

Rape as a Weapon of War, This Time in Israel. Why Are Feminists Silent?



Screengrab from a video shot as revellers realize Hamas gunmen are attacking. Girls were raped beside the corpses of their friends.

by Phyllis Chesler and Mandy Sanghera

In 2021, we were part of a grassroots team which rescued 400 women from Afghanistan. We have all, together and separately, worked on a range of feminist issues including rape, sex trafficking, honor killing, child marriage, and forced veiling. Together with thousands of other women, we have signed countless petitions and resolutions calling for freedom, justice, and safety for women globally.

We cannot understand the feminist silence about what is happening to civilian Israelis in general and to Israeli women in particular. We just quickly surveyed the online feminist

media and although articles appear about women being terrorized, raped, and murdered in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Ukraine—we could not find a single article about what has been happening in Israel, including what is happening to women in Israel.

This is also true of many feminist organizations.

This silence is very deep. We fear it is the kind of silence that precedes the proverbial storm, one in which Israel will be accused of overkill, and of war crimes.

The information, the images, the first-person stories, the witness accounts—all confirm that a massive and barbaric terrorist atrocity was launched by Islamist Hamas against civilian Israel. We know that Iran and Qatar are behind this attack, one which is being celebrated globally.

For a moment, let's set aside the facts that the demons of Hamas have also murdered and kidnapped Israeli civilian men of all ages.

But here is something about which feminists in general and #MeToo feminists in particular are usually sensitive.

This is what we've all seen. Hamas beasts parading the dead body of a naked Israeli-German woman; pushing a still living Israeli woman with bloodstained pants (evidence of her having been raped), being taken hostage; Israeli female hostages being called sex slaves in Arabic by their kidnappers.

We now have some videos of Hamas men raping Israeli women, both dead and alive; the rapes are accompanied by hoarse and blood-curdling references to Allah.

While the whole world was outraged about sexual violence against Ukrainian women in Bucha, Tigrayan women in Ethiopia, Yazidi women in ISIS held territory—apparently, not all women are equal when it comes to denouncing sexual violence.

In war, all women suffer and now is the time for the anti-colonial/anti-racist feminist movement to be united against all sexual violence. We do not have to “take sides,” support one people over another in a war-zone, in order to condemn the kidnapping of children and grandmothers—and the raping of girls and women. And the rampant be-heading of babies.

It is worrisome that we are seeing, once again, what has happened to Jewish women in pogroms century after century in Christian Europe and in the Islamic world.

The world—and this includes all those champions of human rights and women’s rights, seems to be turning a blind eye or even celebrating sexual violence perpetrated by terrorists on Israeli Jewish women—and upon all those who live among them.

Rape as a weapon of war, not as a spoil of war, is a war crime.

The United Nations proclaimed June 19th of each year as the International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict. It has not condemned the terrorist attack upon civilian Israel—including the kind and amount of sexual violence that accompanied it.

This time, the atrocities were filmed and sent to relatives and posted online as a form of snuff porn, psychological warfare.

The Iran-backed war that Hamas has launched is also a religious war against Jews and the Jewish state.

Although Women across the world should unite in the face of growing conflicts and wars with one message: “We will not accept sexual violence in conflict or otherwise, regardless of race, religion, ethnicity or any other factor.”

Our phones and TV screens are filled with images of Israeli women’s bodies as a conquered battleground; would you have the

world turn away tomorrow when your bodies become a battleground?

Aren't Israeli women who've just experienced sexual violence, public humiliation, captivity, and death worthy of our concern?

Do they not deserve our compassion, outrage and concerted activism?