Snaga Žene: Disrupting Discourses of Victimhood in Bosnia-Herzegovina

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Abstract

As the nature of global violence shifts and conflict becomes increasingly characterized by intrastate violence, theoretical underpinnings of violence and aggression based on Westphalian models have become insufficient. Contemporary warfare is no longer confined to acts of violence between states using large-scale weaponry where non-combatants are rarely at the front lines. Instead, small arms have allowed rebel groups to bring the front lines of conflict to villages, resulting in a much deadlier age of violence against civilians. This shift has led to an increase in attention to the impact of violent conflict on civilians, including a consideration of the gendered experiences of women, men, girls and boys.

Of particular concern in this article is the way in which a discourse of victimhood, mobilized through international policy and intervention, can further marginalize and disempower women in postwar contexts. Drawing on ethnographic data from fieldwork with women in Bosnia-Herzegovina, this article will highlight the usefulness of a narrative framework for understanding how individuals make sense of violence, and the discursive politics at work in how these experiences are storied. To this end, the article endeavours to expand the theoretical base from which to understand women's experiences of conflict in order to ensure postwar interventions do not confine women to the role of "victim," but support a full range of their expression of agency.

Keywords: narrative, gender, conflict, violence, victimhood.

1 Introduction

As the nature of global violence shifts and conflict becomes increasingly characterized by intrastate violence, theoretical underpinnings of violence and aggression based on Westphalian conceptualizations of war have become insufficient (Anderlini, 2007: 194). Contemporary warfare is no longer confined to acts of violence between states using large-scale weaponry, where non-combatants are

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rarely at the front lines. Instead, small arms have allowed rebel groups to bring the front lines of conflict to villages, resulting in a much deadlier age of violence against civilians (Leatherman, 2011). This has led to an increase in attention to the impact of violent conflict on civilians (Newman, 2004: 179), including a consideration of the gendered experiences of women, men, girls and boys.

International recognition of the diversity of experiences and needs of populations affected by violent conflict has coincided with broad shifts towards gender-sensitive policy and programming within international governing bodies such as the United Nations (U.N.), and among international NGOs and donors (Carpenter, 2005). Although these shifts recognize that violent conflict affects individuals differently, tracing the way in which violence is sustained and reproduced discursively can offer useful insight for those seeking to be helpful in these contexts. Given the ubiquitiousness of violence and the multiplicity of ways it unfolds and is folded into the world, scholarship that endeavours to deepen our theoretical understanding of these dynamics and how to address them is urgently needed.

Looking at these dynamics within the context of women's experiences of violent conflict, this article employs a narrative lens to advance theoretical frameworks for understanding violence in three distinct ways: (1) the article reveals the discursive politics at work in how violence is storied, which has implications for which types of violence against whom become visible; (2) it offers insights into the implications of narratives that present binary framings of victims and perpetrators of violence, and how these essentialized framings shape the way violence is understood and addressed; and (3) it demonstrates the usefulness of a narrative framework for understanding how actual individuals affected by violence make sense of these experiences.

The way in which experiences of violent conflict are understood, made visible in the narrative landscape within which these experiences are storied, shapes the nature of efforts that seek to support those recovering from the aftermath of war. To this end, the overall goal of the article is to expand the theoretical base from which to understand women's experiences of conflict, in order to ensure postwar interventions do not further disempower women by inadvertently perpetuating or sustaining dominant narratives that position women without legitimacy.

Reflecting a commitment to bridging the gap between theory and practice, the article will propose narrative praxis as a resource for increasing complexity in the narrative landscape of women and war. By generating a richer account of women's experiences of conflict and its aftermath, narrative becomes a resource for disrupting the dominant discourse of women's victimhood, which inadequately reflects the diversity of women's experiences and needs. The article will draw on data generated through fieldwork with women across Bosnia-Herzegovina to illustrate the usefulness of narrative methods for eliciting and elevating these narratives to support the emergence of a more comprehensive narrative of women and war.

Jessica M. Smith

2   The Case: Why Bosnia-Herzegovina?

Looking at the case of Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH) offers an opportunity to learn from gendered experiences of violence within this context to explore the three theoretical puzzles presented earlier. The nature of violence in the Western Balkans brought to international attention the systematic use of sexual violence as a weapon of war and highlighted gendered experiences of violence during and after conflict.[1] Women were specifically targeted as a way to disrupt the social fabric of communities and destroy the local culture (Skjelsbæk, 2006), suggesting social, symbolic and political motivations for this type of gendered aggression. The experiences of women in BiH played a catalyzing role in the adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325),[2] which firmly placed the issue of women, peace and security on the international peacebuilding agenda. UNSCR 1325 is a considered a landmark achievement from an international policy perspective, and led to the subsequent creation of the *U.N. Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda*,[3] which has come to shape contemporary postwar policy and programming for women in the aftermath of violent conflict.[4]

Although global attention has largely moved on from conflict in the Western Balkans, BiH was chosen as the case study, based on the premise that women's experiences of violence in BiH and how that violence was understood and storied by the international community are critical for understanding how interventions aimed at supporting women during all stages of conflict are developed and deployed. A deeper analysis of the theoretical underpinnings of these narratives yields useful insight into the logic driving efforts to support women in postwar

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1   The United Nations International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) was established to investigate and prosecute war crimes during that took place during the conflict in the Balkans, which included crimes of sexual violence. According to the ICTY website (see link below), "In a number of landmark judgements, the Tribunal advanced the development of international justice in the realm of gender crimes by enabling the prosecution of sexual violence as a war crime, a crime against humanity and genocide. Ultimately, rape ceased to be perceived as the unrestrained sexual behaviour of individuals and was recognised as a powerful tool of war, used to intimidate, persecute and terrorise the enemy." Although gendered forms of violence have always been a dimension of conflict, in the case of Bosnia-Herzegovina, this was the first time charges of sexual violence were included in an international war crimes trial. For an overview of landmark ICTY judgements on sexual violence, please visit: <www.icty.org/en/in-focus/crimes-sexual-violence/landmark-cases>.

2   For an overview of UNSCR 1325, including the full text of the Resolution, please visit: <www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/wps/#resolution>.

3   UNSCR 1325 was the foundational policy document upon which the U.N. WPS Agenda was built. At the time of publication, six additional U.N. Security Council Resolutions had been passed to strengthen the goals and objectives outlined in UNSCR 1325 and facilitate its implementation. These resolutions include UNSCR 1820 in 2008, followed by UNSCR 1888 and UNSCR 1889 in 2009, UNSCR 1960 in 2010, and most recently, UNSCR 2106 and SCR 2122 in 2013. To access the full text of each resolution, please visit: <www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/issues/women/wps.shtml>.

4   For a fuller description of the Women, Peace and Security approach to gender and peacebuilding, please see the following study submitted by the Secretary-General pursuant to Security Council Resolution 1325: United Nations (2002), *Women, Peace and Security*. New York: United Nations. Available at: <www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/public/eWPS.pdf>.

situations – for example, women's contemporary efforts in Syria or the Democratic Republic of Congo.

3   Narrative Insights into the Politics of Representation

A narrative lens yields valuable relational information about the organization of power in a given context by tuning into the constellation of stories that comprise a particular narrative landscape (Cobb, 2013). From a narrative perspective, the way in which individuals make sense of themselves and others is revealed in the nature of the stories that are told. Regardless of whether narrative originates from the institutional or the personal level, it is a material object within which relational and social dimensions of power become visible (Ibid.: 124). Narrative analysis draws attention to how individuals are discursively constructed and positioned, and by whom. Scholars such as Annick T.R. Wibben (2011) and Sara Cobb (2013) emphasize that narratives are not value neutral; on the contrary, they are inherently political.

For example, dominant narratives of women and war often position women as victims instead of agents, which not only has implications for women's expression of agency in these spaces, but also influences how women's experiences of war are understood, and subsequently, how international intervention and policy is structured. Policy formation could thus be viewed as a discursive practice (Shepherd, 2008).[5] Using a narrative lens to understand the way in which institutions such as the U.N. function as sites of discursive power reveals the political nature of narratives originating from within these spaces.[6] It also draws attention to the possibility for institutions such as the U.N. to, perhaps inadvertently, construct disempowering narratives that position individuals without legitimacy, and thus, reproduce damaging power dynamics with hegemonic force.

4   Essentialized Representations and a Dominant Narrative of Victimhood

Within the narrative landscape of women and war, essentialized representations of women's experiences are prolific, from the grassroots to the institutional level, and serve as the scaffolding of a dominant narrative of women's victimhood. These essentialisms are closely linked to cultural gender norms, and assume that women are a homogenous group, with similar experiences (Leatherman, 2011). They overlook the way in which power organizes social relations and structures, influencing the social construction of gender and prescribed gender roles (El-

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5   Shepherd's article, "Power and Authority in the Production of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325" (2008) offers a thorough and insightful discussion of the discursive practice of policy formation within the context of the development of UNSCR 1325. Shepherd describes this "discursive terrain" as "the multiple discourses that the institutions are product/productive of and the multiple practices of power and representation that constitute the boundaries of that which is intelligible within the institution" (2008: 384).
6   For an analysis of how policy formation and implementation functions as discursive practice that organizes political authority and legitimacy, please see Shepherd (2008).

Jessica M. Smith

Bushra, 2012: 9; Swaine, 2009: 421), which has consequences for women's legitimacy and agency in these contexts.

The dominant nature of the victimhood narrative overshadows, and may indeed silence, alternative narratives of women and war that describe women's resistance, resilience, participation in conflict, and other expressions of agency,[7] inflicting a form of representational violence through an erasure of the complexity of individuals' experiences. Given that narrative provides the structure from which individuals make sense of the social world (Hume, 2006: 75), exposing how women's experiences of war are storied, and by whom, reveals the theoretical perspectives and politics driving these narratives. For those concerned with the implications of war in women's lives and in the world, narrative becomes an indispensable lens for understanding women's experiences of conflict and its effects, especially in cases where these theories shape policy and practice intended to help those most affected by violence.

After the war in BiH ended in 1995, the international donor community placed great emphasis on funding post-conflict programming that focused on meeting the needs of women, a priority that shaped the nature of organizations and programmes that emerged (Pupavac, 2005: 397) and led to a burgeoning of civil society organizations, which stepped in to fill critical gaps in essential services (Walsh, 2000). The majority of these organizations were started by women, and many focused on services targeted at meeting women's needs (Ibid.). Women's civil society organizations scrambled to frame their work in terms that would be attractive to donors with vested interest in supporting work that addressed particular dimensions of women's needs.

Much of this attention was focused on addressing the effects of gender-based violence (GBV), which was, of course, a critical need after the war. However, it was not the only critical need. This power dynamic became problematic to the extent that it forced grassroots women's organizations to alter efforts to address locally identified priorities or approaches to postwar recovery, in order to obtain organizational funding. For example, according to Elissa Helms, the focus on GBV by scholars, activists and policymakers reinforced a narrative of victimhood in which women were predominantly positioned as victims, instead of agents (2013). This occurred to such a degree in BiH that Helms reported some women felt "victimhood" became the only currency through which they had access to international aid (Ibid.: 235).

As a narrative of victimhood was increasingly reinforced, it had a negative impact on women's expression of agency. Even in cases in which the essentialized representation of women as innocent victims created new opportunities for women to engage in the public sphere (Ibid.: 177-178), their legibility in these spaces became conditional on a sustained performance of victimhood. Helms shows that in the short term, this functioned to increase women's access to political spaces; however, when they were invited into the political arena, the roles available to them were gendered and understood to be depoliticized (Ibid.: 183).

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7   Please see Bouta and Frerks (2002) for a discussion of the variety of roles women take on during all stages of conflict.

In the long term, this has been damaging for women's legitimacy, as it has restricted women's expression of political agency to "acceptable" domains of political activity – for example, refugee return or reconciliation efforts (Ibid.: 170). Women's political participation was thus encouraged as long as it did not disrupt or threaten existing patriarchal power arrangements, and the work of "real politics" was left to the men, a dynamic which did not entail any real transformation towards gender equality.

5   Gendered Logic of Acceptable Suffering

The impact of victimhood discourses focused exclusively on women also have implications for notions of masculinity and the social construction of acceptable victimization and suffering, and influence how men's experiences of violence are understood. Discursive power dynamics dictate which stories of violence are socially acceptable in a given context, and the politics that drive them ensure that certain stories are marginalized, or in some cases, erased, from the narrative landscape. For example, stories of sexual violence against Bosniak men or stories of sexual violence against Serb women are rarely mentioned in narratives of violence in the context of the Bosnian war.[8] To this end, the discursive dynamics that influence which stories of violence can be told by whom,[9] and the dominance of particular narratives leads to an incomplete or "thin" story which does not accurately reflect the complexity of individuals' experiences or the extent to which violence permeates their lives.[10]

In the context of the war in BiH, the dominant and gendered nature of victimhood narratives imposed silences on men's experiences by framing violence within a discourse that legitimizes certain forms of suffering to the exclusion of others. As Cheldelin and Eliatamby argue,

> Women are essentially and overwhelmingly portrayed as the victims of war, whether as mothers grieving over sons dead and missing, or raising fatherless children; as widows struggling to survive in male-dominated societies; as refugees displaced from their home, community, and country; or as those raped,

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8   Bosnia-Herzegovina has three officially recognized ethnic groups, Bosnian-Croats (predominantly Catholic), Bosnian-Serbs (predominantly Orthodox) and Bosniaks (predominantly Muslim Bosnians). For a fuller background on historical and contemporary constructions of South-Slavic ethnicity, please see *The New Bosnian Mosaic: Identities, Memories and Moral Claims in a Post-war Society* by Bougarel *et al.* (2007: 1).

9   For a rich discussion of the narrative dynamics between violence, gender and the nation unfold in the context of El-Salvador, please see Hume (2006).

10   Applied to the analysis of violence, a narrative lens reveals the ways in which the narrative landscape during conflict becomes increasingly compressed, as storylines lose complexity (Cobb, 2013: 266). In a phenomenon Sara Cobb has labelled "narrative compression," stories of self and other grow polarized, falling into moral binaries, black and white characters and one-dimensional plotlines (Ibid.). Stories of violence become "thin," drawing on dichotomous framings of "victim" and "perpetrator" and mobilizing essentialized representations. These essentialized narratives lack complexity and fail to fully represent the dynamics and effects of violence, and thus, obscure the workings of power by which they are sustained.

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tortured, and left physically impaired, psychologically distressed, shamed, humiliated, or dead. (2011: 1)

Discussing the implications of this dominant narrative of women's experiences during war, they point out the damaging assumptions underlying a narrative that suggests "men are spared victimhood and women are limited to it" (Ibid.).

Beyond the individual level, essentialized narratives and the gendered logic that drive them also have implications for how interethnic violence is justified and storied. Essentialized narratives of "victim" and "perpetrator" allow for a dehumanization of the Other, and can be found in discourses mobilized to justify acts of violent aggression. For example, the essentialized narratives of ethnonational difference in the Western Balkans were instrumental to the war effort (Helms, 2013: 138). Furthermore, the way in which this "difference" was storied influenced how morality, in relation to acts of violence, was constructed and understood.

Helms draws attention to the role social constructions of masculinity play in gendering ethnonationalist discourse, arguing that binary positionings of "women-as-victims/men-as-perpetrators" or "women-as-nation/men-as-protector" place very real limits on individuals' agency and truncate our understanding of sexual violence in conflict (2013: 230). By positioning Bosniak men as protectors instead of aggressors, "It followed then that when Bosniac men went off to fight, it was out of duty to defend their homes and families, not out of violent tendencies" (Ibid.: 138). Helms writes,

> The symbolism of female victimhood effectively invokes innocence and non-implication in the processes leading up to conflict; female victims and mourning mothers easily stand in for the nation and its territory and point to the barbarity of the enemy in attacking "even" women and children (Ibid.: 230).

A fuller picture of the dynamics and logic driving dominant narratives of women and war, made visible through attention to the stories circulating in the narrative landscape, offers a robust foundation from which to investigate how women's disempowerment is reproduced and sustained through delegitimizing discourse, and how this might be addressed.

6   Narrative & Agency

The positioning of individuals and groups within narratives of war has implications for how the nature and effects of conflict are understood. In organizing the speaking space, dominant narratives function to organize who counts as a legitimate interlocutor, which privileges certain stories over others, and inherently results in the privileging of some voices over others. Positioning theory (van Langenhove and Harré, 1999) is helpful for tracking this dynamic within discourse (Cobb, 2013: 164) because it provides insights into the relationship between legitimacy and how individuals are narratively positioned. Agency and legitimacy

are closely intertwined (Cobb, 2013; Nelson, 2001; Rancière, 1999), therefore understanding who counts as a legitimate interlocutor within a particular space, and why, not only reveals valuable information about power embedded within the social context, but has implications for the type of repositioning that may be required to increase an individual's legitimacy.

Agency, from a narrative perspective, is understood as a relational practice in which legitimacy – and by extension, agency – is produced through discursive positioning (Cobb, 2013; Shepherd, 2008). A relational understanding of agency is particularly important in cases where certain stories are marginalized by dominant narratives because the silencing of certain narratives undercuts the perceived legitimacy of the speaker, inflicting another form of violence on individuals and having implications for expressions of agency.

In her work on counterstories, Hilde Lindeman Nelson (2001) offers valuable insight into the role narrative can play in responding to this type of violence. Dominant narratives make it difficult for counterstories, those which destabilize the master narrative, to gain traction (Ibid.). A counterstory, according to Nelson, is "a story that resists an oppressive identity and attempts to replace it with one that commands respect" (2001: 6). Nelson suggests narrative methods can support the development of effective counterstories through which marginalized voices can begin to reposition themselves as legitimate interlocutors.

A narrative lens is helpful for not only revealing the relational nature of how stories of women and war are discursively constructed, but narrative also becomes a resource by which we can begin to "thicken" stories of conflict and counter essentialized narratives through counterstories. As discussed, experiences of violence and how they are storied can be delegitimizing. In the case of wartime sexual violence, these particular acts of aggression are intended to achieve exactly this outcome.

By returning to individuals' lived experiences and how individuals themselves story these experiences, it is possible to create counterstories that break away from dominant narratives and essentialized representations of women and war, and begin to add complexity back into how women's experiences are storied and understood. Narrative praxis, which will now be discussed, offers resources and opportunities for individuals whose voices have been marginalized or delegitimized to construct more empowering narratives, and can help counter the representational violence that occurs when essentialized narratives are mobilized. It is through this process of narrative "thickening" that better-formed stories[11] can emerge, and diversity and richness of stories in the narrative landscape can increase.

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11 This concept was first used to describe narrative evolution within the field of family therapy by Carlos E. Sluzki (1990). Sara Cobb (2013) adapted the model for use as a narrative approach to conflict resolution.

Jessica M. Smith

7   Narrative as Theory & Praxis

Better-formed stories are achieved through a process in which the narrative researcher or practitioner works with participants to develop new meanings from the stories that structure their experiences, such that a richer diversity of perspectives emerge, and with them, new avenues for action (Cobb, 2013: 226-227). Through narrative praxis, conversations can be directed away from what Jerome Bruner (1986) refers to as the *landscape for action* (involving a description of a sequence of events), bringing "experience near" at what he refers to as the *landscape of consciousness* (the lived experience of those involved in the action, as discussed in White, 2007: 77-83). Storytelling driven by "experience near" centres on the lived experience of the participants, drawing attention to the particular, instead of the global (Ibid.: 40). Stories on the landscape of consciousness then become the material from which to understand how individuals make sense of their experiences and how their understandings of themselves and the Other shape the range of action they perceive to be available to them (White, 2007: 80-84).

A process of reflection is inherent to the generation of stories on the landscape of consciousness, and thus, presents an opportunity for new meaning-making. As participants story, or re-story, their lived experiences, it is possible for the narrative researcher to support the evolution of narrative such that the participant is positioned with greater legitimacy within their own account. This process of narrative (re)positioning holds the possibility for participants to uncover new insights that expand their understanding of themselves as agents. Furthermore, this type of narrative work has the potential to disrupt dominant discourses by introducing better-formed stories into the narrative landscape, destabilizing essentialized representations through the emergence of more nuanced, empowered narratives. Narrative evolution is thus facilitated through this reflexive process of generating conversation, within which shifts towards better-formed stories are supported.[12]

8   Narrative Praxis Using Photovoice

Photovoice is an arts-based research method that offers an additional resource for narrative evolution by facilitating processes of reflection and reframing, while supporting individuals in authoring their own narratives and projecting these self-representations into the public sphere. Photovoice is a method of participatory action research developed by Wang and Burris (1997) that uses photography as a vehicle for generating conversation and storytelling. Participants are given cameras to take pictures that capture their experiences and perspectives, and these images are then used to stimulate and facilitate dialogue at individual and group levels. Photovoice has been used to study a range of social issues, including

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12   Other scholars have discussed the benefits of reflexive dialogue processes for conflict resolution, for example, see Rothman (1996) and Rothman and Olson (2001).

health behaviour, homelessness, access to community resources, immigration and so on (Hergenrather *et al.*, 2009: 690), and is an effective method for elevating marginalized voices into the public sphere (Molloy, 2007; Teti *et al.*, 2013; Wang, 1999; Wang and Burris, 1997).

One of the core objectives of photovoice is to affect social change, often using photo exhibitions or presentations as vehicles to engage policymakers and the community (Molloy, 2007; Wang and Burris, 1997) in critical discussion about complicated social issues. The introduction of these images into the public sphere, alongside the stories of meaning that accompany them, creates an opportunity to counter the representational violence that occurs when individual's experiences are essentialized, and provides a resource for participants to author more empowered representations that reflect the diversity of their experiences, while simultaneously creating an opportunity for community members and stakeholders to learn from their perspectives.

Within the photovoice literature, contestations over meaning and representation are encouraged and reflected in the activist framework that ungirds photovoice projects, and are seen to support social action for change (Molloy, 2007). Patricia Leavy describes visual art as "an important medium through which struggles over representation occur" (2009: 219). This dynamic is reflective of broader theories about the transformative power of visual art and the potential for this medium to provide a vehicle for disrupting essentialized representations, by offering a means by which to articulate alternative representation of self (Ibid.).

To increase the emancipatory nature of research practices, opportunities for self-representation and articulation of voice must be supported. As authors such as Charles L. Briggs caution,

> The illusion of shared participation in discourse and the production of knowledge legitimates practices for creating social inequality and modes of exclusion that seem to spring naturally from differences in what individuals know and can project into the public sphere. (2001: 919)

To this end, photovoice opens up the range of possibilities available to participants to articulate and project their expertise into the public sphere, and gives them agency and control over the dimensions of their experience they think are most important to convey. By positioning participants as their own visual storytellers, this research method avoids recreating damaging power dynamics that occur in a contemporary global context where images of the "victim other" are becoming increasingly ubiquitous, offering an antidote to the dominance of essentialized narratives of victimhood.

Both narrative praxis and photovoice aim to support an evolution of narratives among participants through processes of reflection, and are aligned in a relational understanding of the nature of social constructions of meaning. Furthermore, inherent to both is a commitment to increasing narrative complexity. Combining an arts-based approach such as photovoice with narrative praxis strengthens the methods. Using the artistic process of producing photographs to encourage self-reflection, and then, using the photographs themselves to facili-

Jessica M. Smith

tate reflexive individual and group-level dialogue guided by narrative praxis, supports the emergence of a richer, more diverse narrative landscape.

9 Bridging Theory & Praxis: Photovoice with Women in Bosnia-Herzegovina

The hegemonic force of the victimhood narrative in characterizing women's experiences of war invites curiosity about which stories, or aspects of stories, are missing from the narrative landscape. In the case of BiH, how do actual women affected by conflict story their experiences? Do their self-descriptions counter essentialized representations of women, and disrupt the dominant discourse of victimhood? To explore these questions and to learn directly from women affected by conflict, photovoice workshops were conducted with 29 women from BiH.

Photovoice workshops were organized in partnership with a local organization or community in four cities across BiH. Each workshop began with a focus group,[13] which explored with the women their experiences of success navigating the aftermath of war, challenges they continue to face and wisdom they have to share with other women who may also be trying to recover from violent conflict. Focus groups included basic photography skills training, after which the women were provided with digital cameras and encouraged to take pictures around the themes discussed in the group. Women had several days to take photographs before meeting for an individual interview.[14] These images were used as the platform for dialogue in the interview, in which women shared their motivations for creating each image, the story represented by the image and why they felt it was an important aspect of their experience to share.

This method of interviewing allowed participants agency over the interview process, as they were able to choose which aspects of their story they felt were most salient to share with the researcher, and to set parameters for the conversation since they ultimately chose which images they created and included in the conversation. Narrative praxis techniques, such as circular questioning,[15] were used to ask about the images, and when a woman's storytelling was characterized by a description of events (landscape of action), follow-up questions were asked to encourage her to share the meaning she ascribed to these events and to support a transition of storytelling back to the landscape of consciousness.

At the end of the interview, each woman was invited to include one of her photographs in a traveling public photography exhibition and project website.

13 Traditional focus groups and interviews were conducted alongside the photovoice workshops, a selection of which were co-facilitated with my colleague Dr. Marie Berry, assistant professor at the Josef Korbel School at the University of Denver. As such, some qualitative data from the project appears in both of our data sets.
14 All focus groups, workshops and interviews were conducted in the local language with the support of a Bosnian research assistant who is highly proficient in both English and Bosnian/Serbian/Croatian (BCS) languages. To the best of our ability, the narratives analyzed in this paper reflect the voice of the women interviewed, but due to the nature of interpretation, are to some extent, constructions of the interviewee, the research assistant and myself.
15 For more information about circular questioning as an interview technique, please see Tomm (1988) and Brown (1997).

She was encouraged to choose an image which she felt best represented the story she wanted to share publicly – with her community, with policymakers, with other women in postwar contexts. Although this was an optional dimension of the project, each woman chose to include a photograph and accompanying story in the exhibition entitled, *Her Wisdom, Her Wings* or *Njena Mudrost, Njena Krila*.[16] In every case, the images and stories the women chose to project into the public sphere were not singular narratives of victimhood. Although experiences of victimization certainly emerged in some of the women's stories, they were in the context of a description of their resilience and pride in what they had been able to accomplish, even in the face of overwhelming challenges.

When given the opportunity to speak on their own behalf, women in the project authored more complex and agential narratives than those that make up the dominant discourse of women and war. They shared stories of losing husbands and family members, of having to rebuild their homes, of having to figure out how to survive during the war and in the years afterwards, but they also spoke of themselves as "snaga žene" – strong women. The images they chose to include in the exhibition focused, for example, on stories of their strength and resilience, entrepreneurship and economic autonomy, and the importance of self-care.

One woman, Ena,[17] chose to include a picture of her house, with a small wooden shed attached to the back. After the war, Ena said the State had given her an apartment to live in as part of a programme to provide housing for single mothers with children, whose husbands had died during the war.[18] However, she said that these apartments often belonged to other citizens, and when people began to return after the war, the women were evicted, even though the State had arranged the housing. One day, Ena said she suddenly found herself with nowhere to live. She had begun building her own house, purchasing materials and overseeing construction, but it was far from complete. When she was evicted from the apartment, she moved with her children to the tiny wooden shed next to where the house was being built. They lived there for a year without electricity or a bathroom. She would knit by candlelight in the evening to earn extra income while finishing the house. Today, Ena considers this house the biggest success of her life, and is very proud that as a single mother, she was able to create such a nice home for her family. She hoped her story and message would encourage others, "You see, you can make things happen when there is a willingness to do so."

Another woman chose to include a picture she had taken of her sewing machines. Belma has been sewing for over 40 years, and has a successful business as a seamstress. She titled the photograph, "Led by the Sound of a Sewing Machine and a Strong Women's Intuition." She said the humming noise the machines make when she's sewing makes it sound like their singing, "My sewing

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16   This photography exhibition is in both English and BCS and has been show twice in BiH, with future plans for exhibitions in Washington, DC and New York. A digital gallery is available in English at <www.herownwings.org/projects> and in BCS at <www.herownwings.org/projects/bcs>.

17   Pseudonyms have been created for each woman to protect their identity.

18   For an in-depth description of the privatization of property in postwar BiH, including an analysis of the impact on women, please see Haynes (2010: 1821-1824).

Jessica M. Smith

machines have sang for me my entire life," she said. Belma hoped her image and story would convey the importance of women's financial independence,

> Every woman should find a way to make money for themselves. All of my life I've been earning my own money. You can start small and build up. There is safety and security in life when you have your own money. If a woman has her own money, she has her safety.

Another entrepreneur, Jasmina, who had started her own business growing raspberries, chose to include a picture of her crops. Describing the image, she shared,

> This is a symbol of my hard work, my hobby, and the financial gain it brings me. Growing raspberries is a way to work for myself, so I don't have to work for someone else. It's about long-term financial stability; this is an investment in my future and my family.

She said she had always wanted to do something that she enjoyed and that proved what she was capable of: "Having my own business shows that I work hard and that I can do this. I am an example that when times are really tough, you can get creative to find a way to make it work."

Other women chose to select images that focused on strategies and techniques they had developed to recover from the effects of the war. For example, Amela chose to include a picture of a lake in her town. She described the photo, saying, "This is the place I feel most relaxed. At the lake I feel good spiritually, emotionally, and physically, so this is where I go to rest." Her message was about the importance of self-care and Amela wanted to encourage women to take time for themselves,

> If women don't find time for themselves, no one else will give them that time. This is important because of all of the things that people ask from us – give this, give that, like being wives and mothers and the rest – if you burn out you cannot function.

She said, "I have to have 'me time' in order to keep going, to keep moving forward."

Although these examples offer only a snapshot of the narratives the women provided, they suggest that the narrative of women and war is indeed more nuanced than the dominant narrative of victimhood would suggest, and the narratives which women chose to project into the public sphere focus on many other dimensions of their lives and experiences. The stories they shared were ones in which they took pride in their ability to overcome challenges and the creative ways they found to do so. Their stories also highlighted the hard-won confidence they now have in their ability to endure. Their stories were accounts of agency, within which women positioned themselves as legitimate actors and active contributors to positive change within their families and communities.

The purpose of this discussion is not to, in any way, diminish the very real and horrific forms of gendered violence that individuals experience both during and after conflict, and the incredible challenges women victimized by war face. It is, however, to advocate that singular narratives of victimhood are incomplete, and researchers, policymakers, activists and others should endeavour to thicken these narratives by accounting for women's resilience alongside their suffering, and whenever possible, provide opportunities for self-representation among women affected by conflict, ensuring their perspectives and experiences are elevated into the public sphere.[19]

In this case, narrative praxis and photovoice worked together to support women in articulating stories of their experiences that were not beholden to a victimhood narrative, but instead, expanded beyond dominant representations of women's experiences of war. Furthermore, the photography exhibition provided an opportunity for women's self-representations to be projected into the public sphere in a context in which they were positioned as legitimate experts. Too often, stories are told *about* women, and this project allowed for stories to be told *by* women, and allowed women to actively participate in the nature of the stories that were told. The exhibition also presented an opportunity for the community to learn directly from women affected by conflict, and to be exposed to a more complex narrative of women's war experiences, which included a portrayal of women as agents, actively contributing to positive social change. To this end, the project was successful in disrupting the dominant discourse of victimhood and countering the politics of representation that marginalize women's voices and experiences.

10 Conclusion

In conclusion, this article has sought to add complexity to the narrative landscape of women and war by comparing dominant narratives circulating in discourse at the institutional level with narratives at the grassroots level – those directly authored by women in BiH. Through an investigation of how women's experiences of conflict are storied at each of these levels, the article has endeavoured to expand theoretical frameworks for understanding how violence is produced and reproduced through discursive politics, and offer insights into how to more thoroughly understand women's experience of violent conflict, and in so doing, support the creation of more effective and emancipatory policy and intervention.

19   My research commitments are anchored in feminist ethnographic methods and informed by the work of scholars such as Schrock (2013), whose "methodological imperatives of feminist ethnography" which she describes as the avoidance of universalizing women's experiences, an attention to the ethics of representing "other" women, commitments to social change and acknowledgement of the quandaries of knowledge production, a reflexive approach which "allows informants to assign meaning to their own lives," and through iterative processes, have the opportunity to provide feedback on the researcher's representations, an attention to intersecting experiences of oppression and the role structures play in this, and a commitment to avoiding representational violence by featuring stories of women's struggles alongside stories of their agency and resourcefulness.

Jessica M. Smith

Preventing and addressing gender-based violence in conflict is of critical importance; however, for any meaningful progress towards women's empowerment and gender equality in postwar contexts, these interventions must be structured in ways that do not further marginalize women[20] or confine them to the role of "victim," but instead, support a full range of their expression of agency. Careful attention must be paid to how women are discursively constructed and positioned through policy, programming and academic research to ensure these interventions are as emancipatory as possible, and that the narrative landscape remains diverse and complex enough to account for the range of experiences and needs women have in the aftermath of war.

This article has explored narrative dynamics and their implications for power and agency within the context of women and war; however, these dynamics operate and structure power and legitimacy within a variety of conflicts. For example, scholars have explored these dynamics in the context of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict (Rotberg, 2006), transitional justice processes in post-genocide Rwanda (Hourmat, 2016) and recovery from violence and reparations processes in post-conflict Colombia (Castel, 2016). Narrative as a theoretical framework and analytical lens offers an invaluable resource for both conflict analysis and its resolution. Furthermore, methods such as photovoice and narrative praxis may be particularly useful in countering dominant discourses and elevating marginalized perspectives and voices of individuals and communities into the public sphere.

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Jessica M. Smith

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