

Phenomenology and Feminist Philosophical Intervention in Genocide

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The recognition that sexual atrocities can be acts of genocide is now becoming a new common sense (e.g., *International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda*). Traditionally, they were overlooked, for instance in the Holocaust and the ensuing Genocide Convention, but this changed with Bosnia, which made it possible to identify these atrocities in later genocides like Rwanda and Darfur. I argue that the variety of activities, grounded in survivor testimonies that brought sex-specific experiences of genocide to the light of day in Bosnia and precipitated this shift in humanity's awareness, is phenomenological. I begin with a first-hand account of these efforts in which I played a central role, efforts that culminated in a landmark lawsuit in New York City (*Kadic v. Karadzic*) that, for the first time, got sexual atrocities recognized as acts of genocide under international law. I describe the philosophical move of incorporating these phenomena into and changing our traditional concept of genocide; and the initial failure of international institutions to recognize them because these institutions *ideologically* applied pre-existing concepts onto the phenomena, which obscured them. I conclude with an alliance between indigenous and North American feminists that helped pull this reality out of concealment and yielded our lawsuit. Finally, I show how this activity manifests a de-absolutized version of Hegel's idea about the worldly sources of shifts in our understanding of oppression and Heidegger's phenomenology, where thinking in response to lived experience may precipitate a "crisis" in our existing concept of an issue; an approach he contrasts with metaphysics' ideological concealment of phenomena.