besides the lack of clear distinction between fighting forces and civilian populations, there is also the problem of constant “flux.” Counterinsurgency warfare means that the spaces and times of frontline combat and off-duty “leisure” are not fixed but change continuously, depending on the movement of troops. To fight nationalist guerrilla warfare, European armies developed small, highly mobile units that tracked insurgents across large rural areas, with no obvious rear base, operating relatively independently of main command structures. Ordinary troops that were deployed in rural areas a great distance from central command could also “afford” such behavior with little risk of being caught. The opportunities to engage in rape or sexual harassment were a product of the kind of warfare these troops were engaged in: rural, remote, and with no obvious front line. This means that in both wars of independence, circumstances were created in which troops could easily come into contact with local women, in a context of relative autonomy, and thus relative impunity.

**Motivations for Rape in Wartime**

Feminist scholar Cynthia Enloe, who has worked extensively on gender and militarism, classifies rape in wartime into three main types: “recreational rape,” “national security rape,” and “systematic mass rape.” Similar kinds of classifications are used by other scholars. Cases that take place in villages, in camps de regroupement, or in army barracks might fall into the category of “recreational rape.” They are enabled because commanders—either at the local or national level—are unable or unwilling to enforce discipline. In the words of Dominique Olivier, a French army veteran of Algeria, “If there is a very bad captain, or second lieutenant who’s no better, you’re heading for a disaster, a catastrophe. First of all, lots of people will be killed, and then as the second lieutenant doesn’t control his
men and the captain doesn’t control his second lieutenant, you can be sure that mechtas [villages] are going to burn, girls will be raped, and the few possessions that they [rural civilians] have in their homes will be robbed, etc.”

Implicit in many contemporary accounts and memoirs is the notion that combat heightens men’s uncontrollable “need” for sexual gratification. Dutch veteran Sikke Galama recalls such a mood after combat: “The urge for female flesh, you may even call it lust, increases after fear has waned.” Viewed from this perspective, rape could be seen by some as the consequence of a failure to secure sexual relations through consensual or monetized forms. This kind of thinking underpinned Western armies’ role in actively organizing prostitution to channel this “need.” Yet besides the fact that it is highly questionable whether organized prostitution reduces incidences of rape, we must also treat the idea of an “uncontrollable urge” with suspicion. Other men subject to the same dynamics of war be it in the barracks surrounded by baboes, or guarding women in the makeshift prison of Tifelfel—did not rape. Occasionally, as a Dutch soldier writes in his diary, some even intervened to stop rapes happening: “When we came nearer we heard two soldiers on patrol inside and a woman’s voice say ‘tida toean,’ ‘no sir.’ After a second I recognized the voice of one of the sentries, flung the door open, and held the startled fellow soldiers to task about their behavior.”

Similarly, in an Algiers torture center, FLN militant Louisette Ighilahriz was saved from repeated torture and rape by a French military doctor. The rapes that victimized Louisette Ighilahriz and Djamila Boupacha in Algeria, and Sitti Hasanah Nu’man in Indonesia, fall into Enloe’s category of “national security rape.” This is rape deployed as a tool of terror to punish women who are labeled subversive and perceived as a threat to the nation and/or state. But here again there is ambiguity. In their witness accounts these women state that they are being targeted for who they are—nationalist activists—but the acts of violence to which they are subjected also reflect a loss of discipline of their captors, blurring the lines between “recreational” and “national security” rape. This is shown in the case of H. G. Esméralda (the pseudonym of Huguette Akkache, member of the Algerian Communist Party). Her account of being held by elite paratroopers at a torture center in Algiers tells of women being raped by paratroopers who are drunk, who clumsily grope, and whose appearance is disheveled: “It was extremely messy everywhere, paras came and went carelessly dressed: gray underwear, barefoot, topless or in a vest. When they saw me they made vulgar jokes.”

Based in urban centers and staffed by senior officers, interrogation centers were under much closer central control than rural units. The fact that torture, rape, and murder of suspects routinely took place at these centers indicates complicity in such forms of violence at the highest levels of power and that they were
part of a system, as Raphaëlle Branche has demonstrated in her pathbreaking work on torture during the Algerian War of Independence. Yet, there is no evidence that rape resulted from top-down orders in the course of the Algerian war. Similarly, in his seminal study of Dutch military violence in Indonesia from 1945 to 1949, Rémy Limpach concludes that while in some cases clear orders to carry out summary executions and burn down villages can be traced back to higher command, this is not the case with regard to the act of rape. This by no means exculpates French and Dutch army commanders from complicity or responsibility in the incidence of rape, despite the fact that many would fall back on the “few bad apples” analogy to explain “unacceptable” acts of violence committed against local populations, if these became public. Nevertheless, while it is clear that the type of conflict created circumstances that enabled and thus facilitated rape, this does not mean that “systematic mass rape,” to adopt Enloe’s term, was part of French or Dutch military policy in Algeria or Indonesia.

It remains much debated, notably in the Algerian case, whether or not rape was ideologically motivated, a key aspect of the definition of systematic mass rape. Scholars who examine rape by the French army in Algeria argue that possessing and degrading Algerian women was a way to humiliate enemy men, to undermine their family and by extension the nation. To quote Branche, “Rape is an act of violence in which the penis of a man is the means—but another object could be used—and the vagina of the woman is not the ultimate goal. . . . The desire is less sexual than the urge for possession and humiliation. . . . Through the woman, shaken up, beaten up, raped, the soldier attacks her family, her village and all the circles to which she belongs, including the last one: the Algerian people.”

This hypothesis is plausible, but hard to prove. When looking back beyond the time frame of the conflicts in both Indonesia and Algeria, we can see how “possessing colonized women” was a recurrent theme. One of the ways in which colonial rule was exercised was through the sexualized objectification of the bodies of the colonized. As Elizabeth Wood has argued, armed groups who reinforce cultural taboos about sex with target populations will have relatively low levels of sexual violence against those populations, while in the absence of such cultural taboos, sexual violence will be high. There were certainly no cultural taboos about Dutch men having sex with Indonesian women, nor French men having sex with Algerian women; on the contrary. Colonial exhibitions in which colonized people were the exhibits, sex tourism, and the extensive production of pornographic images of colonized women divided into “types” such as “young Arab woman,” “Moorish woman,” or “young Kabyle woman” are but a few manifestations of this. The sexualized imagery of North African women encouraged white men to peek beneath the “mysterious” veil to discover “primitive”
and “wild” women. In the Southeast Asian context women were stereotyped as precociously promiscuous. In fact, in many of the Dutch diaries of Indies veterans, local Indonesian women are referred to as “mysterious” and prone to seduce innocent conscripts. The inferior legal, political, economic, and social position of colonized people gave them only limited room for maneuver to avoid the images and roles assigned to them, and the margins were even narrower for women.

For Ann Laura Stoler, the asymmetry in the sexual relationships in the colonies between European men and local women was a metaphor for a broad range of power structures. On the one hand, there was the urge to set strict boundaries between the realm of the colonized and colonizer, to decrease the risk of “racial degeneracy.” On the other hand, Dutch colonial authorities actively encouraged cohabitation with local women because of the lack of European women. Born out of an enterprise of commercial exploitation primarily driven by men, the Netherlands Indies evolved into a society in which employing local women—often young teenage girls—as servants and mistresses of male administrators or as concubines of local colonial troops became a common practice until around the 1920s. Susie Protschky situates the baboe in the barracks during the war of independence in the continuity of these practices: “Their domestic labours were provided in a context of militarised violence and built on colonial class and racial hierarchies developed in civilian as well as wartime practices.”

Algeria was a settler colony where very rapidly there was a balance of European men and women. However, the social space of the European nuclear family coexisted with a state- and military-organized prostitution of Algerian women on a significant scale. In anticolonial resistance from the late nineteenth century onward, we can observe the figure of the Algerian woman as the embodiment of autochthonous “authenticity” that needed to be defended from the colonial male gaze. A key figure in reinforcing this discourse during the Algerian War of Independence was the Martiniquais psychiatrist and author Frantz Fanon, who had worked in a psychiatric hospital in Algeria. As an active supporter of the FLN, he published an essay in the FLN newspaper Résistance Algérie in 1957, depicting European men’s rape of Algerian women as the logical consequence of colonial domination. He presented the bodies of Algerian women, hidden behind the veil and thus “unknown” to the colonial gaze, as the symbol of an unfinished conquest. In the eyes of the European man, he argued, the Algerian woman “has an aura of rape about her.”

The argument that the colonial legacies of the subordinate position of colonized women and decades of objectifying imagery were disinhibiting factors in regard to sexual violence during the wars of independence is convincing. The evidence also suggests that the lack of prosecution of cases of rape
by the French and Dutch armies reflects a widely held view that the victims—
colonized women—were not considered important enough to risk damaging
soldier morale. However, arguing that Algerian or Indonesian women literally
and metaphorically represented an unconquered territory and as such were vul-
nerable to rape is much, much harder to prove. One of the complicating factors
is that rapes were also carried out by Algerian and Indonesian men serving in
the French and Dutch armed forces. Recruitment among local men was exten-
sive, in part to save money and limit metropolitan loss of life, in part because
their knowledge of local languages, terrain, communities, and power relations
was extremely useful.54 In oral histories in Algeria, one of the groups that rural
populations single out as particularly feared were the commandos de chasse (lit-
erally “hunting commandos”). These were highly mobile, relatively small troop
units created to hunt down ALN rural guerrilla units by mimicking their tac-
tics. They often had a large percentage of Algerians in them—in the words of
French general Maurice Challe, “The best fellagha [pejorative term for a member
of the ALN] hunter is the Frenchman of North African descent.”55 This relatively
high presence of Algerian men participating in patrols and sweeps explains why
in women’s accounts of sexual violence, Algerian and not French soldiers are
sometimes presented as more brutal, and more likely to rape. In the words of
Chérifa Akache, who offered logistical support to the ALN in the region of Kab-
ylia, “When it was the French [soldiers], it was OK. But as soon as they brought
in the harkis [Algerian auxiliaries in the French army], they knew the population
and the problems began [a euphemism for rape].”56

The significance of the roles that military personnel carried out (where they
were and what they were doing) rather their identities (their ethnicity) when
determining the types of offenses soldiers were likely to commit is reflected in
the work of Christiaan Harinck. In his study of how Dutch military theory was
translated on the ground during the Dutch-Indonesian conflict, he points to the
need for a “safe” environment for potential offenders. Rape was more likely to
happen in areas with low levels of insurgent action, by groups of men in small
patrols who would rapidly move on to another area.57 One subgroup among
the Dutch armed forces is overrepresented in the judiciary records for acts of
violence against civilians: the Korps Speciale Troepen (special forces). Like the
commandos de chasse, they had a significant proportion of local soldiers (in par-
ticular coming from the Moluccan islands), were able to operate autonomously,
and were accountable only to the highest level of command.

Given the very similar dynamics of rape in the Indonesian and Algerian con-
text, the contrast in the politicization of the topic is striking. It demands taking
a closer look at how rape has been theorized and politicized—or not—by both
anticolonial movements.
Winning the War through Reputation Damage: Politicizing Rape by the Enemy

To legitimize their claims to statehood, the Indonesian and Algerian nationalist movements drew in their discourse on the principle of the right of all peoples to self-determination,58 a well-established notion since World War I. Another common feature in their propaganda and that of their liberal and left-wing supporters was comparing the colonizer’s violence to Nazi practices.59 A new point of reference, that of human rights, started to gain ground after 1948 and the publication of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights—mostly too late to feature in discourses around the Indonesian war. The complete absence in the Indonesian context of the rape of Indonesian women by the colonizer as a symbol of colonial oppression shows that Indonesia’s international campaign against the former colonizer was primarily focused on the illegitimacy of Dutch recolonization. Indonesian women as victims of sexual violence simply did not feature. Even Indonesian women’s organizations, who in 1952 discussed societal problems affecting women such as polygamy, child marriage, and poverty leading to prostitution, did not address the issue of sexual violence.60 The topic did resonate, much later, in the world of fiction, through the popular 1982 novel Wanita Lima Nama by Kawar Wati.61 In contrast, in Algerian campaigning against French colonial rule, the rape of Algerian women was a key tool in discrediting France’s claims to legitimacy. This theme was woven through the contemporary academic frameworks and political discourses on the war—and in many ways still is. Fanon’s work has played a powerful role in shaping how subsequent scholars have framed the motivations of French military to rape Algerian woman.62 Rape is not only talked about more often in the Algerian case—it has become a fundamental frame through which the war is characterized.63 In short, while Indonesian propaganda efforts to discredit the Dutch focused on extolling Indonesia’s rights as a nation, Algerian denunciations of the French additionally condemned violations of human rights.

Geography as well as chronology account for the different ways in which the sexual abuse of Indonesian and Algerian women by European armies was treated by nationalist movements. In 1945, Indonesia had just emerged from a period of mass forced prostitution of European, Eurasian, and Indonesian women under Japanese occupation (1942–1945). At the time the problem was silenced, but even when in the 1990s the taboo was broken, the public discussions revolved around the suffering of Dutch and Eurasian women, not that of Indonesian women, despite their numerical overrepresentation as victims of this war crime.64

By the early 1960s, attitudes toward sexual violence were very slowly beginning to shift. Zohra Drif, a member of the FLN’s urban bomb network in Algiers,
was asked to write a pamphlet for *Les Temps Modernes*, the literary magazine of French philosopher and political activist Jean-Paul Sartre. In *La mort de mes frères*, Drif presents a narrative of Algerian women as victims of death, violence, and rape, and Algerian men as emasculated by this French assault on “their” women. In an interview decades later, she explained her intent to delve into some of the worst aspects of the war to “have an impact on a certain section of the [metropolitan French] population.” The prostitution of Algerian women as a form of colonial attack on the Algerian family was addressed in a book cowritten by Algerian nationalist Salima Bouaziz, who belonged to the FLN’s French network.

Women and men in the FLN were aware of what kinds of accounts of violence were most effective in turning international opinion against the French. The women who brought Djamila Boupacha’s account of rape to the French public were her lawyer Gisèle Halimi, a member of the FLN’s collective of lawyers, and the feminist Simone de Beauvoir, an influential supporter of the anticolonial struggle. For the nationalist movement, the fate of the young, French-educated Boupacha embodied the barbarity of the French army in Algeria and the vacuousness of its claims that it was pursuing a “civilising mission.” For an early 1960s French public, she was the most “sympathetic” kind of rape victim—young, attractive, and sexually inexperienced. For Halimi and Beauvoir, Boupacha’s case would also represent a key step in the later campaigns in France pressing for women’s bodily autonomy. Halimi and Beauvoir would challenge France’s restrictive abortion law in the 1970s. Halimi would play a key role in challenging lenient sentences given to rapists and restrictive definitions of what constituted “rape,” culminating in the 1980 revision of French legislation on rape (which dated from 1810). In the case of Indonesia, the rape of Indonesian women during their struggle for independence would be given political meaning only decades later.

**Dealing with Rape: Recognition and Redress**

At the time of the Indonesian and Algerian conflicts, few women who were victims of rape were able to obtain redress, or even have their stories recorded. Boupacha’s story was told because it was politicized by the FLN. A judicial investigation was begun, brought against “X” (unidentified suspects), for “arbitrary detention and willful injury” but ran into difficulties when the commander in chief in Algeria, General Ailleret, refused to provide photographs of soldiers serving in the barracks where Boupacha had been attacked so that she might identify them. Women who had some kind of positive relationship with some members of the French or Dutch armies were perhaps more likely to prompt some
form of official response. In Algeria, there is at least one case in the archives of local women in one village complaining to the Specialized Administrative Section (SAS, a civilian-military unit established to administrate and control rural populations) about a mobile unit that had committed rapes in their village. In November 1961, the head of the Aghribs SAS declared that thirty women had come to see him to complain about the behavior of the commandos de chasse of Akfadou. Seven of the women had filed complaints for rape, but these do not seem to have led to any trials, only to the reassurance from the head of the SAS weeks later that the perpetrators had been “severely punished.”

In the case of the Ben Hamdani rapes in 1957, it seems very likely that the three parachutists charged by a French military tribunal with attempted rape were eventually disciplined only because one of their victims was the daughter of a former Algerian soldier in the French army, who persisted in seeking to bring the men to justice. For the French army, it was the victim’s father who merited the perpetrators being sanctioned. Their punishment was very light. Two of the men, “TG” and “RR,” received a suspended sentence of three years, while the third, “CP,” was acquitted. What is telling is that TG and RR, unlike CP, already had a history of undisciplined behavior and were therefore punished more for insubordination than for rape.

The evidence on redress is not always easy to interpret. One possible explanation for why many of the rape cases prosecuted through Dutch military courts were rapes of baboes is that there was more empathy for them as victims, as they were part of the social circle of the military camp. Another explanation is that they were more likely to be raped, as they lived in the barracks. Rather than giving a witness statement condemning a rape, or intervening to stop an assault taking place, troops could just as easily close ranks and get a baboe dismissed from her job, with no chance of getting her case heard in a military court. In this situation, baboes could have more to lose by complaining than women from the local village. And all of these explanations could also be true at the same time, varying from barracks to barracks.

What is undeniable is that the vast majority of Indonesian and Algerian women had no mechanisms and no leverage to report rape at the time. In both colonies, rape in times of war and peace was barely recognized as a crime. The colonial legal code in place in Indonesia since 1918 did not consider rape a crime against the person, but rather a crime against public morality. Therefore, if the woman who was raped was considered to be a prostitute or of “loose morals,” in the eyes of the law and military justice she was not a rape victim, as public morality was not offended. This explains why a notable number of rape cases in the archives are of girls under the age of fifteen, which was the age of consent. These cases were easier to prosecute, as the offenses were most obviously illegal, and
the victims fit the profile of a rape victim (i.e., virgins) according to the morality codes of the time. Similarly, in France, rape was not a crime that was taken seriously either by society or the law in the late 1950s and 1960s, unless the victim fitted similar criteria.

Extensive research has shown that the consequences of rape can impact the rest of a woman’s life, leading to infertility, damage to genitals, incontinence, family rejection, psychological trauma, aversion to sex, sexually transmitted diseases, unwanted pregnancy, and the complications of abortion. The children born of rape and their mothers have to confront the shame often heaped on them by their own societies. These consequences undoubtedly will have affected the lives of many Indonesian and Algerian women. To a certain extent, we can only speculate about this, given the scarcity of sources and the social taboos that continue to be attached to rape. At the same time, these fragments and taboos underscore the importance of valuing and historicizing other kinds of sources, such as poems, novels, and anthropological and linguistic studies, which enable women’s voices to emerge, as well as reading court records “against the grain” and conducting oral histories. Through this, small references to how women endured sexual violence and how they, and their communities, coped with the consequences emerge. An illustration of such a coping mechanism is offered by ethnographer Camille Lacoste-Dujardin, who conducted research in the region of Iflissen in Kabylia in 1969. She states, “They have chosen to forget. Not only have husbands not divorced, and the young girls rapidly married, but they also tried to get the victims to abort, so that no child would be born of these rapes.”

Women also employ euphemisms and strategic silences. Expressions such as *ksen fellacent esser* (they took her intimacy from her) in Kabylia and *l’monqer* (deliberate badness/evil) employed by women in the Aurès to refer to rape illustrate ways of articulating one’s experiences without being explicit. Sitti Hasanah Nu’mang’s reference to how she was raped while unconscious employs similar kinds of euphemisms: “In solitude I lamented my fate. Father was shot, I was polluted and helpless, only God knows why.”

Women also have a language of resistance. In the Aurès, M’barka, who provided logistical support for the ALN, describes how at the outbreak of war women in the village were instructed by members of the FLN on how to protect themselves from the risk of being raped. They had to make themselves ugly, take off their jewelry, avoid brightly colored clothes, and smear themselves with dirt and animal excrement. Women held in the women’s prison of Tifelfel describe giving their babies to young unmarried women to hold in an attempt to protect them when soldiers came into their space looking for a woman to rape. Though it is uncertain whether these strategies worked, their historical relevance lies not in their efficacy, but rather in the way women tried to achieve a sense of control
over their own lives and, later, life stories. In Kabylia, rural women also composed and transmitted oral poetry that included references to rape and made it part of the story of their community, less about specific women. Among those collected by historian Souhila Benkhellat we find, “Forgive the Senegalese who killed my father, but there will be no forgiveness for the Frenchman or the harki who dirtyed my daughter and my sister.”

For Djamila Boupacha, who had actively chosen to publicize her story of torture and rape in custody to advance the cause of independence during the war, taking (back) control of her painful history after the war also involved generalizing it to embody all Algerian women. In the 1990s, the portrait that Picasso had painted of her after she became a cause célèbre came to Algiers. At the opening exhibition, a fellow attendee (who did not recognize her) asked, “Is that Djamila Boupacha?” to which she replied, “No, it’s the woman at war.”

New opportunities for formal redress can arise when the social agency of victims of war changes. From the 1990s onward, after the wars in Rwanda and Yugoslavia, when rape was used as a tool of ethnic cleansing, a much greater understanding of and political sensitivity to rape as a weapon of war emerged. In both the French-Algerian and the Dutch-Indonesian contexts, this facilitated the revisiting of wartime cases of rape, and other forms of wartime violence, through court cases. In France, there were several legal attempts, but a series of amnesty laws passed after 1962 limited the possibilities of bringing legal cases against the French state for crimes committed during the war in Algeria. Mohamed Garne, the abovementioned child born after the rape and beating of his mother by French soldiers, had to fight for recognition as a war victim throughout the 1990s. When in 2001 he won his case, this was in a societal context in which French torture of Algerians during the war of independence had dramatically returned to the attention of the French media, prompting the collection and dissemination of testimonies from French army perpetrators, bystanders, and victims. Illustrative was the publication, in 2000, of the testimony of a former member of the Algiers bomb network, Louisette Ighilahriz, on the front page of Le Monde. Ighilahriz described the terrible torture she had endured in French army custody. She subsequently revealed, little by little, and then explicitly in a prime-time documentary on French television, that she had been repeatedly raped by French army officers. This prompted a series of investigations in the French media into torture and rape. Ighilahriz successfully took French army general Maurice Schmitt to court for defamation after he accused her of lying. She won a symbolic one euro, which she then lost on appeal.

In the Netherlands, it was through the activities of the human rights activist organization KUKB, led by Jeffrey Pondaag, which for years had pushed for apologies and compensation from the Dutch state to Indonesian victims of
Dutch violence, that a case of rape was successfully brought to court. On 27 January 2016, Mrs. Tremini, an Indonesian woman eighty-five years old at the time of the trial, who in February 1949 was raped in the city of Peniwen by five members of a Dutch special forces unit, won her law case against the Dutch state and received 7,500 euros in compensation. The severity of the crime, gang rape under threat of a weapon, convinced the judge to overrule the statute of limitation of thirty years. Human rights lawyer Liesbeth Zegveld recorded Mrs. Tremini’s testimony:

It was Saturday 16.00 [4 p.m.], we heard Dutch soldiers enter our village, together with my niece, we hid under my bed, suddenly they entered my house screaming “get out, get out” so we got out of the house, I saw five soldiers, who were looking for my husband, who had already fled to hide, because they could not find him I was dragged into a room by one soldier, my niece was not allowed inside, he undressed me while laughing until I was completely naked, he entered my vagina with his hands, I begged, “Sampunndoro—I beg you don’t do it sir”—but because I was held at gunpoint I was afraid to do anything. Under threat I was forced to have intercourse with all five soldiers, one by one.

Mrs. Tremini had to wait until the turn of the century, when public discussion about the right of victims of war to reparations had gained traction, before her case could be brought to the fore in the Netherlands. Rape during the Algerian War of Independence had already mobilized public opinion in France in the late 1950s and early 1960s because of the interplay between French left-wing intellectuals and Algerian activists who had a keen sense of how to frame their message in order to become politically relevant.

In a 2020 article, Susie Protschky argued that “the recent Dutch endorsement of an independent historical inquiry [of which this edited volume is an outcome] into the military actions of the late 1940s would not have happened had historians not persisted with the problem of how to frame questions about and find evidence for atrocities.” This framing and reframing is, of course, a multi-directional process, with new political and legal frames also shaping historians’ reinterpretations. Protschky’s article is a case in point. She analyzes Dutch soldiers’ collections of amateur photographs of the apparently banal domesticity of barracks life, notably photographs of baboes and of soldiers with baboes. Seeking to give space to silences, Protschky argues that women’s facial expressions and the unrequited touching in images can be read as an “evidence base positing the likelihood of women servants having experienced sexual coercion and violence in this context.” At the same time, into these silences, we also place our own subjectivities and the dominant frameworks of our times. In 1981, Malek...
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FIGURE 5.3 The eighty-five-year-old Mrs. Tremini (right) won a civil court case and 7,500 euro compensation from the Dutch state for being a victim of rape by five Royal Netherlands East Indies Army special forces personnel in February 1949 in Peniwen. Her daughter and a witness are sitting next to her. (Yvonne Rieger-Rompas, private collection)

Alloula published his influential analysis of nineteenth-century Orientalist photography of Algerian women. In an analysis echoing that of Fanon, he argued that “possessing” Algerian women’s bodies was both a metaphor and a mechanism of imperial rule. As Cynthia Enloe pithily analyzed Alloula’s analysis, “Becoming a nationalist requires a man to resist the foreigner’s use and abuse of his women. But what about women themselves? . . . Malek Alloula and other male nationalists seem remarkably incurious about the abused women’s own thoughts—and about the meaning they might have assigned to foreign conquest.”

Much of our analysis confirms arguments already made in the literature about the specific dynamics of guerrilla warfare and counterinsurgency, and the factors likely to contribute to a higher incidence of rape: a relatively small group, only loosely under central command, often with a high degree of mobility, is more likely to commit rape. Like perpetrators of other acts of extreme violence, rapists will have taken into account that the risk of getting caught and punished was very low. Impunity reigned, as the system for monitoring, reporting, researching,
prosecuting, and punishing abuse was challenged by constant movement of troops and the often covert nature of operations. The dynamics of rape in custody are also familiar, with rape used as a means of torture and humiliation. That rape in custody did not take place to the same extent in Indonesia as in Algeria and that Dutch equivalents of the French *camps de regroupement* were not established is not a matter of ethics, but of counterinsurgency strategy and of scale. That the figure of the *baboe* as servant and potential sexual partner in all army barracks is missing in the Algerian context is related to the difference in colonizing strategy: Algeria was a settler colony, whereas Indonesia, for the Dutch, was a commercial enterprise led primarily by men.

When taking a closer look at the different nature of the sources that we have at our disposal to study rape in the two conflicts, we are compelled to think carefully about who is more likely to get heard, if women get heard at all. Only women who had some degree of trust in the judicial system of the colonizer, and were exceptionally brave, would file a complaint themselves. But the vast majority of victims were doubly silenced as colonized women. This immense silence in contemporary records is mirrored in the historiography. What the comparison has shown is how “getting heard” in the Algerian case was established through the politicization of rape as a propaganda tool of anticolonial struggle. For historians, this necessitates exercising caution when articulating rape as a colonial attack on the family and the nation, as this is first and foremost political discourse of the time, with a long afterlife. It succeeds in mobilizing attention to challenge colonial domination and abuse, but at the same time sidelines elements of the story (such as, for example, the role of autochthonous troops in committing rape) that do not neatly fit the colonizer/colonized dichotomy.

Women’s accounts often hint at messier histories of motivation, opportunity, resistance, and remembrance than can be found in literature that is more theoretical, or focused on the national level. Obtaining these personal accounts requires in many cases a slow and painstaking process of building trust and deep knowledge of local contexts and culture-bound codes for talking about rape and sexual violence. Two stories collected by Galuh Ambar in Indonesia and Khe-didja Adel in Algeria in the course of their ongoing projects are deeply suggestive of the value of trying to untangle these entangled histories. In the first case Ambar is confronted with two strongly divergent accounts about a number of rapes that took place in late December 1948 in Yogyakarta, in the aftermath of the Dutch occupation of the city. In a contemporary report from Indonesian local authorities estimating Dutch damage and violence in the neighborhood of Godean, six rapes are recorded. Yet during a seminar that Ambar attended, meant to review the history of the Indonesian Revolution, historian Darto Har-noko claimed that according to an Indonesian veteran deployed in the area,
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thousands of Indonesian women had been raped. This massive discrepancy is in itself worthy of investigation: What are the processes of transmission or non-transmission between the moment in which the acts of violence took place and the two radically different assessments of the numbers of victims? How do these figures map onto women’s stories? What are the political and social interests at stake that might explain a (possibly) artificially low figure in the earlier period, or a (possibly) much inflated figure later on?

The second story is that of Laatra, a woman from the Aurès Mountains in Algeria, in an oral history interview she gave in 2019. Laatra is euphemistically referred to by some of her neighbors as “the wife of the sergeant.” In a fragmented account, spoken in front of her visibly shocked daughter, Laatra described being kidnapped from her village of Roufi (Ghoufi) and forced to live in the local barracks between 1956/57 and 1960/61. Laatra had initially been arrested as the wife of a member of the rural guerrillas, and for her own activities in providing food for the nationalists. She describes being beaten and insulted, but promised that she would be released in a few days. One of the members of the local harka (regiment of Algerian auxiliaries in the French army) then decided that she would be “reserved” for a noncommissioned officer—the “sergeant” to whom her neighbors refer. Laatra thus remained locked up in the barracks alongside some other young women who, like her, had been designated as “girls for the soldiers.” One of the harkis, who was from the same small village as she was, tried to inform her father of what had happened, but when her father came to the barracks to try to free Laatra, he was sent away with the false message that she was there of her own volition.

Laatra’s story is striking, as it reveals a “type” of rape hitherto not discussed in the extensive literature on rape in the Algerian War of Independence—informal “brothels” created by groups of troops through kidnapping women who were not remunerated—in other words, sexual slavery. The first question, then, is why is so little known about this? Was it extremely rare? Or have historians not been asking the right questions using the right language? The use of the euphemizing expression “the wife of the sergeant” by Laatra’s neighbors is striking—it even implies a certain status, far removed from the term “sex slave.” In a wartime situation of extreme poverty and violence, her kidnapping perversely provided her with improved material conditions—she was better fed and, as the sergeant’s “wife,” had her own accommodation. She was also extremely lonely, and at one point tried to climb a wall, injuring herself in the process. She was not seeking to reach the outside world, but trying to join the kidnapped women kept by less highly ranked troops and who were housed together, with a group of harkis. Because she had been kidnapped and raped, Laatra later was also in many ways as trapped in her village as she was in the barracks—upon her release her husband refused to
take her back, although she did later remarry. Finally, what happened to Laâtra’s story between her release in 1960/61 and telling it to the interviewer in 2019? In a small village where clearly many people—possibly everyone at the time—knew what had happened to her in the barracks, how is it that her daughter did not know, and why had Laâtra decided to tell her now?

In sum, taking the Algerian and Indonesian cases together highlights the importance of going beyond, on the one hand, questions about why soldiers rape and how they get away with it and, on the other hand, discussions of the psychological and physical impact of rape on its victims—without denying the burning importance of these issues in a global context in which rape continues to be used as a weapon of war. The process of seeking to establish a historical comparison pushes us to shift the focus toward analyzing how rape is given meaning, or non-meaning, and by whom, and for what purposes, at the local, national, and transnational levels. It demands that we pay attention to how these different scales of meaning interact, and how they change over time.