NATO and the Kosovo War.
The 1999 Military Intervention from a Comparative Perspective

Kathleen Zeidler*

The End of Silencing? Dealing with Sexualized Violence in the Context of the Kosovo Conflict (1998/99–2019)

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Abstract: This study deals with sexual violence in the Kosovo conflict. Adopting a broad timeframe from 1998/99 to 2019 it analyses the discourse about sexual violence and considers the actors involved, focussing on practices of silencing and "un-silencing". In 1998/99 international actors, particularly NATO member states, brought sexual violence into their narrative to justify military intervention. It was not until 2012, after more than a decade of silence, that conflict-related sexual violence began to be integrated into the narrative of heroism and victory in Kosovo itself. The author highlights particular turning points of the breaking of silence about wartime sexual violence when for the sake of certain political interests it came to be presented as a threat to the nation. Finally, she shows that aspects of gender hierarchization were hidden, which contributed once again to the reimposition of silence on individual survivors of sexual violence.

Keywords: sexual violence, Kosovo, NATO intervention, public memory, feminist activism

Introduction

Pristina, 18 October 2018. As a survivor of wartime sexual violence Vasfije Krasniqi-Goodman stood next to Hashim Thaçi, the president of Kosovo, to receive Honorary Citizenship (President Awards, 18 October 2018) and then she was pictured being presented with a huge bouquet of flowers in front of a monument erected to

***Corresponding author: Kathleen Zeidler,** Graduate School Global and Area Studies, University of Leipzig, Leipzig, Germany, E-mail: kathleen.zeidler@posteo.de

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commemorate the victims of sexual violence during the 1998/99 war in Kosovo.[1] So Krasniqi-Goodman's testimony resulted in public acknowledgement for what she had suffered in the war, and she was fêted with honours. In the same year, as part of the campaign #BeMyVoice, Kosovo-Albanian marathon runners, the national football team and other prominent figures all showed support for survivors of sexual violence in the same war, thus framing the wartime sexual violence as a national concern. Even pop superstar Rita Ora raised awareness of the topic among her fans on digital social networks by making the nationalist hand-gesture representing the Albanian eagle (Figure 1).[2]

Figure 1: Rita Ora supporting the campaign #bemyvoice (Screenshot). Source: Ora 2018.

Such examples seem to imply that the sexual violence engendered by the conflict is now publicly acknowledged not only by civil society but also by the highest state actors, suggesting that perhaps more than twenty years after the war, Kosovar society has come to terms with its past. In this study I shall examine that impression critically and relate it to continuities and changes in the representation of wartime sexual violence since the beginning of the Kosovo conflict and how it

1 For practical reasons, throughout this article I have refrained from pointing out at each stage the changing political status of Kosovo, which went from autonomous province of the Yugoslav Republic of Serbia to independent republic. For similar reasons I have used the toponyms that are common in English, for example Kosovo instead of Kosova, and Pristina instead of Prishtina/Priština.

2 See Hashtags *#BehuZëriIim* / #bemyvoice on Twitter.

has been dealt with. I shall emphasize in particular its effect on the NATO intervention of March to June 1999 and its aftermath today.

Previous research has shown that throughout history conflict-related sexual violence has been silenced in terms of public acknowledgment and international justice (Askin 1997; Brownmiller 1975). However, various actors have made constant demands that the silence on the subject should be broken, their voices becoming particularly insistent during the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina (1992–1995) (Stiglmayer and Faber 1994). To explain wartime rape, women's rights activists have since oscillated between a "gender frame" and an "ethnic frame" (Bos 2006) while on various occasions wartime sexual violence has been politicized with the aim of mobilizing military action without much consideration for the experience of those who fall victim to actual violence (Harrington 2013).

Similar contradictory aspects can be seen in the case of the Kosovo conflict. As Karen Engle (2007) has argued, feminists were important in pushing women's rights as a legitimate reason for "humanitarian" military intervention. The "marriage" of certain feminists and interventionists ("military hawks") as "feminist hawks" (Godec 2010, 238) was articulated for the first time during the Bosnian War (1992–1995) when the legal scholar and feminist activist Catharine MacKinnon successfully established the term "genocidal rape". The notion of rape as a method of genocide emphasized a difference between "genocidal rape" of Muslim and Croat women by Serb forces and other war-related rape. Feminists in the "genocidal rape" camp were more likely to demand military intervention (Engle 2007) while, according to MacKinnon, feminists who emphasized rape "on all sides" tended to "deflect intervention" (1994, 189).

On the other hand, the human rights lawyer Rhonda Copelon (1994) criticized such hierarchization and stressed the danger of once more obscuring sexual violence in other contexts. Instead, Copelon suggested consideration of the intersectionality of genocide and sexual violence. Later, with regard to the US "war on terror" in the aftermath of the attack on the World Trade Center on 11 September 2001, MacKinnon (2006) advocated including the suppression of women as part of the rationale for military intervention. Other authors too referring to Kosovo demanded that sexual violence be placed more prominently on the political agenda for military intervention (Rodgers 2001). Although the notion of "genocidal rape" was not deemed sufficient to provoke military intervention in Bosnia, armed intervention to protect women was increasingly legitimized (the "saving women" narrative, Godec 2010, 239), for example in Afghanistan (2001), Iraq (2003), and Darfur (2003/4) (Godec 2010; Engle 2007). However, certain feminist authors have been critical of such justification, considering instead the negative consequences for local women such as the emergence in Kosovo of human trafficking and forced

prostitution (Godec 2010, 245–46) and highlighting too the more general increases seen in "everyday" rape and other violence (Engle 2007, 224).

The object of this article is to trace the representation of sexual violence in the Kosovo conflict from 1998/99 until today, as well as examining how various actors have responded to changing representations. That was achieved by considering arenas of discourse and differing degrees of power among the actors. For example, men too were victims of sexual violence (Clark 2017), but to reflect the fact that the public discourse on the subject was completely preoccupied with women as victims, this article focuses on women. Inspired by critical discourse analysis and the framing approach used in the study of social movements, this study analyses a variety of sources including press articles, publications of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), reports and documents of international organizations, and grey literature. I consider it important to include information from a large variety of actors, from civil society as well as from the military, political, and legal spheres of the conflict, so Kosovo-Albanians, Serbians and "Westerners" will feature here. Increasingly—and in accordance with the feminist insistence on emphasizing women's agency instead of their victimhood—the term "survivor" has replaced "victim", but I firmly acknowledge the life-long impact of sexual violence on those who experience it. The term "survivor" in this context can in fact be traced to the American feminist Kathleen Barry (1979) while allusions to Holocaust survivors are far from coincidental (Cole 2021). Related matters are the struggle for public acknowledgement and reparations, and the complex dynamics between gender and nationhood have been crucial for this endeavour (Yuval-Davis 2011).

To develop the argument, this article elaborates on processes of "silencing" and "un-silencing" about sexual violence in Kosovo. "Silence" as a leitmotif is used to focus attention: who is silent or silenced? By whom or what are they silenced? How is their silence explained and have attempts been made to end it? And if so, how? That approach was inspired by studies on silencing and denial as social and political phenomena, emphasizing "tension[s] between what is personally experienced and what is publicly acknowledged" (Zerubavel 2006, ix) and "intersect[ions] at the nexus of power and agency" (Cooke and Dingli 2018, 1). Furthermore, I looked for support to feminist notions of the silencing of rape and other violence against women in both peacetime and war (Charlesworth 1999). When sexual violence is treated as a threat to security demanding military intervention, and when it is publicly acknowledged, that is no matter of objectivity and impartiality but one of gendered power relations such as are seldom made visible. Searching for silences means therefore emphasizing both continuities and ruptures in how and by whom sexual violence is seen as a relevant or irrelevant problem, and to what end.

The first part of this article deals with the functions of representations of sexual violence in the context of the armed conflict between Serbian forces and the Kosovo Liberation Army (*Ushtria Çlirimtare e Kosovës*, KLA) in 1998/99, and the NATO intervention from March to June 1999. I emphasize how NATO representatives framed rape as part of a Serbian "ethnic cleansing" campaign against the Albanian population and how that entered the justification narrative of NATO's attempts to protect an ethnic group by military means. In the second part of the article I shall discuss the transition from the silencing of sexual violence to its presentation to Kosovar society as an element of narratives about heroism after the war. I have focused on debates about accountability for conflict-related sexual violence in the transitional justice process and the representation of conflict-related rape both in transitional justice and in the process leading to Kosovar independence.

Protection of Victims or Justification of Intervention?

The subject of rape in Kosovo featured in international debate during the NATO intervention in 1999. Rape was described as a "weapon" used systematically by Serbian forces as part of their "ethnic cleansing" campaign against Kosovo's Albanian population. The narrative of sexual violence had already played an important role in the 1980s, long before tensions in Kosovo progressed to armed conflict. Accusations of rape of Serbian women by Albanian men in Kosovo were promulgated both there and in Serbia proper chiefly by the Serbian national elite, who framed allegations of those rapes as "ethnic cleansing" or genocide. That narrative of victimhood (Jalusic 2004) contributed to mobilizing Serbs to retaliate for the national cause. Historians and political scientists broached the subject of the 1980s "rape in Kosovo" as a symptom of nationalism in Serbia (Bracewell 2000) and have acknowledged the importance of the "rape discourse" to the increase in nationalism which eventually led to the wars of Yugoslav dissolution (Dragović-Soso 2002, 120–1; Schmitt 2008, 302; Sundhaussen 2012, 231–2).

In the 1990s, before the open armed conflict in Kosovo, sparked primarily by the war in Bosnia and the extensive media coverage of wartime rape there, a previously unknown international sensitivity emerged to conflict-related sexual violence. Sexual violence during the Bosnian War was discussed extensively in international legal and academic discourse, which emphasized the use of rape by Serb troops as a method of "ethnic cleansing" of Bosnian Muslims and Croats (Bassiouni and McCormick 1996; Patel 1994; Skjelsbæk 2011). As a consequence, the international community worked on the integration of rape—indeed sexual violence in general—into international legal instruments such as the statutes of the

International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and the International Criminal Court (ICC). Important landmark decisions on sexual violence at the International Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and for Rwanda (ICTR) further strengthened international legal prosecution of conflict-related sexual violence (Brammertz and Jarvis 2016). Debate on the subject showed that the international community was already well aware of the problem when the Kosovo conflict turned from rising hostility into open armed conflict.

Tracing Sexual Violence

When in 1998 accounts increased of atrocities perpetrated by both regular and irregular Serb forces in Kosovo, the international community felt an imperative to act. The basis for their action in Operation Allied Force, as the NATO intervention in Yugoslavia was officially named, was purely moral: ostensibly it was an attempt to protect the Albanian population of Kosovo from severe human rights abuses and to prevent a "humanitarian catastrophe", in the last resort by means of military force. Indicators for the severity of the "humanitarian catastrophe" were first and foremost massacres of civilians, and the danger of "ethnic cleansing" of the province by targeted expulsion of the Albanian population. Bahador (2007) considered that media coverage of three incidents of massacres before the bombing began prompted a significant policy shift, which led first to the Rambouillet Agreement, known formally as the Interim Agreement for Peace and Self-Government in Kosovo, and then, when the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia refused to sign it, provoked military intervention.

Women and children as sufferers of "ethnic cleansing" were presented in media coverage as the human face of a "humanitarian catastrophe" (del Zotto 2002; Nachtigall und Bewernitz 2011) and made military intervention for the protection of Albanian civilians seem even more justified. Cynthia Enloe (1993, 166) then argued from a feminist antiwar perspective that protection of "womenandchildren" is an age-old narrative used to justify military violence and even war, which however does not consider the actual needs of women. Before the NATO bombing began on 24 March 1999, very little information about rape in Kosovo had been publicly available (Human Rights Watch 1998; Serbia–Montenegro Country Report, 26 February 1999). An Albanian civil society organization called the Council for the Defence of Human Rights and Freedoms (*Këshilli për mbrojtjen e të drejtave e të lirive të njeriut*) had collected among its information on other human rights violations committed by Serbian authorities a significant amount of detailed data on acts of sexual violence perpetrated since the beginning of the 1990s. In the organization's published Bulletins however, women who had been the victims of

sexual violence were mentioned only in relation to their male relatives and as "maltraitée par la police serbe" (Ahmeti 2001, 28). When women members of the Council criticized such silencing of victims of sexual violence, political leaders blamed the complaining women for having the wrong priorities. The men insisted on maintaining the focus on "the nation, not women" (Di Lellio 2016, 7).

In 1993, Vjosa Dobruna and Sevdije Ahmeti of the Council founded the Centre for the Protection of Women and Children (*Qendra për Mbrojtjen e Grave dhe Fëmijëve*) which, without giving up the broader ethnic framework of the repression of all Kosovo's Albanians, focused on the rights and health of women. In the 1990s Dobruna and Ahmeti linked up with international feminist networks that had flourished since 1992/93 due to the international attention drawn to sexual violence in the Bosnian War. Dobruna and Ahmeti thus found funding and profited from knowledge transfer (Di Lellio 2016, 8–9).

After the outbreak of armed hostilities in the former Yugoslavia in 1991 international organisations monitored the situation in Kosovo too. In August 1992 Tadeusz Mazowiecki was appointed UN special rapporteur and began reporting on behalf of the United Nations (UN) Commission on Human Rights on the human rights situation in what had been Yugoslav territory (e.g. Mazowiecki 1992, 29–32; 1993a, 33–9; 1993b, 27–30). Kosovo was one of those territories, but among his references to human rights abuses in Kosovo he made no mention of sexual violence. During the escalating armed conflict in 1998/99, the Centre for the Protection of Women and Children, with the help of KLA members, documented 36 cases of rape and sent the information electronically to international organizations with the intention of enabling later criminal proceedings at the ICTY and to stimulate military intervention by NATO (Di Lellio 2016, 10). However, so far as accessible sources reveal, the Centre's reports of sexual violence received no international attention before the bombing began. However, it is fair to point out that investigation of such crimes at the time would have been more than difficult given that access to Kosovo was close to impossible. The OSCE Kosovo Verification Mission (KVM) of 1998 managed to gain access on the ground between November 1998 and March 1999 when the bombing campaign began, but that mission too made no mention of rape (OSCE 1998). Meanwhile, although parliamentary debates on Kosovo were already taking place in NATO member states, but with the exception of Canada, none put forward crimes against women as an argument in favour of military intervention (Godec 2010; Krieger 2011).[3]

3 Krieger 2011 (380–90) published the following source on the exceptional case of Canada: Special Debate in the House of Commons, Extracts, 36th Parliament, first Session, Hansard 134, 1830–2330, Ottawa/Ontario, 7 October 1998.

Later investigations revealed that there had already been cases of rape before the military escalation in March 1999, but that they multiplied enormously with the beginning of the bombing. Human Rights Watch confirmed six cases, most of them in autumn 1998; Sevdije Ahmeti (Centre for the Protection of Women and Children, Pristina) documented 36 cases of rape before the NATO campaign began; the Humanitarian Law Centre in Belgrade reported two cases; and the OSCE Kosovo Verification Mission documented 23 cases during its time in Kosovo from November 1998 to March 1999 (Human Rights Watch, March 2000; Erasing History, May 1999).

International attention increased when approximately two weeks after the air raids began on 24 March 1999, US Defense Department spokesman Kenneth Bacon and British foreign secretary Robin Cook disclosed unconfirmed reports of the existence of "rape camps" and the occurrence of "systematic mass rape" (Pentagon: Reports of Rape, *CNN*, 9 April 1999; Loeb and Smith 1999; Watt, Traynor, and O'Kane 1999). While there is no doubt that large numbers of women were raped in Kosovo, the existence of "rape camps" could not be confirmed (Human Rights Watch, March 2000). Nevertheless, journalists followed the cue of the US and British accusations and sexual violence became an important part of the news coverage of the conflict (Borger 1999; Rohde 1999). So it was that unlike in Bosnia, where Western politicians were reluctant to respond with military force to the stories of mass rape first reported by journalist Roy Gutman (Gutman, Bosnia Rape Horror, *Newsday*, 9 August 1992a; Gutman, The Rapes of Bosnia, *Newsday*, 23 August 1992b), conflict-related rape in Kosovo was brought to public attention by state representatives involved in the NATO bombing.

Justifying the Bombing

Critics of the military intervention in Yugoslavia reproached NATO states that their drawing so much attention to rape was little more than a ruse to cement their justification for the bombing (Winkelmann 1999; Cook Voices Wide Suspicion, *The Irish Times*, 14 April 1999; Human Rights Watch, March 2000). As Human Rights Watch (March 2000) mentioned, a number of commentators saw no coincidence in Cook's public announcement of "rape camps" a day after NATO's particularly controversial bombing of a train at Grdelica bridge south of Belgrade on 12 April. As Godec (2010, 243) claims, compared to Bosnia or Afghanistan, in the case of Kosovo "there was no strong 'saving women' narrative put forward by the international community". Altogether the protection of women's rights, i.e. the right not to be raped, was not decisive for justification; rather it was embedded in the protection of the ethnic/national community of Albanians.

Considering how rape was referred to by politicians of NATO member states, however, it seems plausible that the incidence of rape was increasingly used to justify the continuation of the bombing after mid-April. In debates in national parliaments and at the UN Security Council, rape was mentioned by delegates in three contexts, first in discussions about participation in the military intervention,[4] second concerning the use of ground troops[5] and finally, in debates about the controversial bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade.[6] The majority of international observers, politicians and journalists alike, framed the rape of Albanian women by Serb forces as a violation of humanitarian law, or to be more precise, as part of their "ethnic cleansing" campaign, as the systematic, widespread, and organized deployment of a weapon of war. Certain actors referred to the lack of proof that would sustain such statements (UNFPA 1999). In Bosnia the discourse about rape had been used for propaganda purposes by all warring parties to emphasize the victimhood of their "own" women while denying the guilt of their "own" men (Mostov 1995; Žarkov 2008), but in Kosovo the diametrically opposite response of Kosovar politicians in their public statements was not to represent rape as a tool to enforce international intervention (Luci 2004).

Feminist Perspectives

Post-Yugoslav feminists were divided in their assessment of the NATO bombardments. Feminists in Bosnia working with women war victims welcomed the bombing of Serbia (Helms 2013). At the same time, they worried about their

4 See Krieger 2011 for the following sources: Canada: Special Debate in the House of Commons, Extracts, 36th Parliament, first Session, Hansard 134, 1830–2330, Ottawa/Ontario, 7 October 1998 (380–90, esp. 383); France: Speech by M. Lionel Jospin, Prime Minister, during Question Time in the National Assembly, Paris, 27 April 1999 (396); Netherlands: Speech by Dick Benschop, Released by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, State Secretary for Foreign Affairs, College of Europe – Natolin, Warsaw, 12 May 1999 (406); United Kingdom: Statement by Prime Minister Tony Blair, London, 10 June 1999 (412); USA: Secretary of State Albright: Statement before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, as Released by the Office of the Spokesman, Department of State, Washington, D.C., 20 April 1999 (421). See also: Erasing History, May 1999; SPD-Parteitag: Auszüge aus der Schröder-Rede, *Spiegel online*, 13 April 1999; Fischer 13 May 1999.

5 Edited Transcript of Interview Given by the Prime Minister, Tony Blair, for BBC World Services, Tirana, 18 May 1999, in: Krieger 2011, 311.

6 Rape was mentioned in an answer to the question of proportionality: "accidental casualties" cannot be compared to "systematic killings, executions, rape […]". See Krieger 2011, 440–4: Security Council Debate Concerning Letter Dated 7 May 1999 from the Permanent Representative of China Addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/1999/523), S/PV. 4000, 8 May 1999 [Netherlands' and Albania's delegates mentioning rape].

feminist friends in Belgrade, with whom they were still strongly connected through their anti-nationalist activism. Feminist activists in Belgrade, too, struggled with how to position themselves in relation to NATO intervention. The overwhelming majority of Serbian citizens, even those engaged in antiwar circles before 1999, opposed the bombing (Satjukow 2020). Of those feminists who spoke out against the bombing, some did so out of patriotic feelings, others maintained their anti-militarist pacifism while at the same time wishing to see the end of both the "ethnic cleansing" in Kosovo and the regime of Slobodan Milošević. Earlier, during the war in Bosnia, they had emphasized the rapes as deeds done to women by men "on all sides", making it difficult to single out one ethnic/national group, and problematizing the option of military intervention against any one group held responsible. Thus the "ethnic" versus "gender" interpretation of wartime rape had divided former Yugoslav feminists (Miškovska Kajevska 2017).

Anti-nationalist feminist groups such as the Zagreb Women's Lobby or the Belgrade Women in Black saw negative aspects to the singling out of sexual violence from among all the other war-caused effects on women, and recognized danger in its instrumentization for national purposes (Batinic 2001, 7–8). That might be the reason for their remaining silent about rape in Kosovo during the war in 1998/99. Still, the Belgrade feminists emphasized their identity as women over their national belonging, aiming to care equally for all women who found themselves under NATO bombs and for all women victims of "ethnic cleansing" (Mlađenović 2002). The Belgrade-based Autonomous Women's Centre Against Sexual Violence (*Autonomni ženski centar protiv seksualnog nasilja*) set up a telephone counselling service at the end of March 1999, immediately after the bombing began. They spoke to Serbian and Albanian women from Serbia and Kosovo to help them deal with the fear and anxiety (Papić 2014, 58–61).

At the same time, various members of women's groups from Kosovo, some of whom were themselves refugees, set up projects to help and support women in refugee camps in Albania and Macedonia (Wareham 2000, 23). Those activities could profit from the networks they had already established, as well as from the experience of Bosnian NGOs working with victims of sexual violence during and after the Bosnian War. Considering that Serbian troops stood against an Albanian refugee population, it can be assumed that for Kosovar women's groups there was little doubt about the "genocidal" nature of Serb-perpetrated rape, and that they welcomed the military intervention on their behalf. Vjosa Dobruna, for example, said: "Let NATO bomb every second" (Boustany 1999). At the same time, some Albanian women did maintain contact with Belgrade-based anti-regime, antiwar feminists and human rights activists (Mlađenović 2012; Rogova 2012).

From Silence to Heroism

Different Shades of Silence

For about 13 years from 1999 to 2012 women's experiences in the Kosovo War, including of wartime rape, were silenced and marginalized in Kosovo (Gusia 2014), a "protracted silence" (DioGuardi 2016) that resounded despite the attention that had been paid to women immediately after the war, as Kosovo was preoccupied with the return of refugees, violent backlash, transitional justice processes, the progress of independence and creation of a hegemonic mnemonic narrative of the war.

As Stables (2003) pointed out, a number of publications assumed that patriarchal "Balkan culture" was what was making ethnic Albanian women stay silent about their experience of rape (Erasing History, May 1999). The OSCE's attempt (1999) to "break the silence" on wartime rape in Kosovo mirrors how international attention for sexual violence grew, after being almost non-existent before the wars of Yugoslav dissolution. Women's experiences gained significance in the international arena because women were important witnesses for the prosecution of perpetrators. However, the valuation of any act of rape in armed conflict as a breach of international humanitarian law is based not on the experiences of the individual victim of the crime but on the threat to a national body and on the motivation of the perpetrator. Western attention for sexual violence in armed conflict abroad has also meant that both rape itself and the subsequent silence about it became externalized, something only "others" do. That ultimately means that the high number and overall rate of unreported cases of sexual violence in "peacetime"—even in the self-perceived "civilized, enlightened West"—is a neglected problem. Moreover, the fact too that UN and related international personnel have been found to have profited from prostitution and human trafficking for sexual exploitation is carefully suppressed (Simic 2012).

Finally, the insistence on the need for individual testimonies places the "blame" for the silence of the Kosovar women on the women themselves, which seriously misunderstands the complexity of the situation. The fact is that the circumstances of the investigations and the investigators' lack of sensitivity must have been more than enough to make the women reluctant to speak about their experiences, as observed by UNFPA (1999). The Kosovar sociologist Nita Luci argues that the sole emphasis on the patriarchal nature of Balkan society as the thing that prevented women from speaking is too narrow (Luci 2004, 163). First of all, the hierarchy thus characterized is humiliating, as it depicts Kosovars as "primitive" and "backward" (Luci 2004, 163–64). Wareham (2000, 23) added that the Kosovar women's awareness of the failure and difficulties of Bosnian women

who had testified about sexual violence at the ICTY was another important aspect of their reluctance to "confess" to suffering wartime rape. International, that is "Western", actors established that *talking* about experiences of sexual violence was to be the norm, or a goal to be reached. Achievement of that was then allegedly prevented by external obstacles that needed to be overcome, such as the "patriarchal society" of the Balkans. Scholars have contested that characterising of the women's silence as a passive reaction and instead identified it as an "affirmative, strategic choice" (Di Lellio 2016, 13), or even a "resistant action" (Luci 2004, 163). In addition to their subordination to what was indeed a strongly patriarchal society, Luci sees the women's refusal to speak as an objection to Western colonialist behaviour, as resistance to the West's imposition of its own "enlightened imperative" on Kosovo to speak up. Luci argued further that in not speaking about their rape experience the women might have sought to avoid too much loosening of the cohesion of the Kosovar nation. She was referring to the hypothesis that Serb forces used rape as a deliberate method to destroy the unity of Albanian families. Women therefore chose to prioritize protection of their national unity that was again "under attack" from outsiders, over what Luci calls "yet another over-adaptation of Kosovo-Albanian femininity by (current Western) imaginations of subjectivity" (Luci 2004, 165).

The presence in postwar Kosovo of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission (UNMIK) protectorate meant that transitional justice was shaped predominantly by international actors. While in a general manner the UN at international level urged states to protect women from conflict-related sexual violence and to end impunity for such crimes (e.g. UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) and UN Security Council Resolution 1820 (2008)), nevertheless transitional justice actors in Kosovo largely overlooked wartime sexual violence. Ultimately therefore, the level of prosecutions for wartime sexual violence in Kosovo at the ICTY fell short of expectations. After negative experiences and security problems for a number of victims of and witnesses to rape who had testified in the Milošević trial, activists "vowed to never again ask survivors to testify" (Di Lellio 2016, 11).

The UNMIK too received criticism from local and international civil society actors, as did the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX) which was the civil mission by the European Union that was set up in 2008 to establish the rule of law in Kosovo. Both were accused of failing to prosecute perpetrators of sexual violence effectively (Amnesty International 2017; Letter to EULEX, 8 March 2012). Despite binding UN resolutions on conflict-related sexual violence the international political community failed the victims of wartime rape in Kosovo by omitting the subject of prosecuting the perpetrators of it from the EU-mediated dialogue on normalizing relations between Belgrade and Pristina, which for both Serbia and Kosovo was a precondition of EU accession. The Kosova Women's

Network, an umbrella organization for a number of women's groups, strongly criticized such a glaring omission. They demanded an apology from Serbia and insisted that within the framework of the EU-mediated dialogue Kosovo should seek "justice for the raped women" (Aliu 2012). In 2018 women political and civil society leaders who in 2006 had organized themselves as the Regional Women's Lobby for Peace, Security and Justice in South East Europe (RWLSEE), addressed the UN secretary-general António Guterres directly, demanding "international justice for women survivors of sexual violence during the wars in Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia", referring to UN Security Council Resolution 2106 (2013) and urging immediate action (The RWLSEE Letter, 7 March 2018).

In summary it is true to say that after the war it became apparent that there developed different tones of silence on wartime rape in Kosovo. International actors explained the lack of reliable witness accounts with refences to "cultural specificities" of the victims, while the question of who should be held responsible for survivors' silence was rarely discussed. Within the UN greater sensitivity developed among other inter- and transnational organizations as did a tendency to adopt binding, all-encompassing regulations. Commitment to ending the silence on conflict-related sexual violence began to prevail, but with regard to Kosovo their new aspirations failed to materialize sufficiently. For more than a decade in fact there was no public discourse on wartime rape in Kosovo, but that changed in about 2012 when civil society began to ask for recognition for the victims and acknowledgment of the wartime sexual violence done to them.

Unacknowledged Survivors

The matter of reparations for civilian victims of armed conflict emerged as another important aspect of transitional justice needing to be addressed (Basic Principles, 16 December 2005). In 2012 a bill was passed on reparations for veterans and war victims in Kosovo but it did not include victims of sexual violence (Law 04/L-054), which triggered a public debate on wartime sexual violence that has still not been resolved.

The hegemonic memory in postwar Kosovo excluded the experience and participation of women as fighters, supporters or victims, and female perspectives on memory. Ethnic minorities too were excluded, like Roma, Turks or Bosniaks. Public memory was largely characterized by the "mnemonic hegemony" of male KLA veterans and was centred on the armed resistance to Serbian oppression (Gusia 2014; Ingimundarson 2007; Schwandner-Sievers 2013). This materialized in public commemorative practices such as the erection of monuments or the re-naming of streets and places, but also in how processes of transitional justice

were adapted. Numerous privately-funded monuments were built in Kosovo showing individual, exclusively male KLA-fighters in a heroic, patriotic manner, rendering invisible both women's contribution to the war and their memory.[7] In that sense the shaping of public memory was "privatized" as, in the absence of government regulation, wealthy or powerful citizens could present themselves or their relatives in an emphatically masculine heroic light, to further bolster their social status or political power (Gusia 2014, 140). Following that logic of masculine heroism an ethnonational hierarchization was put in place which affected too the politics of memory (Visoka 2016). The resulting gender hierarchization then had an enormous effect on the position of victims of sexual violence in the public memory.

Immediately after the conflict there were significant differences between the priorities of the international community and those deriving from the experiences of Kosovar women. The women's rights activist Rachel Wareham (2000, 15–6) discerned three forms of sexual violence as generally relevant to Kosovar women, those being the consequences of wartime rape, domestic violence, and "trafficking in women". Of those three, rape disappeared from the public agenda over 1999 and 2000 after certain local journalists published "insensitive" reports of pregnancies after wartime rape (Di Lellio 2016, 12). A systematic analysis of local media representation of wartime sexual violence in Kosovo is lacking, however. Domestic violence was not mentioned publicly at all, while "sex trafficking" gained huge attention locally and internationally as the discourse in Kosovo switched from rape to human trafficking, reflecting international priorities (Istrefi und Qosaj-Mustafa 2009). Both at home and abroad, public attention was much more narrowly focussed than women considered necessary for an adequate view on the significant impact on their lives of war and intervention.

Lack of public recognition was accompanied by exclusion of the affected women from medical and economic assistance. Before 2012 there were only a handful of NGOs to which women needing medical or psychosocial counselling or treatment because of wartime rape could turn, such as the Kosova Rehabilitation Centre for Torture Victims (*Qendra Kosovare për Rehabilitimin e të Mbijetuarve të Torturës*, KRCT), Medica Kosova, Medica Gjakova, and the Centre for the Promotion of Women's Rights.

Through its privatisation therefore, the job of dealing with the consequences of wartime rape was removed from the political arena, but the silence ended abruptly in January 2012 when Law 04/L-054 came into force on the Status and the Rights of the Martyrs, Invalids, Veterans, Members of Kosova Liberation Army, Civilian Victims of War and their Families (Law No. 04/L-054). The new statute offered

7 On female KLA fighters see Kalnoky 1998.

reparations to stated groups because "their contribution and sacrifice were crucial factors for freedom and liberation of the country" (Article 1, Aim, 1). The criteria for inclusion in the category of "civilian victim of war" were to have been killed or "wounded"—which excluded victims of sexual violence, those who had endured physical injuries of other kinds, or who had suffered psychosocial damage, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Civil society actors working on behalf of women were outraged at the exclusion of rape survivors and demanded the law be changed. A strong wish coming from civil society to see the law amended therefore became an essential driver for public recognition.

Silent Heroines?

In the following years civil society actors, especially the above-mentioned women's organizations and NGOs dealing with victims of wartime rape, initiated protests, awareness-raising campaigns and lobbying activities. In March 2014 the government of Kosovo amended the law to include the category of "sexual violence victim of the war" (Law No. 04/L-172). After that the activists pushed for the implementation of the law and for public acknowledgement of the women as a victim group. It took four years and constant pressure from civil society for the government to install institutional structures like a government commission to adjudicate applications for acknowledgment of the status of victim of sexual violence and administer the prescribed pension. The most important activities were a demonstration on 8 March—International Women's Day—in 2012 with the slogan "We don't want flowers. We want justice for women who suffered sexual violence during the war", as well as an awareness-raising campaign called "Hear my voice" (*Dëgjo zërin tim*, 2013), the placing of a monument to "Heroines" (*Heroinat*, 2014) in Pristina, an art installation entitled "Thinking of you" (*Mëndoj për ty*, 2015) and a theatre performance called "Silence of a song" (*Heshtja i kangës*, 2014). There was also the above-mentioned awareness-raising campaign called "#BeMyVoice" (*#BehuZëriIm*, 2018) on social media networks. Simultaneously Naxhije Doçi, the former parliamentarian and leader of the women's forum LDK, and the NGO forumZFD published books of testimonies from anonymous victims (Doçi 2013; forumZFD 2017). Then, the journalist who had interviewed Vasfije Krasniqi-Goodman for the TV programme in which Krasniqi-Goodman had publicly revealed her experience of being raped wrote a novel entitled "Me, raped" (Murtezi Shala 2018).

Such initiatives and contributions suggest in their titles a sense of a silence to be overcome. Speaking in the first person the campaigns addressed Kosovar

society directly, demanding a hearing for the voices of survivors of wartime sexual violence. However, it was still not the survivors themselves who were raising their voices as a reaction to the 2012 law, and until Krasniqi-Goodman's public "confession" in 2018 only civil society organizations were speaking for survivors—and overwhelmingly it was women activists who did so. For the campaign "Listen to my voice" (*Dëgjo zërin tim*) in the context of 26 June 2013, the United Nations International Day in Support of Victims of Torture, the NGO KRCT produced a short awareness-raising film that was shown on Kosovo's main television programmes. The campaign addressed the Kosovar Albanian public, urging them to support "victims of rape that even now, after 14 years of war (sic!), are feeling abandoned instead of being treated as heroines of war" (Kosova Rehabilitation Centre for Torture Victims 2013). The campaign appealed to the citizens of Kosovo to change their attitude to rape during war and to treat women as heroines rather than abandoning them. The national collective was addressed by referring to the essentialized roles of women in society, as shown by these words from the minister for European integration, Vlora Çitaku, who supported the NGO campaign:

> Rape is a weapon through which the war continues even when the guns are silenced. Women survivors of violence are our mothers, sisters and daughters. They are heroines who gave us lessons, lesson [sic] that should not be discarded! It is very important that the debate about these survivors in Kosovo is open and [it] is time for this debate to [be] put into action." (Kosova Rehabilitation Centre for Torture Victims 2014)

By saying that the war was continuing through the effects of rape even after armed hostilities had ended, Çitaku might well have been referring to long-term psychosocial consequences for rape survivors of their traumatic experiences. Equally, she was affirming that in the silencing of the victims the "Serb enemy" was still exercising his power, and that only when the raped Kosovar women were honoured as heroines could the war be seen as ending in a true victory.

The narrative of women as heroines was further supported by the monument "Heroinat", erected in Pristina in 2014. The woman's face on the monument is not an individual portrait but a composite "ideal Albanian woman's face" (Figure 2). The monument actually consists of 20,000 small pieces of metal each showing a miniature image of the same face which laid together form a huge golden relief. The number is symbolic of the supposed number of rapes of Albanian women during the war, which could not be verified. The number confirmed by Human Rights Watch using evidence they found for cases that occurred during NATO's intervention is actually 96, although they acknowledge that the true number may be expected to be much higher (Human Rights Watch 2001, 130). After the inauguration—at last—in 2018 of the Commission to Recognise and Verify Survivors of Sexual Violence During the Kosovo War, up to July 2021, 1510 individuals had

Figure 2: The *Heroinat* monument in Pristina. Courtesy: Kathleen Zeidler.

applied for compensation under the terms of the March 2014 law no. 04/L-172 (Haxhiaj 2021). The monument however, does not commemorate or honour individual women, but represents a "universal" Kosovar woman.

The national collective became even more visible in an installation performed in that same year of 2014 by the artist Alketa Xhafa-Mripa and the sociologist and policy analyst Anna Di Lellio called "Thinking of you". The two women had the vocal support of president Atifete Jahjaga herself who saw the installation as a turning point, after which wartime rape "is no longer treated as a topic that has to be silenced and hidden" (forumZFD 2017, 10). As an attempt to end the stigma of wartime rape the installation consisted of a display of thousands of skirts and dresses set up in the football stadium in Pristina's centre (Figure 3). The garments were collected in cooperation with several women's groups from citizens from all over the country for an awareness-raising campaign. The initiative was

Figure 3: The art installation "Thinking of you" by Alketa Xhafa-Mripa in the soccer stadium in Pristina. Courtesy: K2.0, Atdhe Mulla (Marí 2015).

accompanied by huge local and international media coverage, making rape in the Kosovo War publicly visible, and became a collective event uniting Albanian Kosovars—urban and rural, women and men, "heroine" and victim.

However, sociologist Vjollca Krasniqi and colleagues have highlighted problematic aspects of the installation. According to them it brings a traditional notion of femininity, symbolized by the items of clothing, into a public arena of masculinity, the football stadium, and thus "reproduces the subordination of women within the Kosovo Albanian nation-building project at the same time as it attempts to counter it" (Krasniqi, Sokolić, and Kostovicova 2020, 470). Furthermore, the organizers chose 12 June 2015 for the installation, the anniversary of the day NATO troops entered Pristina at the end of their military intervention. The authors conclude that the trauma of survivors of wartime sexual violence is recognized

> through its alignment with the sacrifice for the national cause. […] Engaging with the nation-building project in Kosovo legitimizes the public recognition of the legacy of wartime sexual violence, but it also embeds that recognition within the dominant construction of the nation. […] This results in recognition of the crime of sexual and gender-based violence but not of the individual survivors.

To sum up, the awareness-raising campaigns and activities were characterized by various aspects. First, they addressed the Kosovar (Albanian) nation as a "we" group, then they addressed the cohesion of the nation of which the raped women should be a part, thirdly they sought single women especially among the political elite as allies. Jahjaga in 2014 installed a National Council for the Survivors of Sexual Violence in Conflict, which aimed to bring together state institutions and civil society actors working on survivors' behalf. She connected that national coordinating mechanism to the Global Initiative for the Prevention of Sexual Violence in Conflict launched in 2012 by British Foreign Secretary William Hague in cooperation with actress Angelina Jolie, a special envoy for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). It is a matter for speculation whether the motivation for Jahjaga's political engagement was solely empathy with survivors of sexual violence or an attempt to increase the international legitimacy and reputation of Kosovo (Di Lellio 2016), but in any case the awareness-raising campaigns were connected to the hegemonic narrative of the war in depicting raped women as heroines who sacrificed themselves for the sake of the nation. The high visibility of the NGO campaigns stands in sharp contrast to the shadows apparently obscuring actual rape victims as participants in the debate. Again, the victims are being talked about, rather than themselves talking. The same is true of the 2014 petition addressed to the UN, which was designed to press it into an investigation of sexual violence during the Kosovo War. The way the

petition campaign represented survivors of wartime rape shows "how they continue to be stigmatised by those who take on the role of representing this voiceless group". Instead, what was needed was a victims' organization similar to those in Bosnia, so that victims could be presented as social and political actors (Marku and Limani 2014).

Finally, in 2018 the first woman, publicly and under no cloak of anonymity, testified that she had been raped during the war (Kadriu and Morina 2018). That woman was Vasfije Krasniqi-Goodman, and she was honoured and received Honorary Citizenship (Figure 4). However, her name was given as "Vasfije Goodman" emphasizing, as a commentator observed, the fact that she had left Kosovo after the war to resettle in the United States and had taken her husband's name (Tabunë e theu Vasfije Goodman, *Kosova Sot Online*, 17 October 2018). Kosovo-Albanian admiration for the American "liberators" might have contributed to the positive resonance of Vasfije's "confession" but such a step perhaps remained less socially acceptable for "ordinary" women in rural Kosovo. All the same, Krasniqi-Goodman's statement sparked an unprecedented public debate on wartime rape, with one anonymous survivor calling her public presence "therapeutic", and saying that Krasniqi-Goodman had given her courage. "It needs to be us fighting for ourselves. Not having our mouths silenced" (Halili 2018). Krasniqi-Goodman herself gained further renown in Kosovo and entered parliament (Plesch 2021). Since then, greater numbers of survivors—some of them men—have spoken, albeit anonymously, about their experiences of wartime sexualized violence (Haxhiaj 2021).

Vasfije Krasniqi Goodman at the memorial "Heroinat" in Pristina dedicated to raped victims of the war.

Figure 4: Vasfije Krasniqi-Goodman honoured in front of the monument "Heroinat". Source: Kadriu and Morina 2018.

Conclusion

In this article I have shown two turning points in the response to sexualized violence during the Kosovo conflict, points that clearly reveal shifts in processes of silencing and "un-silencing". Both turning points have in common that rape was framed dominantly as part of an attack on or even as a method of destroying a national or ethnic group. The first turning point was the NATO military intervention. In this context the discourse of international actors in NATO member states and international governmental and non-governmental organizations posited military rape as justification for "humanitarian intervention". In 1998/99 sexual violence committed by Serb forces on Albanian women in Kosovo was framed as a matter of human rights and humanitarian law and was publicly discussed as part of the Serbian "ethnic cleansing" campaign. While the intervention went on there was a huge outcry about rape, but that outcry quickly faded. The Kosovo War strengthened the discursive connection between sexual violence and "ethnic cleansing" or genocide that feminists like Catharine MacKinnon had established during the Bosnian War. Increasingly from 1999 onwards women's rights became part of the "responsibility to protect" doctrine and were used to justify military intervention in Afghanistan (2001), Iraq (2003), or Darfur (2003/4).

In Kosovo's public sphere voices of wartime rape were silenced for more than a decade until 2012, when the subject finally appeared on the public agenda. 2012 therefore represents the second turning point when a shift came in how wartime sexual violence was dealt with publicly. That second shift followed the engagement of civil society actors in reaction to a law on reparations for war victims. The new rape discourse in Kosovar society presents women victims of sexual violence as heroines who sacrificed themselves for the liberation and independence of the nation. They were thereby integrated into a hegemonic war narrative reframed from collective victimhood under Serbian repression to heroism and victory. Civil society actors on behalf of raped women have attempted to integrate survivors of sexual violence into that narrative, while political actors use rape discourse to strengthen national identity and burnish the international reputation of Kosovo as an independent state. Alongside the right to financial reparations, survivors of sexual violence gained increased public acknowledgement although represented largely symbolically as part of the national collective. As individuals they remain silenced.

All the discourse and public attention did have an effect on the administrative approach to the problem, which can be seen as an amelioration of the situation of raped women. However, any such amelioration is limited to certain women, those seen as members of the Kosovo-Albanian nation and only as long as the nation, not

individual women, is deemed to be the primary target of the assaults. A number of scholars and activists have drawn attention to the activities of the ICTY, UNMIK, EULEX and the government of Kosovo concerning wartime rape, revealing new processes of silencing in so far as they failed to insist on accountability for the sexual crimes perpetrated. International organisations have indeed increasingly acknowledged women who experienced rape as individual victims and witnesses, which suggests an expectation that they are entitled to speak about their ordeal. At the same time, however, they have ignored the question of the victim women's agency to decide if and when to speak or stay silent, seeing silence instead as merely an obstacle to be explained and moved aside.

Public representation of sexual violence in today's Kosovo is contradictory: On the one hand sexual violence is no longer taboo; it is publicly visible and audible at a number of levels. On the other hand, the victims themselves are still silenced, and although campaigns to end their silence speak in support of them, still the victims themselves do not speak. Rather, they are represented as passive, though heroic in service of the nation. So we may ask, was the public honouring of Vasfije Krasniqi-Goodman the end of the silencing of wartime rape in Kosovo? The answer is—"Yes; and No". Indeed, sexual violence is not silenced when national entrepreneurs discover its value to elevating the nation, which can have positive effects on survivors if measures to ameliorate their situation go beyond political rhetoric and are actually implemented. However, gendered aspects such as structural inequalities and power hierarchies might continue to work as incentives for silencing victims/survivors of any sexual violence, whether conflict-related or not.

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Bionote

Kathleen Zeidler is a historian specializing in the history of Southeastern Europe. After completing her Master's degree at the University of Leipzig in 2013 she worked in Leipzig as a researcher at the Leibniz Institute for the History and Culture of Eastern Europe (GWZO). A member of the Graduate School Global and Area Studies at the University of Leipzig, she is completing her PhD on "Sexualized Violence in the Post-Yugoslav Wars. Civil Society and International Law." In 2020/21 she was awarded the Sylff-fellowship coordinated by Leipzig University and the Tokyo Foundation for Policy Research.