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Social change, gender and violence: post-communist and war affected societies

Vesna Nikolić-Ristanović; Kluwer Academic Publishers, Dordrecht/Boston/London, 2002, ISBN: 1-4020-0726-4 (Hbk) £60/95 Euros/US\$87

This is an ambitious and thoroughly argued text that explores the complex relationship between violence against women, gender identity and social structure in the context of rapid economic, political and social change in four former communist countries: Bulgaria, Hungary, Macedonia and Serbia. How this is further complicated by ethnic conflict and war in Serbia and Macedonia is also considered. Nikolić-Ristanović draws on extensive secondary (quantitative) data and on primary data from interviews to illustrate how macro changes brought about by the transition from a centralized to a market economy impact on the everyday lives of women and men, family relations and violence against women, particularly domestic violence and sex trafficking.

The first two chapters provide background with extensive detail of macroeconomic changes and how these are mirrored in altered patterns of employment and income for women and men across the social spectrum. The conclusion is that women are likely to have been left in poverty with little social or political capital and where the safety net of many social benefits has been removed. This, Nikolić-Ristanović maintains, increases 'women's vulnerability to violence', a phrase consistently used throughout the book. I would contend that while women's socioeconomic position does render women less powerful and diminishes their ability to avoid or leave violent men, women are vulnerable to violence because of what men do. To talk of women's vulnerability hints at 'blaming the victim' since the focus is placed on women, obscuring the ways in which women resist, and removing the emphasis and responsibility from men as doers of violence.

How radical economic transition has brought political and cultural change is examined in the third chapter in relation to symbolic, and actual gender roles and identities. Here, the work of Connell (1993, 1995a, 1995b, 2001) on masculinities/femininities and Messerschmidt (1993, 1995, 1997) on capitalist patriarchy is used to link structure, agency and subjectivity. With the arrival of capitalism and democracy, there has been a reappearance of hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity in contrast to the more egalitarian socialist gender roles (at least in the public sphere). The author argues that the emergence of multiple, marginalized masculinities have led to a crisis in masculinity, which correlates to an increase in violence against women, with

an implicit assumption here of causality. The dominant explanatory framework for men's violence appears to be reactive theories (Gelles, 1987, 1997; Straus *et al.*, 1988) where men's frustration and sense of inadequacy in attaining normative masculinity along with status incompatibility between heterosexual partners is argued as the cause of men's violence. This is a much rejected theory by many feminists and while Connell maintains that the key structures of gender relations are labour, power and cathexis (structures of emotional relations), Nikolic-Ristanovic has focused almost exclusively on labour, thus the opportunity to further explanations of men's violence through a political critique of patriarchy is closed off.

The prevalence and forms of domestic violence are discussed in chapter 4. A definition at the outset would have been helpful as the reader is left unsure of how this contested term is being used. It becomes clear that it is used in a way more akin to the term 'family violence' since there is discussion of both inter and intra-generational violence between adults within a range of kin relations. By far, the most depressing chapter is on trafficking women for sex. Secondary data show an increase in the numbers of women, predominantly girls and young women, forced or coerced into sex 'work'. A range of push and pull factors in sending, transit and receiving countries, including the presence of both active and peace-keeping military forces, are discussed. Nikolic-Ristanovic elucidates well the commodification of women in the global market and illustrates not only how this is a form of violence in itself but how violence is used to recruit, control and enslave women. Both chapters conclude with an explanatory framework where a shift is made to a multivariate theory of men's violence (O'Neil and Harway, 1999) in which a complex array of social, psychological and structural factors is deemed to cause men's violence.

The final chapter highlights some of the positive effects of transition brought about through the emergence of democracy and civil society. This has led to the (re)-development of the women's movement and a subsequent increase in activism, theory and research to both support women experiencing violence and to seek legal and policy reform. There is an interesting discussion of the reasons for this work being couched as women's rights rather than feminism. Greater access to Western knowledge, experience and funding has also been possible along with the inherent tensions this brings. The short conclusion draws on the work of Gilligan (1997, 2001) who posits a public health model of prevention arguing that it is only by understanding its causes that we can deal with violence effectively. While this is difficult to disagree with, there needs to be caution in our explaining violence against women since any explanation can be appropriated and used to justify or excuse men's actions.

The book would have benefitted from more rigorous editing; heavy footnoting, a substantial number of typographical errors and inexact referencing detract from

and make a difficult read of a book which contributes usefully to our knowledge of women's experiences of men's violence.

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Gender, democracy and inclusion in Northern Ireland

Carmel Roulston, Celia Davies (Eds.); Palgrave, Hampshire, 2000, ISBN: 0-333-76066-2 (Pbk) £15.99

This collection of essays assesses women's contribution to democracy and peace in Northern Ireland. I am often struck by the extent to which women writing about Northern Ireland are not just academic researchers but are often activists, actual participants in the processes they describe. This collection is no exception and brings together a range of contributors who have experienced varied aspects of political life in this contested region. This collection clearly benefits from the fusion of academic analysis and community involvement. While noting the relative