

(Un)Canning the Victims: Embodied Research Practice and Ethnodrama in Response to War-Rape Legacy in Bosnia-Herzegovina

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This essay explores the potential of embodied research practice among women survivors of rapes committed during the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1990s. As similar research in the past has often been subjected to incapability to describe the trauma expressed by research participants in the format of verbal testimonies, this study explores the potentials of turning from words toward the body. Stories are being brought forward by the help of different forms of dramatic tools and body expressions, using movement, voice and visual portrayals. By the time this research practice became personally harmful and traumatizing for me as a researcher, I responded with a performative/performed essay entitled Canned. This one hour-long monologue was staged not aiming to become just another portrayal of war crimes in the Balkans, but rather as a dissemination tool to reflect the research and the position of the researcher in this and similar traumatizing contexts. I explore the potential of ethnodrama as a format for distributing research outcomes in order to display to the audience how certain mainstream narratives have been 'canned' and reproduced by women survivors and their surrounding society but are also preserved and guarded within specific social institutions, including academia.

This is me. I crawled out of silence.
I would like to crawl out of my body, too, but I can't.
You can't crawl out of your body just like that.

~ *Canned*

The Body Tells What Words Cannot

Silence among survivors of sexualized violence, an inability to 'put in words' their painful experience, is by scholars of trauma and collective memory usually understood as the expression of psychological or/and political repression that perpetuates in the post conflict-societies (see for instance: Caruth 1995; Bar-On 1996;

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Delić and Avdibegović 2015). Sometimes, choosing silence over a spoken word, is simply a result of the fear that the stories, if told, would not be heard, or that listeners would not be able to really understand what had happened to the testifiers as “we have no language for representing the body in pain” (Patraka 1999: 87). Since I started research a few years ago with a group of women who survived detention, torture, and sexualized violence during the Bosnian war in the 1990s,¹ I have been experiencing this continuum of silence in my own work. The general struggle to describe and verbalize not only the trauma of sexualized violence but also the painful event itself, led me step by step to move away from the traditional and established research practices focused on language and verbal expression only. Instead of accepting that we have ‘no language’, and hence silence is the only option to approach these experiences, I claim that we need a different, alternative ‘language’ that can also embrace non-verbal modes of communication. Consequently, I started to explore and develop an embodied research approach: the practices I used were mostly inspired by my professional background in applied drama and community theatre, and also by my individual need to understand and express social complexities through more symbolic, metaphorical and abstract communication means. In this essay, I illustrate how those practices were applied when working with *silence* and *the body in pain* to open up and discuss established assumptions and social realities of survivors of war related sexualized violence, and particularly how sexual trauma can be told and re-told by survivors’ bodies and body expression.

However, while doing this emotionally demanding research I soon started to feel myself dragged into the collective trauma of my research participants. I felt the need to respond with a critical position by writing about the silenced, ‘canned’ and ‘locked’ identities these women keep living in. To prevent reproduction of stereotypical images, several questions about how I am going to narrate the contaminated, emotionally loaded, and re-victimizing testimonies of survivors, or how I am going to break the cycle of harmful yet continuously repeating narratives, occurred regularly. These questions, combined with vicarious traumatization that I experienced myself and the critical position toward past scholarship about war-related sexualized violence and survivors, led to the creation of the performative essay *Canned*. This one-hour-long monologue was staged not aiming to be just another artistic portrayal of war crimes from the Balkans,² but rather as a dissemination tool, enabling myself to reflect my research, and the position of the researcher in such and similar vulnerable, marginalized and traumatizing contexts.

¹ For more on the socio-political context and the use of rapes as weapon of war in Bosnian war in 1990s see Card 1996; Hayden 2000; Hromadžić 2007; Skjalsbaek 2006.

² The topic of war crimes in Balkans has rather been well covered in art production in the recent years. For the analysis of performances dealing with the war in Balkans see: Močnik, 2013; more about the ‘aesthetics of war rapes’ in: Močnik, 2016.

Also, the research results in the form of performance somehow helped me to evaluate my own role and impact in this very community. Through the example of *Canned*, the second part of the text further displays the potential of ethnodrama as a format for distributing research outcomes in order to display to the audience how certain mainstream narratives have been limited and reproduced by women survivors and also how they are preserved and guarded within specific social institutions and actors—in my concrete case, by academics.

Researching with Applied Drama in Trauma Recovery

By going beyond the transcribed interviews and recorded verbal testimonies, the methods of applied drama enable us to understand society through “acting, interacting, touching and feeling, seeing and hearing, making sense of and representing their lives through a variety of ‘media’” (Roberts 2008: 6). In line with this, several scholars have used dramatic components and performativity in their qualitative research to explain culture in terms of “staged actions” or life as a “dramatic performance” (Denzin in Roberts 2008: 5) where human behavior is understood through theatrical characters and roles (Simpson Stern and Henderson 1993; McKenzie 2001). However, performativity in the context of this text relates to alternative understanding of conducting, recording, analyzing and disseminating the research material. Turning from traditional oral testifying toward performative, embodied research practices, and using diverse set of approaches that have been developed by several theatre theorists (Grotowski 1986, Stanislavski 1988), encouraged the participating women and me to discuss their traumatic war experiences though (re)discovering the body and the body expression of their experiences through non-verbal means. As an embodied research approach emphasizes collaborative acts of imagination and real world portrayal, it explores the many narratives of a supposedly single trauma experience and furthermore positions ourselves in different and fluid roles throughout the research process.

The experience of working with applied drama is rather holistic: it is not simply “individual and imaginary but also social and corporeal” (Nevitt 2013: 12). Narrating or framing the traumatic experience through the embodied action is not necessarily identified “prima facie by their testimonial function” (Bennet 2005: 2), but has a potential to expand the understanding of the individual experiences through the broader context we live in. Broader contextualization consequently helps us to understand the survivors and their experiences as unique and individual, but also culturally, politically, and sometimes religiously shaped and impacted. In this sense, participants would refer to their pre-war romantic involvements and/or romantic expectations and idealistic images about marriage and contextualize them in their post-war (post-rape) life.

Jill Bennet, co-curator of the art exhibition *Telling Tales/1999* on trauma and memory, describes how the works of invited artists did not primarily focus on

understanding trauma and manifesting a set of symptoms that could be ascribed to them as trauma survivors. Rather, they were using their work and artistic tools to explore and develop a language by which the experience of traumatic memory could be registered (Bennet 2005: 2). Similarly, research participants in my context often find the process of describing traumatic experience and their sensations through words challenging, and therefore the dramatic expressions of various non-verbal forms become “communicable language of sensation and affect” (ibid). This language offers a sufficient frame through which survivors can tell their own truths in order to be heard without their testimony being facilitated or interpreted by an outside source (such as a researcher, for instance). This is not to say that survivors’ primary experience is not subjected to appropriation and reduction of their trauma. Rather, using the capacity of embodied art to transform perceptions, these experiences might question some well-established paradigms that were previously created solely on the basis of verbal testimonies.

In this way, embodied research can bring several new dimensions into understanding phenomena, as well as newly positioning and establishing a different relationship between researcher and research participants. Dramatic interaction, for instance, builds up self-esteem and positive self-image of survivors: getting feedback from the audience raises a sense of being heard, being visible is being acknowledged and hence, helps one to re-humanize, to make the participant again someone whose life and story matters. Secondly, the format of ‘applied drama inquiry workshops’ instead of the ‘question-answer model’ prepares research participants for the process by introducing the (research) environment, building safe space and creating comfortable and trustworthy research conditions. The traditional format of interviewing, with its instant and often time-limited nature, might become very intrusive if not exploitative in the eyes of survivors. Survivors often mention how the control over their own life was taken away by being sexually violated during the war. Now, in the war’s aftermath, their stories and their experiences in the forms of testimonies are being taken in the very same manner. Most of the survivors that I worked with had previously been taking part in interviews and different research projects and had learned how to manage the flashbacks and traumatic symptoms triggered by continuous remembering. Still, as one almost never comes to terms with her violent past, every new interview risks reopening the wounds again. The methodological approach, ideally, would have to respond to high ethical demands that strive to minimize the risk of continuous re-traumatization and would not influence significantly the process of psychological and social recovery. The embodied research approach leans toward these principles, especially by emphasizing the importance of opening activities, where research participants and the researcher have the opportunity to get to know each other, to build trust in the group, and create a space where testifying and sharing is mutually respected and any challenges, obstacles or/and risks are acknowledged.

The whole process is not limited to evidence collection but is based on strong interpersonal relationships between human beings, rather than subject (the researcher) versus objects (the research participants). An open and flexible format, and a meaningful relationship between all the participating sides, may sometimes result also in bringing a therapeutic character to the research process. As research participants are invited to equally shape the progress and development of the process, the sense of exploitation or abuse for information diminishes and is instead exchanged for the feelings of empowerment and active contribution in shaping social reality and knowledge production. This 'welcoming invitation' to influence the very nature of the research sometimes presents also a challenge and shortfall. Research participants might impact the change in epistemological basis and even changing of research questions posed in the research plan. But what really puts the research at risk is the transaction of power from researcher to research participants: once research participants are given more 'voice', they are also given more power that can be misused in terms of manipulating the collected evidence. Sometimes research participants see participation in the research process as opportunity to enforce their own (political) agendas, which are not necessarily in line with personal values of the researchers and, more importantly, with ethical standards of academic conduct.

As we will see, embracing and using the embodied language beside the traditional systematic, rationally organized and word-based idea of qualitative research can affect the research results and consequently also the knowledge that we produce about certain social phenomena. Traumatic events expressed, perceived, studied and understood through this alternative language are no longer the matter of more or less successful attempts to explain certain chaotic historical events through reason and logic. On the contrary, by giving space to the body, we start to understand those events also as they were lived and experienced on 'one's own skin': chaotically, unexpectedly, emotionally loaded and indigestible, and very often indescribable through words.

Expressing the Pain by Embodying the Testimonies

I turned to embodied research methodologies after several failed attempts to open up different topics about the post-war and post-rape life of women survivors. Through verbal inquiry, they were providing me the data that has already been collected, analyzed and debated by several other scholars prior to my research. Those inquiries more or less consisted of testimonies and sharing of women's war experiences and has generally avoided reflecting their post-war understanding of their gender and sexualities. During this initial encounter, there always was a conflicting attitude coming from them: sometimes they would show their will and need to talk about this; some other times they would neglect it and try to change

the topic. The turn toward embodied research, thus, seemed to be the answer to overcome those obstacles and challenges.

The examples presented here have been recorded between January and March 2015, with a group of survivors from a smaller town in north-eastern Bosnia-Herzegovina. We gathered in a close circle of 15 women on a weekly basis, spending from 2-4 hours per session in the process. In the format of a workshop, we used different theatre warm-up games and exercises to explore body movement, physical and spatial awareness, as well as the use of items and body language (building on e.g. Stanislavski 1988; Boal 2002; Prendergast and Saxton 2014). On one occasion, the group was asked to bring items from their home that would symbolize a 'point of no-return', a phrase we used during the workshops to refer to the moment when war rapes happened. For many, this moment signifies a point of radical change and a clear distinction between the period before and after the war, and the life and perception of life and identity before and after they have been raped.

In one of the workshops, women were divided into pairs and asked to share their stories about their selected item with their partner. One of the women brought red lipstick. She placed it in her partner's hand and then held both hand and lipstick firmly in a fist. For a couple of minutes, she only looked at the lipstick in her fist with tears pouring down her face. Her tears were running in silence, and her face was still. When she got the lipstick back, she took a piece of white paper and wrote all over it with the lipstick; the red color on the paper was applied chaotically and solidly. She never explained her actions with words, but the moment itself was strong and expressive, and the item that she used was highly symbolic: red lipstick, which could symbolize sexuality, attractiveness, womanhood, and flirting. The woman was not only giving away the item, but—on a symbolic level—she was giving away power and ownership. She took several minutes to contemplate her 'point of no-return' by holding the lipstick in a fist and in her own pace and space. There were no disturbing questions: she re-created this moment for herself in the way she wanted to, guided only by the item that she brought, and by silently engaging with another woman. When she was ready—and not when I, the researcher, wanted the answers from her—she took the paper and destroyed the lipstick by pressing its red filling into it. The symbolic meaning that the red lipstick held before the 'point of no-return' was performatively destroyed by its physical destruction.

We can read this act as expressing the body in pain, as visualizing—instead of describing with words—what *the body* experienced. This act can also be read as a confrontation with how this woman is locked in the status of 'the victim', much determined by traditional views of gender. After the war, the communities in the region remained patriarchal, and female sexuality remains being framed by the discourse of innocent and (sexually) pure women. In the case of rape survivors, the cultural and social perception of sexuality is *per se* a 'matter of violence' and,

therefore, 'dirty'.³ Survivors' bodies were violated and have become physical testifiers, a place, where traumatic pasts are inscribed. Sometimes they reflect visually obvious scars and other times they communicate with the visual, non-verbal language to identify and align (or not) with real and projected social imaginaries.

In another activity a woman was asked to cover her eyes with a blindfold to become completely reliant on another woman in their couple. She was led through space blindfolded, aiming to build trust and focus on the senses of touch, smell, and hearing. As those women had been detained in a camp, covering their eyes was quite a challenge for many. At one point, one of the women sat down, feeling dizzy. She then described how being blindfolded reminded her of the moment when she was captured and locked in a cellar:

We were fifty or more women. We were locked in this cellar. It was completely dark. I had not seen sunlight for two months. I knew it was daytime when we were able to sleep, when we had peace. When the soldiers came to take us, I knew it was night. This was how I was counting the days and nights.

Other women began to share their stories and similar experiences from detention. In the middle of the story sharing, a woman shouted out:

You cannot do such exercises with us. We are a vulnerable group, and, with us, you can only play fun games where we feel relaxed and positive. We survived many bad things, and you have to be careful when working with us.

To respond, I asked them how they understood the term 'vulnerable group'. One of the most vocal participants took the lead and started to speak in the name of the group as 'one coherent unit':

This, what unites us, does not unite any other group. We were hurt very deeply and we can only understand each other. I can tell you a million times what I have been through, but you will never be able to feel how I feel. T. [referring to the participant sitting next to her] does not need my explanation. She was there, she felt it, and she knows what I feel. I do not need to talk about it.

This 'shared' experience and sense of belonging to one united group has been reflected also on the level of discursive distinguishing between *the victim* and *the survivor*. When I referred to women as 'victims', they often corrected me to use the term 'survivors' instead. This epistemological move conveys that the women who survived war rapes want to change their status and refuse to be locked up in the

³ For more on representations of survivors sexuality see: Močnik, 2017. *Sexuality after War Rape: From Narrative to Embodied Research*. London: Routledge.

victim status for the rest of their lives; thereby they claim an influence on the narration of their own identities. Despite this acknowledgment during the workshop, they often are embedded in a 'victim-survivor-hero' triangle, which in fact does not provide any systematical or radical changes in their identities and social realities. The 'victim-survivor-hero' model is constituted by "troubling categories", as Aylwyn Walsh points out (see Walsh' contribution in this Special Issue). As a researcher witnessing women's narrative of pain, Walsh considers in her work a series of examples of how the continuous demand for simplified and unified testimonies constructs a legitimate narrative that becomes a unique portrayal of survivors' painful pasts. Throughout the process, this became apparent when women were asked to create a visual portrayal of the 'survivor' which pretty much captured the features of 'a victim'. To address these questions, we used the Image Theatre technique⁴ to sculpt the image of 'survivor' with their own bodies. In Image Theater, the participants use their body or the bodies of other participants to 'sculpt' otherwise conceptually complex subjects such as relationships, and emotions, symbols and abstract ideas, and real-life situations. These images can be combined or can be 'dynamized' into stories. While trying to break down the paradigms of 'survivors', women would sculpt statues, which featured bodies bent downward, with sad facial expressions and downcast eyes. In one case, other characters and protagonists were added to the initial image: the woman-survivor remained in its center, but now surrounded by different pairs of shoes. Those shoes were to represent victim advocates arguing about victims' rights and talking in their names, while she remained silent and powerless. During the reflection phase, I asked the women how they perceived the statues sculpted by their fellows and why in any of the 15 more or less similar representations we could not see any happy and satisfied face—as women were often showing during the workshops. One of the women responded with:

I want others in this group to see me happy, because I am happy—I am healthy and I have everything that I need in my life. I laugh a lot, especially when I meet other women, and we chat and have a fun time together—like now. But I cannot be a "happy victim"—what would it look like? How would society see me after all that happened to me?

Another woman, participating at the same session, jumped in:

I lost my husband in the war. I was waiting 15 years to find his bones. They still did not find them. After 15 years, I decided to continue my life and marry again. I was only 37 back then; so, I re-married. Do you think anybody was proud of me? According to my ex-husband's family, I am a whore and nothing more. His mother shouted at me and called me a bitch because

⁴ This technique was developed by Augusto Boal and is described in *The Rainbow of Desire* (1996).

I couldn't even wait to bury my first husband. And in my new family, I am also a whore because I was already married. Everybody expects us to wait and die in this role. You can't be happy, because then they think you are lying about being raped.

The set of statues that women created resonates with victimized images and a vague, yet very well-established collective identity of the group of women that supposedly share the same experience, hence, the same story of a rape victim.⁵ Past narratives have certainly created a strong, very homogenous representation on female victimhood (for more on this, see Hayden 2000: 172, and Helms 2014) and the statues created during the workshop clearly reflected this commonly accepted social representation. Paraphrasing Benedict Andersen, the concept of *victimized cautiousness* is based on a presumed "collective experience" (Engle 2005: 959) of rape and sexual abuse perceived and interpreted by all affected women in the same way. Perhaps some of the women would perceive their experiences differently, but the social demand for one and the same image, results in them accepting those assigned identities. In random conversations many of the participating women would define their identities and lives outside of what is socially desired and expected from them. Still, this collective identity of having similar experiences and pasts, has occurred repeatedly, thereby keeping the former victims in this role. The individual experiences might have been diverse, but the role society offers them is homogenous.

The idea of 'collective (female) victimhood' has often been brought into debate during the workshop, yet often used uncritically and taken for granted. At one point, one of the women shared a story about her murdered baby and another woman started to sing *sevdalinka*.⁶ Others joined her by humming. After singing, one of the women commented this moment as:

You see, we victims are very special people. Every woman who survived something like this will be more emphatic; will always be ready to help others in need. We will always feel the pain of others and acknowledge it.

By explaining further this 'special' feature of victims as having an ability to feel for others, she amplifies the well-established paradigm of collective victimhood and innocence (for more see Skjelsbaek 2006; Kapur 2012; Helms 2012 & 2014). The painful experience is not only the component that connects and unites those women into one community, but also makes them different, at a discursive level even somehow superior to other people in terms of evil-doing: they can be harmed

⁵ For the critical perspective on the idea of collective testimonies, representation of victimhood and victim narratives among survivors see: Žarkov 2007, Banjeglav 2011; Simić 2012; Bar-Tal & Cehajic-Clancy 2014.

⁶ A traditional genre of folk music from Bosnia-Herzegovina, which is part of the Bosniak culture but remains popular across the entire ex-Yugoslavian region.

and violated, but they would never harm or violate themselves or others because of what they survived, she concludes. However, this idealized and romanticized image of victims by victims has been critically observed by several researchers before, and as it had appeared several times during this research, we tried to critically address it too. We recreated the scenes or visual portrayals of those representations, which helped to see the survivors themselves through ‘different eyes’ and consequently also to question those invented identities accordingly. Retelling the story through the visual portrayals offered multi-layered observations, acting out different scenarios, playing with the protagonists and developing different plots. It all happened in the controlled and safe environment; yet stories do not contain magic or superficial resolutions. Not looking for finite answers, in this way the research site becomes a place of dialogue creation, the place of reflection and (re)construction of alternative social meanings. It impacts survivors to ‘see’ themselves in literal terms, to understand their physical existence, their living social realities, and who they are—all through their bodies as the bodies of survivors.

The story sharing at one point also impacted me—as an outsider, as a researcher—and the trauma transfer started to manifest in different physical and emotional symptoms. To address and express what I later defined as vicarious trauma, I continued exploring dramatic tools as my own mode of expression.

Translating Research into Performance: Ethnodrama as Researcher’s Critical Reflection

Usually research ethics in the context of traumatized communities and vulnerable environments focus on risks for research participants and the potentials of re-traumatization (Orth and Maercker 2004; Hlavka and Mulla 2011; Graham-Kevan et al 2015); only recently the ethics or research principles guidelines started to pay more consideration to potential manipulation of the research results by the pressure of research participants or trauma transfer and its harmful effect on the researcher during and after the research process (see Lekha et al 2009, Maček 2016). As a researcher, I am aware of not being a bare outsider and/or observer, but rather entangled in the research I conduct (cp. Schult 2017). But still, the question of how one can preserve a high level of (self-)criticism and distance demanded by academic standards when confronted with highly emotionally subjects perpetuates my work continuously. In practice, this endeavor is not easy. Researchers with backgrounds in psychotherapy, social work, or even psychiatry, are often better prepared and equipped, emotionally and physically, by trauma-informed approaches that are meant to protect them from similar transmissions (see for instance: Campbell & Dienemann 2001; Campbell 2002; Chaitin 2003). Coming from a background in social sciences with an anthropological approach, however, I have consistently encountered this deficit of self-protection against

trauma transmission. As my field work progressed, the impact of the survivors as traumatized community has become more evident in my private life. I began to lack space in which the emotional condition, later manifested as vicarious trauma, had never been adequately addressed. The monodrama *Canned* was my emotional response to my long-time research work with war rape victims.



Fig. 1: Scene from the monodrama *Canned*. Performed in Pocket Theatre Studio/2015 by Nena Močnik. Photo © Sunčan Stone.

The monodrama *Canned*, which I wrote in 2015, falls into the established category of ethnodrama (Saldana 2005), a format that employs traditional and/or formal theatre to launch “a live performance event of research participants’ experiences and/or researchers’ interpretations of data.” The script of an ethnodrama “consists of analyzed and dramatized significant selections from interview transcripts, field notes, journal entries, or other written artifacts”, presented for an audience (Saldana 2005: 218). Thus, the final production as a research-based theatre performance becomes a means of reflection and evaluation, watched, perceived, and observed by audiences. Although *Canned* fits well into the category of ethnodrama, I subtitled the piece as a performative essay adapted for the stage. With the term ‘performative’ I refer to the performance narrative, the embodied storytelling and the (re)enactment of the story in front of an audience—the very experience of this story, both visually and acoustically, presented by the bodies of actors, unfolded in a scenic transmission in front of spectators and shared with this audience (cp. Berns 2009). *Canned* was initially written as a short essay and later translated into a theatre play. Its very form remains essayistic, hence the

term. The text and the performance are a very personal and intimate reaction to my engagement not only as a researcher but as a human being. Later it became a dissemination tool, sort of a performative, embodied *extension* to the original research. Instead of showing the traumatic experiences of the research participants, it focuses on my own experience and pain of dealing with their traumas. This enabled sharing of what in traditional research remains “unsaid,” that is, the researcher’s own transformation by being confronted with the pain of others. The essay and turning it into a stage adaptation furthermore allowed me to get to know my limitations and moral values better, and enabled me physically and psychologically to continue working on my research in such settlement.

The traditional position of an academic confronts the researcher with a dilemma: since scientific writing aims to capture and transmit the ‘real’ and ‘true’ story of the testifiers, its logical and critical argumentation easily dehumanizes the researcher into a ‘rational being’. Even though I have for a long time been witnessing the trauma-loaded testimonies, I had no place to expose my emotions, or simply, my very own response as an empathetic and compassionate individual. *Canned* reads:

It became important who I am, the story settles to my body, it starts to follow me, now it is my shadow and the load on my shoulder, I cannot separate from it anymore, and there is no line between my research and me, those stories, they push me to the floor, they oppress me and bring me down, *you should keep this distance, now you got pathetic, just throw everything away*, I hear mockery from other agents, I leave everything behind, I come back to pack, to can, to store, this truth forever, as there is no expiration date to the truth, because expiration date makes the knowledge pathetic, emphatic, I will never have to say: I was wrong.

In contrast to scholarly texts, research outcomes in the form of performance refer to its ability to “evoke and invoke shared emotional experience and understanding between performer and audience” (Denzin 2003: 13). Those embodied, sensuous experiences create the conditions for understanding: “Thus performed experiences are the sites where emotion, memory, desire, and understanding come together” (ibid). Performing testimonies embodies and individualizes pain and suffering. Regardless, the tragic narrative of female rape survivors is performed through an interpretive framework; it is mediated, cognitively, emotionally, and morally.

In terms of knowledge distribution, the performance usually targets a broader and more diverse spectrum of audiences than academic texts. The spectators hold different economic, social, cultural and symbolic capital. Packing the research experience as a researcher to the performance enables an incorporation of feelings and interpersonal relationship; it questions the demand of distance and objectivity and the role and impact of empathy. As *Canned* states:

When I look directly to her eyes, her story occupies me emotionally; their gloom colonizes my body and my mind, I no longer trust what tomorrow brings, and her fear is my fear, the fear of dark tunnels, the gloom, the nights, and kicking the door, loud talk, and the eyes tied with the black scarf. Her story occupies me, I see myself emphatic, and then, pathetic. I lost the distance.

The monologue exposes this constant fear of being too close, too intimate with the research participants. It addresses and challenges the traditional posture in social sciences to keep objective distance, to ward off potential influence, impact, and manipulation. The increased empathy and solidarity with research participants, on the other hand, might be dangerous as well. It can generate bad conscience and a feeling of 'profiting' from the suffering of others (cp. Maček 2016; Schult 2017). *Canned* acknowledges this position:

My hands are dirty. I wanted to believe I am just a regular storyteller. And it occurred to me, I am nothing but a thief. I steal intimacy, ideas, understandings, fears, and passions from other people; I only add beginning that attracts and nice ending. I even take the right to interpret them! But I skip the boring parts, every story has this boring part.



Fig. 2: Scene from the monodrama *Canned*. Performed in Pocket Theatre Studio/2015 by Nena Močnik. Photo © Sunčan Stone.

In the form of ethnodrama, *Canned* was produced and presented to audiences as a performative reflection and aimed to question my role as a (female) researcher and the legitimization and representation of my own data, collected and analyzed in the initial research. As shown by a few extracts here, *Canned* addresses the idea of reflexivity on how knowledge is acquired and interpreted, but also the researcher's own ability to present it and by doing this — to be able to find a responsible position toward research participants and their intimacy but also toward myself, the researcher, as a vulnerable human being, not only as a professional. Researchers are exposed and vulnerable to their own (self)criticism, mistakes, scarcities, and, most importantly, their emotions. In a performative process, the testimonies of the survivors are internalized and owned by the researcher who is not only an interpreter simply retelling stories, disseminating them, and arguing about them: the stories become emotionally digested by her and the messages are shared among broader audiences. Thereby the researcher remains in charge and takes moral responsibility for all participants involved.

Concluding Remarks

Although the practices of community drama and applied theatre have for decades been present in educational and cultural work, the same cannot be said for qualitative research. This is somehow surprising as working with the body in the field of traumatic memories and abused sexualities to explore and question the social narratives importantly shapes those landscapes with new insights and approaches. One of the arguments can be found in ethical guidelines in research on gender violence that frequently suggest that research findings must be faithful enough to the research participants' accounts that they are able to recognize their own narratives within the research outputs. In the case of survivors of sexualized violence, those narratives are often designed to protect and maintain the survivors' moral integrity that is packed in silenced and victimized identities. What we can see from the example where women sculpted the 'victim' is that sometimes narratives have to be visualized and put in multidimensional format, as it is only after we have 'seen' that we can critically discuss them. Hence, the case here was not the fact that we do not have the language to represent the stories or images of certain realities and identities, as I briefly brought to the fore in the beginning. We certainly do have a language, but it is often misleading, insufficient and limited and easily subjected to manipulations and appropriations. These limitations translated into the physical world can furthermore (maybe negatively) affect the social realities, beliefs and agreements we live by. The very idea of a victim or/and survivor and collective victimhood presented earlier in this text is but one such example. What an embodied research approach thus persuades is for us to think about the social reality, pasts and presents — on multiple levels with intense social and political dynamics. Testifying in performative ways does not demand the story to be

told in strictly linear and logical sequences — as life dynamics are usually not linear nor logical. What is more important is the contextualization of one past event into the broader scope of a life of an individual and the collective where she lives. Throughout certain activities women addressed many themes beyond the question in focus yet still related to the topic itself. Red lipstick in relation to prescribed gender roles and expectations is the example of this.

Despite several advantages, visualization and embodiment of women's experiences cannot totally escape the process of verbalization and logical conclusions. If not being asked to explain and verbally elaborate their embodied actions and expression, the researcher observes, estimates and develops the evidence herself. To explore the dynamics of the process beyond the verbalization and rationalization of the knowledge, I furthermore explored how dramatic components can advance the traditional dissemination of the research results by creating a performative essay. In the beginning this format served as the response to challenges and dilemmas, arising from a very close, emotional and intimate relationship between me as a researcher and the women survivors as research participants. It has soon become a space of different reflection: not the reflection of results and field notes obtained together with women, but the reflection of my own position as a researcher and as a human being in such a research context. As Zala Dobovšek put in her critique (Radio Student, September 2016):

/the performance/ serves as transcription of wounded body and mind, that constantly fear not to contribute enough—not to the sources, nor the beneficiaries (...) The body, that is split up, seeks to find the balance between the truth, ethics and the scream, it succeeds to be ripped from the world of academia and finds its 'liberation' in theatrical, fictional world as the territory, that allows the word to be replaced by the meat, the statistics by atmosphere and quotations from other by her own testimony.

Hence, instead of retelling the testimonies, the act of performance as a form of research dissemination makes it possible to tell the researcher's own testimony. The subject here is no longer the testimony of the survivor, but the collector, the teller, the researcher. What the audience witnesses is not what happened to survivors or the experiences of war crimes. Spectators witness how the researcher has experienced the survivors' narrated past experiences or/and traumatic memories. In this sense, we can watch the ethnodrama both as a representational tool of gathered data, and also as the intimate unveiling of her very human, vulnerable, confused, and sometime powerless nature. However, be it in the format of the methodological approach or dissemination tool, my dramatic and embodied practices may not completely serve as the language to express the traumatic pasts, but to a certain extent can, for sure, fulfill the gaps of the continuous silence by expressing the trauma directly from where it is usually stored — in the body.

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