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LEARNING SILENCED SEXULITIES: WAR RAPE LEGACY AND TRAUMA TRANSMISSION AMONG WAR RAPE SURVIVORS¹

Abstract

The paper examines the complex interconnection between rape legacy, silence and transmission of sexual scripts through traumatic memories of survivors. By the help of narrative analysis the study shows, how framing the experience of sexual abuse and violation in the paradigms of shame, guilt and silence, supports to maintain the patriarchal ideas of women as inherently 'rapable' and the very rape culture as the accepted cultural norm. For this breaking the silence is not essential only for women survivors to recover from the trauma in order to get free of the past, but becomes crucial in transforming patterns of rape culture, actively and critically addressing it and nevertheless, in establishing future effective practices of prevention of sexual violence, both in peace and conflict.

Key Words: Silence, War-Rape, Sexuality, Trauma Transmission, Post-Conflict

Whether you read Slavenka Drakulić classic novel *As If I Am Not There*, in which the protagonist, the victim of war-related rape, keeps "swallowing not only /.../ words, but even ././ thoughts" (1999, 22) or watch the dramatization of the work by Juanita Wilson (2009), the portrayal of women raped during the war in Bosnia in the 1990s² communicates the same message: the omnipresence of *silence* is embodied in the way the characters move. They "walk with hunched shoulders, their eyes lowered, their bodies pressed together, and quiet, making themselves smaller than they are" (Drakulić 1999, 45). The complex fusion of this key phenomenon, silence, that surrounds the crime of war rape and its aftermath among the survivors is visible not only in narratives of eternal victimhood and innocence but already in the recurring choices of titles of works on rape: *Breaking the Wall of Silence* (1996), *The Silent Scream* (2014), and *Sound*

of *Silence* (2014), to name just a few. Silence becomes one of the identifiers for women survivors, and due to the social pressure, seemingly also “the most dignified position” (Vetlesen 2005, 215). It appears as the inevitable consequence of the shame surrounding sexual violence, and sometimes, it enables disguise and denial because in many cases shame is invisible, inscribed from within and expressed as feelings. The fact that this is the case indicates that sexuality is a disciplining discourse and a means of social and political power as understood by Foucault. Hence, remaining silent protects survivors’ dignity and respect in their communities: If they speak up, they eventually decrease their individual trauma, but they risk social rejection and being shunned by their families and friends. Because the crime of rape is implicitly tied to numerous social taboos, stigmatization, cultural norms, and moralities, speaking out automatically means the risk of destabilizing social relationships and habitus. In addition to social stigma, past studies reveal that survivors’ stories have been regularly silenced by post-conflict (nationalistic) projects and the imposed cultural imperative of the “unspeakability” of wartime rapes (see Agathangelou 2000; Hayden 2000; Ruff-O’Herne 2008).

Although there has been a continuous tendency to speak about the silence and to break it, survivors’ faces remain blurred, their names de-identified, and their testimonies appropriated. Survivors often find themselves embracing the cultural contracts on silencing sexual violence and the individual need to speak out: “the complexity of her /survivor’s, a.n./ countenance also reinforces the tension between the need to communicate her trauma and the pressure of silence” (Culbertson 1995, 172). In the first chapter, I use the discursive analysis of selected sources to show how this relationship between communicating trauma on one side and the pressure of silence on the other in the context of the legacy of war-related sex crimes needs to be understood beyond the survivors’ inability to communicate the pain and past experience. The chapter focuses on the ways we discuss and think of rapes, what we show and expose, and why some of the discourse and narratives have been able to dominate and lead whereas others were neglected.

Since texts mean just as much by what they leave unsaid as by what they say, by what is absent as by what is present, those texts that explicitly employ rape in turn raise questions about their silences, their absent centers, about what they chose to obscure. (Sielke 2002, 4)

I focus on silence as “debased currency” and “a modish idea” (Leys 2000, 304) within the social sciences and in broader public narratives that follow a “complex of negotiations about what is acceptable and what is to be silenced, what can and cannot be said, in the disjunctions between private narratives and public discourses” (Jelin 2003, 16). I ask in what ways the available narratives reduce survivors to speechless and voiceless spectacles of victimization and how these narratives shape their social realities. Silence in the context of sexual abuse is never only an absence of communication, speaking openly of the atrocities, or verbalizing the abuse—it becomes a part of disowning the body of the survivor of her mind and ego. It is the nonverbalized expression of the unspeakable nature of traumatic experience that is beyond the narrative. Devastating traumatic events are believed to create ruptures in the linear flow of experience, and this resists any attempts at verbal representation (Caruth 1995).

Based on the analysis from the first part of the study, this “grand narrative of Western philosophy,” which portrays war rape as an undiscussed and unspeakable trauma, is further debated in the context of “echoes of trauma” (Wiseman & Barber 2008). Moving away from clinical investigations of trauma transmission and related PTSD, this section underlines interpersonal themes and child-parent modes of communication in which the painful experiences from the past are to be addressed. In contrast to the focus on the trauma transmission itself (Mikulincer 2006), echoes of trauma understands trauma as highly variant and dependent on numerous variables, including verbal and nonverbal trauma in the sociocultural context of both parents and children (Wiseman & Barber 2008, 231). Building on this paradigm, I argue that silence as an expression or form of sexual trauma could represent a toxic sexual script that survivors transmit to their descendants. Framing the experience of sexual abuse and violation in the paradigms of shame, guilt, and silence could work to maintain the patriarchal ideas of women as inherently ‘rapable’ and rape culture itself as an accepted cultural norm. I furthermore draw some conclusions regarding how breaking the silence not only is essential for women survivors to recover from the trauma and free themselves from the past but in fact becomes crucial in transforming patterns of rape culture, actively and critically addressing it, and establishing future effective efforts to prevent sexual violence both in peace and during conflict.

Emergence of Silence in the Narrative Map of War Rape Survivors

Slavenka Drakulić, in her famous 1999 novel *As If I Am Not There*, illustrates how silencing the “rape survivors-to-be” started with humiliation and dehumanization in detention:

(...) they look at each other with the same question in their eyes. But they do not talk about it; they keep silent (...). And still they keep silent. Do they think that this conspiracy of silence can conceal their shame, defend their honor? Or is it that their experiences are not something one can share with others, not even with those who have gone through the same thing themselves? (1999, 153)

Silence among survivors is often understood to signify psychological and political repression. Because it deviates from the Eurocentric psychosocial norm of voice, the absence of voice according to Carol Kidron (2009, 6) signals “psychopathologized processes of avoidance and repression, socially suspect processes of personal secrecy, or collective processes of political subjugation.” In the context of the Holocaust, a number of authors began to define this silence in terms of unspeakability (Caruth 1995; Kidron 2009), the inability to discursively frame the nature of a horrific experience. Caruth (1995), along with other theorists, asserted that trauma is fundamentally incomprehensible, unreadable, and inaccessible, and other authors have maintained the same stance on silence as “signifying the ineffability of the disaster” (Blanchot 1986) and the limits of ethically narrating the atrocities of war and genocide (see Adorno 1949; White 1992; La Capra 1994). Dan Bar-On (1996, 99) describes the silenced facts from victims as the “primary pain of the trauma and the victims’ consequent difficulty in putting this pain into words,” and he frames this as “indescribable.” In contrast, here I focus on what he further elaborates as “undiscussable”: the secondary pain of victims that manifests itself in the social responses of certain bystanders that transforms perpetrators’ atrocities into so-called silenced facts. However, the silence is not the consequence of solely the indescribable psychological and physiological pain but rather of the whole experience that dehumanizes and humiliates victims as human beings (Anderson & Doherty 2008; Ullman 1996). Sexual taboos, social stigmas, and different fears are also communicated through silence (Skjelsabek, 2011) in terms

of the broader toxic social context in which speaking out is not a matter of reporting the crime—although the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia has recognized mass rapes in Bosnia as crimes against humanity—but a question of honor and shame. Delić and Avdibegović (2016) reported that survivors often expressed the fear that their stories would not be heard or that people would simply not be able to understand what had happened to them. They felt that they could not trust others, and their silence appeared to be the best response for their self-recovery but also for leaving behind the past of the whole community and the events. Survivors' fear that their testimonies will not be believed or will be appropriated and they will thus be re-victimized (Henry 2010, 1101) all add to the vicious and unbreakable circle of rape silence.

Even if Helsinki Watch (1993) and Amnesty International (1993) had published their reports on rapes when the war was still going on, the cross-sectional study by Delić and Avdibegović (2016) shows that the average period of silence lasted approximately 10 years, which could also explain the fact that the literature on different aspects of the phenomenon of war rape in Bosnia-Herzegovina began to flood the public space around the same time. However, there is a slight paradox in the fact that whereas more and more women spoke out and publicly appeared in courts or as parts of different informative and educational projects, the narrative of silence as well become stronger if not more intrusive. Meanwhile, the numbers of survivors who did expose themselves publicly continued to increase, and we came to hear more testimonies and data on the events themselves; different agents including academics and journalists importantly impacted the social judgments and the idea of the social narrative of silence and victimhood. Less has been said, however, about how survivors fashion themselves on the basis of their experiences and these judgments (Mookherjee 2006, 434). Still, the majority of previous studies note that trauma survivors keep the details of their painful past experiences secret (Danieli 1998; Kidron 2003). As George Simmel argued in his classic essay "The Secret and Secret Society," the latter is a consciously desired concealment that enables group cohesion by restricting the distribution of social knowledge; it controls the system of power and directs moral misconduct. In short, it helps members of society and social groups to position themselves in response to the judgments of others. A 2006 film by Jasmila Žbanić, released in the United Kingdom as *Esma's Secret: Grbavica*, opens a nexus between silence, shame, and secrets that is captured in its central character. Esma, as the representative of "raped Bosnia," is mostly

a quiet, passive woman, and her ongoing fear—which we can see in her wide open but still insecure eyes—is continuously narrated through her perpetual silence: from the very beginning when her eyes open abruptly to seek empathy with the spectator to “dropping her head and keeping silent” (Vojnović 2006) to her holistic attitude throughout the whole film in both her behavior and her body posture. Her trauma and “secret” are narrated nonverbally by her granted lack of “*joie de vivre* as demonstrated by her (depressive) body language” (Koebel 2009). Žbanić’s language and introduction to Esma’s secret are nearly always subtle, and the details of Esma’s past pop up piece by piece until the movie’s climax, when she finally reveals her background to Sara, her daughter, and to the spectators. We can see this point in the narration as also the moment when the burden of silence is finally broken and the secret is revealed.

The very idea of the movie’s plot, be it about Esma’s individual trauma or the collective silence we also observe in the group of other survivors, rests on Simmel’s paradox that members of society need knowledge and information to live among each other. However, sometimes the complicated system of modern-day conception is sufficiently devastating and dangerous that one needs to falsify it:

To understand social information, then, requires wise discernment, which can sort out the real from the false, can reveal what is hidden, can tell what should properly be kept hidden, and can dismiss much else that is cunningly or cheaply proffered. (Beideman 1993, 6)

In terms of war rape survivors and the public recognition of rape as a crime, we can apply Simmel’s idea in the frame of the personal protection of survivors and their descendants, but the narrative of silence also operates in the place of political manipulation of information and how we want to construct societies, social order, and activities. Silence thus sometimes appears as a consequence of a secret, part of a painful past that cannot be communicated out loud, but it also appears as a desire to forget past traumas in order to construct new, trauma-free, postwar identities. The survivor denies and ignores the past with the act of silence in order to move on with her life (and her family) constructively without being preoccupied with danger.

Just as survivors were long resistant to speaking out, academics and journalists were committed to breaking the silence and even to working against the “conspiracy of silence” (Danieli 1988; Zerubavel 2010).

However, we can read these attempts as Kidron (2009, 8) described them: “moral and political mission[s],” as the anthropologist-turned-activist serves to liberate trauma victims from the “shadows of silence” (Waterston & RylkoBauer 2006). The problematic part of the mission to break silence is not appropriating the truth or exaggerating the traumatic expression in form of silence; this mission was always accompanied by patronizing discourse that fueled accompanying characteristics of “perfect” victims such as innocence, powerlessness, and soul death, among others. One illustrative example is the classic work *Breaking the Wall of Silence: The Voices of Raped Bosnia* by Seada Vranić (1996). In the book, Vranić builds an image around the silenced women in relation to religion and urbanized versus traditionally raised women such that the latter are portrayed as more innocent. One interviewee who originated from a rural part of Bosnia asserted that the women who had spoken out on rapes were clearly “city women” because everybody else would be ashamed to talk about these vulgarities (Vranić 1996, 125).

In her book, Vranić narrates silence as an essential attribute given to raped women. She begins the introduction by quoting her friend Nada, a Serbian psychologist, who gives her some “instructions” on how to make a victim talk about her experience. She writes:

Nobody knows more about keeping silent than a raped woman (...) Get rid of the stereotypical idea of victimization. A victim may not look threatened, confused, depressed or sick. A victim may be fat, not a thin skeleton. Some victims have no education; others may be well educated. A victim may be limited in his or her own mind, or very intelligent, ugly or pretty, young or old. But you must never show that you are surprised (...). Real victims will not ask for money to tell their experiences. False victims will do that. False victims often have money as their only motive to tell their story and will ask for money at the beginning of an interview. (...) Do not try to break the ice, try to be funny, comical, or amusing. Be serious, but not official. Try to get the victim to talk in a monologue without questions (...) if you repeat these stories over and over, soon the stories will seem unauthentic, banal... (Vranić 1996, 33-35)

Another example is the 2014 documentary movie *The Silent Scream (Nečujni krik)*, produced by the Balkan Investigative Reporting Group from Bosnia-Herzegovina and released in order to motivate and encourage survivors who had not yet spoke up, to send the message that they did not need to be ashamed of what had happened. The title itself communicates

two extreme psychological anxieties that survivors usually face: on the one hand, the burden of embodied trauma and overwhelming urges to scream out and on the other, the social pressure, fear of stigmatization, and threat of exclusion. The executive producer of the film, Mirna Buljugić, exposed the need to change the culture of silence and break down the stigma as one of the leading motifs in further work with survivors and communities. The survivors who collaborated with their testimonies mentioned the inability to talk with their spouses and even being abandoned after they spoke out. Erna Mackic, editor at Balkan Investigative Report Network (BIRN) Bosnia and Herzegovina office said, "Society is not ready to hear them, listen, or help" (Justice Report 2014), and a similar narrative was adopted by a journalist who reported on the movie's screening:

The core of this trepidation is due to the incident in itself; nobody really feels at ease when talking about a survived rape. But the silence is reinforced by aspects of Bosnian society, which is a predominantly traditional one with a male power monopoly. (Ferizaj 2015)

As the silence was shattered over the years of numerous women's speaking out, the publicly accepted discourse of women rape survivors' remaining silent became a kind of paradoxical paradigm. We can agree—at least after the (in)famous release of Angelina Jolie's 2011 feature movie *In the Land of Blood and Honey*, which portrayed rapes and raped women as the protagonists—that the topic is "generally known but cannot be spoken" (Taussig 1999, 51). However, stigmatized, avoided, and silenced the crimes of sexual violence remain, the status of war rapes is beyond the "silent witnessing" under which the conspirator is aware of the crimes but is unwilling to publically acknowledge it (Cohen 2001, 75).

As a conclusion to this chapter, I claim that the silence surrounding the war rapes in Bosnia-Herzegovina is neither random nor spontaneous. Rather, I borrow from Durkheim (1964) and Foucault (1977) and assert that the ritualized and controlled mechanisms of silence are the ultimate manifestations of social control not only over collective memory but also the very culture of sexuality. In the case of rape survivors, we find the structure of desired female sexuality being further perpetuated; the silence of the past crimes is usually accompanied by the image of powerless, innocent, "pure" women.³ The complexity of silence among rape survivors is multiplied by the fact that sexuality is generally expected to be socially suppressed. Most aspects of human sexuality are often articulated in

the forms of “taboos against looking, listening, as well as speaking” (Zerubavel 2010, 34). In addition to sexuality’s being a social taboo and as such silenced, avoided, and unspeakable, sexual violence and rape as a war crime are to varying extents denied by all sides involved, including protecting so-called national heroes from the execution of law and justice. Setting aside the criminal justice aspect of this issue, I would like to proceed by contextualizing silence in the process of trauma transmission. Women’s sharing their experiences of sexual atrocities by breaking their silence in their families and in front of their children is nothing but undressing their intimacy and talking about your sex (Plummer 2004, 102). Moreover, if the definition, experience, and understanding of sex among the survivors equal only violence, abuse, and nonconsensual acts, then we can perhaps talk about the transmission of specific cultural codes that are the result, consequence, and/or legacy of their trauma.

Silence and Trauma Transmission

In this chapter, I want to incorporate the role of silence as discussed above into the process of trauma transmission. In the same way as Lyotard and Larochelle (1992, 407–408), I call for a more flexible reading of “speaking out” and of communication as memory practice that also takes take into consideration nonverbal and interactive meaning making. These authors assert that language

is not essential for communication if by communication one implies understanding or empathy. Communication and transmission, as mechanical metaphors, erringly reduce the complex process of language to mechanical relations. (1992, 407–408)

In these terms, here I perceive silence as a complex process of meaning making that plays a role not only in each individual survivor’s memorization but also, as I claim here, in her trauma transmission.

However, before I develop hypotheses and draw some paradigms, I would like to elaborate on the understanding of trauma transmission itself and how we can observe and study it in the context of postwar Bosnia-Herzegovina. The clinical studies and literature on trauma transmission, particularly the effects of PTSD, are rather rich and expansive; in most of the sources, scholars came to the agreement that second generations may

suffer from the traumas of their parents, which can result in maladaptive behavior patterns (see Halik, Rosenthal & Pattison 1990). Among others, Kogan (1995) describes symptoms of PTSD such as repression of emotions, difficulties with intimate life, fear of separation, failure to separate from parents, isolation, and others. Rather than understanding trauma in Freudian psychoanalytical terms as an individualized, unconscious process (Freud 2003), I focus on the moments when “testimonies of survivors enter into history narratives” (Ricoeur 1999, 143). Rather than clinical and psychotherapeutic studies of trauma, the qualitative–narrative research approaches appear more suitable for studying the second generation’s relationships with the painful, unspeakable past experiences of their parents and their communities. These nonclinical studies (see, for instance, Bilu & Witztum 1997; Bar-On et al. 1998; Sagi-Schwartz et. al. 2003) have not in fact found reliable evidence of greater emotional and psychological problems among descendants of survivors in comparison with control groups. Some early studies found particular patterns of behavior such as aggression (Krystal, 1968; Baracos 1970) and distrust in external environments, that is, fearing people outside of the family (Danieli 1988; Lifton 1988) as the projections of survivors that were successfully transmitted to their children and/or grandchildren. Because these symptoms rest at the crossroads of psychopathological, behavioral, and social influences, they will be taken into consideration later when I begin thinking about how perpetrators project contaminated ideas of (female) sexuality and general patriarchal rape culture codes.

Studying the meaning of trauma in the life stories of survivors and descendants through more ethnographic accounts furthered advances in terminology beyond the medical context, which shifted from “transmission of trauma” (or secondary traumatization) to “intergenerational effects of trauma” (Kadron 2009, 7). Kadron elaborates:

Attempts to outline the process of intergenerational transmission have given us a plethora of terms, such as “vicarious identification,” “secondary traumatization” (Figley 1995), and even the metaphysical term “osmosis,” yet all these terms and implied “processes” fail to depict the way that survivors “give off” their experience of trauma or the way that their descendants internalize and embody the effects of trauma. (2009, 15)

A number of theoretical perspectives and research fields have attempted to investigate whether trauma and traumatic experiences are transmitted

to future generations and, if so, what exactly is transmitted (Wiseman & Barber 2008, 3). However, in analyzing the available studies and sources, Kidron (2009, 15) critically observes that psychological and cognitive conceptualizations of knowing the trauma failed to define the practices of transmission itself and also reception. The interest in what has come to be known and revealed from the violent past to the so-called second generation has sparked memory studies, and the discourse produced by descendants of survivors has come to be seen as a “syndrome” of belatedness or “post-ness” (Hirsch 2012) that has been variously termed “*mémoire des cendres*” (Fresco 1984), “absent memory” (Fine 1988), “*mémoire trouée*” (Raczymow 1994), “received history” (Young 1997), “vicarious witnessing” (Zeitlin 1998), “inherited memory,” “belated memory,” and “prosthetic memory” (Lury 1998; Landsberg 2004). In her *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust* (2012), Marianne Hirsch problematizes those concepts and her term “postmemory” through assumptions of an essential link between the traumatic past of one generation and the need for descendants to remember. The use of ‘post’ or ‘after’ implies the inter- and transgenerational acts of memory transfer (including of traumas) and the fact that the received memory is necessarily different or distinct from the memories of witnesses and victim-survivors. The idea of postmemory emphasizes memories that are not personal but that significantly impact one’s individual or generational life and world perspectives. The post-generation “remembers” some of their parents’ experiences through both stories and silence as well as the images and behavior they receive from their parents as survivors.

However, the two generations often live in a dialectical relationship between the *need to know* (descendants) and the *need to forget* (survivors), which maintains the culture of silence in which “parents do not tell and children do not ask” (Bar-On 1995). Hence, Wiseman and Barber (2008, 80) assert that silence in families is not a conspiracy (Danieli 1998) but rather a protective mechanism: Survivors who desire to forget the past and adjust to new, post-conflict life continue to believe that withholding information about the horrors is compulsory for children’s unaffected development. This proved to be a misconception in that the children who were protected from the traumatic stories of their parents and grandparents were sometimes affected not only in the form of ill health but also in social dysfunction, violence in their communities, and other outcomes (for more, see Milroy 2005, xxii). In addition, Kidron (2009) emphasized how the ethnographic

accounts of Holocaust descendants show the presence of non-pathological forms of trauma through “silent, embodied practices, person-object interaction, and person-person interaction.” This nonverbal transmission of ideas, the *silent presence*, is an important form of communication that reproduces existing patterns of rape culture and oppressive sexual scripts. According to Ruth Waynryb (2001), survivor–descendant interactions entail transmitting shared ideas or meanings as a system of signs; because I do not see language as an essential or distinct mean of communication, I propose to study silence as a form of trauma transmission.

Jordanova (2012, 54) argues that women generally feel more comfortable sharing their war experiences with their children and grandchildren and are in this way important transmitters of the memory narrative that travels across generations. However, as she adds, this does not apply to female victims of war rape: “In this specific case, their story seems better organized again but it omits the moment or period of sexual abuse.” For this reason, I want to analyze trauma transmission in the form of silence through Bar-On’s (1995) concept of the “double wall.” This paradigm summarizes everything that has been said before on understanding, applying, and interpreting both individual and collective silence; it focuses not on reasons or attempts to explain why silence is adopted but more on how this silence is later used by descendants. After wars, both survivors and perpetrators build a wall between their present-day lives and their traumatic pasts and the violence they experienced or committed. Many children sense these walls—also through the silence—and to fill in knowledge gaps and answer the questions they have had for years, they build their own walls that in a sense are how they construct, explain, and interpret the history and their parents’ experiences.

The lack of opportunity to put these experiences into words sometimes leave a fertile ground for the flourishing of fantasies that the child develops to fill the gaps. Sometimes this involves the generation of possibilities that are even more appalling than those that actually occurred. (Wiseman & Barber 2008, 235)

At later stages, dialog seems almost impossible: Even if one side “opens the window,” only the wall on the other side can be seen. Bar-On, together with other scholars in the field of psychoanalysis, insists that only when the silenced histories are revealed can the transgenerational transmission of trauma be prevented.

The idea of the double wall is important in the frame of this study because if we imagine the generation that grew up with specific memories narrated through the ideas and implications of silence, we risk losing this generation's potential to advance understanding of certain (harmful) cultural patterns. Silence, denial, and shame, all (un)discursive practices that surround the legacy of rape, help to maintain the conception of sexual violence in which women are viewed as "inherently rapable" (Smith 2005, 3). The recent history, the rape stories both told and untold, and the ethnic stereotypes that are still embedded in every piece of cultural identity make women from Muslim survivors' families more vulnerable to sexual stigmatization; disturbingly enough, the men and boys on the other side are no less stigmatized: a male of Serbian origin becomes subjected to eternal positioning as a rapist and a perpetrator. Transmitted trauma thus manifests itself in rape myths (Burt 1980), prejudicial, stereotyped ideas, perceptions, and beliefs about rape, rape victims, and rape perpetrators.

Silence as a Counterproductive Narrative in Fighting Trauma Transmission and Violent Sexual Patterns

Whereas silence is usually coupled with forgetting or denying, here I take it as facilitated collective memory, where it can be understood as "a complex and rich social space that can operate as a vehicle of either memory or of forgetting and thus can be used by various groups for different ends" (Vinitzky & Teeger 2010, 1104). Silence provides a narrative frame for the rape stories to be told and the survivors protected. The story of silence positions survivors into contexts within society, where it travels and

it can be embodied, written down, painted, represented, communicated and received in distant places by isolated individuals, who can then, through them, be remembered and reunited with the collective. (Eyerman 2004, 161)

If we are to understand the silence of raped women as part of the collective memory, then this silence become particularly problematic from a Durkheimian position in social thought where collective memory is seen as central to the reproduction of society (for more, see Eyerman 2004, 161). What is intriguing here, however, in terms of sexual scripts is what Susan Sontag would call "collective instruction":

What is called collective memory is not a remembering but a stipulating: that this is important, and this is the story about how it happened, with the pictures that lock the story in our minds. Ideologies create substantiating archives of images, representative images, which encapsulate common ideas of significance and trigger predictable thoughts, feelings. (2003, 85–86)

Silence as a form of collective trauma and survivors' expressions of their hurtful pasts have become translated into the leading narratives about war rape and how we discuss, narrate, and attempt to understand the crime and its legacy in post-conflict contexts. As I showed previously in this text, the silence surrounding war rapes and survivors not only is a nonverbal expression but also sends out cultural, political, and symbolic ideas. According to Schudson (1997, 6), the past continues and shapes the present on three levels: (a) personally through how it is transmitted in individual lives; (b) socially as manifested in social institutions and laws; and (c) culturally, mainly through language and symbolic systems. All three levels importantly form the ideas of sexuality and sexual violence and its application in individuals' personal and social lives. What I claim in the following lines is that if the prevailing memory of women survivors is a traumatic one that equates sexuality with violence and abuse, then this memory is easily translated into transmitting specific norms, cultural perspectives, understandings of relationships, gender-related paradigms, values, and beliefs.

Despite the listed sources in the previous chapter that show that the evidence on war rapes and crimes of sexual violence in the context of the Bosnian War is rather rich and significant, the omnipresent narrative of silence communicates the very problematic social understanding and (desired) representation of survivors and phenomena as such, as well as of sexuality itself. First, the silence is counterproductive in searching for justice and recognition of war crimes; it contributed considerably to securing impunity for the crimes in the aftermath of the war (Lyotard 1988). However, what I want to address here is this very connotation of the taboo, stigmatized culture of (female) sexuality that silence brings with it. As in other contexts, silence is "self-reinforcing" (Bird 1996, 51); the longer we remain silent, the more silence we need to cover the previous silences. In other words, "silence becomes more prohibitive the longer it lasts" (ibid). Sexuality has been silenced across all cultures and times; practices, rituals, and beliefs both normative and alternative have coexisted empirically,

but the (public) acknowledgment was built with the understanding of sexuality as undiscussed. The open debate about many of its aspects was socially and even legally suspended, and given that the debate lasted for centuries, sexuality itself became propagated as silence. Hence, we find ourselves today in a position in which war rape is difficult to discuss; it is difficult to find the proper words to talk about it, and it is difficult to find anything to say (see also Flesch 1966, 349; Ryan & Oestreich 1991, 30). Breaking the conspiracy of silence among rape survivors and their descendants thus means also making sexuality and violent sexual culture part of public discourse and social recognition.

Using survivors' testimonies, I propose to observe the (sexual) culture here as story, the social world as text, the society as discourse, and the lives as narratives. These ideas have been well established in the contemporary social sciences (Blumer 1969; Hall 1973; Brown 1987), but to understand the vast web of joint actions among two generations (survivors and their family members and descendants), Ken Plummer (1995) developed more precise and accurate paradigms. Cultural scripts or, to narrow the topic to my interest here, *sexual scripts*, operate through storytelling by three important agents. First are (a) the producers, who turned themselves into social, sexual objects. They display their sexual lives and provide the stories to spectators and audiences. Both the language of trauma and the silence provide societies with their ideas on sexuality and sexual violence. Survivors' narratives play crucial roles here in exposing the oppression, violence, and trauma; giving voice to "silent histories" raises awareness and public recognition of gender-based violence and "alters history's narrative" (Hesford 1999, 195). Those who are targeted by the stories might become either (b) coaxers or (c) consumers. Coaxers are listeners and questioners; the coxer is the researcher who brings the problematic narratives of silence and shame to the public and attempts to shatter the stigma of sexually abused women. Consumers, in contrast, consume these stories or interpret them through their social meanings and conceptualizations (Plummer 1995, 106–107). In this respect, the latter can be either other silenced female survivors who hear rape crimes and events related in the media or what I am interested in here, descendants who know the story, assume certain parts of it, or build flourishing fantasies to fill in the missing, non-narrated parts. The meanings of the stories depend not only on actors but also on changes in the realms of context and social worlds (Plummer 1995, 106). Sexual stories or scripts as a "set of behaviors, beliefs, and the meanings attached to them are

constructed by individuals and social groups” can change over time and across national boundaries (Lewis 2006, 254). The rape, the violence, the pleasure, the visibility, and the ignorance of sexuality are defined by these scripts, but as Lewis argues, they are “not simply downloaded verbatim into individuals. Individuals select the cultural scenarios that are most consistent with their own ideas of and experiences with sexuality and incorporate them into their own menu of sexual acts” (2006, 256). However, the rare studies that exist on prewar Bosnian sexuality and sexuality among Balkans in general do not emphasize the “interpersonal” or “intrapersonal” scripts (ibid).⁴ Cultural scripts do not refer only to the “expectations of male-female relations, but they are also in charge of moral prescriptions for appropriate and inappropriate sexual practices and their public representation” (ibid). In addition, there is a continuous rivalry in the literature between essentialist views of sexuality under which it is a fixed, culturally and socially independent human instinct and the constructivist view that forms my hypothesis here, which claims that

sexuality has no inherent quality and merely represents a system of cultural meanings which are themselves created within matrices of social power relations”. (Drescher, Ercole, & Schoenberg 2003, 1)

Sexuality, hence, captures culturally specific “instructions for sexual conduct,” which includes “when, where and with whom” (Laumann & Gagnon 1995, 190). However, what is more important in the context I attempt to address here in my search for the intersection between (violent) sexuality as the legacy of trauma transmission and is what some scholars have called intrapsychic scripts: These are a metaphor in which sexual meanings and desires serve as a guide for sexual conduct, not only in the present but also in the past and the future (Laumann & Gagnon 1995, 190; Whittier & Simon 2001, 141). Furthermore,

intrapsychic scripts include fantasies, memories, and mental rehearsals, and it is within the intrapsychic scripts that individuals work out the difficulties involved in enacting interpersonal scripts within the general context of cultural scenarios. (Simon & Gagnon 1986)

Survivors’ testimonies, which in my opinion are transmitted as either trauma or memory, could easily affect specific perceptions and ideas of sexuality. The latter is, as is gender, a social construct (Schwartz & Rutter,

1998; Lafont 2003; Seidman & Fischer 2006), meaning that it is shaped and regulated by social norms. Rape as a sexual crime and not a marital norm achieved intellectual agreement only recently, and communities and social groups around the world still perceive it as an unproblematic and unquestioned part of cultural traditions and accepted practices. Early definitions omitted the possibility of rape in families and marriages by understanding rape only as male “sexual intercourse with a female, not his wife, by force and against her will” (in Finkelhor & Yllö 1985); in addition to prohibiting wives from making criminal allegations of rape against their spouses, these ideas also contributed to the strong legacy of gender-based divisions between females as victims and males as perpetrators (for more, see Burt 1980; Lonsway 1994; Weiss 2009). Rape as an accepted and normalized sexual pattern was also described in Seada Vranić’s *Breaking the Wall of Silence* interviews:

You know what rape is. You are married and you know what men do with women. For years and years, I heard that it, between men and women, sex as it is called in modern times, was the best thing in this world or the world beyond. My whole life I worried about not marrying (...) Unfortunately now, as an old woman of 50, I grew wise (...) If the “beast” had not taken my honor I would forever think wrongly and I would never know the truth. (...) I wish I would have never known the truth and I wish instead that I would have regretted (not having sex) for the rest of my life. (Kadira in Vranić 1996, 130)

The mass war rapes that happened during the conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina were crucial in the process of recognizing rape as a separate war crime during the prosecution by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in 1996 (Simons 1996); although crimes of rape and sexual violence had been committed in wars before, this was the first international war crimes trial held since those in Nuremberg (1945) and Tokyo (1946) and marked the first time in history that individuals were charged with rape and sexual violence as war crimes and crimes against humanity. However, the international law clashed with conventional wisdom on rape as a crime against humanity, which is well illustrated by the example described in *They Would Never Hurt a Fly* (1996), a historical nonfiction novel by Slavenka Drakulić. She witnessed the trial of the so-called Foca Trio⁵, who all pleaded not guilty, and in her words, the whole trial and the accusations of rape seemed surreal to these men because

[a]fter all, even if they were a bit rough with the girls, they did not kill them, and they did not order them to be killed (...). (...) the crimes committed by the trio from Foca do not even look like crimes, at least not in their eyes. In their part of the world, men often treat their own wives as nothing more than cattle. The man is the boss, the woman should shut up and obey him, and it is not unusual for a man to beat up his wife in order to remind her of that. Rape? What is rape anyway? To take a woman when you want and wherever you want? It is a man's right, no question, as far as his wife is concerned (Drakulić 2005, 53).

The ways in which a culture defines and understands appropriate sexual practices and gender roles mediate the silence and shame of sexual victimization rather than sexual perpetuation. Furthermore, the cultural narrative regarding gender, sexuality, and crimes related to both contributes to survivors' perceptions of their identities and experiences as shameful (Weiss 2010, 287). In societies such as that of Bosnia-Herzegovina, women's chastity, moral laws about "good and bad," sexist imagery, and the superiority of men and male heterosexuality, as well as the cultural legacy of taboos, stigmas, and silence, all (in)directly impact adult sexuality. As Stevi Jackson (1999) argued, the ideology of childhood innocence becomes quickly gendered: Just as little girls are continuously (hetero)sexualized from very early ages, little boys are called on to prove that they are "real" boys in ways that mark them as men, masculine, and in Bosnian (popular) culture, even as macho (for more, see Epstein et al. 2000). Across cultures and throughout time, female sexuality has been guarded through virginity and purity myths, reproduced and re-narrated through generations; once it was dishonored, it became a matter not only of individual shame and humiliation but also a reflection of a family's failed protection and hence reputation (for more about this, see Jafri, 2008; Skjelsbaek, 2006). Similarly, the context of war merely reflected these everyday patriarchal patterns and this cultural preoccupation with female sexuality and the "woman-body needing protection" (Jalušić 2004, 150; see also Seifert 1994, 59). Nearly universal historical and cultural ideas based on and maintained in patriarchal systems and worldviews contribute to the accepted norms of female sexuality as such as traumatic. Even the early feminist ideas on "sexual liberation" communicated that if anyone needed to be the first to break the circle of violence, it was women. However, the core ideas of rape culture, where the woman is still to be (self-)blamed in case of rape (due to her improper behavior, clothing, etc.) suggest that even "liberated" women have to be aware of

their own responsibility to protect themselves from the dangers of sexual attacks. Indeed,

‘good girls’ are expected to be both chaste and diligent in protecting their sexuality from violation. (...) This means that when rape or sexual assault occurs, it is often the victims rather than the offenders who are blamed, humiliated, or defamed by these crimes. (Weiss 2010, 289)

In the abovementioned novel *As If I Am Not There*, Drakulić illustrates these ideas by showing how certain items that exaggerate femininity and sexual independence are in the end nothing but symbolic badges of spoiled sexuality. The sequence that takes place in a detention camp describes how the protagonist, after discovering a left-behind cosmetic bag, puts on red lipstick, black eyeliner, gray eye shadow, and black mascara that highlight her “mysterious, seductive eyes” (Drakulić 1999, 92), and in this transformative and liberating moment, she rediscovers her prettiness and her self-confidence. Sharing this with other girls, she is “breathless, joyful and she throws herself on to the mattress” (ibid). Touching her forehead, at first the girls assume that she has become neurotic and has a fever. M., one of the women, becomes angry, demanding her to take off her makeup: “Take off the make-up (...). You look like a whore.” S. responds to her without hesitation, “But why are you angry? I am a whore. We all are whores.” When M. wipes off her makeup, she runs into the toilet:

You just want to look pretty for our boys, right dear? (...) Of course, so they like you. So, you can smile with painted red lips at those boys, those enemy soldiers. Smile and say to them: come into my arms. Quietly swallow the horror, like sperm. Pretend it is not being forced on you, but rather that it is fun and you enjoy it. Then perhaps they will forget that their task is to rape you. (Drakulić 1999, 93)

In this paragraph, Drakulić summarizes all of the prescribed roles and behaviors that navigate female sexuality and creates a narrative that constructs, moralizes, and domesticates the past events in a continuous cultural flow. When we narrate war rapes, we go beyond historical and legal accounts by sending forward messages and thus establishing a fruitful ideological basis for preserving cultural patterns. Some scholars (see Blanco & Rosa 1997; Egan 1997) proposed that teaching history should promote critical and reflexive approaches whereby the past is not a definite

event or phenomenon but can be seen as constructed and sometimes unfaithful representations of social realities. This same also applies to the sociology of sexuality, wherein the latter is no longer naturalized and normalized as an unchanging biological instinct but is provided by all different influences of learning and socialization processes.

Studies on trauma transmission in Bosnia-Herzegovina have been rich in investigating the transmission of inter-ethnic and inter-religious hatred, legacies of the ethnic interwar division and political fears nurtured among the three ethnic groups in the region. However, the role of negative life stressors—especially the violent experiences of rape survivors and their attitudes concerning their sexuality and that of their descendants—has been little studied. In terms of sexuality as such, the vast majority of schools and families officially silence any kind of sexuality, and in the rare cases when it is presented publicly, it exists in very straight, repressed, and limited form (for more, see Epstein, O’Flynn & Telford 2001). Because Bosnia-Herzegovina remains a patriarchal country, the struggle regarding alternative sexualities also goes hand in hand with unsilencing the past atrocities that used sexuality for the purposes of war.

Conclusion

The previous text aimed to address the complex interconnection between rape legacy, silence, and the transmission of sexual scripts through survivors’ traumatic memories. I ask, If the Bosnian generation of postmemory, as Marianne Hirsch would call it, translates the contaminated messages of war rape trauma and silence into social realities, values, and relationships, does this reflect resistance to changing the rape culture and the failure to do so? Is the so-called silenced traumatic memory of female survivors capable of transmitting the knowledge and understanding of sexuality as violent and abusive?

Both the silence of women who were raped in wars and their trauma transmission to postwar generations have been addressed previously, but very few scholars have addressed the question of how we (can) learn sexual culture through memory. This seems extremely important when the memory consists of traumatic experiences of abused dignity and dehumanization through sexuality. For this, I have attempted to argue that we need to start debating the silence of raped women as well as the narrative about this silence beyond the medicalized understanding of

trauma and PTSD. We can observe silence as a PTSD symptom, but it could also be a protective mechanism for the descendants; it is therefore a conscious act of survivors not to tell in order to avoid potentially stigmatizing or traumatizing their children. Sometimes, the silence is also a choice against transmitting the trauma; however, as I attempted to argue using Dan Bar-On's idea of double walls, whether the story is silenced or told in parts, one always strives to find the missing spots and fill the narrative gaps. If survivors do not share their rape stories with their families, descendants will learn about them from the media and their peers and friends. The circumstances that led some of the women to speak out and others to not do so are numerous, and therefore, to gather the knowledge and raise awareness, we must rely on those few who voiced their memories. However, most of the knowledge has been produced by agents for whom speaking out does not bear the burden of shame, social ostracism, and stigmatization. It makes the whole idea of raped women's silence somewhat counterproductive because we have to ask ourselves how exactly we define silence—which can only be seen as an interpretative act—based on the testimonies of those who did not keep silent. I argue that at one point, silence became an ideological vehicle for further promoting heteronormative values, positioning women as powerless, shut down, voiceless. In the last two decades, information and knowledge on war rapes in Bosnia-Herzegovina have spread widely, which shows that there have been voices, individuals speaking out, and that they have been heard. Meanwhile, keeping the idea of a raped woman as a silent victim rather than focusing on the women who became loud, voicing survivors only confirms the broader sociopolitical demand for these categories and identities to be preserved and supported by the accompanying narrative. We can see this as a failure in previous narratives, in which the goal of many scholars was to bring the issue to the front, the open space, and to actively address it. Rather than shattering the stigma of survivors, the continuous presence of the silence narrative only reaffirmed and empowered the social myths it was supposed to combat.

The paradigm of breaking the silence speaks to us because there is silence and it does need to be broken; the silence is the cry of women survivors for the support of outsiders, agents, scholars, and journalists. We will therefore never have real access to women's experiences; because of their silence, their experiences are always interpreted by those who speak in their names, a contradictory, somewhat "savior-based" position that needs critical discussion. This is not to say that there is no silence and

that women were not silenced, literally or symbolically. On the contrary, I believe that in post-conflict Bosnia-Herzegovina, there is great interest in putting pressure on survivors by threatening them and thereby keeping them silent. Silence helps in denying war crimes and therefore slows down the process of transitional justice and prosecution.

Still, what I think is important is what I was attempting to reflect in the connections I draw between silence, trauma transmission, and sexual culture as learned behavior. In the second part of the text, I attempt to show how restraining postwar generations, especially descendants, from open debates on “abused” sexualities helps to promote the culture of silence as the normal and accepted social order. It not only empowers the idea of women as inherently vulnerable and even rapable but also maintains the divisions along ethnic lines in that we have on one side the narrative of silenced Muslim women survivors, for whom speaking out would be a shameful act, and on the other side, only the image of the violent, aggressive Serb male perpetrator–rapist. This division communicates the essentialist understanding of sexualities as ethno-prescribed attributions, and this narrative influences the very ways people perceive themselves along gender and ethnic lines and the social roles and ideological positions they accordingly take. My main concern therefore remains, How do we break the silence of rape survivors and rape crimes without actually reinforcing it?

NOTES

- ¹ This text is a part of broader study called “I Will Not raise My Child to Kill Your Child: Motherhood, Collective Memory and Continuation of Culture of Violence Aftermath of War” that addresses the question of trauma transmission among women survivors, now mothers, of war rapes in Bosnia. This text is only theoretically based and serves as a foundation for understanding the main concepts and paradigms of sexuality, trauma transmission, and silence as three of the main theoretical aspects in the context of war rape survivors and their after-war family lives.
- ² For more about the war rapes committed during the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, 1992–1995, see Amnesty International (1993) and Helsinki Watch (1993).
- ³ See my forthcoming essay, “The Epistemological Evolution of ‘Imagining the Sexualities’ through Violence in the Balkans” in Sonja Biserko (ed.), *Yu Historia: A Multi-perspective Historical Account (2018)*.
- ⁴ According to Lewis (2006, 256), sexual scripts are held at three different levels. Cultural scenarios refer to the cultural or the social level, where abstract ideas about sexuality are created and shared among members of the community, society, or culture. Interpersonal scripts influence how an individual acts on his or her chosen set of sexual ideas in relation to other person(s). The third level, the intrapersonal level, explains the location of the individual’s own ideas about sexuality.
- ⁵ Dragomir Kunarac, Radomir Kovač, and Zoran Vuković, three Bosnian Serb war criminals from the town of Foča in Republika Srpska, were the first men in European legal history to be sentenced for outrages upon human dignity, including the mass rape of Bosnian Muslim women as crimes against humanity. On February 22, 2002, at the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in The Hague, the men were sentenced to 28, 20, and 12 years in prison (Drakulić 2005, 46).

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