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The Cannes Protest and the Unfolding of a Deeper Truth

Barira Parvez^a

^aBharati Vidyapeeth University, Pune, India

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The concerned article deals with the controversial protest that took place at the CANNES FILM FESTIVAL on the 23rd of May 2022 that send shockwaves around the world. The protest was just the tip of the ice berg, for the underlying truth reveals more horrifying and ghastly stories. The full-fledged war between Russia and Ukraine has not just been limited to weapons and ammunitions, sanctions or seclusions. The war has rather resulted in sexual assaults, rapes, gang rapes and violence particularly against women. Rapes and sexual assaults have been used as cheap and effective weapons of wars for a long time now. Impregnation of young girls and women, the brutal physical, mental and emotional and humiliations combined with injustice in dealing with such atrocities has been an excruciating plight for those women. The sanctions have been just a ruse to the public for the ground reality is that the real tragedy is never dealt fairly.

Keywords: *protest, truth, law.*

INTRODUCTION

Cannes Festival or Festival De Cannes (2022) witnessed a flabbergasting incident on day 4 of the event as a female aged 18 showed up at the event semi-nude. Her torso was painted in the colors of the Ukrainian flag while the lower part was painted in red alluding to the bloodshed in various parts of the war-ravaged country owing to the ongoing Russian onslaught that has

impacted millions. The incident resulted in shock and has left a myriad of unanswered questions.

People viewed the incident differently. One section of the viewers was disgusted and dismissed this as a shameful act by a woman who'd go to great lengths to gain attention. While the other section realized how aloof they had been the whole time as they indulged all day and night and had little time to give to things that have a bigger impact on the world. While this gala is organized to promote films and documentaries of outstanding merit, it also can serve as a place to raise issues that matter the most¹. Thus, this girl decided to take this festival as an opportunity to draw the attention of millions around the globe to the ongoing crisis in Ukraine in a way that came as a surprise to many.

BACKGROUND OF THE SUMPTUOUS FILM FESTIVAL

The CANNES FILM FESTIVAL is held annually in Cannes, France. This festival previews new movies from all genres including documentaries from all over the World which are further reviewed by the eight-member jury. It is an invitation-only festival held at PALAIS DES FESTIVALS ET DES CONGRESS (A venue specially set up for the Cannes festival). This year Indian actress Deepika Padukone was chosen as one of the members of the jury. Day four of the massively celebrated film Festival surprised the invitees, right when the red carpet was laid out for the premiere of George Miller's "Three thousand years of longing" on Friday the 22nd of May 2022; The eighteen-year-old female striped open her clothes and barged in shouting slogans of "DON'T RAPE US". The security then quickly encircled her and covered her with a jacket, taking her off the red carpet.

THE DISTRESSING QUESTIONS

The incident leaves us with a lot of compelling questions. First, how did the woman get inside when there is extensive security at Cannes? Then, what made her strip herself before hundreds of people just so that she can preach her message? Third, what is the dark truth of the Russia

¹ 'The Festival in 2022, Interview with Thierry Fremaux' (*Festival De Cannes*) <<https://www.festival-cannes.com/en/qui-sommes-nous/festival-de-cannes-1>> accessed 24 May 2022

and Ukraine conflict that is being hidden from the eyes of the public? And the final question, Does this show callousness on the part of the authorities or maybe us? The security at Cannes is extensive. It requires one to go through multiple security checks posted before the red carpet to get to the Lumiere Theatre in Palais.

There are also numerous metal detectors. Security officials also give alerts before entering the theatre. But the big question is not about the security at Cannes but the security of the Ukrainian people and especially women. Russia which started a full-fledged war on Ukraine and what; to a large extent can be called the third world war has left Ukraine shattered and despondent. In 2021, Russia began a large military build-up along with its border with Ukraine, and up to 1,90,000 troops and their equipment were installed². Shortly before the invasion, Russian president Vladimir Putin raised questions about the statehood of Ukraine and also falsely accused Ukraine of being governed by neo-nazis who persecute the Russian ethnic minorities. Russia also blamed NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) for expanding its area of work eastward since the early 2000s. Putin also deemed Ukraine joining NATO as a threat to Russian security and hence disbarred Ukraine from joining the alliance.

The major developments started happening around February 2022, when the Russian army, which was already positioned with equipment, invaded Ukraine on February 24th, 2022. This invasion has caused Europe's massive refugee crisis since World War II. Right after Putin announced a "special military operation" on Ukraine, there were massive air strikes and multiple ground invasions that shook Ukraine to the core. Hundred days since the announcement of war and since this very day Ukraine has been strangled to helplessness. Air strikes, bombardments, multiple ground invasions, execution of men, threats to civilians, and all the unthinkable things have happened. Soldiers are also alleged to have looted people of their necessities which include property, food, clothing, firewood, etc. The civilians have also reported cases of brutality which includes violence, cold-blooded murders, and rapes. During

² Claire Gilbody-Dickerson, 'Ukraine war: Russian soldier repeatedly raped woman at gunpoint in Kharkiv, Human Rights Watch says' (*I News*, 3 April 2022) <<https://inews.co.uk/news/world/ukraine-war-russian-soldier-repeatedly-raped-woman-gunpoint-kharkiv-human-rights-watch-1554605>> accessed 24 May 2022

the first two weeks of April, there have been 400 reports of rapes by the Russian soldiers reported to the Kyiv Independent.

WAR CRIMES IN A CIVILIZED WORLD ARE THE WATCHDOGS WATCHING?

According to one of the reports of Human Rights Watch, there have been numerous cases of war crimes and human rights violations by Russian soldiers on the citizens of Ukraine. Human rights watch documented 10 people who reported crimes of execution, repeated rapes, loot, and other cruelties being inflicted upon the civilians by the Russian soldiers. Most of these people asked to keep their names anonymous concerning their and their family's security. One of the women who was documented shared a ghastly, horrifying incident that took place with her. On March 13th this woman aged 31 years was hiding in a school basement in the Kharkiv region along with her family and almost 40 other people which mostly comprised women and children. On that very night, a Russian soldier banged on the door of the school and forcibly entered the premises. He had an assault rifle and a pistol. He went to the basement and asked everyone to line up or else he would shoot everyone. He asked one of the hostages to get him food. They came back an hour or two later. After he came back, he approached the woman and asked her to follow him. He then took her to a classroom on the second floor and asked her to undress and perform oral sex, while pointing a gun at her temple the whole time. He also shot at the ceiling twice and threatened her continuously³. The soldier raped her twice and did not allow her to cover herself in the extremely cold weather. He also harmed her by cutting the skin of her neck and cheeks with a sharp knife. He also cut a few strands of her hair. He slammed her face repeatedly with a book and slapped her multiple times. The next morning he asked her to get cigarettes and they came down. The woman asked the guard for some cigarettes, which he gave to the soldier. After that, he left. The woman and her family moved to the nearest Kharkiv region where the volunteers provided her with some basic medical assistance. The woman says she is lucky to be alive, but one could only imagine how PTSD would keep her traumatized for a lifetime.

³ Laurel Wamsley, 'Rape has reportedly become a weapon in Ukraine. Finding justice may be difficult' (NPR, 30 April 2022) <<https://www.npr.org/2022/04/30/1093339262/ukraine-russia-rape-war-crimes>> accessed 25 May 2022

GHASTLY STORIES AND UNTHINKABLE CRIMES

There have been various other incidents where the Russian soldiers have reportedly raped women and made video clips and posted them on porn sites. On 4th March 2022, Ukraine's Foreign Minister, Dmytro Kuleba, spoke of numerous sexual violence cases in the Ukrainian cities which have been occupied by the Russian soldiers. Women are being raped for hours and then killed. Horrifying incidents of senior citizen females being gang-raped have also been reported. Russian soldiers were reported to be carrying drugs like Viagra and condoms. According to some reports by the human rights ombudsman of Ukraine, almost two dozen women and girls have been systematically raped by the Russian forces in the Bucha region, a suburb of Kyiv. Nine of these girls are reported to be pregnant.

Rapes done during the time of war have been used as a weapon to humiliate, dominate and impregnate women and girls. These rapes can be systematic or opportunistic and nearly all the time goes unpunished. There are various instances where women have been raped until they got pregnant and then imprisoned to avoid abortions. This has been a grotesque way for disparate troops to bond. There are also reports that state that Moscow had deliberately used rape as a strategy to threaten, subjugate and humiliate civilians. Forensic experts who performed post-mortem examinations on women have found evidence of sexual assault and rapes on women before they were killed. These were just a few cases of heinous and ghastly atrocities being committed by the Russian soldiers in various regions of Ukraine. Numerous other war crimes would have happened and will, sadly, go unreported.

THE CURIOUS CASE OF SANCTIONS

The United States of America joined forces with its European allies to counter the Russian onslaught by designing a pack of sanctions that, as assumed, will deter Russia from furthering the war. This strategy has seemed to fail until now as Russia is earning millions of dollars per day by selling oil and gas. And with the west needing urgent supplies of oil, they will, for the moment, cannot do anything more than lip service. This seems to be a classic case of need-based dealing. European countries cannot risk the downfall of their economies and thus have

to buy Russian oil at whatever cost they sell. This deal gives Russia an upper hand and allows it to garner money to fund the war or at least drag it for a few more months. No European country or the western countries of the USA or Canada will stop buying Russian oil as it would directly push them into their worst economic crisis since possibly World War 2.

Then, the European countries have to find a middle ground, too. Germany categorically rejected the plea of the EU to stop trading with Russia. The fate of the Nord-stream pipeline from Russia to Germany is undecided but it cannot be suspended as it would directly affect millions of Germans and thus Germany had to make a precarious decision of whether to support Ukraine or look for self-interests. And as it can be seen Germany has chosen the latter. France has been equivocal regarding the current situation, President Macron has asked for diplomatic mediation for finding a resolution to the war. Nothing could stop the war if the so-called civilized countries don't act in unison.

Yes, there have been sanctions done against Russia. But that did not stop Russia from invading and destroying Ukraine. The very fact that Russia has veto power in the UNGA makes it in a way get away with its heinous acts. Many countries are afraid of Russia because of the enormous power it holds in terms of money, defense and authority. The massive funding that flows from Russia to the international organizations can also be traced as a hindrance to taking any strict or direct actions against Russia.

PAYING HEED TO THE PROTEST

This brings us to the most important aspect of our discussion. The very fact that the reported woman had to strip herself semi-naked to preach her message and tell the world about the atrocities being done by the Russian troops on the Ukrainian civilians depicts a lot about us or the society as a whole. We as humans have failed humanity. We are so callous and ignorant of the tragedies going on in this world. Since the time this news has been out, there have been numerous discussions about the same. What is unfortunate about this is that yet there are people out there sitting back on their couches, in their luxurious homes, moral policing every girl. So can we say that they are okay with rapes but not with a protest?

There have been incidents of name-calling, alleging this to be western propaganda against Russia, the whole act being done just for getting “attention”. I would say yes. Yes, the whole act was carried out to draw the attention of the public because of the very reason that we have very casually given so much importance to events like Cannes. We are absorbed into discussions about the dress, the style, the comments, the life, the movies, and the red carpet looks of the celebrities that we have failed to realize our moral duties as human beings. Our consciousness doesn't seem to question or care much for these tragedies now. The situation has become so adverse that the reported female was in a way left with no other option.

Social media posts and media headlines are but a temporary source of information to us. We sit, we watch, we think good or bad or many times be neutral about it and then we forget. But what has been going on in Ukrainian and many other war-torn countries is a doom, a catastrophe, an apocalypse. These war crimes are a violation of international laws related to wars. It is a disguised genocide. And yet it goes unpunished. Time and time, women and children have been the worst victims of brutalities done upon the commonwealth. And yet it is an unfortunate and shameful fact that the authorities, government, and the great acclaimed international protectors of human rights and world peace are not able to provide any concrete security or assistance to such women and children. These are the crimes that are cheap, silent, impactful, and unheard. Cheap because it is cost-free and silent because many of these crimes go unreported; credit is given to our society's creation of stigma and taboo around such a ghastly yet sensitive topic. Impactful because not only the victim but the victim's family gets affected because of it. Sexual assaults and rapes have been used as sociological warfare. Apart from the bodily damage, and emotional and mental trauma; It also makes the victims vulnerable and prone to human trafficking.

Mere sanctions and talks are just not the need of the hour or a permanent solution to this misery. What we require is a record of all those soldiers if it is possible to identify them and punish them for their heinous crimes. We also as human beings civilized and rational beings of this society need to develop our vigilante. We have to get more considerate and sympathetic towards the sufferings and pain of our people. Those women and girls who had to go through

such abhorrent crimes need just not to be heard but rather given justice. And justice is given impartially. So that another woman can never be left so helpless that she requires to strip herself naked just to get the world's attention in order to preach what is already known but ignored.

COVENANTS AT STAKES

Russian onslaught showed how a modern dictator could wreak havoc on innocent civilians and the determination with which the supreme leader thinks he can obliterate a country. Russia did not pay the slightest attention to human rights and caused great damage to people and property. Russia did not show any compassion and violated the following conventions.

1. Article 2(4)⁴ of the United Nations Charter, requires member states to refrain from the “use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state.” This law mentions clearly that force shouldn't be used against any state and Russia breached this code without any second thought.
2. By recognizing Donetsk and Luhansk as separate countries, which are in fact parts of Ukraine, Russia has intervened and violated article 2⁵ of the charter. The process by which the invasion has taken place is also in violation of Article 1(1), Article 1(2), and Article 2(4)⁶ – all of which recognize sovereignty as the key principle of international relations.
3. The attack on Kyiv had a profound impact on the civilians, and it is a direct violation of the Geneva Conventions (that establish international legal standards for humanitarian treatment in war) and international humanitarian law standards. Civilians, in any case, shouldn't be attacked but videos that surfaced showed how tanks were used to kill innocent people who had nothing to do with the war. Geneva Convention IV specifically affords the protection to

⁴ United Nations Charter, 1945, art.2(4)

⁵ United Nations Charter, 1945, art.2

⁶ United Nations Charter, 1945, art.1(1), art.1(2), and art.2(4)

civilians and Article 51 (5) (b)⁷ of the Additional Protocol prohibits such attacks that may cause incidental loss of civilian life

4. International human rights law violations - Both parties (Russia and Ukraine) are signatories to important conventions and declarations including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, European Convention on Human Rights, and the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. These treaties guarantee fundamental rights – including but not limited to the right to life and dignity, the right to be secure from torture, ill-treatment, and forceful detention, and the right to a fair trial even during a public emergency. But Russia not only failed to provide the basic fundamental rights to civilians but also blatantly tortured and murdered millions of innocent people.

IS THERE ANY LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL?

Any sudden and possible end to this war is a pipe dream. The actions of the Western nations are bizarre. The USA and The UK have supplied advanced missile and rocket systems along with modern guns, tanks, and artillery to the Ukrainian forces while they keep trading with the Russians and this thing makes little sense to anybody. In one sense they see a potential defense market in Ukraine. After the end of the war, whenever it happens, Ukraine would look for defense supplies and it won't be surprising if the US or UK would look to grab the opportunity. Resolution of this war is only possible through diplomatic negotiations as war only leads to devastation. Leaders of the advanced economies are required to sit and negotiate terms of peace with Russia as this is the only way out but this is a tightrope walk as any humiliating treaty on Ukraine will not be accepted and will ultimately lead to more bloodshed. The Russian brutality in Ukraine should also not go unpunished. War crimes that have been committed by the Russian army should be tried in international courts and all the offenders should be given harsh punishments. This attack wasn't just on a country. It was an attack to obliterate an entire civilization, an attack that would be tantamount to genocide and such an attack in this period of advanced civilizations is just galling.

⁷ United Nations Charter, 1945, art.51(5) (b)