

Macroeconomic Interventions and the Politics of Postwar Justice

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This essay connects feminist political economy and critical/feminist transitional justice through the analysis of macroeconomic interventions in postwar Bosnia and Herzegovina. Previous contributions to *Critical Perspectives* have argued for the need to establish a dialogue and bring down divides between feminist security studies and political economy in feminist International Relations (Elias 2015; Chisolm and Stachowitsch 2017) and to look at the spaces where security and political economy intersect as a productive line of research (Sjoberg 2015). To build these connections, feminist scholars have stressed the importance of multidimensional concepts and questioned their unidimensional use whenever relevant. Security is certainly one of the concepts benefiting from a feminist critique that has opened up its meaning, with reference to its referent objects as well as its multiple dimensions (e.g., to include women's economic security alongside physical security; see Chisolm and Stachowitsch 2017; True 2015). Another concept that has been productively reframed as multidimensional by feminist scholars is violence (Bergeron, Cohn, and Duncanson 2017; Elias and Rai 2015; True 2012).

I argue that justice can and should be understood as another such multidimensional concept, one where feminist conceptions of the term have the potential to illuminate the connections between political economy and studies of peace and security, as discussed in this essay, while also constituting a fruitful line of research. Justice is here understood as a practice, rather than as a legalistic or institutional approach to dealing with crime and violence. Like security and violence, justice has the potential to speak across fields, because it can take concerns rooted in the tradition of peacebuilding and the prevention of further violence and connect them to the effects of economic interventions in conflict-affected countries, thus moving closer to the remit of political economy. It is particularly important to look at justice in postwar or transitional contexts, where it forms part of people's claim for redress after mass violence.

Feminist scholars have contested the legalistic and individualizing approaches to transitional justice, noting the gap between courtroom justice and the expectations and needs of survivors (Björkdahl and Selimović 2015; Simić 2009). Most importantly, they have broadened our understanding of wartime violence and injustice by putting the experiences of communities affected by conflict, including but not limited to women victims of gender-based violence, at the center of their research program (O'Reilly 2016; O'Rourke 2009). On the other hand, feminist political economists have analyzed how gendered forms of violence are embedded in the global capitalist economic structure through which international organizations and states operate (also connecting them to lived experiences; see Elias and Rai 2015; True 2012).

Here, I argue that this feminist lens, joining studies of postwar justice and political economy, can be applied to the analysis of macroeconomic interventions in postconflict contexts. It is in these postwar moments that political and economic systems, as well as social relations, are often subject to dramatic transformations. A feminist lens deploying justice as a versatile and multidimensional concept clearly shows how macroeconomic interventions are embedded in global capitalist structures but also have very specific and gendered effects on justice issues at the local level.

I draw on Elias and Rai's (2015) suggestion that feminist International Political Economy look at the "everyday," human cost of violence against women, rather the economic costs of it, as international financial institutions (IFIs) commonly do. I also build on Bergeron, Cohn, and Duncanson's (2017) argument that feminist analyses of postwar contexts should look at violence holistically (including but going beyond gender-based and sexual violence). Therefore, I assess economic reforms not in terms of their economic outcomes but in relation to the claims of redress moved forward by communities affected by conflict. I use the example of Bosnia and Herzegovina after the 1992–95 war as illustrative of macroeconomic interventions that we have witnessed elsewhere in the aftermath of conflict or during post-authoritarian transitions (from South Africa, to Kosovo, to Mozambique, and so on).

In the immediate postwar period, IFI interventions set up Bosnia's Central Bank and currency and aimed to promote budgetary stability at a time when the country was recovering from widespread material destruction. During this time, Bosnia's economy grew as a result of the reconstruction effort, and the state budget benefited from increased revenues from taxation. However, such growth failed to generate sustainable employment and did not prevent cuts to public services and

welfare. It was clear that the new postwar, postsocialist Bosnian state would look very different from Yugoslav times. The global financial crisis exacerbated pressure from IFIs to cut budgets, especially because of private banks' limited availability of credit and the slowing down of fiscal revenues. The International Monetary Fund's stand-by arrangements, most recently negotiated in 2012 and 2016, were made conditional on budget cuts, and even IFI support for private banks to remain in the region was tied to the Bosnian authorities' commitment to limiting public spending in key social sectors (De Haas et al. 2012; Gedeon 2010).

These policies had clear gendered implications. First, the reparative function of so-called war-related payments was jeopardized by budget cuts and the promotion of means-tested welfare transfers. Civilian victims, and victims of sexual violence especially, are disadvantaged by the current status-based system, which provides the highest payments to war veterans (Hronešová 2016). However, means-based welfare would provide payments on the basis of economic need and diminish their role in providing some sort of redress for gendered forms of violence and injustice suffered during the war, which left Bosnian women not only physically hurt, but economically and socially marginalized. This suggests that despite pressure from IFIs, there is a need to rethink welfare measures and tailor them to the needs of postconflict communities, in collaboration with these collective groups (rather than as individual claims to basic state support).

Second, both before and after the global financial crisis, IFI interventions seemed focused on boosting economic growth measured through gross domestic product (GDP). As True and colleagues (2017) ask, growth for whom? Not only is GDP a poor measure of standards of living, but also it operates on a different conceptual level than justice, sidelining discussions around fairness and redress in favor of economic outcomes. Fieldwork carried out in Bosnia shows that women were let down after the war because they lost rights to their old jobs, often after being unjustly dismissed. The minimization of the role of the state in the productive economy, championed by IFIs, has gone hand in hand with a reduction in women's formal employment and an increase in emigration. In a country where employment levels struggled to reach the pre-2008 crisis level due to jobless growth after the global financial crisis (World Bank 2017a, 2017b), women (particularly those less well-off) still have lower activity rates and lower access to formal economic opportunities and to credit (World Bank 2015). This results in more women taking up work in the informal sector and incentivizing

emigration to seek formal employment abroad: a staggering 49.5% of Bosnians now live outside the country (World Bank 2019), and there are some indications that more women than men cancel their residence in Bosnia and Herzegovina each year (BiH Ministry of Security 2016, 64), although further research and data on the gendered dynamics of ongoing emigration flows are still needed. Ultimately, the IFI model of promoting economic growth through liberalization and flexibilization of the labor market has demonstrated that – in postconflict countries – justice is needed not only for direct, physical violence but also to redress the structural violence and inequalities that have become entrenched in the postwar period.

So how does this multidimensional understanding of justice link together these macroeconomic interventions with their gendered effects on the ground? A first dimension of the concept of justice leads us to look at the trajectory of women's lives through the war and the postwar transition, taking into account how violence was experienced, its legacies, and the need for redressing it. Macroeconomic reforms also hit social groups that had been violently affected by the war: IFIs assessed their conditions in terms of economic outcomes and indicators, without regard for (legitimate) claims to redress that did not comfortably fit within the individual rights framework predominant under neoliberalism (see Maria Martin de Almagro and Caitlyn Ryan's introduction to this forum).

Second, the concept of justice gives us a different perspective on the insertion of Bosnia and Herzegovina into the global capitalist system, which brought economic targets based on market standards to the forefront of public policy while effectively displacing considerations of economic justice in a postsocialist context where economic well-being was perceived as closely tied to an ideal of equality. It also highlights the shortcomings of an economic paradigm that obscures the connections between formal and informal economies in shaping both injustice and the potential for justice claims to be fulfilled. Justice thus redefined, to include the redress of intersecting and overlapping forms of violence and oppression, speaks clearly across peace and security and political economy.

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Navigating to Subsistence: The Gendered Struggles in the Postwar Everyday and Their Implications for Peace

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In developing a feminist analysis of postwar political economic practices and institutions, my contribution builds on previous Critical Perspectives forums in following Cynthia Enloe’s call (2015, 438) to make sense of people’s gendered political lives while embracing their “messiness” and Rahel Kunz’s (2017) argument for placing life stories at the center of analysis. It focuses on the everyday life of female petty traders involved in the coping economy in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), including those working at the (in)famous Arizona market in Brčko.¹ By taking postwar gendered everyday experiences seriously, my contribution highlights the need for a gender-just, holistic approach to designing postwar reparative justice measures, labor market interventions, and integration of coping economic practices.

The Arizona market’s history stands witness to the profoundly gendered struggles in the postwar everyday. Located near the borders with Serbia and Croatia, it started as a “free-trade zone” at a roadblock created by NATO-led peacekeepers, “bringing together the warring parties.” The market was both unregulated and protected, and human trafficking and prostitution soon started taking place alongside trading, with the direct involvement of peacekeepers (Haynes 2010, 1781–96). Arizona, then, was a site where

1. I remain indebted to the people with whom I spoke during my research stays near the Arizona market in June/July and November 2012, for their patience, time, and trust in sharing their knowledge and experiences. All translations from Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian are mine. The names used here are not the real names of those whose stories are presented.