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GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN BOSNIA: A REVIEW STUDY

Abstract

This review article aims to investigate gender-based violence in wartime and post-war Bosnia. While the existing literature exclusively focuses on the relationship between gender and nationalism, this article rather addresses the psychological and economic violence against women in Bosnia. By adopting a continuum approach, this study uncovers how different forms of violence against women interact with each other from the conflict to the post-conflict contexts. Through a literature survey, this study depicts how gender-based violence has been reproduced from past to present in the case of Bosnia. In discussing gender-based violence, it dwells upon the intersections between mass rapes, forced pregnancy and traumatization. As the main argument, this article contends that sexual violence during the war triggered the spiral of violence and further led to stigmatization and marginalization of these women in the post-war context. It is especially argued that the persistent public stigma is the most blatant manifestation of psychological violence against female rape victims. In addition, it is shown that the overlapping processes of conflict, patriarchy and neoliberalization have led to a series of economic injustices, such as, in the form of the dispossession, poverty and exclusion of women in Bosnia. This article overall suggests establishing linkages between sexual, psychological and economic violence against women during the conflict and post-conflict processes.

Keywords: Bosnia, gender-based violence, psychological violence, political economy

Öz

Bu değerlendirme makalesi, Bosna'da savaşı sırasındaki ve sonrasındaki toplumsal cinsiyete dayalı şiddeti incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Mevcut literatür yoğunlukla toplumsal cinsiyet ve milliyetçilik arasındaki ilişkiye odaklanırken, bu makale daha ziyade Bosnalı kadınların maruz kaldığı psikolojik ve ekonomik şiddeti araştırmaktadır. Süreklilik yaklaşımını benimseyen bu çalışma, Bosna'da kadınlara yönelen farklı şiddet biçimlerinin çatışma ve çatışma sonrası bağlamlarda birbiriyle nasıl etkileşime girdiğini ortaya koymaktadır. Literatür taramasına dayanan bu çalışma, toplumsal cinsiyete dayalı şiddetin farklı biçimlerinin Bosna özelinde geçmişten günümüze nasıl yeniden





üretildiğini göstermektedir. Toplumsal cinsiyete dayalı şiddeti tartışırken, toplu tecavüzler, zoraki gebelik ve travmatizasyon süreçleri arasındaki ilişkiler irdelenmektedir. Ana argüman olarak, savaş sırasındaki cinsel şiddetin şiddet sarmalını tetiklediği ve savaş sonrasında kadınların damgalanmasına ve marjinalleştirilmesine yol açtığı ileri sürülmektedir. Özellikle, damgalanmanın kadına yönelik psikolojik şiddetin en açık biçimi olduğu iddia edilmektedir. Bunun yanında, savaş, patriyarka ve neoliberalleşme süreçlerinin Bosna’da kadınlara yönelik ekonomik adaletsizliklere – mülksüzleştirilme, yoksullaştırma ve dışlama biçimlerinde– sebep olduğu gösterilmektedir. Bu makale, genel olarak çatışma esnasında ve sonrasındaki süreçlerde kadınlara yönelik cinsel, psikolojik ve ekonomik şiddet arasında bağlantı kurmanın mümkün olduğunu ileri sürmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Bosna, toplumsal cinsiyete dayalı şiddet, psikolojik şiddet, politik ekonomi

Introduction

During the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia, it is estimated that about 140 thousand people were killed, and almost 4 million people were displaced (International Center for Transitional Justice 2009). Women were one of the most vulnerable groups during wartime, as they were subjected to sexual and other forms of violence. It is estimated that at least 20.000 women were raped in the Bosnian War between 1992 and 1995 (Jahn 2005). In 2001, almost 10 years after the war, the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia recognized sexual violence and rape as crimes against humanity in 2001. The literature on the subject generally acknowledges that the sexual violence against Bosnian Muslim women was a pre-planned policy of the Serbian command (Cigar 1995, Iacobelli 2009). Most of the perpetrators of the sexual crimes were indeed the members of the Serbian army and police forces, as they confined and abused the Bosnian women in detention centers for long periods (Human Rights Watch 1998). Analyzing the dynamics of sexual violence, many scholars show that mass rapes were used as a tool of ethnic cleansing and practice of communal destruction, especially regarding the fact the rapes during the Bosnian war aimed at impregnating women (Fisher 1996, Iacobelli 2009, Kelleci 2017).

Only a small number of perpetrators have seriously been punished until today and thousands of Bosnian rape victims are still waiting for justice (Sarsılmaz 2021). Amnesty International underlines the fact that “a lot of police officers who allegedly raped still hold their positions, which prevents the victims from reporting the crime” (Zuvela 2009). As of 2018, only 3 Serbian army members were sentenced to prison (Bağ 2018). Therefore, the prosecution of sexual crimes continues to be a problematic issue in the case of Bosnia. Due to the long-lasting injustice, rape victims have kept their silence mainly because of the persistent feeling of insecurity and the fear of stigmatization until recently. Some female war victims cannot apply to the government for health care, psychological support, or social security today (Husić et al. 2014: 128-131). In addition to the sexual violence during the war, Bosnian women have faced multiple forms of violence –most notably, stigmatization, marginalization, poverty and exclusion– in the transition from the conflict to the post-conflict settings (Kuzmanović and





Pajvančić-Cizelj 2020). It is argued that the neoliberal restructuring of the economy and privatizations of public goods and services aggrandized the gender-based violence in Bosnia (Elson 2001, Pugh 2002, Kuzmanović and Pajvančić-Cizelj 2020). Bosnian women who had been already traumatized during the war have to large extent been excluded from labor markets could not access education and social security against the backdrop of neoliberalization (Razavi 2012).

Departing from this discussion, this review article aims to explore gender-based violence during and after the Bosnian war. While the previous literature has exclusively focused on the nexus between gender and nationalism, this article draws attention to the psychological and economic violence against women in Bosnia. By adopting a continuum approach, this article emphasizes the persistence of gender-based violence in Bosnia. The continuum approach “allows scholars and practitioners to understand violence across social and geographical time. [In] this perspective, violence does not remain fixed in one moment or one act. Rather, it acquires different meanings, effects, and affects through individual and community experiences” (Kostovicova 2020: 252). Women who had experienced sexual assaults during the war have been exposed to the overlapping processes of traumatization, stigmatization, marginalization, poverty, deprivation and exclusion in post-war Bosnia. The interlinkages between multiple forms of oppression towards women during and after the war requires using the intersectionality perspective (Hankivsky 2022). It is thereby not only enough to address the violent experiences (including sexual violence) women faced during the conflict but also the intersecting inequalities and injustices they experience in the post-conflict context.

This article investigates the overlapping processes of sexual, psychological and economic violence against Bosnian women from the war to the post-war settings. In the following sections, this article firstly analyzes the historical background of the Bosnian war, and then the scope and dynamics of the sexual violence. This section specifically addresses the mass rapes during the war. Secondly, this article develops a critical theoretical framework on sexual violence during the war. The third and fourth sections discuss respectively psychological violence and economic violence against Bosnian women in the post-war context.

1. History of the Conflict in the Bosnia-Herzegovina

The Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was established after World War II. It consisted of six nation-states: Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Slovenia. Serbs, Croats and Bosnian Muslims were recognized as “nationalities” and had equal status under the federal structure. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the rising ethnic nationalisms vis-à-vis the collapse of the Soviet regime resulted in the dissolution of the League of the Communists of Yugoslavia. Although Slovenia and Croatia achieved independence in a relatively easier way, the declaration of independence was a very





problematic issue for Bosnia-Herzegovina because of its multiethnic composition. According to the 1991 census report, 44 percent of the Bosnian population was Muslim, 31 percent was Orthodox Serbian, and 17 percent was Roman Catholic Croatian (Cigar 1995: 5). It was the lack of agreement between Muslim, Croatian and Serbian actors that led to the eruption of civil war in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Although the leaders of Muslim and Croatian communities agreed to claim their co-independence on October 15, 1991, Serbs objected to this decision. Instead, Serbs established the *Assembly of Serbs of Bosnia-Herzegovina* in October 1991, and later, declared the *Serb Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina* in December 1991. In response, the Croats declared their independence and established the *Croatian Community of Herzeg-Bosna*.

The armed conflicts between Serbs, Muslims and Croats erupted in April 1992 and ended in November 1995 in Bosnia-Herzegovina. “[W]hile it is true that the Balkans had a history of ethnic conflicts, ancient hatreds did not lie at the root causes to the Bosnian conflict in 1992” (Iacobelli 2009: 263). The civil war was triggered by the territorial claims of nationalist actors. Before the war, the political elites reproduced historical grievances, such as Slobodan Milosevic organized nationalistic-irredentist propaganda to expand Serbian territory and form “a greater Serbia” (Black 2002). However, “in the civil war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, which broke out after the declarations of independence of the new states, not only were there confrontations of Serbs with Moslems and Croats, but also Moslems with Croats, and even Moslems with Moslems” (Mrvic-Petrovic 1995: 15). As a matter of fact, an armed conflict between Muslims and Croats broke out in September 1992. In 1993, almost 70 percent of the Bosnian lands were controlled by the *Republika Srpska* (i.e., the Serb Republic). Serbs killed thousands of Bosnian Muslims with the aim of ethnic cleansing between 1992 and 1995. Only during the Srebrenica massacre, the Serbian army killed more than 8000 Bosnian Muslims – including children. It is estimated that about 100.000 people were killed, and 1.8 million people were displaced during the Bosnian War between 1992 and 1995 (Tabeau and Bijak 2005). The Dayton Peace Accords put an end to the conflict in November 1995.

2. The Darkest Turn in the Bosnian War: Mass Rapes

Rape was used as a weapon of war throughout the 20th century, as one of the most devastating examples took place in Bosnia. Current literature acknowledges that mass rapes of Bosnian women are an embedded war strategy of the Serbian command (Henry 2006). The fact that about 20.000-50.000 Bosnian women were raped during the war proves that the Serbian command systematically organized this policy (Pehlivan 2021). The reports of the international community indicate that “the research, planning and coordination of rape camps were a systemic policy of the Serbian government and military forces with the explicit intention of creating an ethnically pure state” (Salzman 2001: 73). Moreover, the document publicly known as RAM plan of 1991 uncovers the fact that mass rapes were intentionally organized in Bosnia. According to the RAM plan, the *Yugoslav National Army* developed





various tactics, including mass rapes, to replace Muslims from Bosnia Herzegovina (Iacobelli 2009: 278). Rapes are not random events but “the direct and planned consequence of conscious policy decisions taken by the Serbian establishment in Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina” (Cigar 1995: 4). In analyzing the case of Foca, Iacobelli (2009: 261) argues that “rape is more than a by-product of war: the act itself provides a vital function in the destruction and disgrace of the enemy” in the Bosnian war. She argues that

in Bosnia systemic and highly organized rape orchestrated by Bosnian Serbian command facilitated a program of terror, as well as a program of genocide [...] in the case of Bosnian Muslim women, they were specifically targeted by Serbian military forces in an intentional policy of genocidal rape meant to destroy the Muslim community of the nation (Iacobelli 2009: 264).

According to the author, the genocidal dimension of rapes in Bosnia needs to be discussed in three dimensions. Firstly, mass rapes were genocidal as they intended to create a terror environment and force Muslims to leave with no desire to return to the territories of trauma. Secondly, mass rapes were genocidal in the sense that they were used as an instrument of torture and murder. Thirdly, mass rapes were genocidal because of the forced impregnation policy. Most rape victims were held under confinement until abortion was no longer an option. The forced impregnation policy intends to destroy the Bosnian Muslim community (Iacobelli 2009).

Incidents which occurred at these rape camps also follow some typical patterns suggesting that they were run according to a Serbian policy. Foremost in suggesting that rape was being intentionally used by Serbian command to perpetrate genocide is testimony pointing to a policy of forced impregnation. Numerous accounts from victims reveal a Serbian intent to impregnate women. Victims scattered in various locations have testified that their rapists told them that they were to give birth to Serbian children (Iacobelli 2009: 275).

One of the most dramatic examples of mass rapes was taken place in Foca in 1992. Almost all witness accounts underline that a highly organized genocidal rape policy was put into practice in Foca. “What occurred in Foca at the Partizan Sports Hall was an exercise in public rape and public humiliation. Knowledge was widespread and acts were by no means the result of *ad hoc* individual actions” (Iacobelli 2009: 270). From the very beginning, men were put into prisons, while women, children and the elderly were confined in detention centers. Three days after the occupation of the town (on April 11, 1992), Serbian soldiers, police officers and members of paramilitary groups started to exercise rape. Women were categorized according to their ages and detained in different buildings. mass rapes continued until the end of 1993. It is difficult to estimate the exact number of rape victims, but we can cite a few figures to give a snapshot: 72 Muslim prisoners were confined to the Foca High School,





and about 50 of them (mostly young girls) were subjected to rape in July 1992. Victims narrated that they were raped every night either at the school or in a close apartment. The Foca High School continued to function as the rape camp until 13 July 1992, when the same rape victims were transferred to the Partizan Sports Hall and raped for more than a month there. Soldiers visited the Partizan Hall in groups, either raped women in the hall or took them to close buildings. Both the Foca High School and Partizan Sports Hall were guarded by Serbian police officers. The victims reported that it was the same men who were involved in mass rapes. Some women reported that they were raped more than 150 times in Foca High School and Partizan Sports Hall. Assessing the case of Foca, International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia decided that the mass rapes were carried out in a highly systemic fashion by the Serbian command. Beyond the mass rapes in Foca, thousands of other women were raped in front of their families in their own homes or detention centers across the country.

3. Feminist Perspective on Sexual Violence During the Bosnian War

Gender-making, war-making and nation-building processes are closely related to each other (Altınay 2004, Cockburn 2010). In the case of Bosnia, the female body turned into the battleground of men both figuratively and literally. Women had suffered from different forms of sexual violence and oppression during the Bosnian war, yet their experiences have become “socially invisible” over time in the post-war context (Nikolic-Ristanovic 2000: 21). Women could not openly speak about their experiences of sexual violence for a long time because of public stigma. Velioglu (2021) suggests that the effect and signs of violence have been scattered through time and in post-war Bosnia, and sometimes women’s articulation of violence could only be grasped through the minute details of everyday life.

Second-wave feminists attract attention to the fact that rape is not an individual crime but a political, ideological and cultural problem (Brownmiller 1975). They argue that rape is a pervasive “act of terror” (Mehrof and Kearon 1973). Feminist scholarship shows that “rape culture” has historical roots and aims at the patriarchal domination of women (Smith 2004: 174). During wartime, the hegemonic patriarchal norms impose that women are required to be protected as much as they belong to the men of the nation. In this respect, sexual crime against women symbolizes an attack on the masculinity of the nation and its body politics (Kelleci 2017). “Within male-female relationships, rape corresponds to the behavior of conquering troops on the occupied territories. Sexual conquest became an accepted evaluation of manhood, a manner of demonstrating dominance and superiority over women” (Nikolic-Ristanovic 2000: 47). The female body represents the enemy territory in the eyes of perpetrators. The act of rape entails highly symbolic aggression, as rapists consider that they attack directly against the most precious part of the enemy nation. “In war, a woman is raped because she represents *the female and ethnic other*, and her ethnic difference is defined by the man whose *property* she is, without taking into account her own ethnic origin” (Nikolic-





Ristanovic 2000: 65).

During the Bosnian war, the act of rape denotes the rapists' intention to construct their masculinity by attacking and humiliating enemy women, which become the symbol of the masculine nation. In this way, rapists aim to deconstruct the masculine pride of the enemy. That is why Bosnian men were often forced to watch the raping of their wives and daughters. "This communication between men became clear during the war in the former Yugoslavia, when buses with women in sixth, seventh or even higher months of pregnancy were sent over the enemy lines – frequently with cynical inscriptions on the vehicles, about the children who will be born" (Seifert 1994: 59). The significant point in this communication is that it aims to humiliate Bosnian men by sexually assaulting their women. Nikolic-Ristanovic (2000) argues that

rape was in order to expel a particular ethnic group from a particular area. This was demonstrated by the humiliation and dishonoring of the victim through rape in front of her relatives, in front of other prisoners, in public places or by forcing family members to rape each other. [...] Within that context, the rape of women with the aim of producing children of the enemy's nationality represents a means for the destruction of the foundation's of family life. In other words, rape is used as a tool to destroy the enemy (66-67).

This theoretical discussion shows that gender hierarchies and patriarchy are reproduced in the context of war. The patriarchal norms were reconstructed through sexual violence during the Bosnian war. While men keep fighting over the living bodies of women during the conflict, they declare their victories over the dead bodies of women in the post-conflict context. By following the feminist scholarship, it is possible to argue that rape and other forms of sexual violence are highly symbolic acts of patriarchal terror that oppress women during wartime.

4. Psychological Violence Against Women in Bosnia

Women did not only face sexual and other forms of sexual violence but also experience psychological violence during and after the Bosnian war. Psychological violence can be defined as "abuses of power in which one person attempts to devalue, restrict, or violate another person to maintain control, advantage, or position" (Good et al. 1995: 59). It is possible to suggest that sexual and psychological violence are closely associated with each other because the sexual violence directly or indirectly injure the dignity and integrity of women. This section argues that the most apparent face of psychological violence against women is the public stigma of rape in post-war Bosnia.

First and foremost, it is necessary to discuss the psychological problems of women who were sexually abused during the war. The current literature shows that sexual violence led to serious psychiatric and psychological disorders in women in the post-war period (Miller et al 2002, Klarić et al 2007). Just after the rape, the most frequent psychological symptoms were nausea, vomiting, headache, sweating, palpitations, and muscle pain. In the post-war period,





avoidance, negation, self-accusation, and suicidal ideas are very frequent among female rape victims (Henigsberg et al 2001; Lončar et al 2006). Miller et al (2002) indicate that “exposure to war-related violence was highly predictive” of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms. It is necessary to underline that thousands of women who had gotten pregnant after rape decided to get an “artificial” abortion. Their decision “to have an abortion was strongly predicted by suicidal thoughts and impulses” (Lončar et al. 2006). A relatively recent study shows that female rape victims in Bosnia still suffer from severe depression, anxiety, somatization, obsessive-compulsiveness, social phobia, PTSD, and sexual dysfunctions (Hasanović & Ćatić 2012).

Although it is possible to interpret rape and forced pregnancy as two sides of the same coin, the latter needs to be discussed distinctively because the children of the women impregnated through rape would be from the “enemy” nationality within a patriarchal point of view. The “unwanted children” become everlasting symbols of suffering and trauma for the rape victims (Carpenter 2010). An ethnographic account on the subject shows that the rape victims abandoned their babies in hospitals and orphanages because they believed that these children would have reminded of the rape incident itself (Nikolic-Ristanovic 2000). In addition, the raped women are afraid of being stigmatized by the public, as the hegemonic patriarchal norms impose that rape is the guilt of women (Nikolic-Ristanovic 2000) since rape continues to injure the fragile masculinity of men in the post-war environment. Moreover, most of the abandoned children themselves suffer from a public stigma, as they are referred as “children of hate” by the public (Pehlivan 2021). However, it is also necessary to remind that, although the rape victims left their children behind, they could not avoid self-blame and self-stigmatization (Nikolic-Ristanovic 2000: 70).

A recent report shows that the fear of stigmatization resurfaces as the most critical subject in the narratives of female rape victims (Husić et al. 2014). Most women continue to keep their silence because rape is still a “taboo” subject due to the hegemonic patriarchal norms (Husić et al. 2014: 80). Especially, if female victims had to live in the setting of the rape incident, they became more silent and could not tell their stories to anyone because of the fear of stigma and social exclusion. Some women try to externalize their experience of rape in order to protect themselves from further stigmatization. “It is also well known that women who have survived rape talk about it very reluctantly and when they decide to talk, they use the third person” (Nikolic-Ristanovic 2000: 24). Delić and Avdibegović (2020) argue that

socially and culturally imposed notions of dishonor and shame related to rape, as well as fragmentation and destruction of the collective and family structure, led to stigmatization and social exclusion of the victims, who reported that they have contend with the ‘double stigma’ of being victim and having a mental health problem (77).

The narratives of female rape victims indicate the psychological symptoms of





depression, social phobia and sexual dysfunction, as many told that they often could not show any affection towards their families and friends, could not trust anyone, could not sleep because of constant fear, avoid having intercourse with their husbands and partners and have suicidal thoughts in everyday life (Husić et al. 2014: 81-85). Some female rape victims told they could not feel attached to their children and had no feelings of motherhood at all (Husić et al. 2014: 88).

Therefore, instead of only discussing past trauma, it is necessary to investigate the traumatic impacts of the war on women from a long-term perspective. This necessitates to focus on the “sequential traumatization” of the Bosnian women (Husić et al. 2014: 30). This perspective tells us the traumatic event was not over in their memories, yet its consequences have been compounded mainly because of post-war stressors in the everyday lives of women. Their traumas have been reproduced by the continuing processes of marginalization, stigmatization and exclusion. “Survivors of sexualized violence in war are almost always in a situation in which their traumatization process continues in the post-war period and in exile, too” (Husić et al. 2014: 30). In addition, it is necessary to recognize the fact that the transmission of trauma from the war victims to their children has led to the transgenerational trauma in the post-war Bosnia.

This discussion shows that psychological violence persists in the lives of Bosnian women. Women were not only traumatized through sexual and other forms of violence during the war, but they also continue to be traumatized through hegemonic patriarchal norms and even excluded and marginalized by the public in post-war Bosnia. Finally, it should be noted that psychological violence triggers a spiral of empowerment of women, which also necessitates looking at gender-based violence through the lens of political economy.

5. Gender-Based Violence in Bosnia: A Political Economy Perspective

Sexual violence during the war and psychological violence after the war have multiplied the social injustices and inequalities women face in post-war Bosnia. Since the 2000s, the country has experienced the neoliberalization of a war-torn economy, in which privatizations and market reforms were conducted in accordance with the demands of international financial institutions. (Pugh 2002, 467). It is likely to argue that not only the war but also the neoliberal restructuring of the economy has led to a welfare vacuum in Bosnia. In this process, informal economic activities, clientelistic relations and “mafia welfare” have become dominant (Pugh 2002, 472). Kuzmanović and Pajvančić-Cizelj (2020) argue that the combination of neoliberal economic policies, patriarchal norms, and nationalist ideologies has led to economic violence against women in post-war Bosnia. Regarding Bosnian women, they define economic violence as

structural oppression based on gender in the sphere of work, including a whole range of productive and reproductive activities taking place within and outside the household and local community: care work, domestic work,





subsistence and informal work, and different types of formal employment (Kuzmanović and Pajvančić-Cizelj 2020: 26).

By following an intersectionality approach, it is likely to argue that the overlapping processes of violence, displacement and dispossession during the war led to various inequalities after the war (UN Women 2019). According to Kostovicova et al. (2020), “war and post-war economic processes interact over time and co-constitute the material basis for the continuation of gender-based violence” (250). In the case of Bosnia, women have faced different forms of violence that are mutually dependent and reinforce each other from conflict to post-conflict contexts. In analyzing a group of Bosnian women who had been expelled from their hometowns during the war and then took refuge in Tuzla, Kleck (2006) finds out that the traumatic symptoms of the women have exponentially increased over time in a post-conflict setting (cited in Husić et al. 2014). Kleck attributes the increasing posttraumatic symptoms to eviction, displacement, domestic violence and the conditions of poverty. The female rape victims living in Tuzla told that, despite their hard work, they could not meet their ends, they could not buy enough food, they could not pay their rent, and they are afraid of being evacuated once again (Skjelsbaek 2006: 387-388). Bosnian women who had already been traumatized through sexual violence faced dispossession, exclusion and marginalization with the transition from a war economy to a neoliberal economy in Bosnia. It is likely to argue that the ongoing impoverishment in the post-war context resurrects the war-related traumas of women, which leads to sequential traumatization, especially among rape victims (Husić et al. 2014).

The lack of formal employment against the backdrop of neoliberal restructuring of the Bosnian economy has led to the economic precarity and vulnerability of women. The rate of female unemployment rose from 21.3 in 1991 to 34.9 in 2006 (World Bank 2022). Today, unemployment continues to be higher among low-skilled women. It is possible to say that Bosnian women are to large extent excluded from labor markets because of the hegemonic patriarchal norms. The drastic issue of female unemployment is also about women’s limited access to education after the war. Compared to other Balkan countries, the enrolment rates among girls in primary and secondary education are the lowest in Bosnia. “This contrasts with earlier historical periods and is a significant setback in women’s status in Bosnian society, and points to new forms of gendered structural inequalities” (Kostovicova et al. 2020: 260).

In the post-conflict context, the Bosnian state has continued to be dysfunctional for a long time in terms of welfare provision to women. They could not reach basic social necessities such as food, shelter, medicine and healthcare services. The lack of institutional capacity could be attributed to the neoliberal transformation of the economy in Bosnia.

Abundant evidence in feminist political economy studies shows how postwar economic recovery through neoliberal transition reproduces conditions of poverty, such as joblessness, and restricts access to social welfare for women





and men alike. Under these conditions, women's already marginalized socio-economic position leads to an increased vulnerability to male control and violence (Kostovicova et al. 2020: 255).

It is necessary to recognize that 90 percent of female rape victims experience domestic violence after the war (Simic 2016). Lack of formal employment and social security together with the dysfunctional state undermine "women's dependence on male breadwinners and subjects them to a normalization of gender-based violence" in Bosnia (Kostovicova et al. 2020: 261). As much as these women become dependent upon male breadwinners, they are exposed to domestic violence in Bosnia. Some scholars point out the "failed masculinities in the post-conflict context – when ex-fighters lose their previous social status primarily as a result of trauma, unemployment, or job loss – as a contributing and sometimes underlying factor in violence perpetrated against women" (Kostovicova et al. 2020: 260). In analyzing the current conditions of female rape victims, Medica Zenica emphasizes that "violence against women continues to be a huge problem in Bosnian society. Alongside the consequences of the war, reasons for this violence include poverty, unemployment, shattered families, and prevailing patriarchal structures and gender inequality within society" (Husić et al. 2014: 11).

This discussion shows that sexual, psychological and economic violence against women have mutually reinforced each other during both the conflict and post-conflict contexts in Bosnia. Bosnian women who had already been abused and traumatized during the war have to face poverty, exclusion and marginalization in post-war Bosnia. It is possible to conclude that the sexual violence during the war triggered the spiral of violence and multiplied the psychological violence (i.e., stigmatization) and economic violence (i.e., dispossession and poverty) against women in the post-war context.

Conclusion

While the previous studies exclusively focus on the nexus of gender and nationalism, this review article attracted attention to economic and psychological violence against women in Bosnia. It is argued that there is a continuum of gender-based violence from the conflict to post-conflict processes. The overlapping processes of conflict, patriarchy and neoliberalization have aimed at disempowering women in Bosnia.

This article argued that sexual violence was an embedded war strategy in the case of Bosnia since mass rapes went hand in hand with the forced impregnation policy. Sexual violence inflicted deep wounds in the lives of Bosnian women. They often have serious psychological problems. Depression, anxiety, social phobia and sexual dysfunction continue to be major problems among female rape victims. These women continue to suffer from stigmatization because of hegemonic patriarchal norms. In addition, it is argued that the Bosnian women's sufferings and traumas have been compounded by displacement, dispossession, poverty, exclusion and marginalization processes in the post-war context.





For future research, this article uncovers the necessity of developing social psychology and political economy perspectives on gender-based violence in Bosnia in order to establish the missing linkages between violence, oppression, injustices and inequalities that Bosnian women experience in the past and present. Ethnographic researchers in the future may help us to understand the interactions between rapes during the war, dispossession in the transition period and intersecting impoverishment, fragile masculinity and domestic violence after war.

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