Leora Kahn and Paul Lowe

"Facing up to rape in conflict: Challenging stigma through Photography"

The act of bearing witness is also a gesture of defiance and resistance: against the flow of time which distances us from what went before, against an absorption in the present, and against the desire to forget or conceal. It is an act of resistance related to an absence, a silence, and therefore to a certain kind of vulnerability; that what is absent will be forever lost.[1]

The Testimony of the Image

By the very nature of the medium, every photograph bears testimony about past events. This is a multiple testimony, in that it offers the viewpoint and experience of the photographer and engages with the experiences of the subject photographed, but it also can invite the viewer to themselves participate in the testimonial act through their proxy witnessing of the image. The image itself also has its own testimonial history, as it is circulated and exchanged, published and presented, and critiqued and commented upon. Photographs therefore have the potential to go beyond the testimony of the photographer or the subject; they in a sense obtain their own independent testimonial function. They provide evidence that such an event happened to such a person at such a place and time, but they can go far beyond that, representing an archetypical event. They can thus bear witness to a class of events, such as the plight of refugees worldwide, as well as to a specific event itself, such as the fall of Srebrenica. Their testimony arguably transcends the immediate moment, and becomes a commentary on human nature and history, and about the propensity to cause harm to others.

With this context in mind, this paper will examine four case studies of how photographers have worked with survivors of rape as a weapon of war as a way of exploring how the photographic act of bearing witness to atrocity can serve to empower the victim to be able to tell their story in a public arena. Rape has been used as a weapon of war for centuries. Civilians are raped by militia and government forces as a tactic to destroy communities in addition to doing lasting physical and emotional harm to the victims. In 2008 the UN Security Council voted unanimously for Resolution 1820 stating that "women and girls are particularly targeted by the use of sexual violence, including as a tactic of war to humiliate, dominate, instill fear in, disperse and/or forcibly relocate civilian members of a community or ethnic group." The resolution constitutes rape as a war crime in times of conflict.

The case studies are, respectively, Marcus Bleasdale's Rape: A Weapon of War in the DRC, Jonathan Torgovnik's Intended Consequences in Rwanda, Armin Smailovic's Black Portraits in Bosnia and Blake Fitch's My Body is a War Zone in Columbia. These four bodies of work explore how the visual image can be used

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[1] James Booth, William. *Communities of Memory: On Witness, Identity, and Justice*. (Ithaca: Cornell UP,) 2006.

as a form of bearing witness, allowing the subjects to present their testimony to the world. Each photographer deployed a different aesthetic strategy in collaboration with the women, allowing them to present themselves to the camera, and thence to the viewer, in an act of resistance and recognition. As Areilla Azoulay observes, such a public acknowledgement of their trauma is in itself a monumental one, as she notes how 'widely prevalent the conception remains that rape stains it victim and that talking about rape in the first person still should be an exceptional act'. [2] The case studies engage with the strategies of participatory photography that gives the subject a voice in the image making as an active process of empowerment.

Azoulay points out that because of the very nature of the act, images of the actual moment of abuse of rape are exceedingly rare. However, the nature of the photographic encounter as a collaborative, equal one, can give the victim a space within which to articulate their trauma via the photographer to an audience. The works thus deal with the complexities of the emotional space generated by the photographic image, by working in intimate spaces in close proximity to their subjects, the photographers challenge the violation of that private, personal space by the abuser. This echoes Azoulay's discussion of the 'arena of rape', where she notes that the 'violence creates a closed space here.[3] It isolates or seeks to isolate the woman from anything or anyone who might come to her assistance and leaves her stripped of her strength, facing her assailant'.[4] The intimacy of the images in each of these projects therefore challenges this violation, reclaiming that private space back for the victim.

Bearing Witness to Trauma

The photographer, and the photograph, can serve as a vehicle through which a victim can make visible their testimony, acting in the role of what Blustein has established as a proxy witness; someone to whom the rights of the witness have been transferred by a victim who is unable to bear witness themselves, or who wishes to share the burden of witnessing by delivering their testimony to a third party. The right to present the testimony of the primary witness as authentic victim is transferred to the proxy, who thus assumes the same claims to legitimacy as the original victim. This is a vital axis of transference in terms of the role of the journalist or photographer in representing the experiences of others, as it endows upon the reporter a moral obligation and purpose to act as such a proxy witness, effectively becoming a

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[2] Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography*. (New York: Zone, 2008) page 255.
[3]Azoulay. *The Civil Contract of Photography,* 203.
[4] Azoulay. *The Civil Contract of Photography,* 223.

prosthetic for the actual witness. This is a significant point, as a subject can be at once a victim and a witness at the same time; they can demand that their testimony be heard, but without a means to address the external audience this right is nullified. The reporter thus serves as the proxy witness, able to access a wider audience, and they represent potentially the best chance that the subject has for their testimony to be heard on a larger scale.

At its heart, the act of bearing witness to abuse has a moral content that differentiates it from the evidential nature of judicial witnessing in a court; it is concerned as much with acknowledgement of the suffering of the victim and the need for justice than it is in necessarily achieving such justice through legal enforcement. As such, it is bound up with memory, remembering and respect more than factual accuracy. It involves an exchange between victim, witness, testimony and audience that implies a demand for moral restitution, even if such restitution simply consists in recognizing the abuse in the present. Barbie Zelizer defines bearing witness as an 'act of witnessing that enables people to take responsibility for what they see' [5], whilst for communications theorist Carrie Rentschler it has an almost physical dimension, with witnessing becoming a 'form of bodily and political participation in what people see and document'[6]. Additionally, it bears a certain moral burden upon the parties engaged in the act, for bioethics professor Jeffery Blustein it is an almost physical task, a 'kind of repair work, a restorative labour'[7] akin to carrying a heavy load. The psychologist and Holocaust survivor Dori Laub, writing of his experiences interviewing other Holocaust victims, concurs that bearing witness is, at its essence, a collaborative, communicative, performative act, noting that 'Testimonies are not monologues; they cannot take place in solitude. The witness are talking to somebody' [8]. This sense of the testimony needing to be performed to an audience is vital; the act of bearing witness rather than simply witnessing demands that the witness enunciates their testimony out loud in some way, to give it expression and form so that it can pay homage to the things, people or events witnessed. This act of enunciation enables the victim to reaffirm their moral right to be respected against the actions of the perpetrator to the contrary. Blustein argues that such abuse is an attempt to void the sense that the victim has rights,

Serious moral wrongdoing does not just violate the rights of the victim to non-interference. It is also a communicative act that expresses this: you (the victim) are of no account, morally speaking, or do not count as much as I do, and you may be used in whatever way I see fit.[9] Bearing witness can therefore counteract this violation by reassigning the status of the victim as a member of society with moral rights; giving the victim a voice acts as a restorative act; recognizing and acknowledging their trauma brings them back into society. The

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[5]Barbie Zelizer. "Finding Aids to the Past: Bearing Personal Witness to Traumatic Public Events,." *Media Culture Society* Vol 24 (2002): page 698.

[6], Carrie A Rentschler. "Witnessing: US Citizenship and the Vicarious Experience of Suffering." *Media, Culture & Society* 26.2 (2004): 296-304., page 83.

[7]Jeffrey Blustein. *The Moral Demands of Memory*. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008), page 86.

[8] Shoshana Feldman, Dori Laub. Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature,Psychoanalysis, and History.(New York: Routledge,1992) page 68.

[9] Blustein, *The Moral Demands of Memory,* 323.

act of bearing witness thus becomes a symbolic exchange between the witness and the audience that restores the victim as worthy of attention. In doing so, the witness asserts the universality of victimhood, the possibility that it could happen to anyone of us. Such witnessing involves a sense of a 'shared humanity and acknowledges a fundamental human equality with respect to susceptibility to pain, misery, hardship, suffering, affliction and the like.[10]'

This process is often a complex one, however, not least because fundamental to the project of bearing witness is a central paradox. The atrocity event resists representation in any complete way, and a testimony of suffering must always include an absence at its core, the gap between the ability of representational forms to transmit experience. The lacuna of trauma creates a space of silence where the ability of language fails to express experience. These spaces are like topological features, with the peaks of representation mirrored by the troughs of its failure. The role of the witness who uses form to translate their testimony contains at its core an aesthetic intervention, the way in which the testimony is formulated and presented, whether text, image or some other presentation, directly impacts on how it might be received by an audience. The aesthetic process can fill in these almost invisible indentations, such that the viewer 'might better think of these silences or absences as a sort of topography: hollows or indentations left by the past, unannounced and mute but awaiting memory's voice, a witness, a poet, and orator, or a monument'[11]. For the witness then, the imperative is to fill these lacunae with something, even if it ultimately fails to fully represent the event. Some representation is better than none at all, as the 'impulse to bear witness is intimately related to fragility, to a silence of memory and of the past, a silence that fuels the witness's sense of the need to bring that past before his contemporaries'[12]. Once the silence has been broken, the testimony has been enunciated, or performed; it may then impact upon the listener with the compulsion to take significant action. As Blustein notes, especially in cases of large-scale wrongdoing, the extent of wrongdoing may be so extreme that those who merely read about it or hear about it distantly either cannot believe or refuse to believe that it actually happened. Witnesses to horrific crimes can provide testimony that shocks others out of their denial or complacency and that galvanises humanitarian intervention and reparative response.[13]

This process moves from the individual to the community, thus sharing the burden of responding to the injury from the victim, so that bearing witness moves 'individuals from the personal act of "seeing" to the adoption of a public stance by which they become part of a collective working through trauma together.'[14] Azoulay argues that the 'duty to watch as spectators is at the same time both the duty to resist injury to others who are governed and the duty to restore the civilian skill of spectatorship: to be an addressee of this injury, to

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[10]Blustein, *The Moral Demands of Memory*, 332.

[11]William James Booth, *Communities of Memory: On Witness, Identity, and Justice*. (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2006) page 74.

[12] Booth, *Communities of Memory: On Witness, Identity, and Justice*. 74.

[13]Blustein, *The Moral Demands of Memory*, 321.

[14] Zelizer, "Finding Aids to the Past: Bearing Personal Witness to Traumatic Public Events,." 698.

produce its meaning as injury, and to continue to address it.'[15] The social act of witnessing, and then performing that witnessing to an audience serves to re-suture the victim into the social fabric, repairing by the act of recognition in some form the rupture of the violent act. The testimony then becomes a symbolic statement of the witnesses' alliance with the moral good against the forces of evil; a landmark that retains its relevance long after the atrocity has passed into history. The photographic image, with its ability to encompass both referential and imaginative elements, is unusually well suited to perform such a symbolic role. Its durable, material persistence, allied with its mobility through space and time, allows it to become a focal point around which the ethics of memory can coalesce.

Marcus Bleasdale: Rape of a Nation.

"We believe in big, really really big. You cannot lock this stuff away in a box or make it arcane." Leslie Thomas[16]

Marcus Bleasdale's association with Human Rights Watch, (HRW) Medecins sans Frontieres (MSF) and other related NGOs is a valuable example of how collaborations between a photographer and a humanitarian organisation are more powerful than the work of one agent alone, maximizing the potential impact of bearing witness. Bleasdale has a long-term commitment to documenting the situation in the Congo, from the days of Mobuto to the collapse of civil society and the rise of the warlords who dominate the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) today. Visually, his images often take the perspective of a participant in the situation, situating the viewer within the scene. He is a prime example of the kind of photographer that has emerged from the complex changes in the industry driven by the digitalization of image distribution and the demise of the traditional magazine market. He works with a variety of outlets and funders to enhance his ability to get his message across, and has a clear personal agenda focused on a particular issue. By forming alliances with editorial clients such as Time or National Geographic who will give assignments, NGOs who work in the field for logistical support and grant-giving entities to fund the work on a long-term basis, he has been able to produce sustained bodies of images that address key issues in the conflict in the DRC. His work has explored the range of issues that drive the conflict, including the battle over conflict minerals, the recruitment of child soldiers, and the use of rape as a weapon of war.

Bleasdale is fully aware of the dangers in representing the aftermath of sexual violence, noting that it is a "very difficult topic to approach both visually and philosophically, the concept of identify and consent is so blurred in these areas. Historically there has been a lot of abuse by photographers and journalists of their subjects in the region".[17] He therefore worked very closely with MSF and their team of doctors and psychologist in the file, following their strict guidelines on informed consent even when working on his own. He was very conscious of the power relations between him and the potentially very vulnerable women,

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[15] Azoulay. *The Civil Contract of Photography 343.*

[16] Kassie Bracken. "Behind the Scenes: Suffering, Writ Large." *Lens Blog New York Times,* Oct. 19, 2009, https://lens.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/10/19/behind-20/

[17] Author interview with Marcus Bleasdale, 2017.

arguing that you turn up there with a pastor or doctor as a white photographer stamped immediately with this authority that is not legitimate. If you walk into the wards or rooms with person of authority you take on that authority, and that's an abuse of power, you need to explain in detail what you are doing, how those photos will be used. [18]

He therefore worked very carefully with the women, even to the extent of showing them the images shot on his digital camera as he was making them, and giving them copies of the photographs to keep. He explained how "when I show them my camera and I ask survivors if I may photograph them, 90 percent say yes. Then I show them a magazine and try to explain what will happen to the photograph, and 90 percent say they do not want their faces to be visible." For this part of the larger project, he combined portraits with images of the locations where the abuse had taken place. The images (figs 1 and 2) are black and white, with graphic use of deep shadows and shafts of light. Bleasdale explains how the in the "aesthetic of the whole book shadow plays a heavy role, I worked mostly in dark rooms shooting into the light a lot, in rooms where women were in front of the window You can see form and texture but can't engage with the identity of the person." In some images, he focused on "legs, or arms or hands, or used a candle to create contrast in those portraits." [19] He also photographed the locations where the abuses had taken pace, according to the women's testimony. In doing so he acted as a Post-Factum witness, returning to the scene of the crime to explore how the latent presence of atrocity can remain as historical, metaphoric and allegorical visual traces. The landscape thus becomes more than a topography, and is transformed into a space of memory and ultimately, remembrance, acting as a palimpsest, a layering of time across the topography of space. Working closely with the psychologists from MSF, Bleasdale found that the experience of retelling their stories was often therapeutic for the women.

However, Bleasdale still had to exercise caution when supplying his work to magazines for publication to protect the rights of the women. Even when working with a female photo editor on a women's magazine in the United States, he recalls that he had to argue about showing the identity of the women. He would question the editors by asking them "how would you like it if was your face or your mother's face or sister's face? Would you have the same view of anonymity?" [20]

The work was used in a wide range of outlets, including in his 2009 book, Rape of a Nation, as well as by MSF and HRW in their reports on sexual violence in the region.[21] It also formed part of a larger exhibition curated by Leslie Thomas entitled Congo/Women on sexual violence and women's rights held in the US Congress in 2009, where the images were blown up to 7 feet by 10 feet to maximize their impact. The exhibition was part of a lobbying campaign that in part led to substantial enhanced funding for the issue in the region, and

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[18]Author interview with Bleasdale, 2017.
[19]Author interview with Bleasdale, 2017.
[20]Author interview with Bleasdale, 2017.
[21] See for example on the MSF website, Voices from the field, July 27, 2009: Democratic Republic of Congo: "Nobody could take her dignity from her"
http://www.doctorswithoutborders.org/news-stories/voice-field/democratic-republic-congo-nobody-could-take-her-dignity-her

contributed to the later Dodd Frank 1502 act on the use of conflict minerals in consumer goods.

Intended Consequences: Jonathan Torgovnik

"Tell the world that the international community has a debt, because they didn't come to our rescue. They should now come to support us, as we deal with the legacy of genocide." Rosette, Rwandan Rape Survivor

During the 1994 Rwandan Genocide Rwandan over 800,000 Tutsi and moderate Hutus were murdered in a period of 100 days. Tutu women were raped on a massive scale by the Hutu militia, civilians and the Rwandan Armed Forces. Rape was deployed as part of a government strategy as a means of stripping Tutsi women of their dignity and identity. In addition to sexualized violence HIV/AIDS was also used to ethnically cleanse the Tutus. The number of women raped is estimated at between 250,000 and 500,000, whilst an estimated 20,000 children were born as a result of the abuse. Laetitia Nyirazinyoye and Maggie Zraly conducted an ethnographic study of resilience among the survivors of genocide-rape in southern Rwanda. The study looked at how society viewed survivors of rape. It showed that rape victims had long been stigmatized in their communities even before the genocide and seen as unfit to marry, so what happened to the rape survivors of genocide largely followed existing social norms.[22]

In 2006, the Israeli photographer Jonathan Torgovnik travelled on assignment to Rwanda with an editor for Newsweek magazine to work on a story about the 20th anniversary of the advent of HIV/AIDS. The editor had set up a meeting with a woman who told her story about how she contracted the virus after being raped by Hutu militia during the 1994 genocide. Torgovnik described the first time he heard the story of rape:
"I will never forgot that interview. It was one of the most horrific I had in my career. Margaret was sixteen at the time of the genocide. She described how her whole family was murdered, she was raped while locked in the room for two months by four or five men every day until finally she was thrown out in the street. She became pregnant. She had a baby boy and managed to love him and feed him, despite the rejection from her family. When I came back to New York where I was living at the time, Margaret's story haunted me. While she had described her life and the horrors that she had gone through, I was thinking to myself how many women are like this in Rwanda." [23]

For Torgovnik the project became a personal mission. He was shocked by the ostracization and rejection of these women by their families and the communities. His family was his social net, this is why he did it. The women told him that they wanted their voices to be heard outside their communities. They did not want to be forgotten and wanted the world to see what had happened to them during and after the genocide. He was determined to show how

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[22]Maggie Zraly and Laetitia Nyirazinyoye. "Don't Let the Suffering Make You Fade Away: An Ethnographic Study of Resilience among Survivors of Genocide-rape in Southern Rwanda." Social Science & Medicine 70.10 (2010): 1656-664.

[23] Author interview with Jonathan Torgovnik, 2017.

widespread the campaign of abuse had been. In 2006 this was a severely underreported story. Over the course of the next three years, Torgovnik went to Rwanda to make over 40 portraits of the families, slowly meeting the women and photographing them. He worked with Avega, an NGO headquartered in Kigali, founded in 1994 to help widows and dependents with medical services, psychological counseling, education and training, housing and legal services and income-generating activities after the genocide. Avega introduced Torgovnik to the survivors and helped him gain the trust he needed. One of the most traumatic experiences he had was when he first went to hear the first story. "We were sitting on the floor and we were all crying. She was talking about her family and how they murdered her aunt. I couldn't take any pictures because I was so traumatized. I had to come back to pictures the next day."[24]
Torgovnik decided that portraits would better convey the issue at hand than straight reportage. He therefore made environmental photos with his medium format Hasselblad camera and a flash. He wanted people to look at the photographs and get drawn in to start asking questions, maintaining that "I wanted the photographs to hit the viewer hard. I wanted people to see the beauty of the women and their children." He felt that the interviews were just as important as the photos. He also had to find a strategy to show the trauma these mothers had experienced. These women hadn't yet shared their stories with anyone. Torgovnik would sit with the mothers for some time before the interview started. The children were not present at the interview. He wanted them understand that the stories would be shared with the world. Torgovnik said that mothers felt it was their mission to tell the story and let the world hear their voices. He decided to do the interviews first and then photograph them after, describing how he "would come to their homes and then we eased into the interview - starting with their life and then they would describe the rape. I felt that I was a vehicle to tell the story and after a while they didn't see me there." [25]
He felt he would be better able to capture on film the feelings of trauma after the interviews because of the intensity of the raw relived experience. The children were then brought in to be photographed with their mothers. The strategy was to compel viewers to read the story after looking at the faces of these families. He had to convey the different feelings that these mothers had for their children born of rape. Many women had issues raising them (fig 3). As he explained, this was a complex situation for many of the mothers,
I remember walking into the house and I see a strikingly beautiful woman who had two daughters who looked the same age. The militia had killed her husband and raped her and took her as a sex slave when she was nine months pregnant. She gave birth and 9 month later gave birth to the second daughter who was a result of rape. She escaped and walked to Rwanda. But her love was divided. The girls didn't understand why their mother treated the first born better and the second one so indifferently.[26]

Armed with the stories and photos and determined to tell let the world know what happened to these women, Torgovnik went to Stern magazine in Germany. What happened was so unexpected. The story was published and

[24] Author interview with Torgovnik,2017.
[25]Author interview with Torgovnik, 2017.
[26] Author interview with Torgovnik,2017.

Torgovnik made sure that a call to action was published in the paper. The children needed funding for a school. With that one story, Torgovnik's work made over $150,000 and today the project has funded education for hundreds of children. His book, Intended Consequences, was published by Aperture, and the exhibition, funded by Open Society Foundations, launched at the Aperture gallery in New York, and then traveled internationally in Japan, France, UK, China and Burma. A separate traveling exhibition also went to ten universities in the US, in partnership with Amnesty International that also developed an education guide based on the work. The nonprofit he founded is called Foundation Rwanda and continues to help the children today.

Armin Smailovic: Sounds of Silence.

"I walk with my head high, proud. I am fighter. I live on, I will never let them break me. That's what they would want. One said that rape is a kind of slow murder. I have not let them kill my spirit, and will never let it happen. I want the same for all the women in the world, and you must help me in that."

Enisa Salcinovic (2011)

The Bosnian-German photographer Armin Smailovic has been documenting the post-war situation in the Balkans for the last twenty years, and has undertaken projects on Srebrenica and the cult of Tito.[27] In 2011 he was commissioned by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) to produce a body of work on the victims of rape as a weapon of war. This was a continuation of UNFPA's informative campaign, S.O.S. Sound of Silence, that targeted public awareness of the status of the estimated 20,000 victims of rape and other forms of sexual violence during the war in BiH. In the words of the project director, Majda Prljaca, the concept of the work was to create 'a vision of making the unimaginable and unspeakable visible'. As she explains, the women live with the terrible legacy of their abuse on a daily basis as they suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, gynaecological problems, sexual dysfunction, lack of concentration, fear, depression, and they have limited access to services such as health and social protection. The majority of the victims live in poverty and are not able to find or maintain jobs due to their psychological condition.[28]

Smailovic had to find a way to represent the psychological state of mind of the survivors whilst not subjecting them to further trauma through the process of being interviewed and photographed. Smailovic was aware of the other bodies of work on rape as a weapon of war from countries like Rwanda, but wanted to make work that was more expressive and conceptual. Smailovic explains the difficulty of dealing with such traumatic memories:

"No one who was not part of this, who did not experience this torture, this abuse, can understand what is happening with the women, but I tried to show that there is this huge, dark room around them that cannot be erased, it can only be medicated to make them have it too often, instead of 24/7 maybe 2/7 or 5/7, it helps them to shorten the times of flashbacks, of depression."[29]

[27] See his work online at http://www.smailovic.com/Seven-States_2_0_job_0_seite_0.html

[28] Author interview of Majda Prijaca.,2014.

[29] Author interview of Smailovic, 2017.

In the process of talking to the women a recurrent theme of their experiences was being kept in a darkened room, and then being taken, often at night, by flashlight by their Serbian captors to be repeatedly raped. From this, he developed the idea of photographing the women in dark rooms, against a black backdrop, and lighting them by torchlight (fig 4). This process was intended to retell their story 'visually, though body language, giving testimony through their expression, like a flashlight on your neighbor, your friend, your sister or mother[30]. In the field, he usually chose to shoot in bathrooms, kitchens or entrance halls where the light levels were naturally low. He explains the process thus:

'Each session took a maximum of three to five minutes, I explained to them that I would use a flashlight, we would look at the images together, whether they would like to be identified or not in the portrait, then we started to find a situation of a portrait in a very quick and easy way, to make it fast for them, I said if they are not comfortable to tell me instantly to stop, it happened two or three times because of the flashlight, they had instant flashback to twenty years ago and I had to stop after 30 seconds, they were ok after that. It was not with every portrait, but with some I had goose bumps, as it felt like I was with her 20 years ago in the same room as she was raped'.

There are over sixty photographs in the whole project, and the women were photographed all over BiH, from Prijedor to Trebinje, Tuzla, Mostar, Sarajevo, Kozarac and Prozor. Smailovic notes also that each session was a performance, the women were 'all made up, dressed up, they were prepared for a portrait session, they did not come just like that, unprepared, but they didn't know what will happen or what it would look like in advance'[31] Aware of the potential problems that such a restaging of the abuse could entail, Smailovic and the team from UNFPA were careful to make the process as collaborative as possible. Given the constricting spaces, he made relatively tight headshots of the women, and then expanded the canvas of the images in Photoshop to situate the women's faces in a sea of darkness. The women's faces loom out of the darkness, partially illuminated by the narrow and transient beam of light from the torch. These shafts of light act as multiple metaphors, for the process of the actual abuse itself, for the psychological and emotional scars it has left on the women, but also for the redemptive quality of bearing witness, of shining a light into dark corners to illuminate them with the testimony of the survivors, echoing Azoulay's claim that 'Rape cannot remain in the dark' [32]By isolating the faces of the women, the viewer is forced into a direct confrontation with their suffering. There is literally no visual space in which to hide from their expressions and the emotion in their eyes. When the work was shown in exhibitions it was presented without any captions or even supporting text, which had a powerful effect on the audiences, as Smailovic explains:

'At the show, it was like there are no questions left from the audience about who these women were and what happened to them, there were no captions, no names, locations or their stories, even those who were open to be photographed

[30]Author interview of Smailovic, 2017.
[31]Author interview of Smailovic, 2017.
[32] Azoulay. *The Civil Contract of Photography,* 259.

they asked me not to disclose the location. But no-one needed to know more, it was all there in their faces.'

The work was also produced as a book, funded by UNFPA, whose Deputy Executive Director Anne-Anne-Birgitte Albrectsen noted that it

gives voice to the voiceless and lets the world know that there is no shame in having endured unimaginable atrocities. These women are our models, our sisters and our neighbours, and they should be celebrated for their strength and courage. This crime is one that thrives in the dark, and by coming forward and sharing their images, they are shining a light on what has been called history's greatest silence.[33]

This series thus deals in an intensely emotional way with both the memory of past abuse, and with its retelling into the present through a process of giving testimony with the bodily expression of the women's trauma. Their faces form topographies of suffering, with the memory of their terrible experiences mapped in every line. But they also stare back at the viewer, sometimes accusatory, sometimes, resigned, sometimes calm. As Majda Prljaca notes, these 'dark portraits communicate the isolation, fear and pain. Released from their surroundings, the photographs look like a visual echo of victims of rape camps. The loneliness of women with the cruel legacy of war and oppression and powerlessness to the outsiders are clear.'[34] The light in the gloom acts as a powerful imaginative metaphor that forces the viewer to engage with the experiences of these women, and how they continue to dominate their lives today.

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[33] Nicole Foster. "Sound of Silence: Dealing with the Legacy of Sexual Violence as a Weapon of War." United Nations Population Fund. N.p., 17 Mar. 2014.

[34] Author interview of Majda Prljaca, 2013.

My Body is a War Zone: Blake Fitch

"If I start to tell my stories, this body that you see, it has been a body of many instruments of war." Lucinda, rape survivor, Colombia

Blake Fitch's work documents the nuances and complexities of the emotional lives of girls and young women, and these concerns served as catalyst for the work she made for the "My Body is a War Zone" project. The exhibition was collaboration between Fitch and PROOF: Media for Social Justice, an NGO that uses visual storytelling for social change. The project was conceived to give voice to survivors of rape or sexual violence in armed conflicts. For almost half a century, civil conflict involving the state, paramilitary, and guerrilla forces had seized Colombia. As a result, almost four million Colombians are considered internally displaced within the country. They have fled diverse harm, including gang warfare, forced recruitment, extortion, social cleansing, and sexual violence. By some estimates, gender-based violence was the cause for two out of every ten displaced Colombian women. Many women have yet to receive any compensation or justice.

The intent of the exhibit was to lift up the voices of survivors of sexual violence, and force accountability and response from the community and policy makers. This exhibit was produced before the peace talks had concluded. Fitch photographed the Colombian survivors who participated in the exhibit.

Her work as a curator at the Griffin Museum of photography, a preeminent resource devoted to the exhibition of photographs, helped her create a powerful group of photos that would be eventually used for a traveling exhibit. In a direct way, Fitch's comfort and rapport with vulnerable young women allowed her to connect with the women featured in the project. This became a key factor in Fitch's beautifully crafted photographs of rape survivors in Colombia. As Andy Goldberg aptly wrote about her work, "It is rare in contemporary photography to encounter a series of pictures this beautiful, innocent, compelling, and intriguing." Fitch is an experienced portrait photographer whose career has ranged from commercial based assignments to editorial assignments in Latin America. Fitch described how she "wanted to use my photography for a very specific project, and this presented an opportunity to make a potential difference in these women's lives. The images needed to show the women from a position of strength. I wanted them to be viewed more as survivors and as warriors." [35]

As a woman, Fitch was struck by the bravery of the women she photographed. "At the onset of the project, the hardship and trauma that these women faced was evident. I could only begin to grasp the pain they have had dealt with". At the time, Fitch was pregnant with her second child. This gave her a personal connection to her subjects, as she explained, "One of the women had a little baby and I realized that because I'm a mom, it made me stop and think about my children and not wanting any harm to come to them. But more

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[35] Author interview of Blake Fitch, 2017.

important, because I was a woman, I could only imagine the pain they went through."

They understood that the exhibit was their way of telling their community their stories. The leader of the group had said that their goal was to get their stories out and wanted to let the world know what happened to them so that the cycle of violence would stop. As they said "We want our sons, husbands, elected officials, doctors and the public to hear our words and see what happens to their mothers and daughters."[36] When thinking about how to photograph the women, Fitch had to find a visual strategy to protect them by concealing their identities. The perpetrators had warned the survivors that they would kill them and their families if they told anyone. Often the abusers would be living in the same town. Fitch wanted to convey beauty, strength and sadness in their portraits.

Because of the issue of safety, Fitch made two different kinds of portraits. The photographs used in the exhibition in Colombia couldn't show the women's' faces. Fitch therefore concentrated on the hands of the women, shooting in black and white so that the lines in their hands would be more dramatic, serving as a metaphor for their hard lives (fig 5). She recounted how she "decided to tell them to use the protective motion with their hand up as if to fight off the perpetrator. You know there is a person staring out behind the hand, it says Stop, stay away from me, I am strong!" [37] The second set of photographs was shot for use in the international exhibition. Fitch took very tight close ups of their faces and eyes, concentrating on the strength in each of them (fig 6). She decided to use a shallow the depth of field in her camera so that the viewer would focus on the eyes. The women's returned gaze seems to say "I am striking back and you can't take my dignity away from me." [38] Fitch felt that the women had a sense of release by the time the portrait was taken. They had kept their guard up for so long by not telling anyone their story, but the process of telling their stories, being photographed, and being listened to was cathartic. It was the first time that they had been asked if they wanted to participate in a project like this, and once the photographs were made, they were also involved in deciding how to use them, giving them a real sense of empowerment. [39]

The exhibit continues to travel internationally, and locally the women now feel confident enough to talk about the exhibit and use it in their work with other women. They are proud of it and feel they own it. One of the leaders was chosen to be a delegate to the peace process in Cuba and several of the women have become human rights defenders for women who are survivors of sexual violence. The exhibit opened the door for these women to be able to talk openly about their experiences and has inspired others to share their stories with the public.

Conclusion: Making the Past visible

With it's direct address to the camera, and thence to the audience, the portrait format invites the viewer to ponder the character, personality and experiences

[36] Author interview, 2012.
[37] Author interview of Blake Fitch, 2017.
[38] Author interview of Blake Fitch, 2017.
[39] Author interview with participants, 2017.

of the subject, what Kozloff calls the "Theatre of the Face."[40] All of these projects involve the direct confrontation with the viewer of an identifiable individual, but also presents a series of such individuals linked together by a coherent, common aesthetic that establishes a connection between them whist retaining the uniqueness of their personal experience. Drawing links between the use of rape as a weapon of war in Congo, Colombia, Rwanda and Bosnia establishes that there is a pressing need for sanctions against such atrocities to be developed at the level of global governance.

The works explored in this paper project a moment in the apparent present backwards into the past, making connections between a person and their past visible. They thus challenge the concept that time is linear and progressive, suggesting that it is more fragmentary and circular. A photograph can connect past to present, and present to past. Indeed, it can also connect present and past to the future, in suggesting what might be as well as what has been. As Shanks notes, photographs have the potential to draw together different temporalities, what he describes as 'memory as actuality – the juxtaposition of different times in the now,' [41] This follows Baer's assertion that photographic temporality is not linear and chronological, but rather more consists of 'singular bursts and explosions',[42]and thus offers the viewer a 'chance to see in a photograph not narrative, not history, but possibly trauma'[43]. By its very nature, the photograph can only be experienced after the event itself; as such, the temporality of photography matches that of traumatic memory. As Caruth explains, trauma is characterized, not
by the event itself—which may or may not be catastrophic, and may not traumatize everyone equally—nor can it be defined in terms of a distortion ... but consists . . . in the structure of its experience or reception: the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it. [44]
Photography is therefore a valuable form of presenting trauma by bearing witness, as it necessarily involves a retelling or reinterpretation of the past by an engagement with the traces and evidence of that past in the present, and a recognition and involvement with the histories of both people and places. As Booth notes, this is an active process of the witness bringing the story of the past back into the present, such that the witness 'brings to light and evokes the sense of the trace' and in doing so they 'restore…what is absent…they overcome the distance, the temporal distance that separates the present from what is being given in the act of witnessing' [45]. This integrity of the witness must be separated out from the concept of the truthfulness of the testimony, as truth is perhaps less important in the context of witness testimony than authenticity. What can be called the authenticity of subjectivity operates here; such that what is sought from the witness is a personal account of an event. As the philosopher Slavoj

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[40]Max Kozloff. *The Theatre of the Face: Portrait Photography since 1900*. London: Phaidon, 2007.
[41]Michael Shanks. (2011) Landscape aesthetics – the politics. (Internet). Available from http://www.mshanks.com/2011/07/landscape-aesthetics-the-politics-continued/
[42] Ulrich Baer. *Spectral Evidence: The Photography of Trauma*. (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2005) page 7.
[43]Baer. *Spectral Evidence: The Photography of Trauma*.6.
[44] Cathy Caruth. *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins 1995) page 4.
[45] Booth. *Communities of Memory: On Witness, Identity, and Justice, 86.*

Žižek observes, the more subjective a testimony is, potentially the more likely it is to be accepted:

A distinction needs to be made between (factual) truth and truthfulness; what renders a report of a raped woman (or any other narrative of trauma) truthful is its very factual unreliability, its confusion, its inconsistency. If the victim were able to report on her painful and humiliating experience in a clear manner, with all the data arranged in a consistent order, this very quality would make us suspicious of its truth.[46]

One of the greatest powers of photography lies in its suggestiveness, its ability to imply or infer emotions in a scene through the activation of the photographic imagination. In the powerful series of images discussed in this paper the act of bearing witness has a distinctive moral quality that goes beyond that of simple witnessing, that it has a potential therapeutic and validating potential as well as an accusatory or documentary one. The act of bearing witness to atrocities thus has a moral value in and of itself in its production of an artifact of testimony to honour the victim, even if it serves no other purpose. The photographer can act as a proxy witness for the rest of society, and the product of this witnessing, the photograph, has a culturally privileged position in light of the foregrounding of the visual as believable evidence. Given the material nature of the photograph, and its portability and mobility, the act of witnessing is transferred then from the photographer as the witness to the event to the photograph itself as the vehicle through which this privileged visualisation is disseminated. When the potential for the photograph as a carrier of memory is added, the potential is then generated for photographs of atrocity to become encapsulated arguments about the abuse of one person by another, and thus as markers of what could be called 'moral memory', generating ethical arguments and positions about what is right and wrong in societies' responses to conflict and suffering. As Azoulay forcefully puts it, 'Rape cannot remain in the dark.The image-maker thus serves as a conduit between the world and the viewer, crystallising experience into a material form, that through its aesthetic and formal qualities, communicates its content to the audience, and challenges that audience to respond. As such photographic discourse forms an 'inseparable part of any struggle in the political arena, for it is in the visual arena, through and by means of images, that women and men train themselves to feel, see, think , judge and act.'[47] The projects discussed in this paper therefore arm the rape survivors with their visual and written testimonies, empowering them with the tools to stand up and defy the stigma and political and social barriers that surround the issue, enabling them tell their stories to the world with the hope of breaking the cycle of rape. To expect photography alone to create significant social change is unrealistic and unlikely, but taken as a vital part of an on-going process of informational exchange it can have a significant role in humanizing the other, and through imaginative engagement increase empathy and the desire to take affirmative action.

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[46] Slavoj ZÌ izÌ ek. *Violence Six Sideways Reflections*. (London: Profile, 2009) page 3.

[47]Azoulay. *The Civil Contract of Photography, 281.*

Illustrations

Fig 1: A fifty four-year old woman victim was, raped by government soldiers in Aveba, DRC while fleeing fighting between government and militia forces. 2006. Copyright Marcus Bleasdale

Fig 2: The church in Aveba, DRC, where government soldiers rounded up many women before taking them outside and systematically raping them. 2006. Copyright Marcus Bleasdale

Fig 3: Valentine with her daughters, Amelie and Inez. "I love my first daughter more because I gave birth to her as a result of love. Her father was my husband. The second girl is a result of unwanted circumstance. I never loved her father. My love is divided, but slowly, I am beginning to appreciate that the younger daughter is innocent. I love her only now that I am beginning to appreciate that she is my daughter too." 2006 . Copyright Jonathan Torgovnik/Getty Images Reportage

Fig 4: Black Portrait, 2011. Copyright Armin Smailovic

Fig 5: From My Body is a War Zone, Copyright Blake Fitch

Fig 6: From My Body is a War Zone, Copyright Blake Fitch

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