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From Individual Suffering to Collective Activism: Academic and Community Approaches to the Bosnian War Rapes

This chapter examines academic and non-academic approaches to the study of rapes in wars, with a special focus on Bosnia.<sup>1</sup> Rape as a war weapon has been analyzed in both academic and community-based work. In this chapter, we examine how academic and community-based approaches deal with the individual and collective identities of rape victims.

Individuals are raped in war because of their voluntary or imposed membership of a group, usually defined by ethnicity or gender. Public analyses tend to focus on the collective aspects of rape, ignoring the individual and subjective experience of the violence. Most existing academic analyses describe and analyse rape through gender and/or ethnic group paradigms, rendering the woman victim as passive and even unknown. In this chapter we expose nuances of suffering and coping typically overlooked in analyses of rape in war, in order to provide a more holistic way of understanding of this violent practice. The chapter addresses a perceived failure in academia to take rape victims' diversity and personal experience into account when producing their analyses, and compares it to the community-based approach to dealing with the issue of rape in war.

The individual-focused approach has yet to be addressed comprehensively in academic work on rape in the Bosnian war. Community-based work uses a more holistic approach, and is thus more sensitive to individual suffering and diversity among rape victims. Community-based work however, focuses on both the individual victim and the group he/she belongs to. For instance, community-based work, supported by both domestic non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and international NGOs, encourages individual victims to create a 'space' for the collective discussion about suffering, in order to rebuild their individual lives. This work recognizes that the dynamic between the individual and

<sup>1</sup> We wish to thank the Solomon Asch Center for Ethnopolitical Conflict for their continuous support in our research. We especially wish to thank Julie Chalfin for careful revisions and editing of this chapter.

the collective impacts on the individual and collective recoveries. The community-based work can therefore offer valuable insights for academics interested in issues of rape and other forms of sexual violence in war.

The theoretical basis of this chapter is shaped by postcolonial and feminist authors, particularly the work of Veena Das and Talpade Mohanty.<sup>2</sup> In her work on Western feminisms, Mohanty criticises Western feminist scholars who “discursively colonize the material and historical heterogeneities of the lives of women in the Third World.”<sup>3</sup> Inspired by Mohanty’s work, motivated by the stories of refugees, shaped by personal experiences of suffering, and equipped with first hand knowledge of Balkans and Western scholarship, our chapter aims to bridge academic and non-academic analysis of violence and war.

### Conflict, Media, Gender-based Violence, and the Hague Tribunal

The war in Bosnia and Herzegovina lasted for three and a half years and an estimated quarter of a million people lost their lives during the conflict. The official number of persons still unaccounted for is around 16,000.<sup>4</sup> Based on the United Nation’s reports, in mid-1995 there were nearly three million refugees and displaced people in Bosnia and Herzegovina.<sup>5</sup> Refugees and internally displaced people from Bosnia and Herzegovina were forced to transform their old cultural patterns, and engage in the creation of new patterns of social interaction.

The ethnopolitical violence that took place in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the subsequent refugee crisis had both local and global effects. The term 'Balkanization' for example, began to be used in both local and international media jargon as a synonym for the unavoidable confrontation between different ethnic and cultural groups. The common definition of this term is: “to break up (as a region or group) into smaller and often

<sup>2</sup> Veena Das; Kleinman, A., Ramphele, M. and Reynolds, P., 2000, *Violence and Subjectivity*, University of California Press, Berkeley; Mohanty, C. Talpade, 1995, 'Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses', in Shcroft, Griffins, and Tiffin, 1995, *The Postcolonial Studies Reader*, Routledge, New York, p. 8.

<sup>3</sup> Mohanty, 1995, p. 260.

<sup>4</sup> See Amnesty International [www.web.amnesty.org/library/index/ENGEUR](http://www.web.amnesty.org/library/index/ENGEUR)

<sup>5</sup> Julie Mertus, Tesanovic J., Metikos H., Boric, C., 1997, *The Suitcase: Refugee Voices from Bosnia and Croatia*, University of California Press, Berkeley, p. 11.

hostile units,” and is attached as a negative judgment and a crude generalization to the people of the region.<sup>6</sup> A common view that the fighting in the Balkans during the nineties was an inevitable outcome of the “culture of violence” embedded in the region, rests on an implicit cynicism in the definition. Similarly, the act of rape may have been attributed as another consequence of the violence inherent to this part of the world.

At the beginning of the Bosnian conflict, the media's role was extremely important because the state controlled almost all information available to its citizens. As the war advanced, many media houses, often inadvertently perpetuated the language of violence and social polarization. Stasa Zajovic, a worker from Belgrade-based NGO, *Women in Black*, discusses the results of a survey in which ninety-five per cent of the people polled, stated that they “could not watch [their] people suffering anymore on the TV”.<sup>7</sup> The example suggests that the media's dissemination of information enabled recipients to identify with the victim(s) and to react favourably to the use of violence against the perpetrators, who were depicted as aggressors.

The confrontations in the Balkans, as in many other conflicts, evoked different ways of 'doing' journalism and socio-political analysis. The Bosnian conflict was a turning point for some media professionals who, clearly confronted by the situation, wrote chronicles of everyday life and began widely disseminating writing about local concerns that acknowledged the pain of the individual victims, where previously, this type of information had rarely been accessible to foreign readers.

The use of rape as an exercise of power in war is not a new tactic. Gender Based Violence (GBV) reports have shown that the goal of rape in modern conflicts is to humiliate women physically and psychologically, thus degrading their dignity. Rape affects not only the women's personal identity, but their families, the community and the social environment.<sup>8</sup> During wartime, rape was used to undermine the community by breaking bonds of support, honour and trust. The deliberate use of rape has been documented in conflicts in Guatemala and Sierra Leone.<sup>9</sup> However, in

<sup>6</sup>The “popular” term (more than 30,000 entries in internet) is also referred as “globalization from below. That is to say, global interconnections have played a role in reviving group identities and thus, have ironically contributed to fragmentation and separation. In this way, balkanization and national separatist movements are the counter-effects or counter-trends of globalization's promise of meta-homogenization”

<sup>7</sup> **Diario 16, 1994 please give complete reference**

<sup>8</sup> E. Richter, E. 1997. *Witness Protection*. Geneva, Coordination of Women Advocacy. Geneva, p. 55.

<sup>9</sup> Oficina Derechos Humanos Arzobispado de Guatemala (ODHAG), 1998. *Proyecto de Recuperacion de la Memoria Historica. Guatemala Nunca Mas*, LIL/Arzobispado de

Bosnia, for the first time in history, rape was recognised as a weapon of war. This happened not only because of denunciation from Human Rights groups, but because of increased media attention about the Bosnian rapes. Today, war rapes are even more frequently addressed and acknowledged in the international and local public spheres, and have created an opportunity for survivors to be heard.

Following the violence in Guatemala and El Salvador in the early nineties, interviewers collecting testimonies asked women in rural communities to discuss sexual aggressions committed by the Armed Forces. The women responded with silence. Silence was also the answer at the community level.<sup>10</sup> However, with the emergence of women's groups, such as *Madres* in Argentina, who organized to search for missing family members and popularized the motto "better to be a loser than non-existent," many survivors of sexual aggression started to come forward to seek vindication. Some enrolled in grass-root initiatives that brought survivors together to share their stories. Others demanded additional means of advocacy and justice, and were offered support from international actors, from various professions, and countries, who expressed interest in their causes. This global concern and awareness to gender-based violence proved to be instrumental in the preferential treatment and special status the world community gave to the Bosnian war rapes.

European Union investigators calculated that in 1992, 20,000 women were raped in Bosnia. By the end of the war the number of women raped was estimated to be between 30,000 and 50,000.<sup>11</sup> These numbers were important for the human rights activists, journalists, and feminists trying to bring Bosnian rapes to the attention of the international community. International attention has created new discourses crucial for the treatment of rape in the decade between 1990 and 2000. 'Gender' was recognized as a political and military strategy in armed conflict and "women demanded that their voices be heard, they requested their suffering to be acknowledged, and they sought punishment for the perpetrators of the

Guatemala, Costa Rica, pp. 73-86; Garcia del Soto, A., 2002, *Sierra Leone Opportunities Industrialization Center when working with Survivors of Gender Based Violence*, SLOIC. Unpublished Report. Araceli@psych.upenn.edu , p. 8.

<sup>10</sup> Martin Beristain, C., 1999, *Reconstruir el Tejido Social* (Rebuilding the Social Fabric), Icaria, Barcelona. p. 26.

<sup>11</sup> Cynthia Enloe, 2000, *Maneuvers. The International Politics of Militarizing Women's Lives*, University of California Press, Berkeley, p. 140.

crime”.<sup>12</sup> As an international response to the use of systematic rape in the Bosnian conflict, the pressure brought by women’s and human rights’ groups created a new discourse about rape. In 2001, the lobbying resulted in a ruling that rape in war was a crime against humanity.<sup>13</sup> Subsequent pressure by women’s, anti-war and human rights groups initiated an international investigation of the scale of rape in war and its specific purposes in the Bosnian war. On June 27, 1996, the International War Crimes Tribunal<sup>14</sup> announced the indictment of eight male, Bosnian-Serb, military and police officers on charges of raping Bosnian women.<sup>15</sup> It was the first time in history that rape was treated as a separate crime in war and this process is the specific outcome of the widespread, long-term effort on the part of activists, feminists, and human rights groups.<sup>16</sup>

Political discussions and the explosion of discourses on the Bosnian war rapes in the international arena strongly influenced the ways in which scholarly and activist interest in this topic developed. There has been much speculation about the actual numbers, character, and circumstances of rapes of Bosnian women. When the investigations began, the reported number of victims was exaggerated and for example, some women’s groups set the number as high as 120,000. Rapes were characterised as “genocidal”. Kesic suggests that what came next was a “counterattack from the side that was allegedly wrongly accused, the Serbs”. “Pointing at the exaggerated numbers, they protested that nothing ‘really serious’ had happened; only a ‘couple thousand’ women were raped”. An obsession with numbers is understandable:

War rapes and other forms of violence against women were so tightly enmeshed within the categories of nation and ethnicity, they could be recognized as a war strategy, subjected to indictment as war crimes, and juristically sanctioned--in short, taken

<sup>12</sup> Barkan, J., 2002, 'As Old as Rape Itself: Rape in Foca', *Dissent*, Winter, p. 64; see also Enloe, 2000: 144.

<sup>13</sup> The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, approved 17 July 1998 and entered into force 1 July 2002, defines rape and gender based violence—including trafficking in women and children, sexual slavery and enforced prostitution—as constituent acts of crimes against humanity and war crimes.

<sup>14</sup> In 1993, the United Nations voted the International Crime Tribunal for ex-Yugoslavia (ICTY) into existence. The precedence of this court was the existence of the international war crimes tribunals at Nuremberg and in the Far East after WW II (Barkan 2002: 62).

<sup>15</sup> Enloe, 2000, p. 135.

<sup>16</sup> Enloe 2000, p. 135; Barkan, 2002, p. 62, 65-66.

seriously—only if they occurred in large numbers, were “systematic” and followed a “pattern,” and if they supported the claim of genocide or ethnic cleansing”.<sup>17</sup>

Exaggerations of numbers and denials of the experiences of women occurred simultaneously, and had a significant impact on the individuals who were raped, as well as on the international public. As Kesic shows, from a legal standpoint the numbers were important, and reports about the Bosnian war rapes were essential for the international community to understanding the phenomenon of systematic use of rape in war.

#### Academic Analysis of the Bosnian War Rapes

In this section, we examine three kinds of dominant discourses about the Bosnian war rapes that obscure the agency and subjective suffering of the individual women victims. Following Foucault, we understand discourses as inscribing “raped Bosnian women” through documentation and scholarly analysis.<sup>18</sup> These discourses can be divided into three main subgroups: 1) academic discourses, including ethnic and gender approaches, 2) academic and activist discourses, including postcolonial and feminist approaches, and 3) medical and psychological discourses. The three sets of discourses overlap, and many scholars and activists use these combinations when analyzing the Bosnian war rapes. Although researchers and institutions may analyse these discourses differently, the discourses have the effect of homogenising the diverse experiences of women victims and creating the generalized, even generic, category *raped women*. In the following paragraphs, these approaches and how they were applied to the Bosnian context are explained. Arguably, the use of these discourses can be

<sup>17</sup> Vesna Kesic, 2002, Muslim Women, Croatian Women, Serbian Women, Albanian Women, in Bjelic; Savic, O., 2002, *Balkan as Metaphor: Between Globalization and Fragmentation*, MIT Press, Massachusetts, p. 317.

<sup>18</sup> Foucault, M., 1972, *The Archeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, Pantheon Books, New York., 1972: 48 describes discourse as follows: “Discourses are not, as one might expect, a -mere intersection of things and words: an obscure web of things, and a manifest, visible chain of words; I would like to show that discourse is not a slander surface of contact, or confrontation, between a reality and a language (langue) the intersection of a lexicon and an experience...Discourses [are] *practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak*” (Authors' emphasis).

challenged by presenting the diversity evident in a community-based approach to the Bosnian war rapes and its consequences.

The problematising of ethnicity is one of the most dominant themes in analyses of ethno-political conflicts. Thus, the rapes of the women in Bosnia are interpreted as rapes by Serb men of Muslim women, or Croat men of Muslim women, or Muslim men of Serbs, and so on. Group identity is emphasised at the expense of individual experience, because ethnicity, and thus the collectivising of identity, is dominant in this paradigm.<sup>19</sup> To break free from this “ethnic monopoly” in the analysis of the Bosnian war rapes requires the introduction of additional factors such as gender into the analysis.<sup>20</sup> However, the gender approaches have to be critically applied

<sup>19</sup> See for example, R. Gutman, 1993, *A Witness to Genocide*, New York; B. Allen, 1996, *Rape Warfare. The Hidden Genocide in Bosnia –Herzegovina and Croatia*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis; V. Nikolic-Ristanovic, 2000, *Women, Violence, and War: Wartime Victimization of Refugees in the Balkans*, Central European University Press, New York; Ruth Seifert, 1994, 'War and Rape: Preliminary Analysis', in Alexandra Stiglmeier, 1994, *Mass Rape: The War against Women in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, University of Nebraska Press and R. M. Hyden, 2000, 'Rape and Rape Avoidance in Ethno-National Conflicts: Sexual Violence in Liminalized States', *American Anthropologist*, 102(1), Pp. 27-41.

<sup>20</sup> See for example are D. Zarkov, 1995, Gender, Orientalism and the History of Ethnic Hatred in the Former Yugoslavia, in Helma Lutz, Ann Phoenix, and Nira Yuval-Davis. *Crossfiers: Nationalism, Racism and Gender in Europe*. London: The European Forum for Left Feminists. University of Nebraska Press; R. Boric, 1997, Against the War: Women Organizing across the National Divide in the Countries of the Former Yugoslavia, in Ronit Lentin, 1997, *Gender & Catastrophe*, Zed Books, New York; S. Slapsak, 2001, The Use of Women and the Role of Women in the Yugoslav War, in Inger, Skjelsbaek and Dan Smith, 2001, *Gender, Peace and Conflict*, Sage Publications, London; Ruth Seifert, 1996, Der weibliche Koeper als Symbol und Zeichen Geschlechtsspezifische Gewalt und die kulturelle Konstruktion des Krieges (The Female Body as a Symbol and a Sign. Genderspecific Violence and the Cultural Construction of War), Gestrich, Andreas, ed., 1996, *Gewalt im Krieg*, Muenster; C. A. MacKinnon, 1995, Crimes of War, Crimes of Peace,' in Elenor Richter-Lyonette, 1995, *The Aftermath of Rape: Women's Rights: Women's Rights, War Crimes and Genocide*, The Coordination of Women's Advocacy; Kesic 2002; Maria B. Olujic, 1998, Embodiment of Terror: Gendered Violence in Peacetime and Wartime in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* 12(1), Pp. 31-50. E. Richter, 1995, *In the Aftermath of Rape: Women's Rights: Women's Rights, War Crimes and Genocide*, The Coordination of Women's Advocacy; S. Hunt, 1999, "Silovannje", *Molila sam ih da me ubiju. Zlocin nad zenom Bosne i Hercegovine*, Centar za istrazivanje i dokumentaciju Saveza logorasa Bosne i Hercegovine; J. Mostov, 1995, 'Our Women, Their Women,' *Peace and Change: A Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 20, No. 4, October 1995; J. Mostov 2000, 'Sexing the Nation/Desexing the Body: Politics of national identity in the former Yugoslavia,' Mayer, Tamar, 2000, *Gender Ironies of Nationalism: Sexing the Nation*, Routledge, New York and Ivekovic 2001.

and examined as well, since gender cannot simply become the sole category of analysis either. Although gender approaches enable a more profound understanding of the role of rapes in the Bosnian war, in these discourses the raped “women” is often imagined as an *a priori*, self-explanatory category of analysis. As a consequence, the diversity and subjective experiences of women victims *as women* have been overlooked. In other words, these discourses operate at the level of a collective/group identity and they also omit the fact that there is more than one way of being a Bosnian *woman* and therefore a female victim of rape. Diversity among women victims has been overlooked, mostly unintentionally, by the researchers who stress the shared gender identity of a victim as crucial, and thus ignoring the individuality and additional identities of the women victims.

#### Post-colonialism and Rape

The way some feminist groups in the West depict women in the Third World, is paralleled by the way women victims of Bosnian war rapes are approached. In both situations, there is a strong emphasis on the ‘Universal Sisterhood/Womanhood’ idea and its implication that Western women have achieved a level of equality and power in their societies that must be exported to liberate women in the Third World.<sup>21</sup> Earlier in this paper we argued that there is a need to deconstruct, individualise, and heterogenise the categories “Bosnian women” and “raped women” in the discourses and analyses of the Bosnian war rapes. It is important to also acknowledge that Western feminisms are also the products of the historical process of individuation of women. In the Third World, the processes of individuation are either uncritically assumed to be the same or taken for granted by Western scholars and/or feminists.<sup>22</sup> Mohanty observes the following:

I would like to suggest that the [‘Western’] feminist writings I analyze here discursively colonize the material and historical heterogeneities of the lives of women in the Third World, thereby producing/re-presenting a composite, singular “Third World Women (Woman?)” –an image which appears arbitrarily constructed, but nevertheless carries with it the authorizing signature of Western humanist discourse. Western feminisms

<sup>21</sup> Mohanty, 1995, p. 259.

<sup>22</sup> Ruth Seifert makes this observation.



appropriate and 'colonize' the fundamental complexities and conflicts that characterize the lives of women of different classes, religions, and castes in these countries.<sup>23</sup>

The crucial work to raise rape as an international political agenda and to inform decision makers about the necessity of defining rape as a crime against humanity revolutionised the treatment of women in war globally. Bosnian war rape reports became essential for the treatment of rape in any subsequent armed conflict, and from a legal point of view, the discussion of numbers was also important.<sup>24</sup> However, some Western feminist groups saw Bosnian rapes through the lenses of their universalist theories of rape and sexual violence, and treated Bosnian women accordingly. Thus, in the service of a Western Universal Womanhood, and in the service of human rights discourses, cultural and social complexities, subjective suffering and individual resistance of women victims, all blended into one story of suffering. Consequently the analytical category, *raped Bosnian women*, was discursively formed as an already constituted and bounded *a priori* category. Female Bosnian war victims were "characterized as a singular group on the basis of a shared oppression...and...they were socially constituted as a homogeneous group identified *prior* to the process of analysis."<sup>25</sup> However, differences (in attitudes, ethnicity, race, and so on) between the women must not be forgotten. Cultural, political and historical specificities, which situated women and in which they participate are essential to consider when building bridges between women's struggles across national and ethnic boundaries.

### Medicalisation of Raped Women's Experiences

In numerous reports on the Bosnian war rapes, the immediate response to a rape victim's suffering was to medicalise, or 'psychiatrise' the holistic experience of suffering. Many Western and local doctors and social workers, even with honest intentions to help the victims of rape, reduced the experience of war and rape to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). PTSD explained the emotional and psychological state of the women

<sup>23</sup> Mohanty, 1995, p. 260.

<sup>24</sup> See Kesic, 2002.

<sup>25</sup> Mohanty, 1995, p. 262.

victims. Women victims in Bosnia were not the only subjects who were analyzed and approached in this fashion by academics, activists and psychosocial workers. Malkki and Pupavac explain how similarly, refugees in the past have been discursively described as “traumatized,” “psychologically scarred,” “hopeless,” “overwhelmed by grief,” and so on.<sup>26</sup>

The overuse and reliance on a PTSD diagnosis to explain the suffering of women victims resulted in two fundamental problems in analyses of the Bosnian war rapes. First, it projected *individual* trauma (PTSD) onto raped women as a *group*. The suffering of the rape victims as a *group* was often discussed in medical terms and used in the analysis of individual suffering. Thus, an individual diagnosis became a label for the constructed raped women collectivity. The process masked the significance of the individual trauma as well as the collective suffering. The collective is thus seen as a mirror image of a particular, “psychologically malfunctioning” individual.<sup>27</sup> The discourse claiming “raped Bosnian *women* suffer from PTSD” blurs individual differences and experiences and delimits the rape experience of Bosnian women as a totalising definition instead of what should be seen as the specific medicalised or psychologised experiences of ethnic and gendered group.

The medical and psychosocial approaches that focused exclusively on rape hinders the detection of other traumas women victims experienced or are still in the process of experiencing. For instance, PTSD, which focuses on the *post rape* trauma, illuminates the events and experiences of rape in the *past/post* whereby ignoring or at least devaluing immediate suffering and coping of the victims in the present. This includes poverty, loss of home, loss of family members, acquiring refugee status, unemployment, lack of opportunity to provide for their children, and lack of education. To label the collection of these different experiences as PTSD misleads by masking real suffering. By using medical terminology and creating a hierarchy in the remembered suffering, rape becomes the main focus around which all other suffering and social troubles affecting survivors are

<sup>26</sup> L. Malkki, 1992, 'National Geographic: the rooting of peoples and the territorialization of national identity among scholars and refugees', *Cultural Anthropology* 7(1), Pp. 24-44; L. Malkki, 1995, 'Refugees and exile: from refugee studies to the national order of things', *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24, Pp. 495-546; and V. Pupavac, 2000, 'Therapeutising refugees, pathologising populations: international psycho-social programmes in Kosova', *New Issues in Refugee Research*, UNHCR, Working Paper 59. www.unhcr.ch

<sup>27</sup> Pupavac, 2002, p. 490.

organized. In other words, psychological and medical discourses rarely consider that individual victims may not be suffering from PTSD but from “a complex dynamic of cultural countering of memory and historiography”<sup>28</sup>

### Community Work: From Victims to Survivors

There is an important dynamic between the collective awareness of rape and the individual healing in women’s lives. Many domestic and international women’s groups that acknowledge this dynamic emerged into civil society throughout the new political entity of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The beneficiaries of these groups were survivors of gender-based violence and the manner in which they experience recovery processes, individually and the collectively levels were diverse. For example, some of the women did not suffer personal loss but could not cope with the absurdity of the general violence on the collective level. Other women lost everything to the hands of their neighbours, but were later able to regain a sense of control and hope in their social and political lives.

The accomplishments and failures of women’s groups to deal with rape in war depended on the group’s goals and competencies and also varied depended on the motivations of the women victims joining the organizations. For example, while some women victims joined a group to obtain the services the group offered, other women victims of rape joined women’s organizations to promote awareness about their experiences, and in doing so, they engaged in individual healing processes.

Restorative justice or reparations are goals that are still pursued by many of women’s groups in Bosnia. The groups maintain reconciliation is only possible after reparations have been made. When perpetrators have physically abused individual victims, who by definition are physically defenceless, the term 'reparation' tends to be used rather than 'reconciliation'. 'Reconciliation' is seen as possibly fostering an artificial forgiveness, whereas reparations recognise the crime and the possibility of precluding future violence. Different levels of reparation are

<sup>28</sup> **Feldman, 2002, p. 263.**

acknowledged, each level reflecting the experiences of survivors at the individual and the family, as well as at the community and social level.<sup>29</sup>

### Rape as 'Sociocide': Foreign and Local Approaches

Many Bosnian women and some men were sexually violated by aggressors perpetrating a 'sociocide' through the rape.<sup>30</sup> Precise information about the extent of the sociocide is difficult to verify. For example, in Kosovo the December 1999 Report of Human Rights Watch reported ninety-six cases of sexual attack by the Yugoslavian soldiers during the period of NATO bombardments. Shortly after the report was made public, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) added four cases to that number and it is widely accepted that there are many more cases that will never be reported. The document produced by the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) *Rape is a War Crime*,<sup>31</sup> reflects widespread uncertainty about the magnitude of the Bosnian war rapes. The book *El Genocidio Bosnio* attempts to approximate that "the average age of women who were raped during the conflict in Bosnia was 28 years. More than half of them were married and 48% of them were raped in front of one or more members of their families. About 40% got pregnant, mostly those that were imprisoned in the rape camps. More than three fourths of the pregnant women kept their babies."<sup>32</sup> One of the greatest obstacles for gathering precise information is the difficulty of obtaining the testimonies of victims.

When the international public became aware of the existence of the rape camps in the Balkans, a wave of foreign professionals, most of them

<sup>29</sup> See P. Perez Sales, 2002, *Ahora le apuestan al cansancio. Chiapas: Fundamentos de una Guerra Psicológica*, Fundamentos, Mexico, p. 267. There are at least seven components to the concept of 'Reparation': (1) emotional reparation of the survivors, (2) moral reparation as the restoration of their private and public image, (3) economic reparation, (4) legal reparation, (5) community reparation as the rebuilding of the fabric and community bonds, (6) social reparation as to avoid polarization and promote cooperation between the traditionally confronted groups and, lastly, (7) historical reparation as to establish the truth for the sake of historical memory.

<sup>30</sup> It is important to acknowledge the new status of rape as a symbolic (to destroy the enemy's moral) and systematic war weapon that was acquired in this conflict.

<sup>31</sup> ICMPD, 1999. *Rape is a War Crime: How to support the survivors. Lessons from Bosnia – Strategies for Kosovo*. Vienna 18-20. <http://www.icmpd.org/>

<sup>32</sup> C. Samary and X. Giro et al, 1996 *El Genocidio Bosnio*, La Catarata, Madrid.

psychologists and journalists, travelled to the Balkans in search of the “raped women.” This victimized group became more attractive to study, than the rest of the population. However, the local professionals, as well as the women themselves, avoided and often prevented, any contact between these internationals and the “rape cases.” Although the first public claims describing the extent of the rapes were carefully reported, the ensuing public horror led many analysts to conclude that foreign professionals had exaggerated the number of actual cases of rape in the Balkans conflict. In addition, the public was so shocked and disgusted by the reports that they refused to believe the real magnitude of the use of rape as a war weapon.

Bosnia’s cultural norms place an enormous weight on the Bosnian woman: after being raped, and were second obstacle to obtaining an accurate account of the war rapes. Women often chose to keep the rape a secret in fear of being rejected by their families and communities. During the eighteen months following the Dayton Accords, UN staff were only able to obtain 70 testimonies from Bosnian rape victims. Frustrated by such meagre results, the United Nations hired a representative from the Coordination of Women’s Advocacy (CWA) to elicit more testimonies from victims and potential witnesses for The Hague Crime Tribunal. Working with only the support of two local human rights interviewers, the CWA representative who was living in the community and became a trusted member of the community, obtained a further twenty-one testimonies. Clearly it was an advantage to combine members of the community, with those workers from international organisations, especially in the interviewing process, where trust between women victims, witnesses, and the human rights interviewers could be more readily established.

Rape adds extreme embarrassment, fear and outrage to the existing feelings of guilt, defenselessness, and insecurity experienced by women in war. Raped women tend to be constructed as traumatized, embarrassed, silent, and unable to engage normally in social activities but the impact of such aggression depends not only on the victim’s personality, but also on the strategies she uses to deal with the trauma, the external circumstances, and her social support. In Bosnia, some victims of public and systematic rapes who refer to themselves as survivors are able to continue taking care of their families and themselves. However, some young women who have been threatened, but not directly attacked, show more incapacitating symptoms. Therefore, it is the woman, and not the situation (of being raped), that needs to be foremost in the recovery process. A victim’s resiliency and the resources available to that individual, and not their

pathology alone, must be addressed when developing holistic psychosocial programs.<sup>33</sup>

There are a few films that document individual experiences of rape and emphasise the women's individual stories<sup>34</sup>. Without questioning the horror and the magnitude of rape, such documentaries emphasise a survivor's ability to recover by themselves and by doing so, effectively support the creation of a new, non-violent social environment.

The case of *Medica*, an NGO founded in 1994 by German activists and led by the gynaecologist, Monica Hauser, illustrates how international initiatives can be decisive in facilitating local empowerment. At the beginning of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the main source of funding for such organizations came from foreign donors, and provided the resources that ran local and international initiatives. Although economic aid helpfully contributes until domestic sources develop and become self-sufficient, a downside is that the groups of foreign experts may stay too long and inadvertently promote a dependency that inhibits empowerment and self-sufficiency. Furthermore, international actors too often misinterpret the actual needs of the local actors and impose values and programmes that do not match local agendas for reconstruction.

These considerations were illustrated by the debate unleashed between Bosnian citizens and international helpers in April 2000, which is described in the independent magazine DANI.<sup>35</sup> DANI posed the question, "should democracy be taught or learned?" The article questions the means that would allow Bosnian citizens the capacity to run their own country<sup>36</sup>. Uppermost in the debate is the confidence of Bosnians to confront and evaluate international agendas. DANI analysed the role of the international community in providing valuable assistance and also imposing unwarranted help based on their own values onto the Bosnian (local) people. For example, in the case of so-called "women issues," there are currently enough experts in Bosnia and Herzegovina, including local professionals and local woman leaders, who are implementing, analyzing

<sup>33</sup> Pupavac, 2002.

<sup>34</sup> For example, *Calling the Ghosts*, 1997, by Mandy Jacobson and Karmen Jelincic for Bosnia; or for Chile, *The Pinochet Case*, 2000. Directed by Patricio Guzman..

<sup>35</sup> DANI, January 28, 2000 "Ten Theses for Bosnia and Herzegovina" and the answer by W. Petritsch (OHR, Office of the High Representative) in March 3, 2000, 'This is not our Country'.

<sup>36</sup> Wolfgang Petritsch in the OHR Press Release, March 2000, replying to DANI's January issue.

and promoting changes for women's rights. On the other hand, support from the international community is still needed in other areas, such as developing economic resources, and helping to give a voice to the suffering and make the injustices visible.

#### The role of the survivors: sharing suffering to recover dignity

It was in the Balkans that the psychosocial impact of the violence on the population received global attention for the first time. Two factors allowed the term "psychosocial" to be widely heard: the use of this term by the omnipresent media and secondly, international funding was allocated for needs other than military and material humanitarian aid. This significant change came about because of the following reasons: (a) designed military actions did not seem to prevent the escalation of the conflict, and (b) the European Union (EU) was a recently created entity. Established in 1991 it was consolidating and posing new priorities, such as the financing of assistance programs based on the psychosocial needs of the population.<sup>37</sup>

Between 1992 and 1995, when the situation in the Balkans was perceived in terms of emergency and humanitarian assistance, victims who experiencing traumatic changes in their lives reported feeling defenceless because of their unpredictable future. Although no longer an emergency situation, many considered their conditions even more threatening. These individuals had lost, or were at the risk of losing, members of their families, friends, their properties, and so on. Some have expressed this fear as "we know who we used to be but we do not know who we might become and it is out of our control" or "they just left me what I knew, what I had in my mind, and confused feelings".<sup>38</sup> Others could not, or preferred not, to speak up and remained silent. Since 1992, an increasing number of the organizations working in the Balkans have implemented some form of psychosocial assistance programs that address concerns that are not purely 'material'.

The evaluation of the psychosocial programs implemented by the European Commission Humanitarian Office (ECHO) reveals that the most valuable services in the eyes of the beneficiaries were the psychosocial

<sup>37</sup> I. Agger and J. Mimica, 1996. *Psychosocial Assistance to Victims of War in BiH and Croatia*, ECHO, Zagreb, p. 7.

<sup>38</sup> Kos. A. 1997. *They talk we listen*. Ljubljana: UNHCR and Slovenska Fondacija, p. 196.

programs that facilitated group activities. It was found that being given an opportunity to get together with other members of the community in a warm place and to share experiences was often the key to recovery.<sup>39</sup> This 'simple' need, which stems from the basic human need, is one of the crucial aspects of the recovery process, both at the individual and the collective level. It was also found that fulfilment of the need *to share and belong* facilitated the creation of groups by these victims that worked in favour of their own goals, as well as for other beneficiaries who have gone through similar experiences. It is the recovery process that community and psychosocial programs struggle to better understand. This process can be represented as a continuum that moves from individual pain and suffering, to uncertainty, to resiliency, to group engagement, and finally, to hope. Utilizing multiple individual and collective approaches toward recovery, as well as capitalizing on local and international efforts, could enhance the understanding and actual recovery process for many survivors.

Underlying all of this is the role of the local and international media. The media sensitizes or publicizes the experience of the survivors and sometimes promotes campaigns regarding rape survivors (Bosnia and Herzegovina around 1994, and more recently, 2002 in Sierra Leone). The positive side of this phenomenon is the media's ability to evoke massive empathy towards gender-based violence in the context of violent conflicts. Ideally, this empathy will lead to a broader support for the efforts to include women, as well as all social actors living in the communities, in the rebuilding of the post-conflict social environments and in dealing with the effects of gender-based violence.

There is a general tendency by the Western international community to create institutions that promote a "fast path to reconciliation." Often these paths do not consider the psychological condition of the victims. Survivors of an atrocity might still feel vulnerable knowing that their aggressors are still at large, despite the new (inter)-national mood for reconciliation.<sup>40</sup> Often, witnesses and institutions that promote forgiveness are at opposition with the survivors request a need for retributive justice. These challenging priorities must be recognized, and actively explored by the social researchers, activists, lawyers and politicians involved in the system.

<sup>39</sup> Agger and Mimica, 1996, p. 56.

<sup>40</sup> Garcia del Soto, 2002, p. 9.



### The Role of Advocacy Organizations

Advocacy groups or groups that deal with gender-based violence and survivor needs in general, tend to vary in terms of their original composition (foreigners, locals), goals (such as public activism, information dissemination, and providing assistance), funding sources, connections and resources, and their beneficiaries. Some of the women's organizations operating in the Balkans include *Medica Mondiale*, *AMICA*, *Kvinna Till Kvinna*, *Marie Stopes*, *ZENE Bosnia and Herzegovina*, *Mujeres en Zona de Conflicto*, and *Women's League* mostly deal with women's issues (reproductive health, and education, job skills training, political and economic empowerment). *Boston Area Rape Crisis Center*, *World Organization against Torture*, *Women's War Victims*, and *Medica's Therapy Center for Women* from Tuzla, among others, have developed specific programs of rape assistance.

The impact of the work carried out by these and other organizations varies enormously. For instance, some continue to carry on with their activities today, while many other organizations were unable to adjust to the changing needs of the population throughout the Bosnian and Kosovo conflict, and thus they ceased to exist. Therefore, the persistence of some human rights organizations is impressive. An example is *Women in Black*, who refused to dissolve the network during the conflicts in the Balkans since 1991, and have expanded their action circles and operations.

Following the Dayton Peace Process in 1995, Bosnia changed from an emergency-humanitarian situation to a 'development' project which initiated a new 'donor' scenario. Even in this new development environment, some of these organizations continue to provide their needed services to women and children such as *Medica Zenica: Women's Therapy Centre* and *Association of Women*. However, new demands have surfaced for the organizations' beneficiaries, such as the increase in domestic violence. Rising levels of family and community violence in the post-conflict scenario is a pattern that has appeared in other post-conflict settings such as El Salvador and Sierra Leone. The unemployment of male ex-combatants, which is related to the increase in domestic and community violence, creates additional problems for women. Unfortunately, like many other agencies that depend on foreign funding, after 2004 *Medica Zenica* may no longer be able to provide vital services to address these demands due to their lack of sustained funding.

With proper funding local women's organizations can develop a high degree of expertise and effectiveness in their work. Currently, many of them are completely autonomous but they continue to collaborate with other organizations, and influence and monitor local, domestic, and international leaders and political institutions. A good example of networking and influence of women's organizations is shown in the document, *Rape is a War Crime: How to Support the Survivors*, which resulted from the work of more than fifty international women organizations implementing projects in Bosnia and Herzegovina.<sup>41</sup> This is one of the numerous efforts that contributed to the declaration of rape as a war crime in April 2001.

Bosnian women cope with acts of violence and with the memories of rape based on personal experiences in a variety of ways that reflect their cultural, political, economic, social and historical identities. Often the presence or absence of group support played an important role in creating conditions for ongoing survival and recovery. In particular, group cohesion has a significant role in shaping ways in which women might respond collectively but also individually as survivors of rape in war.<sup>42</sup>

#### Application of the Community-based Approach to the Academic Analysis

Knowledge about individual coping and suffering gained from the community-based programs can and should be applied to academic discourses to advance analyses of rape in war. Community-based approaches are crucial for understandings of the culture of rape and instrumentalisation of rape as a war strategy. Diversity among rape survivors' experiences can be captured by comparisons of the main patterns of war rape used in Bosnia.

There are at least two main patterns of mass rapes in Bosnia: rural (including small towns) and urban. As reported, women from rural areas were often raped in front of other villagers, and this experience stigmatised

<sup>41</sup> ICMPD, 1999. *ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> R. Bacic, 2001, Fear is a sign that we are alive, *Peace News*, 47 and Martin Beristain, 1999.

them for the rest of their lives.<sup>43</sup> Many rural women were also taken either to rape camps or to “clubs,” “hotels,” or “houses,”<sup>44</sup> which were much smaller than the camps and involved fewer women; usually the younger and 'better-looking' girls. The women were kept for sexual pleasure and the rape strategy was not necessarily to impregnate them (as it was often the case with the women in the rape camps), but to use them as sex slaves. The brutality exercised on these women was deplorable:<sup>45</sup>

The rape of women and girls, including very young girls, usually preceded the murder of their husbands and fathers, as they were intentionally humiliated prior to their deaths.” This rural administration of rape was the most common method of “ethnic cleansing.”<sup>46</sup>

The urban pattern differed; some women in cities were taken to rape camps, while others continued to live in areas controlled by the other ethnic group and were raped during night visits, often in front of their families. Rapes occurred in both homes and public areas. Reports indicate that some times paramilitary forces would force men to rape their own daughters, wives or mothers while they would watch, as if in a theatre. Afterwards, they would rape the women themselves. This situation occurred in cities such as Soca, Zvornik, Rogatica, Visegrad and Prijedor.<sup>47</sup>

There is a widespread stereotype that depicts rape survivors as passive victims. In other words, a pervasive inaccuracy about the raped women was that they remained passive and did not try to escape the rape by resisting. However, the individual stories of women survivors strongly challenge these stereotypes. For example, two testimonies that illustrate the individual resistance of two Bosnian women in the rape camps:

Enisa, a young teacher who was raped by her student in a rape camp near Prijedor, decided to start singing to try to convince other women in the camp of her madness. The story spread around the camp that Enisa lost her mind since she never stopped singing.

<sup>43</sup> S. Vranic, 1996, *Breaking the Wall of Silence: the Voices of Raped Bosnia*, Izdanja Antibarbarus, Zagreb, p. 275.

<sup>44</sup> See Centar za istraživanje I dokumentaciju Saveza logorasa Bosne I Hercegovine, 1999, *Molila sam ih da me ubiju: zlocin nad zenom Bosne i Hercegovine*, Sarajevo.

<sup>45</sup> Many of them had their breasts cut off and their genitals destroyed by sticks and bottles that soldiers would push “down there” : see Centar za istraživanje I dokumentaciju Saveza logorasa Bosne I Hercegovine, 1999, *Molila sam ih da me ubiju: zlocin nad zenom Bosne i Hercegovine*, Sarajevo, p. 106.

<sup>46</sup> Vranic, 1996, pp. 275-6.

<sup>47</sup> Vranic, 1996, p. 277.

for days, even when the rapists would threaten her with knives and guns. She sang until the soldiers decided to take her out of the camp and dump her near the road that leads to Croatia. Only after she made sure that she was in safe hands did Enisa stop singing. She believes that the soldiers decided not to kill a mad woman because of their superstitious beliefs that suggest that the one who kills a crazy person will be visited by demons.<sup>48</sup>

Berina's story is another example. A soldier named Misa continually raped Berina, a young woman from Visegrad, for days.

One morning Berina whispered in my ear that she would bite his penis off if he makes her perform oral sex again. I begged her not to, to be strong. One night they came inside, walking over our heads, stepping on the women who were sleeping on the floor. Ratko took me, and Misa took Berina. I was raped for 30 minutes when we heard the scream coming from the room next door. The scream came out of Misa's mouth. Ratko stopped raping me and started putting his clothes on. Suddenly, Misa entered the room we were in, screaming and waving the gun in his hand. When he saw me on the bed he shot at me twice. Ratko stopped him and took his pistol away. He came closer to me, since I was bleeding. I was shot by two bullets; one ended up in my hip, the other one between my left shoulder and my breast. I was in the hospital for 10 days. Only after I came out I learned what had happen that night. Berina was dead. She did what she said she would. Misa tried to force her to kiss his penis. She bit him so strongly that she almost cut off his penis. He, while screaming madly and in terrible pain, got his gun and killed her at the place. Then he came to our room.<sup>49</sup>

Many more examples reveal the resistance of the women victims. The omission of individual experience and resistance limits analyses and knowledge of gendered war violence, and feeds notions of the "passive and helpless woman war victim" that again support cultural discourses of "women the victim" and "men the protector". On the other hand, the coping mechanisms and active acts of resistance to ethnopolitical inequalities and violence that can be found in individual testimonies point to the fact that women are taking an active stance contesting these discourses.

<sup>48</sup> Vranic, 1996, pp. 39-47.

<sup>49</sup> Centar za istraživanje i dokumentaciju Saveza logorasa Bosne i Hercegovine, 1999, *Molila sam ih da me ubiju: zlocin nad zenom Bosne i Hercegovine*, Sarajevo, p. 208.

## Conclusions and Suggestions

In this chapter, we have addressed some of the complexities, problems and possibilities in the domain of the present day scholarship and community work on rapes in war. We argued that in order to enrich knowledge about this violent practice, individual testimonies, witness accounts, and community-based efforts need to be prioritised. By using a bottom-up approach, the experience of rape in war can be understood from a holistic perspective, and different ways in which individuals and subgroups of victims cope with their experiences can be recovered.

In the domain of academic work, the theoretical framework through which the Bosnian rapes are typically examined, needs broadening. If individual narratives are overlooked, then only a partial analysis is possible. Although many argue that the individual analysis is too complicated and fruitlessly subjective, the individual testimonies of women victims call attention to the valuable lessons of individual resistance to ethnic and gender political violence. These aspects of war rape have been left out of analyses and those discourses that focus exclusively on gender, ethnic and medical dimensions of war rapes. The voices of women, located in the individual testimonies, express individual creative capacity for coping with violence in profound and sub-culturally specific ways. Such diverse aspects of survival and suffering must be incorporated into analyses in order to understand how women cope with and resist gender and ethnic violence both during the war and in the post-war situations.

Differences in identities among women victims are crucial for understandings of the culture of rape and the instrumentalisation of rape as a war strategy. Although this approach may seem risky, with the possibility of emerging fragmented and confused, in the long run, it will have a tougher, more vital importance for social analysis than the current approach, which tends to attach generalised attributes to raped women, and present them as a homogenous group.

This project does not stop at acknowledging the individual voice however. The scholarship on rapes needs to be revised to the level of the individuals (through the process of individualization of subjective suffering). After (re)-discovering the individual voice and experience, these individual testimonies need to be used to build and reconstruct the patterns of experience and behavior that enrich and crosscut ethnic, gender and medical aspect of war rape experiences. It is only by analyzing individual accounts ideas can be developed about the different "patterns of rape" (that

is, the different practices of rapists in rural and urban areas that hint to the strategic aspects).

One might argue that analysis of the act of rape in war should rightly be based on gender and ethnicity and end even more specifically, what could be learnt about rape as a war strategy if the accounts of individual victims are the main focus? Our response is that it is important to remember that rape is, even in war, is an individual act of sexual violence. Only by considering rape as an individual as well as a group act, can the various layers of effects be uncovered and these can then provide the foundation of complex patterns of resistance to such political violence. We believe that this kind of analysis will lead to new explanations of what happened in Bosnia between 1992 and 1995.

Bosnian women cope complexly with acts of violence, memories of rape and suffering. The differences between their experiences should not be neglected in academic analyses or community-based programs and efforts. A bottom-up approach to understanding the rape of women in war will reveal both the resistance and the diversity of women's coping mechanisms. Therefore, in order to understand what happens to victims once the war ends; we need to become familiar with the individuals themselves. The tension between the individual and the collective, their diversity and commonalities, might allow for different women to speak with a common voice and become better heard. The challenge for women survivors and the rest of the social actors is not only to promote their individual resiliency to keep in control of their lives, but also to rebuild their trust about living in their communities and societies.<sup>50</sup> In conclusion, both levels of recovery, individual and collective, are crucial for better understanding and the prevention of women's suffering in violent political conflicts.

<sup>50</sup> This is reflected in the following quotes from individual testimonies of survivors: "...the relevance of staying connected to others for the individual and the community mental health"; "...the type of wish for survival you get through the involvement in the movement" "...when they steal your voice, and your physical strength, but not your will to resist and fight" Augusto Pinochet, *directed by* Patricio Guzman, 2000.