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## GUEST EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

Katherine Stone

Department of German Studies, University of Warwick, Coventry, CV4 7AL.

K.Stone@warwick.ac.uk

+44 (0)24 765 24647

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In recent years, cultural producers have attracted publicity and garnered acclaim for their efforts to raise awareness about conflict related sexual violence (CRSV). In 2009, Lynn Nottage won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama with *Ruined*, which documents the experiences of Congolese women. In October 2013, Jeremy Szumczyk courted controversy when he erected a life-size statue of a Red Army soldier sexually assaulting a pregnant woman in a public square in Gdansk. Conceptual artist Alketa Xhafa-Mripa's tribute to survivors of sexual violence in Kosovo ("Thinking of You") grabbed headlines around the world in 2015. Likewise, Angelina Jolie's involvement in the Global Summit to End Sexual Violence has been much discussed, and her directorial debut *In the Land of Blood and Honey* (2011) about Serbian army rape camps in Bosnia prompted polarizing reactions across Bosnia and Herzegovina. These events remind us of the power of art touch a nerve, attract the attention of the global media, and prompt public conversation. It is thus timely to direct scholarly attention to the messages such works convey about CRSV and how they impact on public understanding. Asking these questions is necessary in order to grasp how creative initiatives might best be utilized not only to foster remembrance but also to support individual and collective recovery, reconciliation, and perhaps even social transformation.

This special issue emerged out of a two-day symposium at Maynooth University, Ireland, that set out to explore these issues. The articles included here span cultural contexts and historical periods, from the aftermath of World War II in Germany to the transitional peace in contemporary Colombia, with reflections on Angola, Mozambique, post-Colonial Portugal, Kosovo, the DRC, and Rwanda. They investigate a range of creative forms from novels, documentary films, reportages, and life-writing to photographic exhibitions and artistic installations. This variety is intended to convey the breadth of the research that exists, albeit in dispersed fashion, in this field. The last decade has prompted increased consideration of the sorts of contributions that creative products and exercises can make to "the cultural and individual dimensions" of transitional justice (de Greiff, 2014, p. 14). Emerging in the 1980s,

this term “encompasses a number of different legal, political, and cultural instruments and mechanisms that can strengthen, weaken, enhance or accelerate processes of regime change and consolidation,” as well as peace and justice (Mihr, 2016, p. 1). By way of illustration, in 1999 the UN adopted the “Declaration and Program of Action on a Culture of Peace,” with Article 8 envisioning a “key role” for “creative and artistic activities.” A decade later, UNESCO launched the “Creative Community Outreach Initiative” to provide better infrastructure for exchange between filmmakers, writers, the media, and the UN. As part of its “Learning for Peace” program, UNICEF also sponsors a number of “theatre for development” projects. What is more, in Timor-Leste, the Commission for Reception, Truth, and Reconciliation explicitly recommended “the development of popular literature, music, and art for remembrance” in its final report of 2003; it committed to providing resources for “creative therapy and activities such as theatre, graphic arts, music, and prayer” in severely affected communities (Wandita, Campbell-Nelson, & Leong Pereira, 2006, p. 311). Elsewhere, such creative tools are more grassroots in character, from community theatre to individual initiatives such as novels and memoirs. As Siddiqui, Marifat, and Kuovo (2014) observe, these bottom-up creative exercises are particularly valuable when legal mechanisms, material reparations, and institutional support are slow to materialize, such as in Cambodia and Colombia (p. 130).

Furthermore, Hamber (1998) argues that “making space for the complaints and opposition of survivors should be seen as an integral component of any reparations program. These spaces can take the form of private spaces (e.g. counselling, traditional mechanisms for story-telling and sharing, etc.) and the ongoing use of public space (e.g. media, exhibitions, theatre, etc.)” (para. 15). They represent “symbolic” forms of reparation. As Simić (2014) attests, the recognition that they offer victims, who may previously have carried their suffering alone, can “produce real effects of a moral, social, psychological, and political

nature” (p. 56). For Hamber and Palmary (2009), these symbolic gestures may be particularly valued by women who tend to be marginalized in institutional forms of reparation (p. 330).

The specific problem of CRSV plays a marginal role in the emerging field of transitional justice and the arts (Thompson, 2005; Thompson, Balfour, & Hughes, 2008; Rush & Simić, 2013; Ramírez-Barat, 2014; Kurze & Lamont, 2019). This situation needs redressing given the particular challenges that survivors face as they reorient themselves in communities in which conflict may have passed but not the reality of gender discrimination and gender-based violence. Since the 1990s, a wealth of feminist research has also dissected the dilemmas associated with the artistic representation of sexual violence. In fact, research into cultural engagements with CRSV is most developed in this area. Scholars have analyzed isolated creative works from a cultural studies perspective grounded in close reading, in order to illuminate issues to do with the ethics of representation and the epistemological value of artistic products. In the words of Garnsey (2016), however, “The location and production of justice within specific art spaces needs to be pushed further so that analysis moves beyond the artwork as an object alone” (p. 474). The contributions in this special issue therefore take traditional cultural studies perspectives as a springboard for considering how cultural products shape, supplement, intervene in, or challenge public discourses about CRSV.

In fact, Garraio’s article examines the role that fiction has played in challenging Portuguese memories of the Colonial War, which tend to exoticize sexual encounters with women in the colonies. For instance, she analyzes how acclaimed novelist António Lobo Antunes discredits the myth of Portuguese “soft” colonialism, albeit by using the violated female body as a metaphor for the delusion of Portuguese power over colonized people. In this respect, Garraio builds on an established body of feminist research arguing that,

The simultaneous presence and disappearance of rape as constantly deferred origin of both plot and social relations is repeated so often as to suggest a basic conceptual principle in the articulation of both social and artistic representations. Even when rape

does not disappear, the naturalization of patriarchal thinking, institutions and plots has profound effects: . . . [Cultural narratives frequently] present women telling stories that echo or ventriloquize definitions of rape that obliterate what might have been radically different perceptions. (Higgins & Silver, 1991, p. 3)

Garraio compares this “ur-script” with a more recent novel by Aida Gomes, which provides an intersectional depiction of violence against women in the colonies. By giving voice to victims and exposing gaps in cultural memory, she argues, such novels “contribute to a better understanding of sexual violence and its long-term impact on victims and their communities, thus paving the way to new forms of recognition and empathy.” Likewise, Swanson considers how art illuminates ambiguities within official human rights narratives. Her case-study is Emmanuel Dongala’s *Johnny Chien Méchant* (2002), adapted for the screen as *Johnny Mad Dog* in 2011, which shifts between the perspectives of a child soldier and his potential victim. Given that perpetrator research is still in its infancy, in part due to “a general lack of empirical knowledge” (Skjelsbæk, 2018, p. 153), Swanson argues that cultural spaces provide “an important means of access into perspectives that may otherwise be closed to view and understanding.” Similar to Garraio, Swanson prizes the potential of the novelistic form to untangle the relationship between CRSV, toxic masculinity, and “global systems of domination including slavery, colonialism, imperialism, and their ongoing legacies.” Her article ultimately asks “what cultural representations of grave human rights violations can contribute to understanding the drivers and impacts of mass rape, and thereby to its prevention and to the recognition and social engagement of its victims and perpetrators, who paradoxically may be victims of grave violations of rights within the same wartime context.” In this respect, cultural works can underpin efforts to re-humanize victims and perpetrators, which are imperative for rebuilding social relationships after conflict (Simić, 2016, p. 223).

The reception of artworks may additionally expose normative discursive frameworks that influence how societies—and courts—respond to sexual violence and its victims. In her

article, Stone examines the diary *A Woman in Berlin* (1954), an important source for the earliest feminist research into CRSV. Its complex reception history in Germany, where the author experienced multiple attacks by Red Army soldiers in 1945, was determined by changing ideas about legitimate victims and victim behaviors. Stone thus argues that creative works like *A Woman in Berlin* are valuable “precisely because they question taken-for-granted and embedded assumptions about victimhood . . . they challenge readers ‘to better grasp the meanings of human rights in human lives and perhaps to identify shortcomings in current conceptions of human rights’ (Meyers, 2016, p. 106).”

According to de Greiff (2014), artistic and cultural forms are often effective in this regard “because they are adept at focusing on concrete others” (p. 18). They add personal and emotional depth to descriptions and statements that may be flattened out by the demands of objectivity and completeness in other domains. Art is also free of the pragmatic constraints on more official interventions; this opens up possibilities for expressing the messiness, complexity, and historicity of CRSV and its effects, including “the impact on political discourse, patterns of socialization relating to the proper ways of exercising authority even at the level of family structure, and the subsequent replication of such patterns generation after generation. Cultural interventions are particularly adept at uncovering those expanding, rippling effects” (de Greiff, 2014, p. 19). Unlike academic, legal, or political discourse, art is not required to draw conclusions, make recommendations, come to a judgement, or offer answers. Poetic language or non-verbal expression may also allow the articulation of difficult experiences and complex feelings. The strength of artistic exercises, then, is that they “may raise questions by presenting facts, as well as different views and complexities inherent in a particular situation but leav[e] the audience to reflect on and reconsider their views and positions” (Simić, 2014, p. 59). Part of our mission in this special issue is to contribute to knowledge about “how artworks open up these spaces” not merely for empathy, but also for innovative modes of political thinking and action, as well as new understandings of sexual

violence (Garnsey, 2016, p. 473). For instance, at the heart of both Swanson's and Garraio's articles is the issue of narrative perspective, which provides access to different, emotional modes of understanding by inviting audiences to imagine characters and the contexts that shaped them. To try to pin down how the aesthetic works in these contexts, then, is to understand the emotional, and not purely intellectual, reaction that a creative work seeks to sustain in its audience.

References to the aesthetic in the context of atrocity are always uncomfortable and raise unavoidable questions about the ethics of representation. For this reason, the individual authors here weigh up the potential for sensationalism inherent in representing acts of sexual violence, the power dynamics of representation, and the risks of re-traumatizing and reifying victims inherent in acts of representing trauma, not to mention issues of unintended audience responses and ideological appropriation. To quote Thompson (2005), "because many war situations are maintained by a complex pattern of narrative creation, myth making and assertions of the truth, the act of telling a story in these contexts—whether for therapeutic, social, or cultural purposes—exists within these networks of competing and often war-sustaining accounts" (p. 26). Such concerns drive Sokołowska-Paryż's provocative article, which evaluates the success of Helke Sander's 1992 documentary film *BeFreier und Befreite* [Liberators take Liberties] and Wojciech Tochman's reportage *Dzisiaj narysujemy śmierć* [Today we draw death] from 2010. In their explorations of Rwanda and 1945 Germany, respectively, Tochman and Sander attempt to balance a contextually-specific investigation of wartime rape with universal narratives that might help their audiences understand distant conflicts. The article asks several challenging questions: How to activate narrative templates familiar and sympathetic to audiences, without reinforcing stereotypes about victims and perpetrators or perpetuating national or ethnic antagonisms? How to convey the reality of sexual violence without recourse to sensationalizing representations and without reducing survivors to the violence they once endured? How to affirm the relevance of all these stories



to the global present, without collapsing cultural and historical distinctions? In summary, Sokołowska-Paryż compares the advantages and disadvantages of visual and narrative media, underscoring questions creative practitioners must consider in their endeavors to raise awareness about CRSV. These questions are not merely the domain of ivory tower scholarship. Amsterdam and Bruner (2000) have shown how deeply-embedded ideas about good storytelling also shape legal narratives. Moreover, the challenges faced by artists as they tell stories about extreme violence are shared by actors at every stage of the transitional justice process.

Another running thread of this special issue is art's potential to empower survivors. Kahn recounts the genesis of the photographic exhibition "My Body a War Zone," which collected testimony from survivors of CRSV in Colombia, Bosnia, the DRC, and Nepal and travelled internationally. She underscores the importance of involving survivors as partners in shaping the exhibit and its use. With their agreement, moreover, the opening of the Colombian exhibit was tied into the rollout of the Gender Based Violence Information Management System developed by the UN High Commission on Refugees and the UN Population Fund, which helped to raise the profile of the event. Consequently, the leading government figures in attendance were confronted with their own failings, notably the incomplete implementation of the sexual violence departments mandated by law. Follow-up interviews demonstrated the empowering effect of the exhibition on the partners. They became activists, using the exhibition as a teaching tool in local communities and starting an organization that gave others the opportunity to talk about their experiences; this network now encompasses over 400 women. The success of this project attests how cultural spaces give women the opportunity "to perform 'authorial agency' where the narrative constructed—the story-telling in itself—creates subjects capable of action" (Björkdahl & Selimovic, 2015, p. 174). Di Lellio's article features another art installation that helped to alleviate the stigma surrounding CRSV. With advocates Rushiti and Tahiraj, di Lellio

discusses her involvement in Mripa's art installation "Mendoj Për Ty" [Thinking of You], dedicated to survivors of sexual violence during the 1998-1999 war in Kosovo. With the help of grassroots activists, those involved in the project were able to travel the country collecting 5,000 dresses from women and families affected by CRSV. The dresses were displayed on clotheslines in the football stadium in Pristina on June 12, 2015; the inauguration ceremony was broadcast live on the country's main television station. According to di Lellio, the initiative helped transform CRSV from a public secret to the subject of national conversation and political concern. Ultimately, she argues, the installation "gave symbolic and emotional meaning to the notion of justice for survivors . . . , which is potentially one of the most effectively transformative roles that art activism could play in transitional justice processes."

To argue that we ought to understand what culture can do differently to other forms of intervention is not to advocate a rose-tinted view of the arts as the domain of ethics, humanity, and social transformation. Nor is it to suggest that culture can somehow stand in for or replace more direct forms of support or reparation. This special issue is simply a modest attempt to spark interdisciplinary dialogue about how creative exercises generate an impact in post-conflict societies. Publishing in this journal, we hope to transport the questions we broach beyond cultural studies, joining scholars and practitioners in dialogue about the successes, limitations, and implications of cultural interventions in the aftermath of CRSV.

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## BIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

Katherine Stone works closely on the impact of gender on conceptualizations of violence. Her first monograph *Women and National Socialism in Postwar German Literature: Gender, Memory, and Subjectivity* (2017) examines emotional and cultural barriers to understanding the full extent of women's complicity in the Third Reich. She is currently developing a larger research project on the cultural memory of wartime rape in post-1945 Germany, which will draw on theories of affect in order to investigate how the reception of difficult histories shifts over time and, ultimately, to illuminate how societies produce knowledge about individual and collective trauma.