Title: How Social Norms Shape The Long-Term Consequences of War-Rape: A Mixed Method Qualitative Exploration

Abstract

Rape is widely used as a weapon of war. Despite its prevalence and impact, war-rape is rarely reported, partly because it is perceived as norm-violating in the patriarchal societies within which it often purposely occurs (e.g., by violating the norm that women should remain chaste), leading to survivors being excluded from their families and communities. While this exclusion is well-documented in the immediate aftermath of war, little is known about its long-term effects on survivors, the strategies survivors use to overcome these effects, or the extent to which these effects and strategies are determined by societal norms and societal discourses. The present manuscript addresses these gaps via two studies, focusing on rape that occurred during the Kosova war in 1998/99. Study 1, analysed the accounts of war-rape survivors (*N*=18), showing that societal stigma associated with war-rape had long-term negative effects on survivors' lives, and that survivors' coping strategies involved focussing on other valued social norms and identities (e.g., motherhood) to reframe their self-image and enhance their self-worth. In Study 2, Kosova political parliamentary debates on legal recognition of war-rape survivors as war victims were analysed using a Critical Discursive approach. Analysis identified gendered discourses of victimhood and motherhood, which serve to rhetorically undermine women's agency, resilience, and independence. These arguments were used to legitimise the injustices that survivors endured. Findings from both studies suggest that wider societal gendered discriminatory practices have impacted survivors' experiences of war-rape. Implications for theory and practice are discussed.

Keywords: social norms, gender-based violence, war-rape, social cure/curse, justice.

Public Significance Statement: The present study evidences the long-term impact of war rape and the strategies used by survivors to cope and overcome the stigma associated with it. While survivors rely on their gender identities to make sense and overcome the challenges they face, they also pay close attention to public discourses on war rape. This study illustrates how public discourses such as parliamentary debates, can further contribute to societal discriminatory gender practices.

Introduction

War is a devastating collective experience that destroys societal, economic, and political structures, resulting in long-term consequences for survivors (Sideris, 2003). Despite its collective nature, societal responses to survivors in the aftermath can be diverse: while some (e.g., veterans) receive public acknowledgement and support, others (e.g., war-rape survivors) are often excluded and ignored (Kellezi & Reicher, 2014). This manuscript focuses on the latter group. War-rape has been used in warfare throughout history, being typically used to torture, intimidate, humiliate, and degrade individuals and the groups to which they belong (Fitamant, 1999). For example, in the 1990s war, an estimated 20,000-60,000 people were systematically raped in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and an estimated 20,000 were raped in Kosova (Hoglund, 2003). Similar experiences are reported in many other countries, including during Russia's current invasion of Ukraine (UN, 2022). Although women are more often the target, men are affected too. In the former Yugoslavia, sexual assault and violence towards men were so frequent that they constituted "war making itself" (Carlson, 2006, p. 16).

The drastic under-reporting of war-rape due to stigmatisation (Nordås & Cohen 2011), and war-rape survivors' (WRS) fear of shame, blame, and even further abuse (Këllezi & Reicher, 2012; Siders, 2003) means that many do not get the support they need. Evidence of such stigma abounds: WRSs are often societally silenced though exclusion from public war commemorations, which is in stark contrast to war narratives celebrating male veteran heroism (Këllezi & Reicher, 2014; Muzaini & Yeoh, 2005).

This stigma and exclusion have limited survivors' ability to obtain justice and redress. For example, despite an estimated 20,000 war-rapes occurring during the 1998-1999 Kosova war, it took until 2021 for the first conviction and sentencing for war-rape (10 years' imprisonment) to occur; (Humanitarian Law Center Kosova, 2021). Furthermore, survivors were only offered the opportunity to apply for official war victim status in 2018 (Republic of Kosova, 2014; van Gulik, 2017; Halili, 2018). All the while, war narratives celebrating

(predominantly) male heroism have dominated public and political life in post-war Kosova. Most of these processes are interlinked with identity-based social and cultural norms which people draw upon to make sense of their world. War narratives have historically been dominated by patriarchal values, undermining voices of many victims, especially women (Këllezi & Reicher, 2012; Sinnreich, 2008; Waxman, 2003).

It is thus important to understand identity-based processes of stigma and exclusion experienced by WRS to identify strategies to overcome it. This can be achieved with The Social Identity Approach (SIA; e.g., Tajfel & Turner, 1979) which we describe in the next section.

Social Identity Approach to Health

The SIA argues that our group memberships influence our thoughts, emotions, and interactions by forming part of our self-concept (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). The SIA has also been applied to understand how group memberships help and harm our health/wellbeing ('Social Cure' and 'Social Curse' respectively Haslam et al., 2009; Këllezi & Reicher, 2012) through several psychological processes involved in the perception and response to stress, in particular by impacting on how potential threats are appraised in light of available coping resources. For instance, our group memberships determine our level of exposure to discrimination (Branscombe et al., 1999) and other stressors (Muldoon & Lowe, 2012). Moreover, our group memberships determine our likelihood of perceiving a stimulus as stressful in the first place (primary appraisal), and, if we deem it to be stressful, our likelihood of perceiving ourselves as having the support and resources needed to cope with the stressor (secondary appraisal; Haslam & Reicher, 2006).

According to SIA, key to these appraisals and perceptions are ingroup norms, which are rules and believes that group members can internalize and that prescribe appropriate actions as group members. These norms can play a key role in of threat and uncertainty (e.g. Covid,

Neville et al., 2021) and for war trauma appraisal and responses. Research on the Kosova war (Këllezi et al., 2009; Këllezi & Reicher, 2012) showed that when war experiences (e.g., physical/psychological harm) were perceived as ingroup norm-affirming (e.g., as suffering in the name of a greater purpose of liberation), survivors were able to imbue their experience with meaning and purpose and were able to seek and receive ingroup social support in the aftermath. However, war experiences that were perceived as ingroup norm-violating (e.g., war rape or failure to fight for the nation) led to a more negative appraisal of one's war experiences, a perceived lack of ingroup support from families and communities, and exclusion from national war narratives and collective memories.

This is an example of the different ways group membership can harm health (processes defined as 'Social Curse', Këllezi & Reicher, 2014), including enhancing negative appraisal, exclusion/loss of valued group memberships and identities, loss of valued social resources, and reduced ability to cope with stress collectively following trauma (Haslam & Reicher, 2006; Këllezi, et al., 2022). Loss or exclusion from valued social groups can be harmful because it denies survivors much-needed group-based resources, which has been shown to be a key mechanism though which people cope with life transitions and trauma (e.g., see the Social Identity Model of Identity Change-SIMIC; Jetten et al., Haslam et al., 2008; Këllezi et al., 2019; Muldoon et al., 2019). The ability to maintain valued groups in the face of adversity preserves social and psychological resilience and facilitates recovery (Muldoon et al., 2019; Kellezi et a., 2019), though negative group memberships and incompatibility between groups can undermine these effects.

Present Study

While the effect of group ingroup social norms on stress appraisal and social support receipt are well-documented, less is known about their impact on the identity-based strategies used by survivors to cope with and overcome stigma in the aftermath of their experiences.

Similarly, it is not clear how social norms influence governmental strategies of recognition and redress for survivors, which are termed transitional justice processes (hereafter referred to as TJPs: Annan, 2004).[1] These issues will be addressed in two studies focusing on the experiences of Kosova WRSs.

Study 1 interviewed survivors to explore how ingroup social norms influence long-term appraisal of the events and affect the strategies they use to cope with stigma and exclusion 20 years after the war. Study 2 involved investigating how social norms are used to construct the image of survivors in parliamentary debates about whether WRSs should be officially recognised as war victims by the Kosova State. The two studies are closely interlinked: while Study 1 focuses on survivors' experiences, these experiences took place in a specific social and political context and were affected by group identities and political representations, including how survivors perceived support they received from the State. As such, an analysis of political discourses on whether WRSs should be officially recognised as war victims (Study 2) is also important to understand the social and political context in which stigmatised war experiences exist.

Context

Rape was systematically used as a weapon of war in Kosova in 1998/99 (Bolderson & Simpson, 2004), predominantly against the Albanian ethnic group. However, the post-war period was dominated by public war narratives of heroism, and (predominantly male) veterans were celebrated for their struggle for freedom and independence, while women's experiences were silenced (Di Lellio et al., 2019). This response was in part influenced by the re-patriarchisation of society during the 90s (Krasniqi, 2014), as the Albanian population turned towards traditional ingroup law (*the Kanun*: Gjeçovi & Fox, 1989) to deal with the long-term social-political oppression they were experiencing in Yugoslavia. The Kanun values the patriarchy and traditional gender norms: a woman's honour is linked to her family's honour.

In this context, being raped, and therefore 'dishonoured', means the whole family is 'dishonoured'. At the same time, the honour of a man is linked to his duty to protect the honour of his wife (or daughter, sister, mother). Viewed from this perspective, war-rape is a violation of both ingroup norms (the norm of women's 'purity', and the norm of men's duty to protect the honour of 'his' women).

Këllezi et al. (2009) have shown that traditional cultural norms played a crucial role in how WRSs in Kosova appraised the war in its aftermath, as well as how communities responded to WRSs. Specifically, social norms and values described in the Kanun, which had offered security from outgroup Serbian political oppression (Social Cure), now threatened WRSs' wellbeing by encouraging other Albanians (ingroup) to shun them (Social Curse).

The largest societal change to how WRSs in Kosova were treated came in 2014 with the amendment of the "Law *on the status and the rights of the martyrs, invalids, veterans, members of Kosova liberation army, civilian victims of war and their families"* (Law No. 04/L-054; Republic of Kosova; Government of Republic of Kosova, 2014)". This amendment meant that, from 2018 onwards, WRSs were recognised as war victims (if they met the required criteria upon application) and were thus eligible to seek financial support from the State (van Gulik, 2017). At the public level, the amendment represents a formal recognition of WRSs, while on a legal and political level, it provides a mechanism for WRSs to gain justice. However, the law was debated over few years in the Kosova parliament before it was approved, leaving survivors waiting for much-needed recognition and financial support.

Study 1

In Study 1 we interviewed WRSs 20 years after the war. Its research questions related to the role of ingroup social norms in determining: i) how WRSs have been affected by war-rape in the long-term, and; ii) what identity-based strategies WRSs have chosen to help them

overcome the Social Curse processes associated with their experiences (e.g., stigma and exclusion).

Method

Design

Audio-recorded semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with Kosova WRSs by the first author and analysed using reflexive Thematic Analysis (TA: Braun & Clarke, 2021). A contextualist framework guided by the SIA was used. This enables investigation of participants' experiences and perceptions from their viewpoint, including how they make sense of the world, as well as a deeper critical analysis of their perceptions of reality as social constructions mediated by socio-cultural meaning. Furthermore, it allows for consideration of language as a medium through which social life is shaped (Clarke, Braun, & Hayfield, 2015).

Participants

Twenty (18 women, 2 men) WRSs were recruited, although only the women accounts were included in this analysis. Efforts to include more men in the research were unsuccessful. Some researchers have argued that war-rape stigma could be even stronger for men, due to strongly-held cultural gender roles regarding masculinity, and its associations with strength and power: both of which can be stripped away by rape (Carlson, 2006). From all participants contacted (around 70) only 20 agreed to audio-recorded interviews, which was expected due to the topic's sensitivity. Participants came from different regions of Kosova, and all were ethnic Albanians. Attempts were made to contact people from other ethnic backgrounds in Kosova who have experienced war-rape, but these were unsuccessful. See Table 1 for participants' demographic information.

Materials

Interview questions allowed participants to raise issues that the researcher had not anticipated, and encouraged a conversational manner that promoted the sharing of in-depth responses (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Topics included the situation in the immediate aftermath of the war; perceptions of stigma and responses from family/community; perceptions of political/public discourses; the impact of the law amendment; perceptions of normative changes; collective memory; and justice. Interviews lasted between 30 minutes and 120 minutes (40 minutes on average).

Analytic Strategy

Interviews were conducted in Albanian, transcribed verbatim, and analysis was guided by the SIA (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). As recommended by Braun and Clarke (2021), researchers worked through the dataset systematically and treated all data equally. The text was coded to inform the development of the themes, with codes capturing the different perspectives and patterns in the dataset. Descriptive (semantic) codes were identified first, before identifying interpretative (latent) codes as a way to investigate the underlying assumptions and concepts that informed the semantic codes (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The final codes were categorised into provisional themes through identifying similarities, differences, connections, and contradictions between codes, and the process was revised until the themes were distinctive from (but still related to) each-other and provided a comprehensive answer to the research questions. Relevant extracts were then selected for inclusion, each of which ends with the participant's pseudonym.

Reflexivity (Applied to Study 1 and 2)

Considering the sensitivity of the research topic, potential psychological and social risks prior to conducting the interviews were carefully considered (discussed in detail elsewhere, Shala, 2022). A few key issues are outlined here. Most participants were recruited through NGOs working with survivors. Being aware of the power position that NGOs could have over some survivors, we reminded participants they were free to refuse participation. To

further build trust, the first author met with the participants several times before conducting the interview, to introduce herself and the research and offer the participants time to ask questions. Given the high level of refusal, we feel confident that participants felt free to refuse participation and were able to give informed consent.

Team discussions were extensive throughout the process of data collection and analysis. The first and second authors' deep knowledge of the socio-political and cultural context of Kosova enabled discussions regarding the researchers' own subjectivity in the choice of the research topic and analysis. For example, during the analysis, some of our own social identities (e.g., gender, age group, ethnicity) led to us strongly identifying with the participants and helped us recognise that the stories shared by participants were collective as well as individual. The systematic nature of theoretical thematic (Study 1) and discursive analysis (Study 2), as well as regular discussions with the wider team, enabled us to identify and reflect on both the value and limitations of this subjectivity.

The multiple identities of the research team influenced the translation and interpretation process. For instance, the political speeches analysed in Study 2 were originally in Albanian. The translation of the text required careful consideration of the location within which the speech occurred, as well as the underlying sociocultural context within which the text assumed a broader political and cultural meaning. As such, the translation process was an integral part of the analysis, rather than a separate one, because it involved the Albanian speakers within the research team engaging in active interpretation, rather than passive translation. However, this process also requires broad knowledge of the translated language (English), as well as awareness of the extent to which Albanian cultural ideas translate into the UK/North American context. Since most readers are unlikely to have detailed knowledge of Albanian culture and history, the native English-speaking members of the research team who did not possess this knowledge helped to identify the appropriate level of background detail and explanation required in each study. This was particularly important in Study 2, because discourse analysis involves analysing the text's broader sociocultural implications.

Results/Analysis

Two main themes relating to social norms and post-war responses were developed.

The first outlines the event appraisal and ingroup responses to gender-based violence and the

second outlines the role of ingroup social norms in informing the strategies adopted by survivors to help them cope in the war's aftermath.

Theme 1: Gender Norms and Values Defined the Appraisal and Perceived Ingroup Responses to Gender-Based Violence.

Participants described how they felt they would be treated by ingroup members due to being WRSs. They relied on gender norms and expectations to understand other people's responses towards their norm-violating experiences:

Extract 1:

"I was so afraid during nights. [...] It seemed like I could see their faces [the perpetrators] with their scarfs and colours. I would scream. [...] I had the feeling people were pointing their finger at me. Whenever I wanted to go out somewhere, I would return immediately. There were rumours. I was not even in the position to help my children; they were going to school, to help them with their homework, nothing. I stayed locked inside, just isolated, isolated. (Jona)

Jona's account highlights the psychological consequences of the event itself, but also the additional burden of what this event represented societally. Like survivors of different forms of disasters, WRS interpreted their experiences relative to their social identities (Durry, 2012). Survivors also used ingroup social norms to appraise their experience and guide their responses in the aftermath. In this case, the experience of norm-violating events led to fear of social sanctioning and disapproval, which led to many survivors isolating themselves and experiencing anxiety. Thus, the appraisal and coping processes of trauma and its aftermath are

shaped by the social context and the norm-violating nature of the experience (Kellezi & Reicher, 2014), which exacerbates trauma and feelings of low self-worth. In addition, negative appraisal could also arise a) if survivors felt that they cannot fulfil their ingroup-based duties (e.g., being a 'good' mother: Jona describes her inability to help her children), b) the psychological burden attached to, and the fear of being outed as a WRS and being confronted with the societal prejudice against them.

While survivors recognised the potential threat from being rejected by their immediate community (community level 'Social Curse'), they also highlighted the State's failure to provide redress for their experiences. This contrasted sharply with the support/recognition received by other groups:

Extract 2:

"W*e have not received support. Why? Why the veteran? I know he was armed and could run away here and there. I, with a bunch of children on my side, was not able to, and I did not have one thing to protect myself with. I stayed without eating, drinking, without anything [...] I can't explain more, I would only want to know, to have an answer to why there was no support for us. Why was there support for the veterans sooner, and not for us? Here lies the problem*." (Lejla)

Many participants felt that lack of State support for WRSs was a discriminatory denial of the suffering they endured, thereby denying them recognition, validation and support that they were due as members who had suffered on behalf of the group. This differential treatment felt even more unfair when recognising the gendered experience of war threats. For example, Lejla's identification as a mother is the lens through which she experienced (and remembers)

the war. Indeed, most mothers reported being inseparable from their motherly role during the war, and, as posited by the SIMIC (Jetten et al., 2009) this maintained identity provided the lens through which the trauma of war was appraised. Lejla explains that the fact that she protected her children (and thus behaved normatively) during the war should entitle her to the same ingroup recognition and support as veterans who behaved normatively by fighting. The State's discrimination of WRSs thus not only involves withholding of support due to the norm-violating nature of rape, but also the failure to acknowledge the (otherwise highly-praised) value of motherhood during the war. Lejla argues that her war story not only involved her vulnerable identity as a woman (and as a WRS), but also her resilient and nurturing identity as a mother. This identity-based contribution was denied, thus denying wellbeing-enhancing Social Cure processes such as ingroup positive evaluation and social support (Haslam et al., 2018). In sum, the participants described how the State support and TJPs they need (and were denied for years) should not be based on their weakness, but should recognise their strength, and how they contributed to the war effort by protecting their children. These perceptions are discussed in more depth in the next theme.

Theme 2: Gender Norms and Values Defined the Survivors' and Their Families Coping Responses and Long-Term Strategies

Patriarchal gender norms and lack of State support/recognition informed the survivors' appraisal of their experiences and their coping responses and life options in the aftermath. These strategies often required long-term commitment, such as choosing to get married to avoid becoming an economic burden to one's family (Sideris, 2003) and to re-establish the family 'honour'. The unmarried social status is also stigmatised and a possible reminder of the traumatic experience. However, a marriage partner could also be a source of shame as the imposition of an ill-matched or inappropriate partner was felt to reflect the stigma of being a WRS.

Extract 3:

*"A year after liberation, they married me off. Horror; against my wish; that was my parents' decision. They found me a husband […] 'we like the boy, we like the family; you are half human; he is polite. Will him [*marriage*] will last; because the difficult one would not keep you'; I took him. I never felt anything for him, nor do I feel now, but for the sake of the children one has to push life forward. What can you do? […] As a result [of the rape], they gave me away to an older man […] never thought about myself; did not think; never saw light with my eyes, because it's different when you love him, and different when someone imposes him on you. The imposition is the worst." (Flaka)*

As Flaka's extract illustrates, the survivors' coping responses and life options were also shaped by the ingroup norm-violating nature of rape. Flaka's parents' decision was an attempt to protect her, by forcing her to marry an older man who they believed was less likely to challenge her already-stigmatised social status. The devaluation attached to Flaka's stigmatised identity ("half human") by her parents reflects the socio-cultural context within which they were raised. Marriage is considered necessary in a patriarchal society like Kosova, given women's economic dependency on men, but this pre-defined life-course is even more normatively prescribed for Flaka due to her being a WRS. Flaka's 'worth' as a wife has been devalued by her rape, meaning that only an older man would be willing to take on the social burden of marriage to such a woman. The devalued identity also reflects a form of infra-humanisation (i.e. denial of human nature and shared humanity: Leyens et al., 2007), mostly conceptualised as an intergroup experience and legitimisation of violence (including gender based violence: Kapp, 2022), but that could also apply to ingroups (Vaes et al., 2021). In this study, infra-humanisation is reported to be used to deny the target full recognition of ingroup membership (most notably humanisation) in

light of their spoiled identity and deviation from ingroup norms, likely use to protect ingroup reputation.

This case also illustrates why women may remain in problematic marriages because of societal norms. Bound to the traditional meaning and value of marriage, many survivors who are mothers consider separation/divorce to be culturally shameful, and thus remain in a 'bad situation'. By enduring a difficult marriage and avoiding divorce, many survivors seek to protect themselves and their children from social stigma, but also from losing custody of their children, which traditionally is given to fathers in Kosova. In the next extract Shota elaborates on the fear that many survivors felt regarding the possibility of losing their children if they were to leave their problematic marriages:

Extract 4:

"There was the pain, the illness, problems, the fear that my husband would change his mind. […] because, if it came to the worst, no one could bring you in a worst situation than your own husband. The problem is always with the husbands. To us; whatever happened to us, if even the husbands treat us badly now, the only option left for us is to go and kill ourselves. […] when I see some of my friends; there are some who have been divorced; they left their children even. Without children one cannot live. It is for them that we are living. […] we are constantly with tears in our eyes till the day we die. Something that we did not want, but you did not have any choice, your hands were tied. " (Shota)

In most cases female survivors described fear that their husband might change their mind about supporting them, especially since these husbands are acting contra-normatively by supporting their WRS wives. As posited by the SIMIC (Jetten et al., 2009), this attempt to maintain and draw on support from valued social identities of wife and mother has been essential for WRS's post-trauma survival, and it also helps the survivors (and their families) to avoid experiencing further harm. The survivors described experiencing immense pressure when trying to avoid potential negative consequences of their war-time experiences extending to other family members, which in turn might affect how their family treat them (Sideris, 2003; Kellezi & Reicher, 2014). This fear led Shota (Extract 4) and many other survivors to behave submissively at home, which itself reflects the wider socio-political status of women in Kosova society (i.e., economic and social dependency on male family members).

While motherhood may thus promote Social Curse processes (e.g., remaining in difficult marriages), it is through the motherhood identity that marriage facilitates that many WRSs seek to restore their self-worth and find purpose in life after the devaluation of their gender identity due to rape:

Extract 5:

"For the sake of the children you have to eat, drink, talk, laugh and everything; as they say, you know, to make them happy, to have them; so that they can have a better life ahead. Because, as for us, life has had it." (Dora)

For Dora, normal life (eating, drinking, laughing etc.) must occur so that her children can have a better future. As a result, her own value depends on the future happiness of her children. In this way, participants' attempts to return to a normal life are informed by their

motherhood identity, which is seen as a duty, an obligation, and even a sacrifice (again highlighting the psychological value of maintaining one's motherhood identity through the traumatic experience, as posited by the SIMIC, Jetten et al., 2009). Dora's account also highlights cultural and social norms around the worth of WRSs, as she states that she cannot expect to experience pleasure and happiness after the rape (*"for us, life has had it"*). The destruction of her 'worth' through the rape has also destroyed her right to an enjoyable life, unless this joy is experienced though her attempting to give her children a good future. Thus, motherhood identity has not only provided WRSs with a new sense of meaning in life; it has also helped them to grow and develop strength by having a future goal (providing for their children). This highlights important Social Cure processes (finding meaning through enacting valued identities) that can help make sense a (Kellezi et al., 2021) and cope with trauma (Haslam & Reicher, 2006), alongside Social Curse ones (e.g. entering and remaining in problematic marriages).

Discussion

For WRSs, life in the war's aftermath was strongly influenced by societal norms. These ingroup norms generated and maintained Social Curse processes: they coloured their appraisal of their experiences, prolonged their suffering, and undermined their self-worth. Survivors' families also drew on ingroup norms to identify the most appropriate strategies to deal with the challenges they were facing. In most cases, the choices about their future lives were imposed on survivors, which included marriage and economic dependence. These choices had long-lasting effects, as stigma around divorce and economic disadvantage would lead to further threats for WRS, further undermining survivors' abilities to lead a fulfilled and independent life as women (Bareket et al., 2018). This highlights the challenges facing these WRS in attempting to maintain valued identities in order to cope with trauma: attempting to maintain identities which should provide social and psychological resources often created challenges. In

line with previous research on SIMIC which highlights the potentially negative effects of maintaining stigmatised group memberships or identities which are incompatible, WRS evidence a high degree of complexity in their attempts to preserve and manage potentially spoiled and conflicting identities, thus adding nuance to current understandings of the SIMIC (Jetten et al., 2019).

While marriage/family life was perceived as a burden by many WRSs, it also allowed WRSs to maintain valued identities, such as motherhood, which many described as a key coping mechanism in the war's aftermath. For instance, it helped them reframe their suffering as a sacrifice which protects their children from harm (e.g., by not getting divorced, and by continuing to live a 'normal' life so that they children can have a better future) (Bennett, et al., 1995). This meaning-making strategy was made possible by societal conceptualisations of motherhood as being a valued identity, which highlights the importance of wider social structures in shaping Social Cure and Curse processes.

The social categorisations that restrict women's positions within the family and society have also been observed and reinforced by political discourses, which will be explored next.

Study 2

The State (in this case Kosova State) is the main source of political discourse. Represented by the Parliament, it plays an important role in the politics of memory, commemoration, and in producing a dominant national narrative of historical events (Ashplant et al., 2004). Political war discourses matter because they have implications for WRSs' participation in social and political life (including in TJPs), and they influence access to health/support services.

The parliamentary debate regarding whether WRS should be categorised as war victims via a law amendment (which until this point only included war veterans) sheds light on how

social norms inform constructions of war-rape experiences and survivors' identities. The proposed amendment involved legally recognising war-rape survivors, while the political debate was between those who supported and those who rejected this proposition. Study 2 explores how this debate was discursively negotiated, and how survivors' social identities were described. The study addresses the following research question: How are social norms imbedded in political debates regarding potential legal recognition for WRSs?

Method

Study Material

This study analysed the parliamentary transcripts of two sessions (in 2013 and 2014 respectively) discussing the law amendment on the recognition of WRSs by the State of Kosova. These two sessions were chosen for analysis because their transcripts were publicly available, and because they were the first political debates in the Kosovan parliament where the possibility of recognising war experiences of sexual violence was explicitly discussed. The proposition for the law amendment was brought forward by the left oriented political party 'Lëvizja Vetvendosje (Self- Determination Movement - LVV). LVV formed the main opposition to the political parties in power at that time. The main party in power was PDK (Democratic Party of Kosovo) which held the government in coalition with a smaller party. PDK's members predominantly positioned themselves against the law amendment. However, there were also cases that some MPs positioned themselves against their party/parliamentary group in support of the law amendment. Essentially the discourses analysed were grouped in two categories regardless of party membership: oppositional discourses (rejecting the law amendment) and supportive discourses (in favour of the law amendment).

The material from these two parliamentary transcripts totalled 40 pages of single-spaced size 12 Times New Roman font on A4 paper. The analysis was conducted in the Albanian language and extracts presented were translated from Albanian into English.

Analytical Approach

Critical Discursive Psychology (CDP) is informed by rhetorical and discursive approaches to discourse (Billig, 1996; Edwards & Potter, 1992) and social constructivism (Burr, 2015). An emphasis is put on the speaker's action orientation, through which the analysis aims to unpack how meanings, subjects, and objects are constructed in talk, and how identities (e.g., of survivors) and beliefs are embedded in these meanings. Taking a critical approach, the analysis also pays attention to how interactions and language are imbedded within historical contexts and looks at wider social and political consequences of discursive patterns (Wetherell, 1998). In addition, CDP offers the possibility to investigate how speakers discursively legitimise certain ideological positionings whilst undermining others.

Analytic Process

Analytical adaptations based on suggestions by Locke and Budds (2020) were used (see Table 2). Each extract ends with the name of speaker, their political party, and when the debate occurred).

Results

The debate occurred between two groups who positioned themselves in opposition or in favour of the amendment respectively. Two repertoires were identified: 'traditional norms of motherhood and victimhood', and 'shared fate', which contained discourses intended to oppose and propose the amendment respectively.

Traditional Norms of Motherhood and Victimhood Repertoire (Oppositional Discourses)

Motherhood

In this repertoire, understandings of motherhood are used to construct the identity of WRSs as being consistent with traditional gender roles, and the meaning of the amendment is discussed through this construction. For instance, in the following extract the speaker argues that the proposed law is useless, because motherhood would stop survivors from coming forward:

Extract 1:

"Until today the statistics reveal that those who have come forward revealing they have been raped do not even reach 2000 in number, while we know that in Kosova there are many more raped women, who are now mothers, have created families, who do not even want that their issue be opened up again. [...] therefore, the best treatment for this category is to include these women in the category of civilian victims and not as war-rape victims." (Rita Hajzeraj-Beqaj, LDK, March 2013)

By positioning survivors as '*mothers'* the speaker first gives victims an identity which, as discussed in Study 1, is highly valued within society. By invoking traditional cultural understandings of the mother's role in society, her account is an example of benevolent sexism, which is rooted in patriarchal structures of gender roles that define women as vulnerable, fragile, and bound to motherhood. Feminist research (e.g., Chodorow, 1978) has often observed how motherhood and womanhood are treated as meaning one and the same, and how the caretaker role of women is culturally constructed as a 'natural' role (McMahon, 1995). This naturalisation of motherhood constructs an idea of women naturally wanting to be mothers, leaving no space for woman who do not, nor for mothers who do not enjoy their mothering role, which is a topic that can be difficult to discuss openly (Snitow, 1992; Dowrick & Grundberg, 1981).

This discourse also implies that WRSs do not want their experiences being ‘opened up’ for discussion. Social expectations are that a ‘good’ mother will solely attend to the needs of her family, and that only a ‘bad’ mother will take care of her own needs (Coats & Fraustino, 2015). The expectations of the ‘mother’ to make the choice to conceal her experience are culturally shaped, and this shared understanding is being invoked with the aim of arguing against an amendment that would openly recognise WRSs’ status as war victims. More specifically, what is being invoked is an image of a ‘good mother’ (Coats & Faustino, 2015), a mother that sacrifices her desire for recognition for the protection of her family: she thus chooses to not want her “issues to be opened up again”. As such, the amendment is constructed as a potential risk for women/mothers. By describing the number of WRSs who have “come forward” as low (around 2,000) and the amendment as meaning that their “issues” will be “opened up again”, the speaker is suggesting that the amendment risks WRSs and their families being publicly identified (and thus stigmatised).

In sum, social norms are used to undermine survivors’ right to recognition and to argue that survivors should not seek such recognition, because doing so would violate motherhood/womanhood norms and risk stigmatising the survivor and their family through public identification.

Victimhood

Within this victimhood repertoire the oppositional discourse group invokes discourses of ‘separation’, ‘special status’, and ‘otherness’ to object to the proposed law amendment:

Extract 2:

“By all means, the pain of all of us as MPs and the feelings and obligation, first as institutionalists, is that this category be treated and be treated specially, with a separate law, where all these women raped during the war would be treated.[…] It

would be good that this […] that a new legal initiative is started and that initiative be dedicated only to this category and based on it to seek compensation based on international legislation; and not do this in this form and abuse this in the name of the families of martyrs, in the name of war victims, in the name of invalids and veterans."
(Bekim Haxhiu, PDK, March 2013)

The call for separation indicates the belief that WRSs should not be included in the existing law, which includes other categories such as '*martyrs, invalids, veterans, members of Kosova liberation army, civilian victims of war, and their families'.* However, in order to avoid being branded as exclusionary, the concept of 'special treatment' is invoked. Within the broader social and cultural context of how WRSs are understood, the 'special' categorisation implicitly speaks to the different societal 'value' that WRSs hold compared to the other categories of war survivor which are already recognised by the law.

The meaning constructed in discourse invoked within this repertoire by the speaker is that the status of war veterans cannot be 'compared' to that of WRSs, which is what would be implied if they were all recognised by the same law. In other words, "pride" (relating to male heroism) and "shame" (relating to female victimhood) should be kept separate, in-line with traditional norms and values that separate the experience of one group from the other in terms of collective appraisal and acknowledgement.

Indeed, the inclusion of WRSs in the same law as war veterans is construed as an abuse "*in the name of the families of martyrs, in the name of war victims, in the name of invalids and veterans".* This speaks to a sense of identity threat (Branscombe et al., 1999): the advantaged group (represented through the political party's identity) perceives that being equated with WRSs is a threat to their advantaged status. Indeed, in the explicit argument for *"*new legal

initiative… dedicated only*”* to WRSs, there is an implicit argument made for the protection of the ‘special status’ of war veterans and other victims.

In many instances within the oppositional discourse, claims are made for a different kind of law for WRSs, or for special ways to deal with the issue of WRSs. Often these claims are used as a disclaimer, with the aim of avoiding being seen as refusing to provide support or recognition for WRSs, yet still justifying the proposed rejection of the amendment.

‘Shared Fate’ Repertoire (Propositional Discourses)

Different from the ‘separation’ discourses within the oppositional group, the propositional group discourses are dominated by a ‘we-ness’ repertoire, defined by the shared war experience. Speakers use different arguments to build the case for inclusion of WRSs in the law.

Extract 3:

> *“Once and for all we need to clarify it for ourselves that their misfortune is the misfortune of every one of us, because it happened to them only and only for the reason that they were Albanian. The wounds in their hearts are incurable, but at least let us be supportive and extend our hand to them to walk together towards the future. Let us show them that we share the same fate. Let us help them to put justice in place.”* (Albulena Haxhiu, LVV, March 2013)

The speaker refers to the war-rape as a “misfortune” which belongs to “every one of us”, implying the shared understanding that war-rape is an attack on the whole community. The community is imagined as Albanian (the ethnic group predominantly victimised in the war) and evokes memories of the Albanian experience of the war, which relates to genocide committed in Kosova by the Serbian regime in 1998-99. The extreme case formulation

(Pomerantz, 1986) "only and only" is used to emphasise the war-rape and sexual violence committed against the population ("only and only for the reason that they were Albanian"). So here, as opposed to other repertoires in which discourses of victimhood constructed war-rape survivors predominantly as women/mothers/sisters, the focus has shifted towards the ethnic collective identity, and thus war-rape is constructed as a public trauma, as opposed to a private one which belongs only to women and their families.

By putting ethnic identity into focus, the speaker is seeking to invoke a sense of *'togetherness'* defined by a valued identity (ethnic), with the aim of building the future together. In this talk about the future, the State (represented by the Members of Parliament) is construed as a hand being "extended" to WRSs to "show them that we share the same fate" and "to put justice in place." The discourse of the "same fate" is used to accomplish corroboration (Potter, 1996) with opposing MPs by inviting them to identify with the "same fate", and at the same time introduces 'togetherness' as a norm to be invoked. Recognition of WRSs is thus constructed as a form of justice because the whole group (Albanians) deserves justice. The speaker is aligning war-rape experiences with war veterans' sacrifice for the national cause, on the basis that the 'shared fate' discourse is far more socially acceptable than specifically focusing on the fate of women, which constitutes a norm violation (as 'good' women/mothers should care about the fate of their families, not of themselves) (see Coats & Fraustino, 2015). As such, the speaker is reinterpreting the amendment as a change that will address the needs of the whole community.

In addition, the 'shared fate repertoire' also thematizes survivors' agency, and prioritizes listening to survivors' opinions regarding how they want to be treated:

Extract 4:

> *"The reason we asked for the amendment of the existing law and did not draft a separate one, is that this was the request of this category themselves. They are a product of war the same as the other categories and do not want different treatment, which would prolong their stigmatisation from the community."* (Albana Gashi, LVV, March, 2013)

Central to arguments of the 'shared fate repertoire' are constructions of equal value. In the speech above, for example, the words "*same as"* imply the function of comparing. The comparison refers to other groups which are recognized by the law, including war veterans. The aim of the comparison is to equate WRSs with war veterans by arguing that the State must recognize and support both groups, because both groups have experienced war-related harm, and thus have a shared fate. Furthermore, whereas those opposing the amendment focused on the differences between WRSs and veterans, 'shared fate' discourses focus on the consequences of the law amendment directly and discuss both positive consequences of amending the law (societal inclusion of WRSs) and negative consequences of not amending the law (societal exclusion of WRSs).

Discussion

The analysis showed that patriarchal norms are used to legitimise and maintain political power because they create a context in which male/heroic war narratives ('protectors') dominate, while females are defined as victims. While the oppositional group invoked motherhood identity and used 'special treatment' discourses to object to the amendment, the propositional group emphasised ethnic identity to argue for inclusion of WRSs in the law as a way to develop ethnic resilience.

The two groups differ in how they implicitly discuss the stigma attached to war-rape experiences. While the oppositional group acknowledges survivors' hesitation to speak up as exacerbating their stigma, it fails to consider how this stigma may be ameliorated, and instead

simply frames their objection to the amendment as a way to protect WRSs from stigma. On the other hand, the propositional group positions stigma as evidence for the need for societal change and perceives the amendment as a step towards that change. Overall, the propositional group marshalled their discursive efforts in support of the amendment by defining the recognition of WRSs in Kosova as an act of collective justice and as a struggle for national justice. This nationalist discourse serves as a reminder of shared wartime sacrifice in the name of the nation (Billig, 1995).

The negotiation of WRSs in this debate produced discourses of 'othering' in various ways. For instance, traditional norms surrounding female victims and the associated assumption that WRSs are female ("our sisters, mothers, wives") led to the othering of male war-rape victims, who do not feel represented by these narrow categories. Other ways of 'othering' were accomplished by the oppositional group through invoking categorisations such as 'special group' to conceptually distance WRSs from war veterans. This finding supports research showing that advantaged groups will oppose change that is likely to increase disadvantaged groups' status due to fear of undermining the ingroup morality through comparison with a low status group (Nadler & Shnabel, 2015). Meanwhile, within the propositional group, 'othering' was accomplished through predominantly ethnic discourses of 'Albanian women', which implicitly excludes non-Albanian WRSs.

General Discussion

Together, these studies extend work which highlights the importance of social identity processes, and social norms in particular, for how people appraise and cope with traumatic events (Kellezi & Reicher, 2012; Muldoon et al., 2019). Specifically, our studies show that sociocultural norms within the family/community/State play a key role in determining the experiences and perceptions of WRSs, even decades after the war ended. In a context of intergroup conflict, these ingroup norms affect how WRSs appraise their trauma, how they

assess their self-worth and quality of life, and how they interact with and are perceived by other members of their families, and their communities, including politicians. They also inform the long-term strategies used by WRSs to cope with their stigmatized identity. Social Curse and Social Cure processes were thus seen to interact in complex and nuanced ways: for instance, while social norms led to many WRSs experiencing economic dependency and problematic marriages, the children born within these marriages provided various norm-consistent psychological benefits (in Study 1). These included the opportunity to find meaning and purpose in life through engaging in the valued social role of caring for one's children, and through maintaining/gaining a societally valued motherhood identity: a process which the SIMIC posits can buffer the stress of traumatic life events (Jetten et al., 2009).

Similar complex Social Cure and Curse processes were observed in study 2 but at societal level. Motherhood identity is a double-edged sword: although it brings psychological benefits, it also leads to conservative societal expectations regarding how 'good' (i.e., selfless) mothers behave, which precludes speaking up about one's WRS status due to the possibility of harming one's family and future generations (indeed, previous research highlights how family bonds can undermine intergenerational speaking up about trauma; Kellezi et al., 2021). Here, motherhood is weaponized in order to oppose a law amendment that would recognise the rights of WRSs. This discourse thus draws upon traditional cultural meanings of motherhood to render the law useless in front of the public, and in front of WRSs themselves, which can undermine TJP processes aiming to recognise and redress the harm relating to war-rape. Together, these findings thus extend the SIMIC literature (e.g., Haslam et al., 2008) by highlighting the nuance and complexity of identity maintenance/gain in post-war contexts and show how motherhood maintenance/gain can be simultaneously a Social Cure and a Social Curse for WRSs. The two studies complement each other by showing how these processes manifest at family and community level (Study 1) and at state/societal level (Study 2)

The present studies also contribute to the TJP literature by highlighting the key role played by families, communities (Study 1) and societal discourses (Study 2) in maintaining and/or changing social norms that could promote or discourage justice for WRSs. For instance, such discourses have the power to maintain and/or challenge stigmatised attitudes towards WRSs. When representatives of the State engage in traditional discourses that maintain and strengthen harmful and unjust gender norms, attempts by others to undermine those norms are likely to be unsuccessful (Cohen et al., 2013). Even when laws are passed that promote equality, the power of discourses to reinforce the very norms that laws aim to change should not be ignored. Experiences from Kosova, based on survivors' first-hand accounts, show that formal recognition of one's survivor status is only part of post-war justice. Being valued and 'respected' is considered equally important for restoring a devalued and stigmatized identity, and for feeling that justice has been achieved.

Importantly these gendered constructions of social norms and values are not limited to the context of war-rape: they reflect broader and historical gender imbalances in society regarding political representation (Butler, 1990; Davies & True, 2015). While experiences of heroism (predominantly prescribed to men) associated with pride are dominant in public/political narratives and discourses, civilians' war experiences deemed to have violated social norms remain underrepresented in discourses and are often even purposely silenced (Këllezi & Reicher, 2012; Sinnreich 2008; Waxman, 2003).

Strengths and Limitations

This study presents only female WRSs' perspectives. Although two male survivors were interviewed, it proved impossible to recruit any more, presumably due to the high levels of stigma attached to being a male WRS. Future research should aim to recruit more men and gender-diverse individuals. Nonetheless, the fact that we were able to interview 18 female WRSs (itself a highly stigmatised identity) is an important strength.

This study is based on interviews with survivors who were willing to be interviewed. Most were recruited through NGOs and independent activists who have supported WRSs, and through survivors themselves. Many potential survivors are unknown to NGOs, so future research should seek out these hidden experiences. For now, there needs to be recognition that survivors who were recruited for the study may experience advantages that survivors who were not recruited do not possess (e.g., feeling able to trust researchers, having the resources to attend an interview, etc.). While those who were not recruited may have different experiences, the fact that there is little existing research involving first-hand accounts of WRSs means that our participants' experiences are still important evidence of the impact of war-rape and the strategies survivors use to overcome stigma in the aftermath.

Implications for Policy and Practice

This research has important implications. The UN's aim to 'end war-rape' (Hague & Bangura, 2013) cannot be addressed without recognising the role played by social norms in perpetuating war-rape, as well as in shaping its impact on survivors' ability to seek and receive support in the war's aftermath. The community-based impact of such norms is also significant: environments dominated by 'male pride' reinforce societal divisions that hamper TJPs by preventing survivors from sharing their stories and seeking justice.

The relationship between social norms, war-rape trauma, and post-war peace and justice is complex, but understanding this relationship is essential in order to provide meaningful support and empowerment for survivors in the aftermath. One of the key aims moving forward should be to acknowledge the role of social norms in creating further harm, and to understand the processes that lead to survivors' isolation and exclusion. Efforts also must be made to change social norms: possible strategies include education and stigma reduction at the

community and societal level. chieving change and reducing stigma for WRSs also requires more trauma-informed approaches which involve families and communities. Inequalities need to be addressed through survivor-led initiatives that meet survivors' specific needs (e.g., their children's wellbeing) and focus on addressing key issues raised by survivors such as economic dependency, and children's stigma by association. Public discussion about changing harmful norms and creating alternative norms that address the harms (Cislaghi & Heise, 2018) can be useful, especially if these new norms are endorsed and enacted by relevant group-members (e.g., role models; valued community leaders; public influencers etc.; Prentice & Paluck, 2020).

The negative impact of social norms is strengthened by gender inequalities, which undermine the WRSs' ability to cope with the consequences, and to seek justice and redress. These wider systemic inequalities must also be addressed. This is where the role of the State and political discourses becomes important, as they can challenge unequal gender systems and power dynamics as part of wider political, educational and transitional justice efforts (Cislagji & Heise, 2020). The State can reinforce new norms in the political and legal system through creating and enforcing new legislation and ensuring that it benefits those who need it. However, as our work illustrates, there are various barriers preventing WRSs getting the support they need, which include conservative groups within society perceiving the recognition of WRSs as representing a threat to their own status, and war narratives which emphasise masculine strength and resistance. This highlights the need for a holistic approach to tackling stigma and empowering normative change which integrates community-based strategies with institutional, political, and legal efforts.

When proposing policies and strategies, the State and other stakeholders need also to be aware of the power of language and its potential impact on survivors in the aftermath of war. As observed decades ago, and confirmed by the presented studies, the nation is associated with men, which can exclude women from political war discourses (Mertus, 1996; see also,

Ringelheim, 1999; Sinnreich, 2008; Waxman, 2003). Future policies and strategies should aim to deconstruct traditional meanings of national identity and its connection to manhood, so that women and non-binary people can have space to construct themselves as part of the national identity and have access to transitional justice processes as part of their collective experience.

Endnote

[1]TJPs are complex and relate to a post-war/conflict/dictatorship society and its socio-political efforts to deal with its past through providing justice to victims, establishing truth, ensuring accountability, offering reparations to survivors, and/or reaching reconciliation and peace (Clark & Ungar, 2021; Shala, 2023). TJPs are important because they help people in post-war societies to heal and to build resilience in coping with the trauma they have experienced (Wiebelhaus-Brahm, 2017).

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