Echo of Experience: A Feminist Response to Racialization of Sexual Crime in the Hybrid Media Event

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The article explores echo as a feminist strategy in the hybrid media event. The article interrogates how evidence from experience in digital culture can operate as an (unessentializing) 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 violence involving asylum seekers and the public debate surrounding the event. The article explores responses to the case with the concept of echo, inspired by Joan Scott's seminal work on fantasy echo. It is argued that the echo produces temporal cues that can ideally open up a reflexive space on digital media to discuss sexual abuse and sensitive cases that undo the essentialist bind and at the same time reveal longer historical trajectories connected to the contemporary debate.

Keywords: echo, experience, hybrid media event, racialization of sexual crime, feminism, anti-racism

It was 1981. I was 15 years old and 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 added, "It's OK, I'd rather walk." He smiled and said that it was no bother. He claimed to be in 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 and 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. When I met the other girls, I immediately told them what had happened, and the 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? After this, he called me a few times and asked me to join him at a local restaurant. I refused, giving excuses. I remember that refusing seemed difficult, as if I owed him something. I felt stupid for being so young, only 15. At this point, I probably had a sense what he wanted from me. He started to feel creepy. After a few weeks, he tried to stop me on the street again, but I hurried on, running. I did not see him again, but I heard about him, publicly defending a friend of his who was, according to him, falsely accused of pedophilia. I have since wondered why this event did not seem alarming 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 was not

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the only time I was approached by an older man, and compared with many more direct physical attacks, this was more subtle. Yet it has remained in my memory as more dangerous than others in some ways. 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 very 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 start to rethink these encounters and what it means to testify about them in public.

This article is not about my experience, but my story offers an example of an echo of experience in relation to a recent case of sexual crime and violence in Finland. The case in question, so-called Oulu sexual crime case, involved several underaged 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 in 2019. The case is an example of a hybrid media event 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 (Freedman, 2011; Gilroy, 2004; Sreberny, 2016). Although my experience from 1980s may seem to have nothing to do with the case of racialization of sexual crime, it is exactly this seeming unconnection that is the point and argumentative core of this article. The article explores the responses to the case as examples of an echo that surface from experience of simultaneous resonance and dissonance to a hybrid media event. The article explores how evidence from experience can operate as an echo that expands the discursive space with a contextual and historical frame in ways that may challenge the logics of the dominant public narrative, in this case to question the trope of racialization of sexual crime. It is argued that its temporality, the delay, is central to echo. The article further explores how temporality and solidaristic resonance of echo can operate as a feminist strategy to produce a reflexive space to discuss sexual abuse and sensitive cases that are difficult to address and often create an impasse of vulnerabilities.

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 (Caliandro, 2018; Hine, 2017; Marcus, 1995). First, I introduce the Oulu case as a hybrid media event. This is followed by exploration of the responses that emerged on social media via the concept of echo, inspired by the seminal work of Joan Scott (1991). The overall media data includes 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 thread consisting of 161 postings shared over 285 times. The analysis of echo focuses on a sample of social media postings and personal blogs and columns (Facebook discussion, Twitter, and HS). I then move on to introduce the case study, the Oulu crime case.

Racialization of Sexual Crime in Hybrid Media

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 men. Police

suspected several men 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 organized gang. As soon as the police published their press release, pointing out that the suspected men were asylum seekers, 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 a local politician, Jones Lokka, who is an active member of the Finns party with a strong anti-immigrant stance and was convicted of incitement to ethnic or racial hatred in a separate case from 2017. Lokka was able to act as a primary definer (Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clark, & Roberts, 1978) of the public debate by actively sharing 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 December 2018, where it was referred to as a "rape wave" ("Miksi Oulun meneillään," 2019; "Poliisi kiistää yhä," 2018). The case demonstrates how certain political interests can be pushed forward through affective public debate: the police felt the pressure of being accused of silencing the case and, therefore, felt the need to bring the case into the public.

From the beginning, the Oulu case was framed as a racialized sexual crime case. As in other parts of Europe, right-wing populism has been attracting support in Finland since the late 2000s (Froio & Ganesh, 2019; Kasekamp, Madisson, & Wierenga, 2019; Nikunen, 2015). The then leader of the Finns 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 (Horsti, 2018; Keskinen, 2011; Nikunen, 2015). The public debate around immigration became further polarized in 2015, when over 30,000 asylum seekers arrived in Finland. Several new anti-immigrant groups organized on social media and alternative media sites, actively distributing news and rumors concerning immigration and asylum seekers as a threat, followed by the emergence of street-patrolling groups, such as the Soldiers of Odin (Laaksonen, Pantti, & Titley, 2020; Nikunen, Hokka, & Nelimarkka, 2021; Pöyhtäri et al., 2019; 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 (Boulila & Carri, 2017; Freedman, 2011; Hall, 1997). 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 below the surface on digital forums. 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 through the politics of fear (Wodak, 2015).

The Oulu case can be understood as a disruptive hybrid media event (Chadwick, 2013; Katz & Liebes, 2007; Titley, Freedman, Khiabany, & Mondon, 2016). Annabelle Sreberny (2016) describes the 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"

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

(p. 3487). In a hybrid media system, a wide range of actors distribute and use power to circulate information according to their goals (Chadwick, 2013, p. 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, Tikka, & Valaskivi, 2019). Perhaps most important, hybridity points to the confusing, as well as productive and participatory, aspects of an event. In other words, hybrid media events can be produced by making use of digital media logics and their networking capacities.

The Oulu case was loaded with political interests, assumptions, prejudice, and rumors circulating on digital networks in ways that shaped the public debate from the beginning. 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 social media (Mvlehti, 2019). The circulation of rumors demonstrates the workings of the affective economy (Ahmed, 2004). Existing prejudice and old narratives became activated in new contexts and affective encounters (Ahmed, 2004, p. 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.

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 (Passi, 2018). By doing this, the police signaled 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 (Huuskonen & Katajamäki, 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; Murji & Solomos, 2005).[2] The linkage between race and crime has a long history, and it plays out in different ways in different national contexts. Overall, media representations and the focus on particular types of crime have been considered central contributors to the racialization of crime since the 1900s (Dyer, 1997; Freedman, 2011; Gilliam, Valentino, & Beckmann, 2002; Hall et al., 1978; Saresma, 2017; Welch, 2009).

Provoked by the Oulu case, politicians, with overly affective discourse, described the case as disgusting and revolting and demanded changes in the asylum process and the associated rights: harder punishments, stronger restrictions for asylum, and speedier deportations. Indeed, the emphasis in policy assessment was on asylum seekers: 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 included intensified mandatory sexual education for asylum seekers and intensified surveillance of asylum seekers at reception centers. Although these policies may be motivated by a desire to prevent crime, they simultaneously reinforce the stigma of sexual crime on all immigrants and target particular part of the population as potential rapists by

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[2] In 2019, there were 1,400 cases of sexual crimes under investigation. Among these, 1,217 suspects were Finns, while 183 were foreign citizens (Happonen, 2019).

default (Blake, 2017). The overall emphasis on perpetrators and their racialization was foregrounded, while support for victims and the prevention of sexual crime attracted less attention (Valtioneuvosto, 2019).

Because of the public debate, refugees and migrants living in Oulu area were increasingly targeted with hostility and hate speech (Hekkala, 2018). The general public in the Oulu area participated in several demonstrations against the asylum seekers and refugees, supported by the members of the rightwing populist party, who organized their own "security event" and mobilized street patrols to ensure safety in the region. The climate of hostility diminishes the possibilities for a group that is already marginalized and underrepresented in public to be seen as a heterogeneous group with different backgrounds, values, and identities (Chimienti & Solomos, 2011). There are various ways to resist racialization; however, in an overtly hostile environment, these are often limited to acts of nonresponse, perseverance, and self-control (Knepper, 2008). As argued by Knepper (2008), the consequences of the racialization 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" (p. 6).

Echo 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, in a predominantly white nation. 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 Joan Scott (1991) argues, "experience can both confirm what is already known and upset what has been taken for granted" (p. 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 (2003), knowledge from experience, particularly from the experience of the most vulnerable, provides an important avenue toward a just society. Mohanty (2003) argues that if we "think from the space of some of the most marginalized we are most likely to envision a just and democratic society capable of treating all its citizens fairly" (p. 511). Zelizer (2002) discusses the power of witnessing as a way to work 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" (p. 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 (Boyle, 2019; Nikunen, 2019; Sundén & Paasonen, 2020; Zarkov & Davis, 2018). The #MeToo campaign has been interpreted as an

example of the promise of digital feminist activism for raising feminist consciousness and producing solidarity. Feminist activism is often interpreted through the concept of counterpublics (Fraser, 1992) that emphasize organization through their own discursive arenas. In the context of social media, the concept of affective publics (Papacharissi, 2014), which refers to the emergence of momentarily, intensive groups as a response to particular news events, has gained increasing prominence. The #MeToo movement has been seen to amplify public awareness of the scope of sexual violence and has offered empowerment through empathy. Research has highlighted its relevance in providing consciousness-raising spaces and networks of solidarity (Mendes, Keller, & Ringrose, 2018; Pruchniewska, 2019; Zarkov & Davis, 2018). Mendes et al. (2018) argue that such campaigns that start with personal testimonies often enhance feminist consciousness and understanding of sexual violence as a structural rather than personal problem. However, intersectional approaches to feminist activism pay attention to the fact that #MeToo operated as a platform for individuals who were already powerful enough to be heard, such as celebrities (Lukose, 2018; Zarkov & Davis, 2018).

These explorations emphasize the experience in the moment and shared affirmation and formation of feminist identity through social media testimonies and personal witnessing. Previous research has also highlighted the complex emotional labor connected to activism with mental costs of participating in feminist activism and explored the affective landscape of #MeToo campaign fueled by shame and anger (Mendes et al., 2018, p. 244; Sundén & Paasonen, 2020; Trott, 2020).

The conceptual use of echo in this article builds on this previous work, but instead of emphasizing affirmation, it points to temporality and reflexive interrogation in context of response. Scott's (1991) seminal work on the evidence of experience sought to 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 essentializing force of the evidence from experience: Scott (1991) 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" (p. 782). Experience should not explain but rather create space for reflexive interrogation. To do this, Scott (2001) introduces the concept of fantasy echo. The concept is mainly discussed in terms of identity construction, the feminist movement, and the production of woman as a category.

Scott (2001) uses *fantasy echo* to describe identity formation in context of collective feminist movements in history. Fantasy is a scene or a setting where collective identity is acted out. Fantasy hides contradiction and extracts coherence from confusion and singularity out of multiplicity. Echo is a reminder of the inexactness of fantasy's condensation. By using echo, Scott (2001) seeks to emphasize that identity is constructed in a complex relationship 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, p. 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 the concept of echo in the context of digital media, as a personal delayed response to a media event.

In the context of the Oulu case, the digital narratives or testimonies that I consider echoes were self-biographical narratives of sexual harassment and violence that had been experienced in the past. These

narratives were distributed on specific Facebook discussions, on Twitter, and on personal blogs and columns. They formed a clear minority among the vast amount of social media and news stories; however, the way they address the question of sexual crime caught my attention. Many of them referred to life in the 1980s, 1970s, and 1960s in Finland, much like the narrative I introduced at the beginning of this article.

One major discussion thread that I encountered and joined was initiated by a theater 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 to be normal and what was risky, along with everyday practices of grooming and harassment. They also described personal experiences of being the targets of harassment.

> Me and my close friends have experienced too many bad things from the part of Finnish men in the past, so I am really upset about the insinuation that this is a new phenomenon and only connected to people arrived from outside. Just to mention, I have had to escape sexual violence several times, once from a moving car and another time from apartments' ventilation window when I was under 18.[3]

This story parallels the narratives of Oulu sexual crime case to her own experience from the past, showing that there is a continuation of sexual harassment across time. The dissonance between public media debate that describes sexual crime as a novel phenomenon and her own experience that contradicts such a claim provides the space for an echo to emerge. Some of the narratives described the desire, as a young girl, to expand the boundaries of everyday life with risky behavior. In a personal column, a female journalist (Vasantola, 2019) wrote about her crush on a 28-year-old prisoner, to whom she wrote letters and also went to see in jail—only to realize afterward that this was not the excitement she was looking for, and she ended all connection with the man.

> I have been thinking about why I ended up going to those visits. Maybe I sought adventures and excitement, and felt myself as an adult. But mostly I wanted to be accepted and wonderful in the eyes of someone else. I kept my "boyfriend" as a secret. I had a sense that something was not quite right, but I thought it was my fault. It was I who had written those letters, it was me who had cycled to prison. My own fault, my own deep shame. (Vastantola, 2019)

These words entail reflective interrogation to ones' own feelings and desires in the past. Her story describes the desire to expand the typical boundaries and explore sexuality at young age, something that is not

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[3] Research data from nonpublic Facebook groups are treated according to ethical guidelines. The postings are translated and anonymized.

uncommon but may lead to risky encounters, particularly in a society with a "sexist atmosphere" (Parkkila & Heikkinen, 2018; Piispa & Honkatukia, 2008). Surrounded by a sexist atmosphere, girls may also adopt the sexism of their culture, seeing it as a way to cope with an impossible situation, to "own" the abuse in resistance to pity. Described as internalized sexual violence, researchers interpret this to be a result of neglect on society's part, specifically normalization and silence (Parkkila & Heikkinen, 2018). The culture of silence and the normalization of sexual abuse are evident in the social media postings responding to Oulu case.

Although 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 me, returned to their own experiences of sexual crime and grooming because the news from Oulu evoked a response, a delayed sound, something that seemed familiar but still detached.

Drawing on these examples, I define echo as an expressed digital response to a media event or a narrative. The temporal dimension, the delay, is central to the concept. First, delay captures the connection to past and memory. Echo reminds of the experiences that have happened before. Second, delay provides a space to reflect upon the past experience and identity. Therefore, unlike in context of affective publics, echo is not an immediate affective reaction, even though it may be emotional and connected to experiences of shame and anger. Rather, echo is characterized by distance and dissonance. In this way, then, echo evokes and brings together different temporal layers of identity and the ways they are connected to values, social worlds, experiences, and knowledge. As such, echo provides a site of interrogation rather than affirmation.

Temporality in echo works both on individual and collective level. On an individual level, it produces space between one's past experience and the contemporary moment that resonates with the experience. This space offers possibility to reflect upon identity and difference. Clare Hemmings (2012) refers to dissonance as a feeling of discrepancy between the embodied self and the self in the eyes of the world. Dissonance, be it rage, anger, or passion, operates as a seed of knowledge: it generates critique and alternative ways of seeing the world. Echo can be understood as a response to the experienced dissonance with temporal reflection, connecting experiences from past and present.

On a collective level, temporality operates by producing perspective to the present, on a longer timeline. As pointed out by Sreberny (2016), the problem of media event is its "eventness," which fixes it to a certain time and space in way that it loses the focus on "broader ideas about what constitutes history and how historical narratives get written" (p. 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 on a longer timeline 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 (2018) encourages thinking about media events in relation to other events within a larger temporal flow, as well as seeing them as shifting in afterlives (p. 137).

Together, 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 realize that young girls encounter sexual harassment. Sexual crime seemed to become relevant only when it involved asylum seekers or racialized men. The personal stories of sexual crime and grooming on social media pointed out the long history of a sexist atmosphere and the everydayness of such practices beyond racial and ethnic boundaries.

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 on a collective level?

It is important to understand that the postings 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. Instead, 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 of digital media, in the everyday lives of adolescents. By showing this, the social media postings operate as echoes: they can provide for contextual and historical understanding of the practices, mechanisms, and effects of grooming, as well as the way they have been silenced as irrelevant in the everyday.

In addition, these personal writings, histories, memories, and narratives of crushes and grooming were acts of solidarity with the victims. Resonating with the experience of the victims, echo offers solidarity with a sense of alliance that is formed horizontally, rather than vertically as downward directed sense of pity (Nikunen, 2019). This solidaristic connection is evident when compared with the highly affective statements made by politicians that positioned the victims far away from the speakers, as people who had been subjected and connected to something "inconceivably monstruous." Echo instead relates with the victims and connects with the contexts of sexual crime, not as something inconceivable but something that happens, even in the everyday.

Together the dissonance, distance and solidaristic resonance operate in ways that can provide for anti-racist ways of addressing sexual violence. By contextualizing sexual crime historically on a longer timeline, echo questions the approach that takes racial identity as an explanation of sexual crime. By producing different time-place contexts, echo works to question essentialist categorizations of "women," "girls," and "asylum seekers" in these narratives. In this way, the echo does its analytic work (Scott, 2001, p. 287) to unessentialize evidence from experience by accumulating and enlarging it. As such, it can produce understanding of a sexual crime away from a single racial encounter to historically and socially formed longer trajectory of sexism in the society.

Ideally, then, echo in the digital context can produce a space of an anti-essentialist interrogation through temporal and reflective delay. However, in the fast-moving hybrid media environment, there is no guarantee that echo operates as an unessentializing and transformative force. Echoes may easily be lost or detached from their contexts. They may become recompiled in ways that feed reductionist and essentialist narratives.

In this case study, echoes remained scattered, without achieving the transformative effect of collective response. Although feminist research has seen potential in social media participation, Fenton and Barassi (2011) argue that the individualized structure of social media with attention on self-representation and personal politics

crumbles many collective forms of action. Digital environment nurtures performative identity politics, endless self-presentation, and attentive distinction in ways that tends to serve erosion of unity with the advent of multiplicity, cacophonia, and unreliability of weak ties (Fenton, 2016, p. 40; Marwick & boyd, 2011; Thumim, 2017). The crucial question is whether these processes lead to increasing essentialist divides and fragmentation or toward multiplicity and interaction between different groups and new alliances. The hybrid media environment operates with combination of old and new, algorithmically organized logics that impact how different voices become heard. Increasingly, activists and politicians are also aware of how to play the algorithm. This speaks of the inequal and complex workings of power in the hybrid media environment. The 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 organized spread of the politics of fear on digital media has shaped the political culture and policies across the national contexts. In addition, the sensitivity of the postings and the organized attacks against feminists and women in general on digital media may produce a threshold for such participation (Nikunen, 2018; see also Boulia & Carri, 2017)[4].

Even in a hybrid media event, in the conflictual space of digital logics, the ability to act as the primary definer (Hall et al., 1978) seems to make a difference. In the Oulu case, the echoes were not able to turn the direction of the debate away from the racial explanation and the idea of a nation under attack. In mainstream media, the perspectives on the case were driven by exclusionary solidarity that foregrounded immigration, rather than deep-rooted sexism, was the problem to be dealt with.

Conclusions

As Barbie Zelizer (2018) 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" (p. 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 racialization 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 recognized something in the Oulu case, something that resonated with past experiences of sexual harassment and general sexist atmosphere of the Finnish society.

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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 a 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 (2017), 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.

As such, these responses have been attempts to widen the debate from simple racialization to the wider structures and histories of sexism.

I have treated these responses and postings with the concept of echo, as something that could be explored as *digital echo*. There are four elements that I consider central to echo in digital culture.

First, the temporal dimension, the delay, is central to echo. It provides a space for a personal, self-reflexive exploration of experience as well as a more collective interrogation of an event from a historical perspective (Zelizer, 2018). In other words, going backward in time may open up and question the dominant logics of an event in the present (Sreberny, 2016). For example, my experience narrated at the beginning of this article 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 a series of other echoes that resonate with particular behaviors and powers surrounding sexual harassment and violence. The methodological choice to use my experience as an example risks sidelining the focus of the Oulu case; however, the temporal space in between these two cases and other narrated experiences is, I believe, the productive, interrogative space of the echo.

Second, echo reflects a feeling of dissonance (Hemmings, 2012), a gap between one's own experience and the representation in the public. 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. Dissonance connects with reflexive exploration that situates 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, p. 107).

Third, echo points out that evidence from experience can offer solidaristic resonance, treating the victims, as well as racialized groups and communities, without predefined stereotypes and prejudice. Importantly, echo works to undo the racial bind and the identification of racialized subjects as the only 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 to tackle sexual crime and violence, without making it a political issue that sidelines the experience of abuse and the chance to help the victims.

Fourth, the hybrid media environment offers a productive space for echoes to emerge; however, it does so with affective and 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 because of its algorithmic 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 various platforms and expand beyond the bounded publics. Furthermore, the hybrid media environment operates as a stage for the struggle over collective memory and therefore echo needs to resist the affective, affirmative logics of those struggles to maintain its interrogative space.

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 polarized public debate. However, there is a true challenge in digital media: How can echo operate as an unessentializing, interrogative, yet collective force on digital media without being caught on the affirmative logics of echo chambers?

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 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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