Echo of experience: Racialisation of sexual crime and feminist response to the hybrid media event

Abstract:

The article explores *echo* as a feminist strategy in the hybrid media event. The article interrogates how evidence from experience can operate as an (un-essentialising) echo that expands the discursive space and provides an avenue for anti-racist response with contextual and historical dimensions. The case study focuses on a hybrid media event of sexual crime and violenceinvolving asylum seekers and the public debate surrounding the event. The anatomy of the hybrid event is explored by looking into the formation and dynamics of the media coverage and social media debate surrounding the case, as well as the ways in which the racialisation of sexual crime is produced in the process. This is followed by exploration that focuses on echo, understood as the responses produced by personal experiences from the past and shared on social media. The analysis seeks to explore the struggle over meaning in the hybrid media process and the possibility of applying the concept of echo to social media testimonies. It is argued that echo can produce temporal cues that open up a space in which to discuss experience in ways that undo their essentialist bind and strategically broaden views to it.

It was 1981. I was 15 years old, walking on the street on my way to dance practice, when a car slowed down beside me. The driver, an ordinary looking Finnish blond man in his 30s with a mustache, asked me where I was going and if he could give me a ride. I said I was going to a dance practice and 'It's ok, I'd rather walk.' He smiled and said that it was no bother. He said he was in a show business and pointed to vinyl records in the leg area, records with his smiling face on the cover of the album. I stepped into the car. Why? Maybe I was flattered by the attention. He was an older man who was clearly in show business, in a very different world from mine in that boring small town. He dropped me off by the school and asked for my phone number. He said he might be able to help our dance group. I gave my number. Immediately, when I met the other girls, I told them what had happened and about my overall feeling was excitement. Wasn't it fancy that someone would just stop you on the street? Maybe, he would actually help our dance group? He did call me a few times and asked me to join him at a local restaurant. I was 15. I refused, giving excuses. I remember that refusing seemed difficult, as if I owed him something. I felt stupid for being so young. At this point, he started to feel too old and creepy. I probably started to have a sense what he wanted from me. After a few weeks, he tried to stop me on the street again, but I refused and hurried on, running. I didn't see him again, but I heard about him, publicly defending a friend of his who was, according to him, falsely accused of pedophilia. I've since wondered why this event didn't seem that odd to any of my friends. We did not discuss it as grooming. Maybe we knew what it was, but hoped that it was something else – a way to stardom? It wasn't the only time I was approached by an older man, and compared to many more direct physical attacks, this was more subtle. I recall several cases of sexual harassment from those days, which we would discuss in passing among friends. The lines between ordinary and abusive sexual encounters appeared to be thin in my youth. Only years later, in the context of the #MeToo campaign and the

media event that is the topic of this article, did I begin to rethink these encounters and what it means to testify about them in public.

This article is not about my experience, but my story above offers an example of an *echo* of experience in relation to a recent case of sexual crime and violence in Finland in 2018. The so called 'Oulu sexual crime case' involved several under-aged girls who were groomed by adult men, mostly asylum seekers. The case became a national scandal and a media event that has profoundly shaped the political climate and attitudes toward immigration in Finland.

The article explores the case as a hybrid media event that has shaped the public debate, with an emphasis on the racialisation of sexual abuse. It further explores the evidence from experience as a way to discuss sensitive cases that are difficult to address and often create *an impasse of vulnerabilities*. It asks what witnessing can do. While my experience from 1980s may seem to have nothing to do with the racialisation of sexual crime, it is exactly this seeming un-connection that is the point and argumentative core of this article.

This article calls attention to evidence from experience and the concept of *echo* as a feminist strategy to use in discussing sexual abuse. I explore how evidence from experience can operate as an (un-essentialising) echo that expands the discursive space with a contextual and historical frame in ways that challenges the logics of the dominant public narrative of the racialisation of sexual crime. At the same time, echo offers solidarity to victims, not a sense of being pitied and othered but of being in resonance with and in relationship to.

This is a conceptually oriented article that explores the relationships between culture and power (Hannerz, 2010) in the context of media participation in a highly sensitive media case, along with the various vulnerabilities involved. The interrogation relies on combining a wide range of sources of knowledge, from the analysis of social media and news media texts to virtual ethnography and autoethnographic notes on social media participation and witnessing. The media data include 111 news stories from a leading national newspaper, Helsingin Sanomat, and 113 news stories from the public service media YLE, as well as discussions on the following social media sites: Suomi24 Oulu (three threads), Twitter (80 tweets #Oulu, #Seksuaalirikokset), and Facebook discussion threads consisting of 161 postings shared over 285 times. The analysis explores the anatomy of an event by following the traces of the public debate (Marcuse 1995; Hine 2017; Caliandro 2018). First, it considers the formation and dynamics of media coverage and the social media debate over the case, as well as the ways in which racialisation is produced in the process. Second, it explores the evidence from experience in the debate. The analysis seeks to explore the struggle over meaning in the process of a hybrid media event and the possibility of applying the concept of echo to social media testimonies.

In what follows, I first discuss the Oulu case as a hybrid media event and the way its logics amplified the racialisation of sexual crime. In the second section of the article, I explore the responses that emerged on social media as testimonies and evidence of experience that challenged the racialised affective narrative of the nation under attack. I further discuss how these testimonies can be understood via the concept of echo, inspired by the seminal work of Joan Scott.

Hybrid media event

In December 2018, the police of Oulu (a city in Northern Finland) informed the public that they were investigating a case of sexual crime that included underaged girls and several adult male asylum seekers. Police suspected several men with foreign background of taking sexual advantage of young girls, particularly one 13-year-old girl. The girls were contacted through social media, on Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp. They were in contact with the men voluntarily; however, the girls were underaged, and there were signs of coercion and suspicions of rape in some cases. The men were acting individually, not as an organised gang. As soon as the police published their press release, the case became major news and a topic of public debate, with comments from all leading politicians and parties.[1]

At first, the police investigation went without any public attention; however, the case had drawn the interest of anti-immigrant groups, particularly one local politician, Jones Lokka, an active member of the Finns party with a strong anti-immigrant stance, who was convicted of incitement to ethnic or racial hatred in a separate case from 2017. Lokka had actively shared the details of the case on a digital network of anti-immigrant groups and members of the party, as well as with the City Council of Oulu. The case was discussed on alternative media sites and local social media forums in November 2018, where it was referred to as a 'rape wave' (Suomi24, MV). Due to this social media publicity, the police felt pressure to address the case publicly.

While the police explained as their motive to warn other potential victims and discover new possible cases, it was clear from the beginning that the news could not be dealt with like regular crime news. The case was loaded with political interests, assumptions, prejudice, and rumours circulating on digital networks in ways that shaped the public debate from the beginning. The case became a media event that was connected to a range of contemporary political and historical narratives that defined the ways in which it was understood and responded to, often in affective and contradictory ways. (Sreberny 2016; Gilroy 2004; Freedman 2011).

The Oulu case can be understood as a disruptive hybrid media event (Liebes and Katz 2007; Chadwick 2013) that captures the attention of the nation. It was not a consolidating event but a conflictual event that involved oppositional stands and could have further polarised the nation (Sumiala et al. 2018; Titley et al. 2016; Sreberny 2016). Annabelle Sreberny (2016) describes the confusing logic of such an event in the current digital media landscape as follows: 'The availability of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and their equivalents in different contexts have radically expanded people's, politicians', and activists' power to create and distribute their own varied visual and aural responses to reported events on a potentially huge scale (Sreberny 2016, 3487).' In a hybrid media system, a wide range of actors distribute and use power to 'create, tap or steer information flows in ways that suit their goals and in ways that modify, enable, or disable others' agency, across and between a range of newer and older media settings' (Chadwick 2013: 218). Hybridity also refers to the intertwining logics of professional media and social media, as well as to the tendency to expand local events to a transnational or global scale (Sumiala et al. 2018). Perhaps most importantly, hybridity points to the confusing, as well as productive and

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[1] The police found 27 suspects, of whom 2/3 were asylum seekers and 1/4 were white Finns. Ultimately, eight men, all asylum seekers, were prosecuted for the sexual abuse and rape of a 13-year-old girl.

participatory, aspects of an event, rather than to a media event as a spectacle that unfolds in the eyes of bystanders. In other words, hybrid media events can be produced by making use of digital media logics and their networking capacities. This means that the emergence of something that can be identified as a hybrid media event can be produced and prepared in the discussion rooms of online forums, rather than erupt on the street, unexpectedly, at a large scale. Because the Oulu case started on digital networks and was spread by a local politician, it is a classic example of a hybrid media event.

However, as pointed out by Sreberny (2016), the problem of the concept of a media event is its' 'eventness', which tends to fix the event to a certain time and space such that it loses the focus on 'broader ideas about what constitutes history and how historical narratives get written' (2016: 3488). To understand the writing of history, events must be explored *backward*, with a nuanced analysis of contemporary cultural politics, to understand the *ongoing* struggle to define the dominant historical narrative that is taking place in the formation of hybrid media events. Therefore, it is important to explore the events as part of a struggle over the dominant narrative and interrogate how historical claims are made in the course of the events, through affective, embodied, and crowded engagements (Sreberny 2016). In a similar way, Barbie Zelizer encourages thinking about media events in relation to other events within a larger temporal flow, as well as seeing them as shifting in afterlives (Zelizer 2018, 137).

In my exploration of the racialisation of sexual crime, I want to take on these points of confusing productivity and temporal restlessness, as well as the potential of echoes emerging in the evidence from experience. Next, I more closely examine the ways in which the hybrid media environment furthered the racialisation of crime in this case.

Racialisation of sexual crime in hybrid media

From the beginning, the Oulu case was framed as a sexual crime involving asylum seekers. The right-wing nationalist politician, by focusing on asylum seekers as perpetrators, was able to act as a primary definer (Hall et al. 1978) of the public debate. This framing furthered the politics of fear (Wodak 2015) that had been shaping the public understanding of immigration and the so-called refugee crisis in Europe. As in other parts of Europe, right-wing populism has been attracting support in Finland since the late 2000s. The nationalist populist party, The Finns, has rapidly become the second largest party, with a clear anti-immigrant agenda. The success of The Finns and support for the anti-immigrant movement are connected with the systemic and active use of social media discussion forums, as in other European contexts (author 2015; Kasekamp et al. 2019; Froio and Ganesh 2019). The leader of the party, Jussi Halla-aho, has a long history of writing anti-immigrant blog posts, including the use of rape as a topic, particularly with asylum seekers as perpetrators (Keskinen 2011; author 2015; Horsti 2018). The public debate around immigration became further polarised in 2015, when over 30,000 asylum seekers arrived in Finland, causing concern over the impact of exceptionally the high number of asylum seekers on society (as compared to the approximate 5,000 asylum applications prior to 2015). Several new anti-immigrant groups organised on social media and alternative media sites, actively distributing news and rumours concerning immigration and asylum seekers as a threat, followed by the emergence of street-patrolling groups, such as the Soldiers of Odin (author 2019; author et al. 2021; Laaksonen et al. 2020). Previous research has pointed out the fact that a sense of threat has been

evoked in the narratives of asylum seekers, refugees, and migrants, who are viewed as suspect others (Chouliaraki and Stolic 2017: 1169; Keskinen 2011; Saresma 2017). In Europe, in 2015, the frame of crime became dominant, particularly after the New Year's events in Cologne, Germany, although it has longer racial histories in various contexts (Freedman 2011; Hall et al. 1997; Boulila & Carri 2017). These frames of crime and fear were effectively circulated on social media. Social media sites also helped mobilise networks of politically motivated people to disseminate news and stories strategically, working toward particular political ends (Ekman 2018). Recent big data research has shown that the social-media debates on immigration in Finland had overtly negative, anti-immigrant framings that were characterised by racist discourse, hostile expressions, and negative stereotypes. Crime-related issues and an excessive focus on sexual assaults have been purposefully connected to asylum seekers and refugees and circulated through various alternative media links (Pöyhtäri et al. 2019). These findings support the view that hybrid media is being actively and systemically used by right-wing populists. At the same time, various solidarity movements and demonstrations against racism were organised as a response to the growing racism and hostility in society and in the public discourse; however, these movements did not make similarly systemic use of social media sites (Pöyhtäri et al. 2019). By the end of 2018, the most heated debates on immigration and asylum seekers seemed to have cooled down; however, the Oulu case revealed and amplified affects that had been simmering on digital media networks.

Therefore, when something like the case in Oulu happened, the news hit a ground already cultivated with the view on asylum seekers as criminals and perpetrators. In a way, the Oulu case appeared to meet the expectations built up with a politics of fear (Wodak 2015) by the anti-immigrant movement through digital networks over the past decade. The hybrid media environment amplified the racialisation of crime with the social media imperative of sharing (van Dijck 2013) and accommodating the circulation of threads in the form of affective news, speculations, and rumours.

Typical of a media event, the case began to dominate the news and occupy space as an exceptional case in its own right. During the investigation, several rumors were circulating regarding the scale of the events, with the potential perpetrators numbering from five to 30. The possibility of an organized pedophilia ring was discussed and later disputed by the police, but the rumor lived on on social media (Suomi24). Speculation about the number and age of the victims was also circulated. The circulation of rumors demonstrates the workings of the affective economy (Ahmed 2004) in hybrid media. Existing prejudice and old narratives become activated in new contexts and affective encounters (Ahmed, 2004: 47). The impact of the affective political climate can be seen in the actions and conduct of the police, leading politicians, policy makers, and the general public.

First of all, the police took an exceptionally active role in publishing a press release with reference to asylum seekers as suspects. The police grounded this in the fact that they wanted to warn the public and obtain information about other potentially similar cases (4.12. 2018 HS; Poliisi.fi/ tietoa_poliisista/tiedotteet). By doing this, the police signalled that the racial and ethnic background of the alleged perpetrators was particularly relevant and specific to the case. A few years before this case, another large-scale sexual abuse scandal was discovered in the same region concerning a religious community, with approximately 30 accused and around 150 underaged

victims (HS 5.1. 2014). The police never addressed the public regarding this case. In other words, by focusing strongly on asylum seekers as perpetrators, their ethnicity and cultural background functioned as an explanation for sexual crime (Anthias & Yuval-Davis 1992; Muriji & Solomos 2005). [2] The linkage between race and crime has a long history, and it plays out in different ways in different national contexts. In the classic study on the racialisation of crime, Stuart Hall et al. (1978) demonstrate how in the UK, the media played a crucial role in invoking fear over crime, as well as focusing on a new type of crime, called muggings, which was connected to young black males. Estelle Freedman, in her study on reports of sexual violence in the American press in the late 1900s, argues that rape reports had political import and 'served to shore up white male privilege with emphasis on African American men as dangerous' (Freedman 2011). In the media, Black men were depicted as 'natural predators, racially inclined to commit sexual violence' and incapable of self-government, whereas when white perpetrators were mentioned, they were described as exceptional and as individuals, with details on their professions and other attributes (Freedman 2011). Overall, media representations and the focus on particular types of crime have been considered central to contributing to the racialisation of crime since the 1900s (Welch 2009; Gilliam et al 2002; Dyer 1997; Saresma 2017).

The Oulu case also shows how the logics of a hybrid media environment produce an amplifying effect wherein certain political interests can be pushed forward through affective public debate. As a result, the police felt that they were compelled to go public with their investigation. Most likely, the police felt the public pressure of being accused of silencing the case and, therefore, felt the need to address the public. Due to the case's high visibility, leading politicians, one after another, came to the public to condemn the Oulu crimes with overly affective discourse, describing the case as disgusting and revolting (HS 5.12.). The eagerness of the leading politicians to condemn the case with highly affective addresses can be seen as an attempt to respond to the assumed emotional register of the voters and ensure that these politicians would appear to be on the right side of the debate (Tolonen, 2021). The affective discourse also positioned the victims far from the speakers, as people who had been subjected and connected to something inconceivably monstruous.

As argued by Knepper (2008), the consequences of the racialisation of crime are not irrelevant, because 'they fuel discrimination in criminal justice decision making and lead to misguided policies with respect to immigrants and ethnic minority populations' (Knepper 2008, 6). Provoked by the Oulu case, politicians demanded changes in the asylum process and the associated rights: harder punishments, stronger restrictions for asylum, and speedier deportations. In December 2018, the government began an assessment of new measures to prevent immigrant-based crimes, as well as sexual crimes such as grooming. The emphasis with regard to policy assessment was on asylum seekers. The measures included speeding up the asylum process and deportations, as well as implementing changes to the Aliens Act such that international protection and residence permits can be withdrawn for a person who is considered a security risk. The measures also included intensified mandatory sexual education for asylum seekers and intensified surveillance of asylum

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[2] In 2019, there were 1,400 cases of sexual crimes under investigation. Among these, 1,200 suspects were Finns, while 187 were foreign citizens.

seekers at reception centres. While these policies may be motivated by a desire to prevent crime, they simultaneously reinforce the stigma of sexual crime on immigrants and target a particular part of the population as potential rapists (Blake 2017).

The measures on sexual crimes included additional resources for the police to use in detecting grooming on the Internet, as well as stricter punishments for sexual crime (VNK).[3] The overall emphasis on perpetrators and their racialisation was foregrounded, while support for victims and the prevention of sexual crime attracted less attention.

The general public, particularly in Oulu area, reacted to the case by organising several demonstrations against asylum seekers and refugees, who were now conceived of as a risk to the nation. The members of the rightwing populist party organised their own 'security event' and mobilised street patrols to ensure safety in the region. At the same time, refugees and migrants living in Oulu area were increasingly targeted with hostility and hate speech. They were reported to be afraid of walking in public because of hostile attacks and comments (Satakunnan Kansa 20.12. 2018; Lapin Kansa 30.1. 2019). Racial differentiation targets specific populations and places them 'in perpetual vulnerablity' (Ponce 2014). As a result, the political subjectivity of asylum seekers and refugees becomes limited to impasse, to acts of denial and invisibility. It diminishes the possibilities for a group that is already marginalised and underrepresented in public to be seen as a heterogeneous group of people with different backgrounds, values, and identities (Chimienti and Solomos 2011). There are various ways to resist racialisation; however, these methods are often, particularly in an overtly hostile environment, limited to acts of non-response, perseverance, and self-control (Knepper 2008).

Echoes of experience

During the public debate on the Oulu case in the mainstream media, tabloids and social media discussions focused on the problems of immigration connected to sexual crimes. However, individual voices on social media opened a different view in relation to the case, presenting testimonies and experiences from the past as histories of sexual abuse in Finland. I consider these postings as evidence from experience that produced an *echo* - delayed sounds and returns to the case.

In the feminist movement, evidence from experience has played an important role in expanding and complementing the picture offered by dominant historical narratives, often overriding women's experience and everyday life. In this way, experience can make visible what has been in the margins in history. As Scott argues, 'Experience can both confirm what is already known and upset what has been taken for granted' (1991, 793).

Particularly for marginal groups, sexual minorities, and ethnic and racial minorities, the ability to bear witness, to provide evidence from experience, has been an important way of shedding light on lived inequalities shaped by structures of discrimination. For Chandra Mohanty, knowledge from experience, particularly from the experience of the most vulnerable, provides an important avenue toward a just society (2003). Zelizer discusses the power of witnessing as a way to work

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[3] https://vnk.fi/documents/10616/11449843/Seksuaalirikollisuuden+ennaltaehk%C3%A4isy+ja+torjunta/315d9b46-b6ee-79af-d0c4-67a3b17ec0b6/Seksuaalirikollisuuden+ennaltaehk%C3%A4isy+ja+torjunta.pdf

through traumatic events and experiences: '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" (Zelizer 2002, 698).

The #MeToo movement provides an example of evidence from experience in the current media environment and an important reference point for this case as a phenomenon that has provided a model for personal accounts of sexual harassment and abuse: a way of discussing them in public (Zarkov and Davis 2018; author 2019;Boyle 2019; Sundén and Paasonen 2019).

Joan Scott's (1991) seminal work on the evidence of experience seeks to further understand the relationship between the past and present as a problem to be encountered and explored, rather than taken for granted. The problem that Scott raises is connected to the essentialising force of evidence from experience: Scott argues that 'experience makes individuals the starting point of knowledge, but also naturalizes categories such as man, woman, black, white, heterosexual, and homosexual by treating them as given characteristics of individuals' (Scott 1991, 782).

Experience should not explain but, rather, create space for reflexive interrogation. To do this, Scott introduces the concept of echo. Scott mainly discusses this concept in context of the construction of identity, the feminist movement, and the production of woman as a category. Scott uses the concept of fantasy echo to describe identification in the accounts of feminist identities through shared commonalities. By using echo, Scott wants to emphasise that identity is constructed in complex relationships to others. Echo points out the diffractions and variations of an experience across time.

Echo refers to incomplete reproductions that are only parts of the original, delayed returns that produce gaps and bridges in meaning. (Scott, 2001: 291). Echo can also be seen in the repetition of modes of political struggle (evidence, image, and post) that are not precise; rather, these modes resonate across different times and places, producing alterations and ironic contrasts. Inspired by Scott's idea, I propose echo in the context of digital media narratives.

These digital narratives, or testimonies, emerged as a response to the Oulu case and its publicity. They were self-biographical narratives of sexual harassment and violence that had been experienced in the past. Many of them referred to life in the 1980s, 70s, and 60s in Finland, much like the narrative I introduced in the beginning of this article. One major discussion thread that I encountered and joined was initiated by a theatre director on his personal Facebook site, where he posted a description from his youth and a recognition of situations in which older (white) guys would be dating 15-year-old girls and picking them up from school with their cars. The posting evoked over 100 responses that described similar experiences from different places in Finland, including Turku, Jyväskylä, Lahti, and Tampere. One of these postings described how young people would gather in the center square of the small town on weekends and men in their 20s would circle around the square in their cars and lure young girls in the cars with alcohol. Many on these postings described the overall sexist atmosphere of youth cultures in the past and the blurring boundaries of what was considered normal and what was risky, along with everyday practices of grooming and harassment. However, some of the postings referred more directly to personal experiences of being the targets of harassment. One of these postings described several bad experiences at the age of 15, having to escape from a moving car and, at another time, from a ventilation window due to potential sexual abuse by older men. Some of these narratives

described the desire, as a young girl, to expand the boundaries of everyday life with risky behaviour. In a personal column, a female journalist wrote (HS 27.1. 2019) about her crush on a 28-year-old prisoner, who she wrote letters to and also went to see in jail – only to realize afterward that this was not the excitement she was looking for and end all connection with the man. Her story describes the desire to expand the typical boundaries and explore sexuality at young age, something that is not uncommon but may lead to risky encounters, particularly in a society with a 'sexist atmosphere' (Parkkila and Heikkinen 2015; Piispa and Honkatukia 2008). A recent study showed that adolescent girls may have difficulties in identifying abusive behavior or considering sexual approaches by older men harassment. Surrounded by a sexist atmosphere, girls may have adopted the sexism of their culture and negotiate with abusive sexual behavior, seeing it as a way to cope with an impossible situation, to own the abuse in resistance to pity. Described as internalised sexual violence, researchers interpret this to be a result of neglect on society's part, specifically normalisation and silence (Parkkila & Heikkinen 2015). The culture of silence and the normalisation of sexual abuse are evident in the social media postings.

While the everyday life of young people in 1980s Finland may seem unrelated to the case in Oulu, their fragile connection is central to the understanding of these postings as *echoes*. The writers of these postings, like myself, returned to their experiences of grooming because the news from Oulu evoked a response, a delayed sound, something that seemed similar but different.

The postings revealed the experience of everyday sexual abuse and harassment, which seemed to be in stark contrast with the sensational media attention depicting the Oulu case as something completely new and exceptional. This view was mostly expressed by politicians, who only now, in connection to asylum seekers, seemed to realise that young girls encounter sexual harassment. Sexual crime only seemed to become relevant when it involved asylum seekers or racialised men. This discrepancy, or dissonance (Hemmings 2012), is exactly where the echo emerged from. The personal stories opened up a space for the narratives of the victims of sexual crime and grooming, as well as pointing out the history of a sexist atmosphere and the everydayness of such practices across racial and ethnic boundaries.

Here, echo is used to question the narratives that sustain the racialisation of sexual crime and the identity formations and collective memories it proposes. At the same time, echo operates as a space in which past experiences are retold, complementing, and challenging the narrative of sudden change and an attack against the nation by foreign men.

What can we learn from these testimonies or acts of witnessing? Can they produce a pathway to understanding the workings of sexism and racism in society more broadly and operating on a collective level?

To understand these narratives as echo is to acknowledge the way they resonate with the media event. They should not be treated as an explanation of what happened in Oulu or as a claim that these experiences from the past are the same as what is happening today. However, they paint a picture of a society with a history of a sexist atmosphere, and they show that the practice of grooming has taken on many forms across time, both before and after the advent digital media, in the everyday lives of adolescents. This echo can provide for contextual and historical understanding of the practices, mechanisms, and their effects, as well as how they have been silenced as irrelevant in the everyday.

The postings were examples of how digital spaces can provide for self-biographical narratives, testimonies, and alternative, anti-racist ways of addressing sexual violence. These personal writings, histories, memories, and narratives of crushes and grooming were acts of solidarity with the victims. At their best, they can function as mnemonic acts and bring individuals together on the path to collective recovery (Zelizer 2018, 698). Such an echo can work to produce a collective response from the experiences of many people across different time and space and, thus, point out the differences within these experiences. By producing different time-place contexts, echo works to question essentialist categorisations of 'women', 'girls', and 'asylum seekers' in these narratives. In this way, the echo does its 'analytic work' (Scott 2001, 287) to un-essentialise evidence from experience by accumulating and enlargening it – producing parallel views to it.

However, in the hybrid media environment, these testimonies remained scattered, without achieving the transformative effect of collective response. This speaks of the inequal and complex workings of power in the hybrid media environment. Echoes of evidence may easily be dispersed or remain in particular discursive bubbles. Hybridity requires networks of power and the systemic use of digital infrastructures. The systemic spread of the politics of fear on digital networks has been able to shape the political culture and policies across national contexts. In addition, the vulnerability of postings and organised attacks against feminists and women in general on digital media may produce a threshold for such participation (author 2019; see also Boulia and Carri 2017)[4].

Even in a hybrid media event, in the struggle over dominant meaning, the ability to act as the primary definer seems to make a difference. The mainstream media was not able to turn the direction of the debate from the emphasis on asylum seekers and the idea of a nation under attack. Perspectives on the case seemed to be driven by exclusionary solidarity and foregrounding immigration, rather than deep-rooted sexism, as the problem to be dealt with.

Conclusions

As Barbie Zelizer has compellingly noted in connection to collective memory, 'seeing violence in the present thus depends on which violence from the past we use to make it meaningful' (2018, 136). It makes a difference how we understand acts of sexual abuse in relation to the past: whether they appear as something completely new or as a continuance of something similar.

Media events take part in building collective memory, and hybrid media events often make the struggle over collective memory visible, with crowded engagements of different views and interpretations. However, even in the hybrid media environment, there are views that override others and logics that prevail. In this case, the racialisation of sexual crime was the dominant trope that framed the public understanding of and responses to the case. However, other narratives emerged, such as evidence of experience from the past. These postings and personal accounts

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[4] Boulila and Carri (2017) describe similar developments in German media, where the Cologne events were depicted as an attack against the nation and German values, producing a climate in which anti-racist feminism was considered dangerous to the country. The feminist campaign #ausnahmlos, pointed out that the sudden interest in sexual violence was product of racism rather than a genuine interest in improving the rights of the victims of sexual abuse and violence. According to Boulila and Carri, raising the problem of deep-rooted sexism in Germany was considered an unpatriotic and extreme stand. The debate was biased and fueled the rise of anti-feminism and attacks against gender studies and their epistemological grounds.

have recognised something in the Oulu case and shared experiences of sexual harassment, abuse, or more general sexism in Finnish society. As such, these responses have been attempts to widen the debate from racialisation to the structures of sexism. I have treated these responses and postings with the concept of echo, as produced by evidence from experience. The concept of echo, in this context, has three aspects in particular.

First, echo reflects a feeling of dissonance (Hemmings 2012), a gap between one's own experience and the representation of the world. Such a dissonance can operate as a seed of knowledge by generating critique and alternative ways of seeing the world, which often drives campaigns and movements for change. However, it is important to understand that experience should not be approached as self-evident or straightforward. It must be treated with reflexive exploration. This means situating evidence "historically, and engag[ing] critically with the conditions of its possibility, while simultaneously foregrounding its participation in an emergent set of political concerns" (Hesford & Diedrich 2014, 107).

Echo may also emerge as a by-stander reaction that 'make[s] us act in atypical ways, particularly when we face public events of a traumatic nature. Situated as bystanders to history-in-the-making, individuals in such cases often respond in ways that are out of the ordinary' (Zelizer 2018, 697).

Second, echo refers to responses that create a space for a reflexive interrogation of the event from contextual and historical perspectives, something that is identified yet different. It can strategically broaden (Zelizer 2018) the view to the event via contextual and historical narratives and past experiences. In other words, going backward in time may open up the dominant logics of a hybrid media event (Sreberny 2016). For example, my experience narrated above cannot be used to explain what happened in the Oulu case. It cannot claim to know the experience of the victims; however, it can voice an experience in another time and space – a delayed response. It can be part of series of other echoes that resonate with particular behaviours and powers surrounding sexual harassment and violence. The methodological choice to use my experience as an example risks sidelining the focus on the Oulu case; however, the space in-between these two cases and other narrated experiences is, I believe, the productive space of the echo.

The focus on echo as a concept points out that evidence from experience can offer solidarity, treating the victims, as well as racialised groups and communities, without pre-defined stereotypes and prejudice. In this case, echoes show the different contexts and modes of sexual abuse across time. Importantly, echo works to undo the racial bind and the identification of racialised subjects as evident abusers. By shifting the perspective in time and place, it can open up space for a politics of recognition that can produce more nuanced understanding of the crimes. The point is not to render the sexual crime committed by asylum seekers irrelevant or more of the same. The point is to open up a space in which to discuss a case with multiple vulnerabilities, to learn from those narratives in order to tackle sexual crime and violence, without making it a political issue that sidelines the experience of abuse and the chance to help young women avoid these situations. A historical perspective demonstrates that these practices are not limited to the present time, the online world, and to asylum seekers as perpetrators; therefore, the problem of sexual crime is not resolved simply by closing the borders.

Third, the hybrid media environment offers a productive space for echoes to emerge; however, it does so with confusing logics. In this case, the narratives and testimonies were scattered and shared in limited contexts as individual stories that never gained as much political power as the dominant narrative of sexual crime. The hybrid media poses several challenges in this regard due to its confusing logics and existing networks of hate, which operate against anti-racist activism. To produce an accumulative force of solidarity, these testimonies would have to reach and be discussed on various platforms and expand beyond the bounded publics, as the #MeToo movement has been able to do. However, as pointed out by Boyle (2019) the public debate around #MeToo soon turned from the violence experienced by women towards the interests of men.

Furthermore, the hybrid media environment operates as a stage for the struggle over collective memory. This requires acknowledging that collective memories are evolving and produced during different stages of political awareness and historical experience. The way they are produced is relevant to understandings of the present.

By introducing the concept of echo in this article, my aim has been to explore how feminist approaches may broaden the gaze in cases that are politically sensitive and involve multiple vulnerabilities. I have found echo to be a useful analytical tool with which to approach personal stories and testimonies that may unravel the dominant dynamics of a debate and even provide an anti-racist response in a highly affective and polarised public debate. I see further potential in using the concept of echo in digital media research, for example, in exploring social movements and their impact on digital media participation. Further theoretical and empirical work is needed to understand the formation and travels of echo in the digital media, as well as the use of the concept during critical reflection on the experience narrated through the media, past and present.

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