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Drawing on the continuum: a war and post-war political economy of gender-based violence in Bosnia and Herzegovina

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ABSTRACT

Current understandings of why and how gender-based violence continues beyond the end of conflict remain siloed along theoretical and disciplinary lines. Recent scholarship has addressed the neglected structural dimension when examining the incidence and variation of post-conflict gender-based violence. In particular, continuum of violence and feminist political economy perspectives have offered accounts of gender-based violence during and after conflict. However, these approaches overlook how war and post-war economic processes interact over time and co-constitute the material basis for the continuation of gender-based violence. The war and post-war political economy perspective that we leverage examines critically the distinction, both in theory and practice, between global and local dynamics, and between formal and informal actors in post-conflict societies. Exposing these neglected structural and historical interconnections with evidence from post-conflict Bosnia and Herzegovina, we demonstrate that the material basis of gender-based violence is a cumulative result of political and socio-economic dynamics along the war-to-peace trajectory. Our findings point to the need to be attentive to the enduring material consequences of interests and incentives formed through war, and to the impact of post-war global governance ideologies that transform local conditions conducive to gender-based violence.

KEYWORDS Gender; violence; continuum; political economy; Bosnia

Introduction

Even though Bosnia and Herzegovina¹ has been at peace for over 20 years, everyday life is impacted by the consequences of the Yugoslav wars – a condition exacerbated by neoliberal policies pursued during externally led peace building (Donais 2005; Pugh 2017). While Bosnia is accurately described as a

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post-socialist and post-war country, scholarship on post-conflict processes has struggled to incorporate these two aspects of transition, especially in analyses of gender-based violence. These two transition trajectories are at the core of Bosnia's ongoing political crisis and paralysis (Belloni 2009; Kartsonaki 2016; Deiana 2018). Utilizing the concept of a continuum of violence and applying a political economy perspective, our study seeks to better understand the persistence of widespread gender-based violence against women in post-conflict contexts. We are cognizant that a gender dimension of violence should not exclude male victims or conflate female and male victimization. Pointing out that established understandings of sexed bodies and gender relations cannot simply be applied in all contexts of sexual and gender-based violence, scholars have suggested that the experiences of violence vary across time and space and according to various axes of difference (Carpenter 2006; Drumond 2018; Féron 2018). We take inspiration from this, and study women victims of violence as a contribution to emerging work on women, peace, and security that aims to make visible women's often marginalized experiences of war and of its aftermath in an effort to make changes to policy and practice (Deiana 2018; Doeland and Skjelsbaek 2018). In particular, we direct our attention to socio-economic and governance policies, and structures that produce the conditions for violence against women in its mutually reinforcing forms: structural, direct, and cultural/symbolic (Galtung 1969, 1990).

Our analysis makes a contribution to structural explanations of post-conflict gender-based violence. We offer a broader theorization than feminist political economy approaches that focus on the political economy of war or on the gendered impact of neoliberal policies in post-conflict (as well as non-conflict) countries. The political economy perspective that we adopt queries the distinction, both in theory and practice, between war and post-war political and economic conditions, between local and global dynamics, and between formal and informal actors in post-conflict societies. Consequently, we need to understand the incentives and interests of local actors that are formed and transformed during the transition from war to peace. We focus on the material basis of gender-based violence that is a cumulative result of local and global political and socio-economic dynamics along the war-to-peace trajectory.

Our methodology involves a qualitative multi-method analysis of multiple sources of data on gender-based violence in Bosnia, while heeding requirements for ethical research practice (Boesten and Henry 2018). We draw on field notes and observations from workshops and informal interviews with practitioners from Bosnia specializing in support for victims of gender-based violence held in the UK and in Bosnia in 2017. They also informed the follow-up research that included semi-structured interviews with human rights activists and analysts in Bosnia in 2018. Through these interactions

we learnt that experiences of violence “most often are of different types, and different causes,” of which economic are most prominent.² These oft-repeated insights underpinned our critical use of the continuum of violence perspective to better reflect and explain the diversity of women’s experiences. Systematic analysis of local newspapers, laws, and reports issued by governmental bodies and international organizations as well as international and local civil society organizations was used to triangulate observational and interview data.

This article is structured as follows. We begin by reviewing how the structural dimension of the continuum of violence has been theorized and outlining how a war and post-war political economy perspective allows us to explain the material basis of post-conflict gender-based violence. We then analyze different forms of gender-based violence in Bosnia to provide evidence of the complex nature of the material foundations of everyday life and their effects. In conclusion, we make the case for incorporating the analysis of war and post-war structures, incentives, and interests into a continuum of violence approach.

A structural dimension in the continuum of violence

The idea of a continuum of violence has gained new status in discussions of gender-based violence in conflict and post-conflict settings (Stanko 1985, 1990; Gray 2019). The continuum has been variously theorized as a metaphor with which to think about the multiple forms of violence enacted upon the basis of gender, especially in relation to violence against women, as well as for thinking about continuity and change more generally. The continuum allows scholars and practitioners to understand violence across social and geographical time. From 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. Simply put, violence occurs and has impact over various stages of history, which are particularly visible in post-conflict contexts.

Feminist scholars have defined the continuum in a number of ways. Kelly (1987, 1988) suggests, in specific relation to sexual violence, that it is a “common-sense” way of understanding the scope of events that constitute sexual violence as well as the varied and ongoing impacts of such experiences on women’s lives (Kelly 1987, 44). Kelly’s ground-breaking theorization draws attention to wider systems and structures that undergird such phenomena, having rejected simple statistical models of the continuum. Instead, her critique suggests that merely plotting the incidence in terms of frequency and linear patterns is not suitable for studying survivors’ experiences. Kelly (1987, 1988) uses the continuum to politicize “intimate” violence and women’s lives, and, above all, to contextualize women’s experiences across

a range of behaviors, incidents, and experiences, embedding them in structural rather than purely individual or emotional explanations.

Scholars such as Cockburn generally define a continuum of violence as a time-based one, where the line of continuity is between phases of peace and conflict (pre-war, war-fighting, peace-making, and post-war) (Cockburn 2004, 24–44). In this conceptualization, the continuum holds within it the possibility of examining the cyclical nature of patriarchal violence, drawing connections across different forms and manifestations of gendered power over and above women. A Venn diagram can be visualized where some forms of violence are connected at their ideological roots, while other new forms emerge out of the specific temporal moments of conflict or other points of intersection. Importantly, Cockburn (2014, 357) acknowledges that the continuum is also intersected by both space and place (where the violence occurs), scale (how it is inflicted: by person or a weapon), and type or kind (how it manifests: direct or indirect, cultural or institutional). These are important additions to Kelly's conceptualization as they broaden the theorization to consider the influence of *where* violence occurs. It is not just about the physical surroundings of specific acts of violence, such as the home or the street, but the geopolitical locations of gendered forms of violence that allow this to occur in the first place.

Krause (2015) proposes that the complexities of gender relations along the war-to-peace continuum demonstrate an array of vulnerabilities in relation to the continuation of the exercise of gendered forms of power. The continuum of violence is maintained as a result of three factors: gendered power structures, ineffective or insufficient law enforcement, and traumatic events (Krause 2015, 16). In this way, Krause's research confirms the need to stretch the continuum concept so that it can hold all of the different forms of violence that constitute multiple subjectivities of survival. Our reading of the continuum is related to the work of Jacqui True, who argues that the political and economic structures of capitalism make women more vulnerable to various forms of violence than is generally recognized. In doing so, True (2012) makes an indirect contribution to theorizing the continuum of violence. She suggests that where, which, and how violence occurs against women cannot be understood independently of economic policies of the state, the gendered division of labor, and the gender-specific dimensions of war (True 2010). This line of argument is extended by Alsaba and Kapilashrami (2016, 12), who demonstrate how locat- edness (in all aspects) is connected with forms of violence to which women may be subject during and after conflict. Fundamentally, as Galtung (1990, 291) has argued, different forms of violence are interdependent and mutually reinforcing; they are manifest in systemic vulnerability, suffering, and alienation that fall disproportionately on women.

These approaches to the continuum of violence recognize the need to consider structural dimensions in the wider political context of victims' lives in

order to understand how violence functions at multiple (macro, meso, and micro) levels. They demonstrate that a structural dimension is not only important in accounting for the incidence of gender-based violence and its variety in post-conflict contexts, but is also essential to resistance against patriarchy and the possibility of social transformation. The political economy perspectives in these accounts explain compellingly *types* and *spaces* of gender-based violence. What we lack in theorizing the continuum is an analysis of the political economy across war and peace that defines the structural conditions and accounts comprehensively not just for different manifestations of harm against women but also how the incidences of structural, direct, and cultural/symbolic violence interact. True's work goes furthest in this direction. Nonetheless, much of this scholarship overlooks how the local context is shaped by the political economy of war and post-war neoliberal transition while considering pre-war socio-economic, political, and cultural conditions. In the next section, we draw on insights from theorizing war and post-war political economy to contextualize the material basis on which the continuum of violence operates.

A political economy of war and its aftermath

If, as Krause (2015) suggests, power relations are central to understanding post-conflict gender-based violence, then a thorough understanding of the reconfiguration of power along the war-to-peace continuum is needed. From a political economy perspective, war is a social phenomenon that augments material inequalities, and is folded into the "underside" of neoliberal globalization processes (Jung 2003; Cockayne 2010). As a system of power, profit, and protection (Cramer 2006; Keen 2008), and a form of social order, war is key to the analysis of the material basis of the continuum of violence against women.

When the rule of law disintegrates and the formal economy contracts, the criminal and illegal activities of a war economy proliferate (Le Sage 1998). A war economy operates transnationally. It relies on illicit regional and global flows of money, people, and goods (Heupel 2006; Wennmann 2011). Its protagonists are part of criminalized politico-military structures connected to the global economy. Embedded within global resource flows, local war economies blur the boundaries between what constitutes the local and the global, and the formal and the informal. They reorder societies, produce new incentives through neoliberal globalization, and lead to specific local transformations.

Wartime reallocation of assets and resources, as well as opportunities for rapid wealth creation, produce new and extreme forms of inequality which spill into the post-conflict period (Staniland 2012). Alongside an emergent class of (male) rent-seeking war entrepreneurs, large segments of the population are unable to meet their basic needs. The most vulnerable among them are often women who may have been victims of wartime sexual violence and displacement and lost their livelihood and male breadwinner security (Kondylis 2010;

O'Reilly 2012). Neoliberal economic policies, practices, and norms in the context of institutional dysfunction after a war reinforce harmful conditions for women. Wartime actors, including the perpetrators of rape and other war crimes, are often integrated in post-war structures of authority, having secured immunity and impunity (O'Reilly 2018). Ensuing governance practices afford privilege to men and women of certain identities, but foremost to those linked to wartime elites. Consequently, peace building morphs into "war by other means" during which local authorities selectively implement externally mandated economic reforms, while privileging certain actors and interests over others (Goodhand 2004). The outcome is peace building as a manifestly polarizing, exclusionary, and gendered process. Poverty, exclusion, and marginalization are distinct features of an emergent neoliberal capitalism in parts of the global system recovering from conflict and not simply a side-effect of a temporary slippage in implementing a standard model of liberal peace.

Traditional feminist political economy has not always interrogated the linkages between war and peace, and between formal and informal actors, and institutions in accounting for gender-based violence in post-conflict settings. Specifically, it has not engaged conceptually the blurring of distinctions among political, military, economic, and criminal elites in the context of contemporary wars (Le Sage 1998; Goodhand 2004). Therefore, we argue that the connections between the local and the global and the exacerbation of social, political, and economic inequalities associated with this form of emergent neoliberal capitalism – whose foundations are laid by wartime capital accumulation – are worthy of further scrutiny. While scholars engage with neoliberal, transitional, and conflict dynamics to account for gender-based violence (Đurić Kuzmanović and Pajvančić-Cizelj 2018), the challenge has been to go beyond treating them as parallel or sequential processes, and examine how these dynamics co-constitute the material basis of gender-based violence along the continuum from war to peace.

Abundant evidence in feminist political economy studies shows how post-war 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. What needs further attention is how these socio-economic and governance conditions characteristic of this neoliberal capitalist model, which integrates conflict-affected societies into global governance structures, help to entrench patriarchal beliefs and gender hierarchies. Post-conflict gender-based violence ought to be understood as occurring at the intersection of these processes, given that formal and informal as well as local and global dynamics simultaneously shape local conditions (see Figure 1). This perspective challenges both singular, continuum of violence, and feminist political economy explanations of gender-based violence in post-conflict

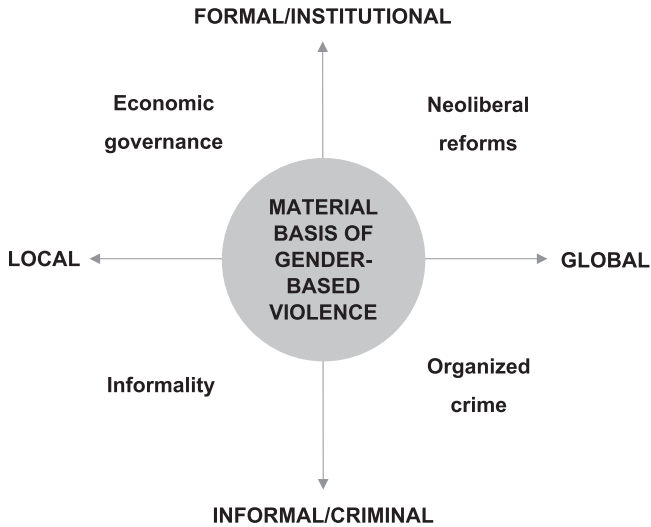


Figure 1. War and post-war political economy and the continuum of violence.

contexts, which maintain an exclusive analytical focus on only one of the quadrants in [Figure 1](#). In contrast, our empirical analysis reveals the interconnectedness that is key to understanding the material basis of gender-based violence in all of its forms in a post-war context.

Gender-based violence in Bosnia in war and peace

Violence against women in post-conflict Bosnia is deeply implicated in the political economy of the war (1992–1995). Sexual violence, including rape, against women and men was a prominent feature of this conflict. In the case of women, it occurred on a mass scale (Clark 2017). It was integral to a broader campaign of the conduct of war and intimidation of the civilian population, as well as a result of opportunistic behavior in the context of the breakdown of law and order (Hansen 2000). The Dayton Peace Agreement (DPA) entrusted the implementation of mandatory economic reforms to the former warring factions (Merdzanovic 2017). These actors were central to shaping the post-conflict order in which gender-based violence occurs (Pugh 2002; Belloni, Kappler, and Ramovic 2016; Deiana 2018).

While there are difficulties in establishing precise figures (Babović et al. 2013; Lazarević and Tadić 2018, 7), research points to a steady increase in certain forms of gender-based violence in Bosnia since the end of the war (Fena 2017). The existing data is based on different methodologies used by the state and civil-society organizations, and produced separately by Bosnia's two entities, Republika Srpska and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Savić 2013). Statistics by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) differ from

the data available to the police, because security institutions such as the police continue to be mistrusted, but especially so by women (Mucović 2017). According to estimates, over 50 percent of women over the age of 15 in the country have suffered some form of violence (Matić 2017). New patterns of victimization have emerged: victims of violence are increasingly younger, including school-age girls, and violence inflicted by small arms, such as “Kalashnikov” rifles, is rising (UNDP/SSEESAC 2007, 3; Žurnal 2009; Isović 2012). The proliferation of these weapons is a direct consequence of armed conflict, as many soldiers brought weapons and other explosive devices home after demobilization. Furthermore, these weapons circulate widely today and are easily available on the black market (Kržalić 2011, 8).

Violence against women in Bosnia also has to be understood in the context of social stigma – itself is a form of symbolic violence, which “can be used to justify or legitimize direct or structural violence” (Galtung 1990, 291). The persistence of patriarchal norms is reflected in the practice of disowning women who decide to leave their violent partners. Close relatives, such as brothers, and the broader community may reject women for “breaking” the family unit (Bljesak 2017). A woman is commonly seen as responsible for the very violence committed against her (CEDAW 2005), which amnesties men and state institutions from responsibility (Matić 2017). Women are expected to be silent about intimate partner abuse, which in turn exacerbates their social isolation and subsequent vulnerability (cf. Majstorović 2011; Denda Borjan 2016; Mannergren Selimovic 2018).

As in many contexts, violence against women is tolerated as “socially acceptable behavior” (Jelin-Dizdar 2012), occurring in a triangle framed by “a patriarchal environment, silence and struggle for the family” (Matić 2017). These socio-economic constraints on women point to the importance of a structural explanation of gender-based violence in Bosnia.³ The continuum of violence reflects an expansion of both the type of violence (from domestic violence to enslavement) and the type of victim (from women in relationships to school-age girls). The material conditions in which violence occurs are the cumulative outcome of externally led economic policies pursued against the backdrop of Bosnia’s state and society that have been transformed by a criminalized war economy.

Liberal peace building in Bosnia has produced lasting instability. According to Kartsonaki (2016, 496–497), Bosnian society is characterized by an increasing number of political grievances owing to unrepresentative and exclusive governance institutions, unaddressed past traumas exacerbated by a lack of reconciliation and weak social cohesion, and huge economic inequalities augmented through corrupt institutions and processes (Donais 2005; Divjak and Pugh 2008; Piacentini 2018). The parties to this peace-building enterprise are the very political elites that benefit from the opportunities presented by the political settlement and the dysfunctional political and governance apparatus

that it has created (Deiana 2018, 37). As Gilbert and Mujanović (2015, 605–606) assert, “a political-economic order of inequality and dispossession” of the means of dignified livelihood has also diminished the agentive capacity of the local society to break this cycle. Women have been some of the main victims of these processes. While not intending to be prescriptive, we use the figure to capture the interconnectedness of the war and post-war political economy in our conceptual framing and to analyze the material basis of gender-based violence.

The material basis of gender-based violence: a political economy perspective

Gender-based violence and governance failures

Post-conflict gender-based violence in Bosnia takes place at the intersection of normative change and “bad” governance practices. Normative change consists of reforms of domestic laws in compliance with international norms, aimed at addressing gender dimensions of public policy (CEDAW 2005, 6–12; O’Reilly 2012; Mucović 2017) in general, and tackling domestic violence in particular. State dysfunction is marked by limited and uneven enforcement of these legal provisions aimed at protecting women and tackling gender-based violence. It also extends to related fields including legislation on small arms, organized crime, and with respect to socio-economic inequalities, including property legislation which is consequential for women’s access to economic opportunities. The flawed implementation of laws in the context of a weak post-conflict state is bound up with either non-existent or unreliable funding for policies that enhance women’s welfare and protection because they are considered as second-order priority (Pupavac 2005).

The failed implementation of the law on protection from domestic violence in Bosnia and Herzegovina’s two entities – the administrative units created by the DPA – exemplifies the gap between normative change and governance practices (Puljek-Shank 2017). The relevant laws comprise a series of protective measures, such as restraining or anti-stalking orders. However, on the rare occasions when such measures are approved by the courts, they are often not enforced (Bljesak 2017). For example, in the Federation, between 2006 and 2009, 391 requests were submitted, as a result of which only 161 women received protection (Savić 2013). Furthermore, there is no such legal framework applicable in the Brčko district, the third politico-administrative unit in Bosnia, which is a separate jurisdiction. The discrepancy in the application of the law means that violence against women is not taken seriously. Considering the additional structural conditions affecting women’s lives, a lack of legal protection impacts fundamentally on the multiple forms of violence that they suffer.

In 2008, the provision of shelter in safe houses was introduced as an additional measure of protection (Muftić, Deljković, and Fansher 2019).⁴ This measure is also rarely approved by the courts, in clear violation of official legislation. In addition, the allocated funding for safe houses is subject to complex procedures within multiple governance levels in Bosnia and is split between the state-level and local authorities (OSCE 2009, 13). An illustrative example is the case of the NGO Ženski centar (Women's Center) from Trebinje that has been advocating for the provision of a safe house for all victims of violence in eastern Herzegovina. The local authorities promised the NGO support to purchase land but then suddenly withdrew backing, after which the item was included in the budget only to be removed again during the municipal budgetary rebalancing. The initiative to address gender-based violence has been hampered by a combination of the lack of funding at the municipal level and the missing commitment of the local authorities to tackle violence against women (Denda Borjan 2016). The lack of institutional remedies is directly related to violence, as illustrated in a comment from a respondent in the study by Babović et al. (2013, 97): "If I divorced him, I would have nothing, my husband would take it all away from me, he would bribe the court, and then where would I go and what would I live off?"

The uneven enforcement of domestic violence laws is a part of a broader pattern of state dysfunction in Bosnia. On the one hand, it fits with the idea of "empty shell" states (Dimitrova 2010, 146), in which laws are adopted but not enforced. Such practices can also be attributed to entrenched sectarian interests that inform governance practices in Bosnia (Belloni 2009). On the other hand, state dysfunction is related to financial constraints facing a post-war state such as Bosnia. In view of the many and competing priorities of post-war rehabilitation, the resources for implementing gender laws (funding safe houses for women, for example) are inadequate and seen as being of lesser importance. Ultimately, gender equality policies in their broad remit usually require a higher level of taxation (Shaxson 2015), which is difficult in post-war Bosnia given the weakness of the economy and a culture of tax evasion.

Neoliberal reforms and violence against women

In the context of radical (neoliberal) economic reforms, characterized by the shift towards private ownership and competitive markets, women are particularly disadvantaged by skewed labor market opportunities and outcomes. Many of these cumulative economic effects of war and post-war transition are present in the broader Balkan region (Bonfiglioli 2014, 2015; Đurić Kuzmanović and Pajvančić-Cizelj 2018). Bosnia has been hit the hardest, as illustrated by labor market outcomes, especially in terms of activity rates and employment. The gender gap in activity rate and employment rate in Bosnia was the highest among the six Western Balkan countries in 2018; the activity

rate and employment rate for men were 53 percent and 44.1 percent, compared to 34.4 percent and 25 percent, respectively, for women (World Bank 2019; Bosnia and Herzegovina Agency for Statistics n.d.). The rate of unemployment is higher among women than men, and a higher proportion of women are long-term unemployed. Long-term unemployment accounted for 83.6 percent of female unemployment in the first quarter of 2018, with the highest incidence recorded among low-skilled women (World Bank 2019). These figures have to be viewed in the context of the overall shrinking labor market under the impact of war and neoliberal economic transition, reinforced more recently by the effects of the global financial crisis. After the crisis, in 2010–2016, employment in Bosnia contracted by 5 percent with a huge gap between men and women (male: 3.4 percent; female: 7.6 percent) (WIIW 2017), which testifies to the precarious nature of female employment. In terms of opportunities to run businesses, women are disadvantaged by economic traditions that mean that they have limited ownership of assets/land to use as collateral – as much as 70 percent of land ownership is accounted for by men (Cancho and Elwan 2015, 36). Hence, men also account for a higher share of registered entrepreneurs (Efendić et al. 2018).

The labor statistics are related to women's limited access to education. Bosnia has the lowest growth in enrolment rates among girls in primary and secondary education in the Western Balkans. 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 (Somun-Krupalija 2011). These inequalities reinforce women's dependence on men and their marginal place and status in society, as evidenced in the context of the gendered division of household labor and in incidences of intimate partner abuse.

As in many contexts of intimate partner abuse, Bosnian women may internalize self-blame (and shame) for the violence that has been enacted upon them. One victim, who left her husband after many years of suffering abuse, blamed herself, since "I thought that it's not easy for him; he is a former soldier, struggling with the post-traumatic stress disorder, sleeplessness, dissatisfaction because he does not have a job" (Savić 2013; Klaric et al. 2011). Scholars have identified issues of "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 (DiPietro 2019). What is noteworthy here is that a perception of "failed" or "fragile" masculinity is one reason why women decide not to leave their abusive partners, holding on to a sense of duty and loyalty for their partner's contribution to the war effort.

According to NGO practitioners, about 90 percent of women who have survived sexual violence in war have also experienced intimate partner and/or

domestic violence (Sorguc 2015). Like other victims of violence, they may find it difficult to exit the relationship due to fear of destitution. As one survivor of sexual violence put it, “I spent twenty days in the camp where I was raped. Physical and psychological abuse in the marriage lasted much longer” (Sorguc 2015). Research demonstrates that in many post-war contexts husbands (and others) ascribe stigma to their wives by viewing them as “belonging to someone else,” which over time is used as justification for perpetrating violence against them (Simic 2017, 324; cf. Skjelsbæk 2006; Sorguc 2015). Women’s (in)ability to resist this stigmatization is connected to their economic disempowerment and marginalization, which limits their options for gaining independence both in the labor market and in the household. While the women’s movement in post-war Bosnia has organized around women’s extraordinary resilience and self-sufficiency in the wake of sexual and gender-based violence (Björkdahl 2012; Helms 2013), their economic precarity and continuing vulnerability has received less attention. A lack of secure and well-paid jobs – which results from the broader socio-economic climate and state dysfunction, analyzed in the previous section – underscores women’s dependence on male breadwinners and subjects them to a normalization of gender-based violence (Jelin-Dizdar 2012; Đurić Kuzmanović and Pajvančić-Cizelj 2018). This is reinforced by women’s exclusion from property ownership (Mucović 2017). Gender discrimination in the labor market is a result of the social prioritization of male war veterans’ employment needs over and above those of women in general, and of women survivors of gender-based violence in particular (Pugh 2017).

Women and the informal economy

Directly linked to neoliberal reforms and their gendered effects is the emergence and expansion of a large informal economy in post-conflict Bosnia (Krstić and Sanfey 2007; Bojicic-Dzelilovic 2013; Ortlieb et al. 2019). The informal economy was estimated at roughly 30 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) in 2018, which is attributed principally to a weak institutional environment and low tax morality (Efendic, Pasovic, and Efendic 2018, 80). Alongside scarce employment in the reduced, formal post-war economy, poor regulatory frameworks, high taxation, and low trust in public institutions – all a corollary of weak governance in Bosnia – have spurred the increase in informal economic activities. Widespread political corruption in post-war Bosnia has contributed to public acceptance of rule-breaking practices in the everyday lives of Bosnian citizens (Jansen, Brković, and Čelebičić 2016). According to a recent survey, some 40 percent of respondents thought that tax evasion was justified in such contexts (Efendic, Pasovic, and Efendic 2018, 80).

The incentives for participation in the informal economy are varied, but by far the strongest is a lack of formal employment, which has forced both men

and women to engage in informal work. Women, in particular, have sought work in the informal sector to support themselves and their children (Sorguc 2015). Another reason why women engage in informal work is a pressure to supplement insufficient household income even when both spouses hold formal jobs. The pressure on household incomes has been exacerbated in the aftermath of the 2009 global financial crisis. In Bosnia, some jobs are manifestly gendered, notably catering, retail sales, domestic services, and agriculture, all of which are associated with precarity. Wages are low and paid irregularly, work conditions are poor, welfare protection is absent, and written contracts are often non-existent. Women working informally can also be subjected to discriminatory practices by male business owners and yet remain trapped in their jobs because of the lack of an alternative (Efendic, Pasovic, and Efendic 2018). This type of employment has increased women's insecurity in the post-war period, particularly that of certain categories of women including single mothers, war widows, and the internally displaced. For example, for single women/mothers working informally, finding reasonably priced rented accommodation is a struggle (Denda Borjan 2016), which increases the risk of poverty and the burden of household reproduction.

Furthermore, men use women's marginal and vulnerable position to maintain labor market advantage and household dominance (Savić 2013). By withdrawing financial support, men force women into situations of dependence, and often onto neighbors and extended family. This can involve various forms of informal work such as domestic cleaning, baby-sitting, and caring for family (Babović et al. 2013; Bljesak 2017; Efendić et al. 2018). Women's vulnerability, then, is a consequence of a complex mix of socio-economic and cultural processes related to the Bosnian war and pre-war social patriarchal practices. In the aftermath of the war, some women have been pressured into bearing more children regardless of financial limitations. Similarly, it is women who are expected to look after elderly relatives in an extended family, thus increasing their involvement in the unrecorded informal economy, resulting in them being doubly burdened in the public and private sphere (Efendić et al. 2018).

Such processes are just one example of strategies used by economic, ethno-nationalist elites to exploit labor and resources in a depressed post-war economy, while simultaneously diminishing the state's capacity to provide welfare protection for its citizens. It is an open secret that securing a job in the public administration requires access to personal networks and the distribution of bribes, which only raises entry barriers for women who do not have access to such social capital and to such male-dominated networks (Brković 2015). Some 62 percent of Bosnia's 142 municipalities are underdeveloped or extremely underdeveloped, with some smaller towns turned into economic wastelands due to physical destruction and population displacement during the war and the uneven distribution of post-war

economic gains (UNDP 2014, 27; Pugh 2017). For women, there are few job opportunities available except in the hospitality or retail sectors, mirroring a similar trend across the Balkan region that characterizes post-socialist transition to liberal market democracy (Bonfiglioli 2014, 2015). Job precarity is bound up with the lack of social welfare provisions because employers often disguise the true number of workers to avoid payment of social contributions. Women, including refugees and those who are internally displaced without appropriate documentation, may be denied basic social services such as access to health insurance and other workers' benefits. Ultimately, the thriving criminal economy and women's suffering of violence in that sphere, addressed in the next section, cannot be explained without considering how both the formal and the informal economy routinely fail women, pushing them into the black market.

The post-conflict criminal economy and sex trafficking

The political economy approach to the continuum of violence also requires paying attention to the criminal economy in Bosnia that has evolved since the end of the war. This growth was initially fueled by the presence of some 50,000 foreign troops (mostly male) in the country, which helped to establish a large market for international and local humanitarian workers, civil servants, diplomats, and businessmen, controlled by networks linked to local political and economic actors. Persistent underdevelopment, widespread poverty, poor labor market opportunities, and weak rule of law have meant that these sizeable criminal economies in the Balkans have been able to establish themselves in powerful and enduring ways (Festic and Rausche 2004; Haynes 2010, 1794). The post-conflict entrenchment of the criminal sector illustrates the interconnectedness between formal economic mismanagement and weak state institutions, while wartime actors remain center stage in charge of post-war neoliberal transition.

Bosnia's thriving criminal economy is dominated by patriarchal structures and problematic, sometimes "toxic" masculinities. Violence, especially the sexual abuse and exploitation of women, is regularly utilized in order to accumulate wealth within a context of economic precarity. Porous borders in this region, which continue to be politically contested, are conducive to the operation of criminal networks, which enjoy the protection of powerful local politicians and businessmen. Many of these networks involved in small arms and human trafficking were established before or during the war with the direct involvement or approval of local political, economic, and military elites. The networks owe their effectiveness to the transnational dimension of their operation (through regional and international connections), enabled by Bosnia's inadequate legislation and institutional capacity to address the problem (Isović 2013). Despite the government's formal commitment to

various regional and international initiatives targeting organized crime, in which human trafficking has been prominent, contemporary Bosnia is a favorable environment for illicit and illegal activities.

During the war and in the immediate post-war period, female victims of trafficking came mostly from outside Bosnia, from countries such as Romania, Moldova, Ukraine, and Russia, to work in bars that were located in the vicinity of the bases of foreign troops and along major motorways (Nikolić-Ristanović 2003; Isović 2012). The rapid proliferation of such bars was facilitated by collusion between their owners and local government officials in charge of licensing and collaboration with organized crime syndicates. In the immediate aftermath of the war, prostitution was almost legalized (Lara 2011). Conceived of as a model of ethnic reconciliation through commerce, the (in)famous Arizona market in northeast Bosnia was developed and supported by the international community that turned out to be the main client. The sex industry, then, operated alongside the selling of weapons, drugs, bootleg media, and various everyday items, which illustrates the blurring of formal and informal, global and local markets, and actors and processes (Nikolić-Ristanović 2003; Haynes 2010, 1780). According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), more than 10,000 women and girls (and men and boys) were trafficked through the Arizona market in the year 2000 alone, while the international community ignored the fact that its own staff were involved in purchasing and selling sex (Haynes 2010, 1795). In 2003, special units of the European Union (EU) closed down strip bars, brothels, and other places in and around major cities where sexual exploitation was taking place (Isović 2012).

Scaling down of the foreign troops had knock-on effects (Harrington 2005). The trafficking and sexual exploitation of adolescents and women is generally less visible than in the immediate post-conflict period. However, the problems remain and indeed the sexual exploitation of Bosnian women in particular is increasingly prevalent (Isović 2013). Sexual exploitation nowadays takes place in private flats, motels, and petrol stations (Jurilj 2016). Women are often subject to physical and mental abuse within these sites; some have their documents confiscated by pimps, traffickers, and police officials (Isović 2012). At the same time, Bosnia has become a country that exports local women and children selling sex (Isović 2013; Brkanic 2016), which illustrates the conflation of local and global dynamics in the continuum of violence. Ironically, Bosnian women have also joined men in the management of criminal activities and in exploiting opportunities offered by their transnationalization. Linked to organized crime, these women perform a crucial role of facilitation in the industry – as revealed, for example, in the court cases linked to the murder of infamous warlord and criminal ringleader Ramiz Delalić Čelo (Pugh 2017). Consequently, women's involvement in the operation of

criminal activities also compounds the challenge of addressing gender-based violence against women.

The criminal economy is fueled by the significant weakness of the formal economy and governance failings. Due to high unemployment and widespread poverty, women's precarious socio-economic position makes them more vulnerable to, and dependent upon, illicit and illegal activities. According to an Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) official, women accept jobs that demand sexual servitude in the absence of a range of legitimate employment opportunities (Isović 2013). In addition to the administrative division of the country and a lack of harmonization of the country's legal codes in relation to trafficking, the involvement of public officials (many of whom were wartime actors) in organized crime such as sex and people trafficking also points to institutional and state complicity in the perpetuation of violence against women (cf. US Office of Department of State 2017). Consequently, strong regional cooperation among criminal actors in sex trafficking, which is a wartime legacy, also maintains the flow of women destined for EU countries.

Conclusion

This study contributes to feminist analyses of post-conflict gender-based violence that aim to "elucidate the intimate connections between war, political economy, nationalism, and human displacement and their various impacts across scale" (Giles and Hyndman 2004, 314). We contend that structural accounts of gender-based violence do not always capture the cumulative impact and intersecting nature of war and post-war transition that perpetuate gender inequalities. Our analysis of war economies and their post-war consequences questions binary distinctions between the global and local, and the formal and informal processes of transition. Examining the interconnections, from a war and post-war political economy perspective, we have shown that the incentives for profit formed during the war have long-term adverse consequences especially for women's welfare and security. As such, war economies continue to shape local post-war conditions, including formal institutions tasked with implementing globally mandated neoliberal reforms. Such a structural perspective, which is concerned with who actors are, what incentives they encounter, and what types of economic/political/cultural structures they rely on, draws attention to the material basis of gender-based violence from war to peace.

In line with this reconceptualization, and informed by Galtung's (1969, 1990) categorization of structural, direct, and cultural/symbolic violence, we have examined different types of violence against women and the failure of local and international institutions to remedy their vulnerabilities. We have done this by drawing on women's accounts of widespread insecurities,

including their exclusion from a range of services, education programs, and labor markets. This, we suggest, is not simply a consequence of war-inflicted destruction, or of current poor socio-economic conditions due to the vagaries of neoliberal restructuring in a post-conflict country. Rather, it is also a result of pervasive institutional dysfunction which, combined with ethnic polarization, has led to political and economic neglect of the marginalized, especially women. Public policies, distorted by a particular configuration of incentive structures and interests formed through the war, have had devastating consequences for men as well. This issue requires further attention from a continuum-of-violence perspective, so as to expose and explain the post-war vulnerability of men, including male victims of wartime sexual violence.

Our analysis has focused on how forms of structural, direct, and cultural/symbolic violence against women intersect along the war-to-peace continuum shaped by continuities of inequalities and patriarchy. Little of this aspect has featured in the extensive scholarship on gender-based violence in Bosnia (except see Nikolić-Ristanović 1999; Pupavac 2005; Đurić Kuzmanović and Pajvančić-Cizelj 2018). Since an understanding that the political economy is at the root of war-to-peace continuums and cycles of violence is widespread among Bosnians, as we gleaned from our field research, problematizing the structural dimension of gender-based violence should inform conceptual developments and subsequent empirical analyses of violence in feminist and other scholarship in post-conflict zones. Above all, this study emphasizes the need to be attentive to the wider political contexts of localities whose material basis is defined by war even in a post-war period, and to global governance ideologies interacting with those local conditions, in order to improve our understanding of the continuums and of persistent gender-based violence against both men and women.

Notes

1. Henceforth abbreviated to "Bosnia."
2. A Bosnian practitioner's observation, April 2018.
3. Babović et al. (2013, 13) analyzed partner and domestic violence in Bosnia and show that material deprivation significantly increases the risks of domestic violence.
4. The total of nine safe houses in the entire country have been run by NGOs and are dependent on external donor funding (Ministarstvo za ljudska prava i izbeglice Bosne i Hercegovine 2018).

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