



Educational Theatre as a way to overcome trauma of women raped during the war in Kosovo

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Abstract

This study investigates the long-term consequences of sexual violence and overcoming trauma at survivors of sexual violence through educational theatre. Participants in this research were 30 women survivors of sexual violence during the war in Kosovo and 4 women were interviewed, who recounted in details the event of sexual violence and their lives after the war. For the quantitative part, three self-report questionnaires were utilized, the qualitative part was realized through a semi-structured interview, whereas the survivors' stories were transcribed, then used in the theatrical play "QUEENS WITHOUT CROWNS" which was part of this study. The first hypothesis, which is directly related to the experience of sexual violence and social acceptance, was not resulted as significant, however, from interviews were obtained results that confirm the impact of sexual violence on the social acceptance of survivors in their walks of life.

The second hypothesis turned out to be confirmed because according to the results obtained victims of sexual violence have a high level of post-traumatic stress, whereas the data also confirm and third hypothesis that due to stigmatization, survivors are excluded and self-excluded from cultural activities. Meantime, as a way to overcome trauma, it has been proven that the theatrical performance realized based upon the stories of survivors has resulted in: reducing the stigmatization of victims and their social acceptance in their living and working circle and it has influenced as therapeutic process to victims to overcome trauma, it has directly influenced in education of family members towards the path of accepting victims, it has raised social awareness among the various spectators present in the artistic performance.

Keywords: *sexual violence during the war, educational theatre, social acceptance, overcoming trauma*

Marigona BEKTESHI FERATI is coming from the Mitrovica - Kosovo. Born on March 29, 1991. She has completed her BA and MA studies at the Academy of Arts in Prishtina, Kosovo, majoring in Stage Directing. She completed her BA studies at "Universum" College majoring in Management. Marigona has put on stage several theatrical plays and represented Kosovo and Albania in several international festivals such as in Prague, in Liege (Belgium), in Bulgaria, Kolashin, in Leuven (Belgium). Marigona Bekteshi Ferati has been invited to lecture and conduct workshops in: 2018 "Arting and Directing",

Canada; 2019 "Educational Theater in world", Canada 2020 "Educational Theater, Greece 2020 Educational Theater, Lithuania. She was the manager in the Youth Office in the local organization "Kosova Population Foundation" under UNFPA for 10 years and now is working as Program Director at CBC television.

Given that nearly 20 years have passed since the war between Kosovo and Serbia, the discussion of sexual violence occurred in Kosovo during the war remains a sensitive issue for our society. As we are talking about a significant number of victims of sexual violence during the war in Kosovo, it is very important to conduct a study through which the stories of the victims will be staged. This aims to change Kosovo society's perceptions about the victims and provide proper social support in overcoming trauma.

Given that a group of Kosovar women experienced sexual violence during the war, putting on the stage a theatrical play in Kosovo is an attempt to open new perspectives on the consequences that these events had on the victims, their feelings and potentially provide an overcoming environment through the educational theatre.

Given that social acceptance is very important, I consider that the realization of this study and its subsequent play is a new way in our country to hear the voice of victims and their stories. This is believed to have impact on public so that these stories evoke catharsis in them and consequently, change the way of their thinking about this issue.

Topicality and importance

Definition of terms:

Gender-Based Violence

In 1993 World Health Organization, the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, the first approved definition of "gender-based violence" was defined as: "Any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life."¹

Sexual Violence

The World Health Organization (WHO) adopted a globally recognized definition of sexual violence in their "World Report on Violence and Health" as: "any sexual act,

¹ United Nations. Declaration on the elimination of violence against women. New York : UN, 1993

attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed, against a person's sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work"².

Rape

The new definition of rape as defined in (2007). Any person ("A") who unlawfully and intentionally commits an act of sexual penetration with a complainant ("B"), without the consent of B, is guilty of the offence of rape.

Sexual violence in conflict

In armed conflicts, the breakdown of social infrastructures, the disintegration of families and communities and the disruption of responses leave women and girls vulnerable to sexual and other forms of gender-based violence, including rape by combatants and intimate partners or acquaintances and, at times, sexual exploitation by humanitarian actors.³

The sexual and gender-based violence perpetrated against women in conflict and humanitarian settings is increasingly being reported and documented. This human rights and peace and security problem has begun to be the focus of international attention, with efforts being made to prevent its occurrence, to respond to the survivors' needs and to address impunity for those responsible.

Sexual violence, known as a weapon of war, is used during the war between Kosovo and Serbia in 1998-1999. There are no accurate statistics on the number of women raped during the war in Kosovo, however, Human Rights Watch Report reports that were 96 victims of sexual violence during the war in Kosovo in 1999, only during the NATO bombing⁴.

On the other hand Vulaj Helena Smith from "The Guardian" reports that Kosovo counts approximately 20, 000 victims of sexual violence abused also by Serb forces⁵.

² World Health Organization (WHO, 2007b)

³ World Health Organization (WHO, 2021)

⁴ Inger Skjelsbæk,, International Peace Research Institute, Oslo (PRIO), page 2.

⁵ Helena Smith;" Rape victims' babies pay the price of war";" Up to 20,000 women were raped during the Kosovan carnage. Now the victims are bearing children fathered by their Serb tormentors. In this harrowing dispatch, Helena Smith reports on the awful fate awaiting the offspring of conflict Kosovo: special report";"The Guardian", 16 April 2000.

As victims face long-term consequences in terms of mental health, interpersonal relationships and their functioning in the community, these victims often happen to be excluded from family circle, social and institutional responsibility⁶. Therefore, it is needed to involve victims in socio-cultural activities to live a life after the trauma. On the other hand, hearing these traumatic experiences is a great challenge even for the victim itself to go back in time, to recall the trauma, and it is extremely necessary for Kosovar society to understand their role in society, the indisputable right to active involvement in the community and their further empowerment.

Although sexual violence during the war has been reflected through numerous studies, in Kosovo there has been a lack of their direct involvement in cultural-theatrical events which according to recent researches has shown that it positively affects to their psychological well-being. There is no information about long-term consequences they have faced and their role in the community. There is also limited information on whether they were professionally treated in the immediate post-war phase in Kosovo and on the mechanisms they used to deal with traumatic events, therefore, this dissertation will serve first and foremost in collective awareness and will attempt to document their experiences. Simultaneously, it is an educational way to overcome experienced trauma. Such a way has even proven successful in the prevention of sexual rape, so from the studies of Christensen, it was found out that through theatre is managed to change the social norm of violence perception, what is considered as prevention of exercising this violence.

Purpose and objectives of the study

This study intends to introduce a new form to overcome trauma at victims of sexual violence in Kosovo as a therapeutic aim and victim's social acceptance to inform the spectator. On the other hand, through this study was aimed to achieve the education of family members in accepting the situation and traumatic events of the victims.

The objectives of this study are to:

- offer Kosovo a study for the first time on the possibility to overcome trauma at victims of sexual violence through educational theatre,
- decrease the stigma of the victims and their social acceptance in the area where they are living and working,

⁶ Hagen, T, K. (2010). The Nature and Psychosocial Consequences of War Rape for Individuals and Communities.

- have impact as a therapeutic process to the victims to overcome trauma of sexual violence experienced during the last war in Kosovo,
- have direct impact on education of family members towards the path of accepting victims,
- raise social awareness among the various spectators who attend the artistic play in order not to create new soldiers of violence, and to support the rights of women victims of sexual violence,
- have impact in raise of social awareness and creation of appropriate support policies for victims of sexual violence,
- portray on how sexual violence during the war has affected the social circle of victims in Kosovo from their perspective.
- Raise awareness of the male population through educational play to stop this phenomenon.

Study hypotheses

1. Victims of sexual violence in Kosovo are excluded from their social circle.
2. Theatrical play will have impact to the spectators to change their opinion about victims of sexual violence.
3. Victims of sexual violence felt emotionally supported by the public after their events in the theatre were visualized.

The family members of the victims have changed their perception on traumatic event experienced by the victims of sexual violence in Kosovo.

Definition of the term 'education'

The term 'education' has been interpreted by different people in different ways. Some of them refer to it formally as the schooling process or lifelong learning. Some others refer to it as the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Some say education is nothing but training the people's minds in special field education to bring desired changes. This only shows that education does not have a universally accepted term. It has different meanings with different functions. Analyzing these meanings would help us to understand what education really is.⁷

⁷ National Council of Educational Research and Training, 2014

In recent decades, drama has begun to take place in elaboration of social issues, policies, jurisprudence of a state and as such should be considered a successful way of dealing with events and circumstances with socio-cultural impact.⁸

Consequently we can consider that educational theatre is a term which has different meanings for different people, and easily can be misunderstood and misinterpreted in different linguistic and cultural dimensions and formats. From the schooling point of view we could say that educational theatre is seen as a good way of informing and educating young students towards a certain social issue which has an impact on the age and the current circumstances they are facing.

From the spectator's point of view, watching an artistic play made in the educational theatre conveys awareness messages about certain social issues and has powerful impact on the interrelationship of changing thoughts, attitudes, and beliefs about certain events.

Social acceptance of victims of sexual violence:

By listening the voice of women who have experienced sexual violence during war around the world, society gains insight into their divergent impacts that the act leaves on the victims, their family, and the relationship between them in the future. Making theatrical plays that focus on educational/ informational programs on physical and psychological well-being of women seems to have a positive impact on public information about such events that affect the woman's life. We must make a special program aimed at measuring the long-term impact that plays evoke in male adolescents up to their maturity phase i.e. become men.

Christensen in an article published in 2013 attempted to point out on how research can be done to show the impact that theatre has on achieving social changes and preventing improper education⁹.

In this article was presented the work of the National Institute of Justice in which the summary of interventions for the prevention of sexual assaults was shown and this study managed to conclude that theatrical presentations “can simultaneously educate and entertain, adapting concerns to the interest, vocabularies and attention spans to their audiences”.¹⁰

⁸ Loren Winship, Educational Theater, *The southern speech journal*, published 2009.

⁹ M. Candace Christensen, *Using Theater of the oppressed to prevent sexual violence on college campus*. First Published September 20, 2013.

¹⁰ M. Candace Christensen, *Using Theater of the oppressed to prevent sexual violence on college campus*. First Published September 20, 2013.

Based on the literature read and mentioned in some of the above cases could be concluded on the importance of educational theatre in preventing sexual assaults, changing social norms about sexuality issues and overcoming traumatic/emotional conditions if the violence has already happened. It is believed that through educational theatrical plays the perception and mediation on the concept of sexual violence will change, at the same time this is directly related to the audience ability to accept and support every victim of this act. It is considered that through educational theatre and making of such preventive plays, victims of sexual violence will create a social support towards overcoming trauma and paving the paths towards integration into social and cultural organizations in their living circle.

Hypothesis testing

1. Victims of sexual violence in Kosovo are excluded from their social circle.

This hypothesis has been analyzed through the direct survey with victims of sexual violence in Kosovo. During the interview process is managed to extract the following paragraphs which testify social exclusion:

"I do not work, earlier before the war I was a tailor, and after the war I got married, but I could not be hired, I worked around 4 months, but not anymore... only if they knew, how to say, or find out from someone that I was raped".

In another interview there are some data that again confirms the exclusion from receiving the necessary health care:

"My mother, as I took shower used to say: Don't you dare to speak about it, otherwise you will have no life to live. Then I got a stomach ache and back pain. My mother did not let me go to see the doctor, because may be found out about me, so I had to endure the pain. I was really bad!"

In the next interview could be confirmed a case of family exclusion, followed by divorce, due to inability to have a baby:

"After the war I went to the doctor, because I could not get pregnant and the doctor told to my husband that is very hard to get pregnant due to the poor abortion treatment that I had.

From that moment my husband's love towards me was growing colder, because I cannot get pregnant, because he wanted to create a family, but he noticed that this is impossible with me. Up

to 2002, our relationship continued somehow, afterwards he wanted to marry someone else with whom would create a family, so finally, we divorced! "

Another case proves the social non-acceptance from her neighbors, whereas her husband was the biggest support:

"My husband supported me a lot, helped me... My husband found me an organization where I could work, to get rid of the trauma... While walking down the street, people used to say ' , Look at this whore'... Oh, my God, it was so hard to me... "

2. The theatrical play will have impact to public to change opinion about the victims of sexual violence.

The spectators who attended the theatrical play "QUEENS WITHOUT CROWNS" have testified that after the play they have changed their minds about the survived women:

"A real reflection of the horror experienced and survived by the dramatic events that took place during the war, sad and creepy experiences of Albanian women/ mothers/ sisters".

"Creepy experiences to the bone. Paining the soul and feeling of smallness in front of these live heroic emblems. "

One of the spectators talks about the goal that he put himself after watching the play.

F.S.: *"I fought for the freedom of Kosovo, now I swear I will fight for these survived women to remove the stigma from them."*

Another spectator reaction speaks about the prejudice that he had earlier towards the victims of sexual violence during the war in Kosovo:

F.H.: *"I have cried all the time during the play, I often felt guilty, because... (cries...), I had bad opinion about these women, I thought that they tried to show themselves, but today when I saw them in the play, in contrary, they were trying to hide, resist, scream, all wearing long jackets, trying to hide the fact that are girls, I feel very sorry for that 11-year-old girl, it was nother fault...*

"I'm sorry that I had a bad opinion about you... I did not notice this reality, I grew up hearing all kinds of talk from people, the truth is totally different, and it's very bitter, painful and unforgivable! "

3. Victims of sexual violence were felt emotionally supported by the public after their events in the theatre are visualized.

Victims of sexual violence have confirmed at mostly the hypothesis:

A: *"I have cried all the time of the play, but at the same time I saw other people around me crying as well, for what they were seeing in the play, and I saw people sharing their feelings with the "actresses/ victims" in what they were experiencing... For the first time in my life I saw men crying continuously, some of them secretly wiped the tears to remain unnoticed... By God, I somehow felt relieved when around me were others crying about something we have experienced, they felt pain just for us!"*

A: *"We really need to have these kinds of plays, although it's difficult to meet 21 years after with rape perpetrators, with our screams, with our pain, but on the one hand I was relieved while crying and for a moment I forgot myself and felt pain for other women about whom I never thought of, because I believed it only happened to me! "*

Another victim was interviewed after the play, and she speaks in another dimension:

B: *"It's a mixed feeling but is very good that play was put on stage, let them see and understand what they have done to us, how they have beaten us, raped us, burned us, stabbed us, someone should tell our society, government how it was, to make them to feel sorry and thinking that they have forgot us and they think that we have forgotten our pain. We still have trauma, but what hurts us more is that nobody cares, they left us aside."*

One of the victims confirms that Kosovo leaders are not dealing with these victims:

B: *"It's a mixed feeling but is very good that play was put on stage, let them see and understand what they have done to us, how they have beaten us, raped us, burned us, stabbed us, someone should tell our society, government how it was, to make them to feel sorry and thinking that they have forgot us and they think that we have forgotten our pain. We still have trauma, but what hurts us more is that nobody cares, they left us aside.."*

Another case confirms the feeling of importance of being in the same place with the public:

N: *"I saw in public that everyone cried and were horrified of what they saw in the play, I said to myself... how we could cope with all this rape..."*

L: *"I stayed in the play until the moment when the actresses/ soldiers jumped from the stage to the public, I was afraid they would catch me, so I left the play..."*

4. The victim's family members have changed their perception on traumatic events that victims of sexual violence in Kosovo were faced.

One of the family members of the victim of sexual violence during the last war in Kosovo said after the play:

M.H.: *"I knew that they have suffered, abused, but I didn't know that they have suffered so much!!! I would never believe, I never knew what happened to our women (shocked).*

Another victim's family member who attended the play commented:

F.L.: *"We have never understood them... never supported them ... often cursed these poor women ... they do not deserve to be treated, as we have treated them. They did not want this to happen either ... we saw what they did to them"*

S.P.: Another victim's family member emotionally quoted about the play:

"I do not know what to say after what I saw ... it's very difficult even for us as family members, we have accepted all victims. It was the war. What could have to do. But to see again the horror happened, it is very difficult, but... I hope this will raise our awareness".

Conclusion:

This scientific research gives an opportunity to overcome trauma of women raped during the war in Kosovo in '99, by staging a theatrical play based upon true stories of survived women of sexual violence during the war in Kosovo.

1. In Kosovo society is a good opportunity that through theatre to reduce the stigma towards target groups, in this case victims of sexual violence during the war in Kosovo.
2. Educational theatre is a new form in Kosovar culture, as such; this research provides a direct impact on the life of the Kosovar public.
3. The empirical way followed in this research has provided valuable statistical data for other researchers who will continue to work in this topic.
4. Through this scientific research, the public, institutions, media, organizations, legal representatives, civil society, professionals in various fields, have had the opportunity to hear exclusive visualized stories in the theatre in Mitrovica.
5. This research will serve to advocate for women's rights, to build self-confidence and their psychological well-being, through the emotional support provided by educational theatre in this case.
6. Is introduced the path on which the stage work was built.
7. As empirical evidence, photos, interviews, video play, inter-professional collaborations were used.

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