SOCIAL CHANGE, GENDER AND VIOLENCE

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SOCIAL CHANGE, GENDER AND VIOLENCE

Post-communist and war affected societies

by

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To Ognjen, my future

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PREFACE

Vesna Nikolic-Ristanovic and I first met in 1994 at an international conference in Adelaide, Australia. Fortunately for us, we spoke on the same panel - the one dedicated to gender and violence. I was taken with her compelling research on the experiences of violence among women in East-Central Europe. Situated amidst war, economic collapse, political upheaval, globalization and the "new Europe," women in this region faced increasing levels of violence and victimization while struggling to hold their families and societies together. Most significantly, Dr. Nikolic-Ristanovic's research shows that large-scale global changes dramatically affect the most private aspects of the lives of men and women in East-Central Europe - their marital lives, their relationships with their children and parents, their friendships, their community ties.

Impressed by her presentation and our initial meeting, I began a correspondence with Nikolic-Ristanovic, from which I was to benefit considerably. We talked about the war in Serbia, her ethnographic research with women refugees, and the challenges she faced as a criminologist working in that context. After contributing a chapter to a book that Lois Lorentzen and I co-edited, *The Women and War Reader*, Nikolic-Ristanovic developed a research project that synthesized her scholarship on war, gender, violence and women's experiences in the public and private spheres. Her proposal was funded by the Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation and resulted in this book. We can learn a great deal from it.

Social Change, Gender and Violence counteracts the tendency to view the collapse of the former Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc system in purely positive terms. "Transitionology," the near orthodoxy that has emerged and that is appropriately critiqued by Stephen Cohen in his book *Failed Crusade*, contends that Russia and the Eastern European states are undergoing a transition from communism to free-market capitalism and democracy. While that process will entail short-term difficulties, transitionologists argue that the ultimate outcome will be great for the peoples of that region and for international relations. Nikolic-Ristanovic is not the first to question that orthodoxy but her challenge is distinct. While recognizing the positive features of the collapse of Soviet and Yugoslav models of communism, she demonstrates that the economic collapse underway has devastating effects on the people of the region. Her project accounts not only for the economic changes, but for other large-scale changes affecting the societies of East-Central Europe: war; globalization; and radical political and cultural change.

Rather than limiting her study to macro level aggregate data, her research applies ethnographic methods to situate the lives of women and men, girls and boys, amidst these changes, melding both macro and micro levels of analysis. Her book shows that hardship falls disproportionately on women in the region. Women are most likely to be left in poverty. They often become heads of household, responsible for providing not only for their own children, but also for members of their extended families. Elderly women and young girls are particularly vulnerable to the effects of poverty. Women and girls constitute the majority of the refugees. Under these conditions of social stress, more women experience violent attacks from their

husbands, male partners, and sons. Nationalist forces within the region have reinstated traditional gender roles in their mobilization of support for the state, further reducing women's social status and power. With the breakdown of the communist or socialist model, social protections previously guaranteed to women have eroded. Thus, while in some ways the "transition" is to be welcomed, in many other ways it spells disaster.

This research brings to bear the kind of analysis we need in order to understand societies in transition and societies at war. While a flood of books and articles, both scholarly and popular, have positioned one ethnic group against another in a battle for morality in East-Central Europe, Nikolic-Ristanovic's work reaches out to women and men from four countries: Bulgaria, Macedonia, Hungary, and Serbia - and to many more ethnic groups. When I spoke with her during her research, she expressed her anguish at hearing the stories of women from not only her home country of Serbia, but also Croatian women, Albanian women, Roma women, and others, who have suffered violence during this time of upheaval and change. Nikolic-Ristanovic showed what was common in these experiences, while avoiding a reductionist gender analysis that overlooks cultural differences. She calls on us to listen to women's stories, but does not reduce the problem of violence to male pathology. Instead, she has placed the lives of both women and men in context, showing how the difficulties produced by war and economic hardship destroy the relationships of people who love and care about each other. Nikolic-Ristanovic calls this phenomenon "the mirror" – the reflection of global change in our private and community lives.

Nikolic-Ristanovic's account reflects an author who is not only a committed social scientist, but also a woman who has experienced the upheaval firsthand. With this book, she shapes the interpretation of events that have dramatically affected her own life. Her dedication to the research under severe conditions stands as an emblem of compassionate scholarship – melding her heart and mind to explain and witness history unfolding in East-Central Europe.

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I especially appreciate the professional and human support I had from Ruth Jamieson from Keele University (England) from the very beginning until the end of this project, especially during my stay in England. I am grateful as well to all those who read and commented on the research proposal and drafts of this book and whose suggestions and ideas in different ways were important for my work: Jennifer Turpin from University of San Francisco, Susanne Karstedt, David Gadd, Annette Balinger, Anne Warall, Davina Cooper and Kyril Drezov from Keele University, Judith Armatta from Portland, Marina Blagojevic from Belgrade, Violeta Caceva from Skopje and Natassja Smiljanic from University of Central England (Birmingham). Also, I want to thank all Keele University Criminology Department staff and especially Tim Hope, the head of the Department, for creating an inspiring and supportive environment for my second year of work on this project. Last but not least, I want to thank my son Ognjen and the husband Radovan, for being just what they are - the support and inspiration which kept me going.

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Social changes, which occurred in post-communist countries in the late 1980's and early 1990's, brought new opportunities for positive developments and offered the possibility of choice. In most countries, the social transition brought an opening of borders, enabling an influx of positive as well as negative influences. However, even the general positive impact of social changes is typically followed by more negative consequences in the everyday life of the people. The most dramatic consequences of social transition manifested in a significant rise of unemployment and the loss of many social benefits. These developments are directly related to the replacement of planned, centralized economies by the market and the privatization of state property. Most people lost their previous social security benefits and, despite the fact that the general character of communism was "equality in poverty," the social transition was the source of numerous existential problems and serious stress. This was further intensified by the fact that, at the same time, the growing import of both material goods and the American way of thinking, i.e. consumerist spirit of the West urged people to achieve their "American dreams" at any cost.

However, the precise manifestations of social changes differ very much from country to country. The manner in which social change is manifested depends on the level of economic development achieved in the communist period, the model of communism accepted (Soviet or Yugoslav), and the degree of its influence in a specific country. Additionally, the existence and nature of other global social developments such as nationalistic movements and armed conflicts create specific features in the transition processes of some countries. However, social changes do not affect all people in the same way.

Many academics have already pointed out the impact of social changes on gender issues in post-communist countries. Watson, for example, argued that the transformation of the relationship between the public and private spheres lies at the heart of the process of change in Eastern Europe, and that the exclusion of women and the degrading of feminine identity are not contingent to, but rather a fundamentally constitutive feature of, the democratization of Eastern Europe. She also points out that this contrasts with existing accounts of social transition which have focused exclusively on the reconstruction of the public sphere, ignoring not only issues of gender, but also the functioning of "real society" in general (Watson, 1993:482). However, as many authors have argued, there are clear empirical indications that gender relations are also in transition – the rate of female participation in the new democratic parliaments is less than in state socialism, women are overrepresented among those who are unemployed, reproductive rights achieved during socialism were challenged, domesticity of women is widely projected as a social virtue, pornography became a new symbol of freedom, and the marketing of women's bodies is rising. The creation of a market economy in Eastern Europe "fundamentally entails the construction of a 'man's world' and the simultaneous propagation of masculinity in the public sphere, with domestication and the marketing of women. The degradation of feminine identity is an inevitable corollary of this process" (Watson, 1993:472).

In the former Yugoslavia, both social transition and the war as macro processes obviously influenced changes in gender relations on the micro level, which further

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contributed to different patterns of women's vulnerability to become victims of violence. Social changes in post-communist countries had a serious impact on women's vulnerability to different forms of violence, especially to domestic violence, trafficking in women, and sexual harassment in the work place. These influences were mediated by changes in the social and economic status as well as in the gender and ethnic identities of both women and men.

This book is the result of both my three years study of the connection between social changes and women's vulnerability to violence and much longer personal experience of living in a post-communist and war affected society. Thus, I have been not only an observer of, i.e. researcher, but also a participant in all these changes. This made my position as a researcher advantageous, while, at the same time, my situation as a human being was very complex and difficult. Being a participant was an advantage since, as I wrote elsewhere (Nikolic-Ristanovic, 1998:462), I was able to observe directly some aspects of my research topic, and unlike Western authors, to be quite familiar with various aspects of the life in both communist and post-communist society's milieu. Moreover, I myself felt like part of my own sample since I shared the fate of the people I was studying. This, as stressed by feminist ethnographers who emphasize closeness rather than distance in fieldwork relations, enhances understanding based on participant observation because of "total immersion in the world one is studying." (Reinharz, 1992:69). On the other hand, living in a society with an extremely high level of instability, uncertainty and stress, as well as with all kinds of rapid changes, was not very stimulating for concentrated intellectual work, let alone for doing research on specific phenomena at the specific time. In other words, in societies, which change so quickly, there is always risk that the research findings, which were accurate for one moment, become partly or sometimes completely inappropriate in a very short period.¹ This is why in this book I so often refer to the time of doing the survey or the moment of writing the book. Moreover, living in a stressful society and doing a survey on stressful events in the life of overstressed respondents often posed serious problems to both my interviewees and myself. This was especially true in Serbia, since interviews were done immediately after the Kosovo conflict and NATO bombing, when both interviewers and interviewees were highly stressed.²

The survey on which the book is based followed my study stay at the Central European University in Budapest at the beginning of 1998, where I spent two months as the Open Society Institute Higher Education Support Project research

1 Data about the development of social movements and legal reform are changing especially quickly. As observed by Dobash and Dobash (1992:13) "the task of characterizing a living movement while still in the process of development is inevitably more complex than charting one that has become a memory". However, in the society in transition similar problems appear when other social phenomena are researched

2 My research assistant in Serbia Ivana Vidakovic, although a psychologist by profession, had problems in both coping with painful interviews and transcribing them. She used to say that transcribing interviews was sometimes even more difficult than doing the interviews themselves. I myself found it very difficult interviewing even activists of women's groups in Serbia, who, thanks to the use of different self-help techniques, usually cope with stress much better than other people. Also, even analyzing the interviews was very stressful so that I often found myself crying while confronted with the overall suffering and hopelessness of my respondents (for similar experiences of other feminist researchers see Reinharz, 1992 34,35)

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fellow. This is where I did preliminary research of violence against women in post-communist society. I learned how different social transition in different countries is, and how interconnected and complex are different aspects of social change. That preliminary knowledge, together with my personal experience, enabled me to design the concept of the survey which, during 1999 and 2000, I carried out in four countries: Hungary, Bulgaria, Macedonia and Serbia.

The main aim of the survey was to examine the ways in which social changes in post-communist and war affected societies influence the vulnerability of women to violence (domestic violence and sex trafficking). Having in mind that preliminary findings suggested the hypothesis that the impact of social changes on women's vulnerability to violence is mediated by changes in the everyday life of both women and men, the subject of research was determined as an examination of the impact of social changes to changes in everyday life of women and men as well as the impact of these latter to women's vulnerability to violence. Also, the impact of social changes, primarily the impact of the creation of civil society and the women's movement, on the attitudes of both citizens and the state toward the problem of violence against women is examined. In this regard, preliminary findings suggested the hypothesis that the development of civil society initiatives in post-communist countries led to the development of the women's movement and the movement for victim's rights and, in this way, contributed to improved social visibility of violence against women and created conditions for improvement of legal and other social responses to it. In addition, the research was expected to provide the answer to the question what is the greater influence: negative changes in everyday life of people produced by the development of a market economy and privatization, or the positive influences produced by the development of civil society³.

Comparison of data for four countries (Serbia, Hungary, Macedonia and Bulgaria) allowed me to learn about similarities and differences in the impact of social changes on everyday life and violence against women. Also, it allowed me, having in mind different levels of realized changes and different social conditions as a whole in each of the examined countries, to test the above-mentioned hypothesis. The comparative research of these processes in countries which belonged to different models of communism, which were on different levels of economic development and which, because of these differences and some additional influences, such as war and inter-ethnic conflicts, achieved different levels of macrosocial change, allowed me a deeper examination of the nature of realized changes and, at least at an analytical level, differentiation between the impact of war and social transition on everyday life and violence against women.

The end of the Cold War and related events, i.e. social transformations and wars in former communist countries, produced significant changes on both the macro and

³ The originally designed focus of research was slightly changes due to unexpected events in Serbia connected to the Kosovo conflict and NATO bombardment of Serbia. It means that the focus of the research is consequently broadened to include questions related to changes in people's everyday lives and women's vulnerability to violence which were produced by new macro level processes (conflicts, bombing but also new migrations and further worsening of the economic situation affecting in different ways all countries included in the survey). In addition, restricted access to information about Kosovo and the fact that it was actually cut off from Serbia, limited my research dealing with this part of Serbia in the measure in which it was possible

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micro level. Both levels of change seemed to be so connected and interlaced that it was barely possible to understand one without exploring the other. Thus, the subject of research was an examination of the influence of macro processes to processes that happen on a micro level and vice versa. The exploration of macro-micro links included:

- a) The links between macrostructural and microstructural changes (e.g. gender and economic structures);
- b) The impact of microstructural (primarily interconnected gender and economic structural) changes on women's vulnerability to violence;
- c) The links between microstructural and macrostructural changes (e.g. the development of civil society, the women's movement and legal reforms).

Consequently data were collected in a way that would allow learning about indicators of social changes on a macro level, on indicators of changes in people's everyday lives and about characteristics of violence against women, i.e. how it is related to changes in everyday life. I chose structural methodology (Hagan, 1988:256) as a main methodological approach for connecting empirical data with theory, i.e. for the analysis of the impact of macrostructural on microstructural changes and violence against women. I tried to look at violence against women using the conceptualization, which focus is on the causes and consequences of violence in the life course. The same conceptualization is used within structural criminology, which itself seems to be one of important theoretical explanations for my findings.⁴ I explore changes in the life course of women and men during first ten years of transition from communism (1989-1999).⁵

The focus of my analysis is on the changes and transitions of the adult life of people in post-communist society, including both changes in comparison with life during communism and different changes that occurred over the last ten years. Looking at the biographical and subjective perceptual processes of individual women and men, based on the use of intergenerational and historical dimensions (prospective and retrospective research design), I analyze them in relation to broader structural changes in their countries. However, as stressed by Burgoyne (1987:51), during their adult life people are faced with many changes, which are not necessarily related to changes in the broader society (e.g. changes connected to moving or size of family). Thus, looking at these changes was necessary as well and enabled me to get correct picture about macro-micro links.

I explore in particular the dynamic relations between the individual women and men and other members of the family and household, and relations between the household and the changing economy within the wider society. The impact of socio-economic and war related changes on family structure, gender identities, relationships and violence against women is the focus of my analysis. I assume that a comprehensive understanding of the causes and consequences of violence requires

⁴ The point of life course perspective, as stressed by Hagan, is "to emphasize that social events which are called delinquent or criminal are linked into life trajectories of broader significance, whether these trajectories are criminal or non-criminal in form" (Hagan, 1988: 260).

⁵ I use the term 'life course' rather than the more familiar 'life cycle' since the latter implies fixed categories in the life of the individual and assumes a stable social system, while the former allows a more flexible biographical patterns within a continually changing social system (Cohen. 1987:1) Thus, the term 'life course' suits much better the unstable and changeable context of post-communist society.

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that it be placed within the context in which it occurs and that it be examined from the perspective of both women and men (Dobash and Dobash, 1998:9). Or, as Mills (1970:12, quoted by Burgoyne, 1987:37) put it, "a social scientific analyses of contemporary issues and problems should enable individuals to understand how their biographical circumstances have been shaped by particular historical events and social changes. Also, this imagination should help its possessor to appreciate that 'by the fact of his living he contribute, however minutely, to the shaping of this society and to the course of its history, as he is made by society and by its historical push or shove'".

As a result, I chose data collection methods that assure acquiring all information necessary to achieve the above mentioned aims. In this regard ethnography as multimethod research seemed to be the most appropriate for placing violence against women into a social context (Reinharz, 1992:53). I collected data in several ways - in Serbia and during my field trips to other countries included in the survey as well as through the important help of my research assistants.

Data on indicators of macro level changes were collected on the basis of available written materials on the characteristics of social changes in each country as well as through the statistical data and analyses. I collected data about the impact of social changes on people's everyday lives through interviews with ordinary people (women and men), through interviews with women's movement activists, academics and experts as well as from press clippings and other published and unpublished materials collected specifically for this research. Data on precise manifestations of violence against women were collected from the documentation of different organizations (women's groups, victim support groups, state institutions and similar), from press clippings as well as from other written materials. Also, I obtained information about the development of the women's movement and movement for victim's rights as well as data on the influence of their initiatives to improve the legal protection of women victims of violence through a specially designed questionnaire as well as through interviews with activists and academics. Also, I collected data on legal problems related to violence against women and legal reforms through interviews with professionals, academics and activists and through analyses of legal texts, research findings and other written materials. For gaining to information about some of the above-mentioned phenomena and processes I used direct observation and participation (e.g. women's movement and legal reforms).

Seventy-eight NGO's (21 in Hungary, 18 in Macedonia, 13 in Bulgaria and 39 in Serbia) were included in the survey. The majority of them were women's groups (18 in Hungary, 17 in Macedonia, 11 in Bulgaria and 34 in Serbia). All victim support and women's organizations which, according to previous information, were expected to deal with violence against women, were sent questionnaires and almost all of them, with only a few exceptions, returned completed questionnaires. For those who, for whatever reason, did not complete the questionnaire, data were collected through the use of other sources, such as brochures, information packages, interviews with NGO activists, articles etc.

The sample of professionals, academics and activists was determined on the basis of the preliminary information obtained by research assistants. It included the total of 45 women's group activists, judges, attorney lawyers, social workers, researchers, professors, psychiatrists and psychologists (10 in Macedonia, 14 in

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Bulgaria, 11 in Hungary and 10 in Serbia). This kind of information collection was especially important because of the small number of research and published materials relevant to the topic of research. In addition, 98 persons (36 men and 62 women) were interviewed about the influence of social changes to their everyday life and women's vulnerability to violence. The sample was determined using age, marital status and employment as the main criteria. As a result, in each country 24 persons were interviewed (9 men and 15 women) with an additional two interviews with Kosovo refugees in Serbia. In total, there were three women refugees in the Serbian sample (two from Kosovo and one from Croatia). Those interviewed were between 30 and 60 years old - five women and three men belonging to each of following age categories: 30-40, 40-50 and 50-60 years. In determining the age structure of the sample I started from preliminary knowledge of the 40-60 year age category as the most threatened by social changes as well as from the fact that people of this age might be able to compare their present everyday life and family situation with the situation which existed 10 years before. Also, I chose the 30-40 year age category, because of the specific problems (unsolved housing problem, women who are married to new businessmen and similar) that this category is expected to face and which may be the factors that contribute to disturbed family relationships and women's vulnerability to violence. Those belonging to the youngest category of the sample were asked about their own everyday life experiences as well as to compare their own experience with the experience of their parents.

Because the main subject of the survey carried out through these interviews was an examination of the influence of social changes on the everyday life of people and women's vulnerability to domestic violence, the sample consisted only of people who were married, cohabited or were divorced, and were living with the partner for at least three years during the examined period (1989-1999).

The structure of the sample regarding employment was determined on the basis of the type of the husband's employment because preliminary research suggested the hypothesis that in the post-communist period men are more under work-related stress than women. This is mainly because of the traditional male role of breadwinner and one who is responsible to solve the economic problems of the family. These stresses, i.e. frustrations, were expected to generate men's violence as well. Starting from this hypothesis, the sample is determined to include women whose husbands are unemployed, employed in state institutions and those whose husbands are private businessmen as well as men who belong to each group. Both working-class and what should be middle class women and men are included in the sample.

The material was collected in the native languages of the respondents and was then translated by either my research assistants themselves or by translators from the countries where respondents originated⁶. Research assistants, who did interviews with women and men from the general population were previously introduced to feminist methodology and feminist interviewing techniques based on a semi-structured questionnaire (with special emphasis on active listening and empathy). In

⁶ The exceptions were interviews with activist, experts and academics, which were done by me in either English (directly or through interpretation by my research assistants) or Serbian.

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interpretation of findings I also relied very much on my interviewees and research assistants' comments. Bearing in mind the accepted methodological approach, I used qualitative analysis as a main method and quantitative analysis as supplementary for analyzing the large amount of ethnographic material obtained from the survey. Similarly as Connell (1995:89,90) noted, I also found that although the life-history method "always concerns the making of social life through time", which makes it "a first-class method for the study of social change", as well as one of "the richest methods in social science", it is also one of "the most time-consuming. Moreover, using it to study large-scale social changes requires a trade-off between depth and scope." Indeed, in spite of small samples of respondents in each country, the extensive amount of narrative material obtained from numerous sources was very difficult and slow for data processing and analysis so that Nud*ist computer program was important in making these problems affordable. However, on the other side, the obtained material was impressive and gave me significant access and insight into the complex reality of the lives of women and men in post-communist and war-affected societies. Hence, doing the analysis was also a real challenge and pleasure.

Research findings are, where appropriate, compared with findings for other post-communist countries as well as with findings on social change, gender and violence in Western countries. The fact that the impact of social change is analyzed using the example of the society under stress does not make the analysis less important for societies where the level of social stress is much lower. On the contrary, in societies under stress the changes are very quick and frequent and thus highly visible. This makes their identification and analysis easier, and the findings of this research comparable with and applicable to wider, i.e. more stable societies, where social changes occur, albeit less frequently and less quickly.

Findings are explored according to different social and criminology theories: masculinity (sex role and structured-action) theories, structural (power-control theory), and feminist criminology, as well as in relation to radical microsociology, resource mobilization theory and global sociology. Thus, apart from giving insight on the real dimensions of the impact of transition and war on people in post-communist societies, I also try to incorporate knowledge about post-communist, war and post-war society into a broader social theory on social change (crises, social transformation), gender and violence. Within that, I especially try to develop theory on masculinity and domestic violence, i.e. trafficking in women, as well as explanations of violence against women in contemporary society which consider structural factors, i.e. inequalities, on both national and international level (e.g. in the context of globalization). Thus, I try to look at violence against women as connected to oppression of both women and men (e.g. as a consequence of both patriarchy and economic marginaliation of both women and men). I argue that violence against women in post-communist and war-affected societies is significantly connected to the increase of social stratification, economic hardships, unemployment, instability, uncertainty and related social stresses, militarism, changes in (especially men's) gender identity (both reinforcement and marginalisation of masculinity) and structural inequalities brought by the new world order.

INTRODUCTION

The book is organized in a way that allows me to proceed with analyses from the macro to the micro level and back.

Macro-micro analysis includes review of changes in four countries included in the survey and the analysis of the way in which they are translated on a micro level, i.e. in the everyday life of women and men. Then I explore how changes in everyday life influence gender identity (masculinity and femininity) and then how both changes influence women's vulnerability to domestic violence and trafficking in women.

Micro-Macro analysis looks at the development of the women's movement and feminism, and especially the battered women's movement and other women' and civil society initiatives, how they are connected with both macro and micro level changes and how effective they are in terms of achieved legal and policy changes.

In the conclusion I try to develop a theoretical explanation which looks at one more general level at the impact of social change or social crises on gender and gendered violence. Especially useful for an explanation of my findings as well as for the development of such theoretical explanation are the following ideas: Connell's ideas about hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity, Messerschmidt's and Hagan's ideas about interconnections between gender and economic (class) structures as well as other ideas which consider interconnections between structural and interpersonal violence (e.g. revised multivariate model of men's violence against women developed by O'Neil and Harway, model of web of violence developed by Turpin and Kurtz and Gilligan's theory of violence and shaming).