

Beyond Bodies as a Battlefield: Examining Gendered Experiences in Reparations Work in Post-War Bosnia

A qualitative study exploring restitution for war rape survivors and
how holistic transitional justice could strengthen peacebuilding



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Abstract

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The conflict in Bosnia divided a country and left long-lasting, unresolved chasms between its citizens. One of the least publicly discussed scars of the conflict is the systematic perpetration of war rape and the perpetuation of stigma against survivors of these crimes in the aftermath of the conflict. Though a taboo and clandestine topic within Bosnia – as well as a subject of limited assessment in political science literature – this thesis will elaborate on the phenomenon of sexual violence in warfare and articulate the post-conflict challenges observed by reparations advocates at the individual, societal, and institutional level. To do so, the thesis first endeavors to use empirical data collected from research participants to examine the long-term impact widespread sexual violence has had on political dynamics in Bosnia’s peacebuilding processes. Then, using the lens of holistic transitional justice, will explore applying transformative, gender-sensitive solutions from the “survivor-focused approach” to dysfunctional dynamics identified within the political taxonomy of Bosnia today. To carry out this study, I selected relevant research participants and conducted fieldwork and interviews with subjects located in three different cantons in Bosnia. I held 12 semi-structured qualitative interviews (four digitally and eight in-person) and divided my interview subjects into four groups by occupation: health center worker, NGO worker, museum curator and government employee. From these conversations, I analyzed and reviewed the data and coded emerging themes from the participants’ responses to affiliated transitional mechanisms commonly employed in post-conflict peacebuilding. This processing evolved into developing three connected narratives of findings and reflections, which I have chosen to present as ‘narratives of injustice’, ‘narratives of impunity’, and ‘narratives of incompetence’. These narratives propose that following the signing of the Dayton Agreement, which officially ended the conflict in Bosnia, policies and programs enacted under the helm of transitional peacebuilding neglected to equally consider or address the full spectrum of traumas experienced in the war. Notably, that the government failed to adequately recognize the use of rape as a weapon of war in the decades following the ceasing of hostilities. In this thesis, using interview excerpts, I will discuss how this silence and inaction could have stymied the development of positive social and economic outcomes for the survivors of war rape, their extended communities, and Bosnia as a whole during this vital period of post-conflict transition. Towards further scholarship, the insights from this study could expand the interpretation of trauma within political science and add background to the gendered dimensions of conflict transformation. In assessing post-conflict reparations work, reframing experiences of trauma in policy and politics could serve as a catalyst for positive and more resilient change.

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Over the course of the last few years, working towards attaining a master's degree in peace and conflict studies has certainly entailed a lot of personal growth and has at times felt like I embarked on a tumultuous, but exciting journey. This was never truer than in preparing for and traveling to Bosnia to conduct my fieldwork for this thesis in February 2020.

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“The essence of truth will be our healing.
Whoever is depriving us of that truth is perpetuating the trauma in our lives.”

- Dorothy Calata

Introduction

No *body* is safe in war. That is to say, no person, regardless of gender, ethnicity, race or status, is guaranteed protection or ensured personal sovereignty in a conflict zone. War makes people feel unsafe and insecure in their immediate surroundings, and in their broader homeland where unbridled chaos has the power to traumatize people in unpredictable and often lifelong ways. Trauma, both physical and psychological, can feel inescapable, especially when it is the type to cross boundaries beyond citizenship and borders beyond providence (Yuval-Davis and Stetzler, 2002). Some types of traumas can even be inflicted on one's most sacred space— one's body. Indeed, rape in any circumstance represents an attack on one's personhood at its most essential level; but when used in conflict, war rape in practice serves as an invasion by the enemy of the highest order and as an instrument of political aggression (Kirby, 2013, Skjelsbæk, 2012). For the survivors of such trauma, since war immemorial, it represents and imprints memories of an intrusion that continues well past any ceasefire as a weapon and a threat (Allen, 1996).

Being raped in war means uniquely living through conflict and its externalities from both outside of and within oneself. Facing the struggles of that duality is a vulnerable experience and a strenuous process that remains altogether uncaptured by the timelines of history books. These personal wars, wars in and of themselves, are ones that survivors will face for the rest of their lives, and ones that connect them directly to a conflict far past the drying of the ink on any dissolution agreement or peace treaty. Given such circumstances, understanding the political dynamics that emerge from conflicts which feature this type of warfare is of acute relevance for further study in political science discourse (Clark, 2018). Since these traumas often emphasize unresolved cracks or engrained inequalities within post-conflict societies, one could also examine whether they point to undercurrents symptomatic of an imbalanced and undemocratic nation-state— *of transitioning towards negative rather than positive peace?*

Given that war does not affect every person equally, not least in ethnic conflict, I set out to explore the narratives and perceptions of trauma at play in a country that has struggled with conflict transformation for nearly three decades: Bosnia-Herzegovina (herein referred to as Bosnia). Since the 1995 signing of the Dayton Agreement that halted active warfare, Bosnia has been in a state of protracted crisis. Conditions like a lack of political will to restore welfare, a breakdown in living conditions, and the prolonging of grievances between groups from the

conflict period continue to drive discontent and may have impeded restitution processes, including letting the legacy of sexual violence and its resulting effects go unaddressed (Clark, 2018, Amnesty International, 2017). Reparations, broadly defined by Kirby (2016), p.372) as “measures taken by the state to make good the various harms incurred during conflict,” are a part of transitional justice and restitution actions that can be employed from the outset of peace processes to institutionally affirm any hurt caused by war crimes, especially of a sexual nature.

Looking through the lens of reparations seeking for war rape survivors in Bosnia, I will explore the gendered challenges their advocates have faced. I will convey responses and insights regarding the lack of consideration given to the needs of survivors and contemplate whether the absence of public dialogue confronting Bosnia’s precedent of sexual violence had a consequential impact on its quotidian restoration moving forward. By studying these advocates’ reflections in relation to political dynamics at the individual, societal and institutional level, I will analyze current and historical policies and practices against an operationalized gender-sensitive holistic transitional justice framework that uses a combined approach, emphasizing transformational over transitional measures (Clark, 2018).

My ambition is to contribute to the improvement of a critical knowledge gap in peace and conflict studies regarding the experiences and impact of sexual violence in post-conflict peacebuilding processes by adding complementary perspectives from political psychology and transitional justice approaches. In doing so, I plan to investigate the following questions in my thesis:

- What challenges did reparations advocates for war rape survivors observe or encounter in pursuing reparations work following the end of the war in Bosnia and how did those challenges affect advocacy outcomes in the post-war period?
- How can the application of a “survivor-focused approach” from holistic transitional justice address the dynamics arising from those challenges?

1.1 Relevance: Why this focus and why now?

In December 2018, Nadia Murad and Denis Mukwege were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for “their efforts to end the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war and armed conflict,” bringing a brave focus and urgently needed critical attention to the subject at a global level (The Nobel Peace Prize 2018, 2018). As many feminist international relations scholars noted as a

response to Murad and Mukwege's selection at the time, this eminent public awarding forced many in the fields of politics, gender and peace studies to endure a "reflection on the state of affairs of research, policy, activism and public opinion about sexual violence," and yielded the conclusion that despite its worldwide reach, interest in expanding discourse on the subject of sexual violence was far less appealing to policymakers than was applauding the *perceived progress* of the prize instead (Stern, 2019), p.1276). As a master's student with a keen interest in the intersection of gender and peace studies, who was inspired by and present for the 2018 Prize, I pursued reading all the scholarship I could on the advancement of women's rights in conflict and read up regarding the international policy agenda on conflict-related sexual violence to learn more about this deficit. What I found was a myriad of critique.

Despite serving as a 'feminist success,' finally providing a spotlight for the stories of war rape survivors and their advocates, critical feminist scholars have suggested that the attention garnered by the 2018 Nobel Peace Prize did not instigate enough of a push in global or domestic policy apparatuses to bring about meaningful change. Women's bodily rights and autonomy were still under threat and Stern (2019), p.1277) asserts that in praising the win solely for its idyllic representation of female empowerment and the advancement of dialogue on sexual violence, there was also a danger in disproportionately "tethering gender and feminism to a particular meaning," and specifically misconstruing "its relation to violence". Indeed, sexual violence in warfare can be perpetrated indiscriminate of gender and through a variety of mechanisms. It can take advantage of the biological features of women to impregnate them by employing genocidal rape, and it can objectify women, conceptualizing them as the figurative embodiment of a country's nationhood (read: the motherland) or as the obvious spoils of war in the aftermath of a conflict— all frameworks which diversify the connections between the normative values and results of gendered experiences in conflict.

Therefore, to examine connotations more deeply, embedded within the congratulatory discussion writ large on women and security, whether superficial or substantive, I decided to challenge myself to look back and critically examine principal examples of sexuality and violence within warfare, like Norway's 'German Girls' or Japan's 'Comfort Women'. From there, I reviewed literature on gendered warfare that extended into the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war, including reading Inger Skjelsbæk's *The Political Psychology of War Rape* (2012) which featured one of the first comprehensive academic writings around the use of war rape in a civil conflict: Bosnia. According to Skjelsbæk (2012, p. 13), the Bosnian case was "by

far the best documented, most analyzed, and most discussed episode among all publications on sexual violence in war” and lifted “to a certain extent, the taboo that...made it impossible to study the phenomenon of wartime rape” before. Originally wanting to go to the Democratic Republic of Congo for fieldwork, given the transformative nature of the Bosnian experience on dialogue surrounding sexual violence I instead opted to focus my thesis research on this landmark example.

Though not a live or active conflict today, Bosnia provided an interesting landscape to attempt to understand the effects of transitional peacebuilding on development at the individual, societal, and institutional level following civil war and incidences of war rape. Not least, it is a post-conflict zone rife with a history of international intervention, the remnants of ethnic-based conflict, a strong gender binary and a view on what peacebuilding processes could look like decades after the fighting has stopped—all topics to be discussed further in my research findings. Certainly, in starting this research in 2020, it seemed particularly poignant to study Bosnia’s reparations work given the many milestones its advocacy touches. Notably, the signing of the Dayton Agreement has reached its 25th anniversary, the mounting of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda has surpassed its 20th anniversary, and the #MeToo movement continues to embroil a global feminist response with activism against impunity towards sexual violence five years on. The 2018 Peace Prize struck a chord internationally, raising awareness and public consciousness on sexual violence. However, it ultimately held only a brief moment of reckoning, and today, gaps and questions within research on sexual violence still persist.

As a jumping off point, the #MeToo movement and its radical questioning of the status quo implores us as feminists and as scholars to be critical of existing frameworks and power dynamics, with an eye towards reexamining approaches employed to old cases in new and innovative ways. In evaluating Bosnia’s activities across a long-term modality, I wanted to try to bridge some of the literature’s gaps by studying the reflections and adversity reparations advocates have been challenged by since their work stopped being front-page news three decades ago. Reviewing first-hand accounts addressing the intersections between trauma and governance, and the efforts to interweave them into post-conflict peacebuilding processes, touched upon my desire to overlap schools of thought from political psychology and gender studies within peace and conflict scholarship.

Further, recent interventions featuring gender-sensitive transitional justice mechanisms have also been successfully transforming the expectations of what was originally deemed possible in restorative practices and peacebuilding. In the last decade, cases like the negotiations of Colombia's peace process have been strengthened by the involvement of women—markedly, in advocating their own perspectives to conflict transformation through grief, truth-telling and initiating dialogue on inclusive power-sharing, which centered their experience of the conflict and enabled more stabilizing, gender-inclusive outcomes (True and Riveros-Morales, 2019, Salvesen, 2017). To utilize such a framework of measures seemed interesting to me, particularly regarding the legacies left by sexual violence in daily Bosnian life and in national policies. In that sense, much like many of feminism's previous iterations, centering trauma and transitional justice perspectives together here undertakes an unorthodox approach, with an ambition to integrate a breadth of perspectives, both of struggle and silence, from the interior and the outskirts of power.

For the sake of advancement of the discourse, it remains highly relevant as more countries transition from active conflict to post-conflict situations that scholars examine advocacy and development work happening in places that have concluded their conflicts and moved into transitional governance models of peacebuilding. In these societies, understanding the mechanisms and approaches that underpin or hinder their progress, particularly towards the axes of justice and equality, will be essential. Peace and conflict studies pulls from a variety of academic disciplines. This combination of theory and perspective provided inspiration and a point of departure for my thesis.

In the next sections, I will briefly review the historical context relevant for understanding Bosnia's record with rape as a weapon of war and will outline key conceptual definitions that ground the framework for my analysis. Then, I will summarize the methods I used in carrying out my research project and will share the responses collected from the qualitative semi-structured interviews I conducted with my research participants. Finally, I will examine the long-lasting political outcomes and challenges named, and, through the lens of holistic transitional justice, will discuss how the experiences of advocacy for war rape survivors could be influenced by shaping efforts to attain a sustained transformation towards 'survivor-focused' post-conflict peace.

2 Defining Context and Concepts

2.1 Historical Background on Rape as a Weapon of War in Bosnia

Bosnia, as a country, has always had an historically multicultural society, featuring many ethnicities and religions living side by side, and was “the most ethnically mixed of all of Yugoslavia’s republics” (Power, 2019), p.55). However, following declaring its independence in 1992, the nation “descended into the deadliest and most gruesome conflict in Europe since World War II” with features like war rape, genocidal massacres and war crimes committed on every side of the fighting (Power, 2019), p.55). Serbian leader, Slobodan Milosevic, in the interest of creating an ‘ethnically pure republic’ in Bosnia, supported Bosnian Serb militants in fomenting a bid of terror and misery to eradicate the Bosniak population and in its place jumpstart the rise of a ‘rightful Serb Republic’, with a new region—Republika Srpska (Allen, 1996). In this pursuit, militants laid siege on many cities and regions across Bosnia, and began deporting people to rape and torture camps where they were systematically abused and violated, in many cases, along ethnic lines (Clark, 2018). It is estimated that 80% of the rapes committed during the war in Bosnia occurred while people were held prisoner in these camps (Clark, 2018, p.41).

The most important conceptual change in this era of warfare, the Balkan Conflicts of the 1990s, was that it brought about the conceptual understanding that “sexual violence came to be seen as a weapon of war” (Skjelsbæk, 2012, p. 60). Due to the mass use of this tactic, the phenomenon came to be known internationally as war rape and was first globally recognized because of its high incidence in the conflict in Bosnia (Skjelsbæk, 2001). However, despite the United Nations Security Council expressing grave alarm about potential widespread violations of international humanitarian law in 1992 regarding sexual violence and forced rape, US Diplomat Samantha Power (2019, p.58) notes in her memoir that top American military officials were later “galled by the UN Peacekeepers’ neutrality in the face of clear-cut aggression” regarding these occurrences in Bosnia. Though it is central to emphasize that war rape was mostly committed systematically by male soldiers in the Bosnian Serb forces (VRS) against Bosniak Muslim women, the Bosnian conflict also included documented rapes by non-Serb forces including evidence of rapes perpetrated by both Bosnian Muslims and Bosnian Croats. In fact, “all sides in the Bosnian war committed rape and sexual violence,” just not at the same level, and importantly, both genders were affected as the rapes were not exclusively committed by men towards women (Clark, 2018, p.43).

Fundamentally, the Bosnian war placed “the issue of conflict-related rape and sexual violence firmly on the international agenda” and still today represents one of the longest running policy and advocacy efforts attempting to address the legacy of traumas perpetrated in war (Clark, 2018, p. 49). It began an era critical in scholarly review on sexual violence, namely of systematic documentation of wrongdoings that lead to securing prosecutions of war rape and sexual violence as war crimes later in international courts (Skjelsbæk, 2012). However, in practice, due to the blind spot for gender-sensitive language in the Dayton Peace Agreement, focus on the long-term effects and impacts of work addressing this gendered violence is a neglected area of analysis internationally and in Bosnia, and requires more reflection within the discourse of gender and conflict in peace and conflict studies.

2.2 Key Concepts and Relevant Frameworks

A. Victim & Survivor Narratives in Conflict-related Sexual Violence

In designing this research project, I was influenced by writings and texts such as Skjelsbæk (2012) and Skjelsbæk (2006) that discuss the cultivation of new vocabulary on sexual violence following its addition to the peace and conflict studies lexicon. In reading, I noticed an interesting dichotomy in how people who experienced conflict-related sexual violence and trauma were categorized—either as ‘victims’ or ‘survivors.’ I choose to take up space here to delineate their differences because I have made a conscious choice to utilize the term ‘survivor’ throughout this thesis.

According to Sveaass et al. (2018), p. 9) language used in international humanitarian law and by the United Nations generally employs the term ‘victim’ in reference to people who have “suffered and survived torture”, and continues to refer to this group as victims for the purposes of legal challenges and cases for reparations. However, normatively the word victim can sometimes insinuate temporal implications unfit for its application towards sensitive topics, such as those who have endured systematic sexual violence. For example, according to feminist security studies, narratives on victimizations can be misconstrued to indicate someone is hurt and exists permanently as a victim or is in lesser control of their life (Campbell, 2007) (Sveaass et. Al, 2018, p.9). Whereas ‘survivor’ can be more appropriate and is often used when those who experience this type of torture speak for themselves because it promotes feelings of strength and resilience within an experience otherwise associated with great adversity.

For this reason, this thesis will refer to people in Bosnia who were individually and/or collectively harmed by this type of trauma as *survivors*.

B. Women, Peace and Security Agenda

Though absent of state power mechanisms, the international humanitarian community's role as an agent of restorative justice work rose to prominence in Bosnia following the ceasefire and in the post-conflict years, instituting a variety of policies. In relation to the central focus of my thesis, I thought it important to examine the peacebuilding strategies on reparations used in the wake of widespread conflict-related sexual violence, and how gendered violence led to gender-based policies.

I focused my inquiry on learning about the development of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda (WPS) and its affiliated gender-sensitive policies in practice, such as United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325. I did this because historically when Bosnia's peace treaty, the Dayton Agreement, was signed in 1995 it did not include women in the negotiations or drafting process and did not consider or include language sensitive to gender or trauma related grievances. Effectively, 'peace' was brokered on paper, but in practice many survivors and their respective advocates were still struggling without normative frameworks in place to inform transitional peacebuilding efforts in a feminist and trauma-reflective way. Given that nearly no one in the immediate post-conflict period in Bosnia received direct attention or reconciliation from the state despite the use of systematic rape meant that there was a deficit addressing women's unique relationship to violence, and a policy framework for addressing that deficit was sorely needed.

Indeed, in many ways reaching 'justice' is difficult in instances where rape has been used as a weapon of war because justice in an institutional sense wasn't inclusive of sexual crime in its definition of trauma prior to the Balkan conflict and doesn't dynamically or easily address the nuanced experiences or degrees of conflict-related sexual violence (Cassese et al., 2009, Aolain, 2009). Despite much of human rights law being created in good faith, scholars observe that it has failed in nearly every case to address the assaults women specifically endured throughout wars and protracted conflict (Stiglmayer, 1994), p.183). That is why the creation of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda and its affiliated mechanisms and later resolutions have been so effective—they address the specific needs of women in a security context and cover policy gaps in traditional international law that encompass and strategically regard phenomena like war rape with inclusive and gender-mainstreamed policies (Shepherd, 2010). Additionally, the resolutions have served

as an aid in augmenting the global implementation of gender-sensitive transitional justice by giving a common framework for governments to work with and creating broader networks internationally around the WPS Agenda which has led to an expansion of the institutional acknowledgement of sexual violence in war, the call for designing National Action Plans, and the strengthening of the feminist approach within post-conflict peacebuilding processes (Martín de Almagro Iniesta, 2016, Martin de Almagro, 2018).

3 Methods

Conflict, and its aftermath, leave long-lasting impressions on any society, especially those in the midst of rebuilding. As a researcher in pursuit of inquiry, any student interested in conducting an effective qualitative study faces addressing those unique challenges and taking important ethical considerations into account when working throughout the research process.

3.1 Summary of Preparation

Initially, in organizing myself for this thesis, I wanted to interview medical practitioners and health advocates working with trauma connected to conflict-related sexual violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo. However, after an outbreak of Ebola spread rapidly in the region where I was planning to conduct fieldwork, changing my country of focus to Bosnia was best. Being the country to spearhead casework for the genre of gender and security literature on sexual violence in warfare that we see today, Bosnia's connection to the nexus of conflict transformation institutions and the global humanitarian community at large remains strong. Twenty-five years after the conclusion of the conflict, one is still able to observe and explore aid efforts to address sexual violence and rape as a weapon of war, visit art and cultural locations specialized in memorial reflection, and discuss political frameworks regarding the pursuit of restorative justice and peacemaking in friendly dialogue with Bosnian politicians and everyday people alike. This openness within the culture facilitated easier access and readiness of participants to taking part in a research study, which yielded optimal conditions when conducting fieldwork.

With this milieu in mind, I designed a qualitative study to travel to Bosnia and interview organizational and institutional voices directly working towards garnering reparations for war rape survivors. Generally outlined, this entailed traveling to three cantons across different regions of Bosnia to interview advocates in person in February 2020, as well as to conduct some

interviews digitally in the same month via Skype. In preparation for this, I began by identifying who to interview in the fall of 2019 in consultation with my co-supervisor Nora Sveaass and by contacting academics from the Peace Research Institute Oslo- Center for Gender, Peace and Security (PRIO-GPS), including my co-supervisor Gudrun Østby and Professor Inger Skjelsbæk.

Additionally, acting on their suggestions, I consulted Norwegian organizations to gain a foothold in connecting with helpful contacts in the regions where I wanted to conduct my fieldwork and started initiating outreach to my targeted research participants. Simultaneously, I designed an interview guide and applied to the Norwegian Center for Data Research (NSD) to receive approval to carry out the research. From the preliminary feedback I received, and following some personal research on local reparations advocates, I chose to contact Scandinavian, as well as Bosnian, development organizations to get in touch with relevant actors and/or groups familiar with advocacy, programming, and policy-driven relief work for trauma and reparations. I also researched heavily into conducting ethnographic research—to learn how to respectfully observe and take part in daily life side-by-side with one’s research subjects—and investigated how to conduct myself when holding interviews centered on sensitive topics given that the central subject of my thesis research is sexual trauma and could potentially put me either directly or indirectly in dialogue with people who experienced that first-hand.

Being able to conduct interviews in-country was also highly relevant for understanding the political dynamics and challenges experienced in Bosnia personally. Even as a bystander in a space, one can gain insights into sociopolitical or societal practices just by observing. However, as a final note on my preparation, I want to emphasize that given my fieldwork lasted three weeks and my sample size was small I am not employing classic ethnography, but rather communicating observations within my findings that represent methods from broader qualitative research.

3.2 On Conducting Sensitive and Ethical Research

In her book *The Political Psychology of War Rape* and other writings guided by feminist research practices, Inger Skjelsbæk particularly underscores having given attention to ethical considerations when designing her novel research approach conducting interviews with war rape survivors in Bosnia (Skjelsbæk, 2012, Skjelsbæk, 2016). In this vein, her insights greatly inspired my research design and informed how I grounded my process in appropriate considerations to

the needs of the research participants. Below I detail my reflections on ensuring that attention to ethical principle was followed:

It is important that I note that I acknowledge I am an outsider to Bosnia and to the direct and indirect experiences of trauma-related sexual violence in conflict. For this study, my strong interest in addressing and examining the long-lasting effects of sexual violence propelled me to persevere through the additional steps needed to ensure the quality of the research was upheld, while also respecting and not compromising on the privacy of my interview subjects as they reviewed and discussed some of the darkest times experienced in their lives and careers.

For me, my time conducting fieldwork lasted three weeks. However, there is no more bleak realization than understanding that as a researcher one is embodying the world of their interview subject for only a brief period of time, yet as citizens based in post-conflict countries interviewees live in the wake of war far beyond the fixed timeline of a master student's case study. Therefore, to ensure efficacy and to expand on procedures used, I will articulate the key aspects marking my ethical and sensitivity-driven methodological approach:

- My research study was approved by the Norwegian Center for Research Data (NSD)
- All of the participants that took part in the research process gave written consent affirming their participation and were given my contact details for any follow-up
- Interviewees were told they were able to ask questions or withdraw from the research process at any time
- Interviewees were told any data collected from their interviews would be deleted at the completion of the study

3.3 Data Collection

Qualitative research is a “research strategy that emphasizes words rather than quantification in the collection and analysis of data” (Bryman, 2008), .p366). In my study, I thought employing a qualitative research approach would yield the best results, as I wanted to encounter the challenges that reparations advocates faced through their own eyes and get in touch with their honest, first-person accounts of their work. This type of approach embodies an interpretivist epistemological position because it stresses investigating an “understanding of the social world through an examination of the interpretation of that world by its participants” (Bryman, 2008), p.366). Since qualitative research also involves the use of open-ended sensitizing concepts, being able to embed terms like transitional justice and feminist security studies from the landscape of peace and conflict literature allowed me to develop preparation materials like my outreach communications and my interview guide with key focus points connecting applicable theory to practice.

When a researcher is studying the inherent taboos and sensitivity of topics like sexual violence and trauma, especially in post-conflict settings, one must think of the possible moral implications that their work may have on their research participants, and utilize methods like cooperative inquiry that ensure flexibility to develop the research design alongside research participants and prioritize involving compassionate understanding when in dialogue (Skjelsbæk, 2012). As a person unfamiliar with the culture and as an interviewer with no Bosnian language skills, I had to either rely on an interpreter or adjust how I was speaking English to the level of the interview subject. In those cases, I wanted to make sure that I was respecting the group of people I was interviewing and empowering their words “through the process of constructing and using their own knowledge” for my research purposes at all times (Skjelsbæk, 2016, Skjelsbæk, 2012), p.14).

The strength of qualitative research according to Bryman (2008), p. 396), is that qualitative rather than quantitative research “provides greater opportunity for a feminist sensitivity to come to the fore”. It allows for women’s voices to be better heard in the exchange of question and response, for exploitation to be reduced given interviews subjects are not objectified by quantitative labeling, and allows for participant to seek emancipation in voicing their insights on topics of personal oppression by sharing their inner thoughts and feelings with the interviewer. Given this backdrop, I decided qualitative over quantitative research would give the most space

to the importance and sensitivity of the advocacy work I would be approaching with participants on conflict-related sexual violence.

Further, I knew I wanted to employ conversation analysis and coding to my findings, so choosing qualitative research methods like simple observation and qualitative interviewing provided the most appropriate method for collecting relevant information for this study. Specifically, I used qualitative, semi-structured interviews, which involve the interviewer asking “a series of questions...in the general form of a interview” that cover the same subjects with all participants, but give the researcher “some latitude to ask further questions in response” to any significant responses or interesting deviations (Bryman, 2008), p.196). While in Bosnia, I conducted eight semi-structured qualitative interviews at in-person settings, such as the participants’ offices or at a cafe, and held four interviews of the same style over Skype upon returning to Norway. Interviews typically lasted one hour and were based on an interview guide that I developed (see Appendix I).

In looking to identify the challenges experienced by reparations advocates for war rape survivors, I wanted to select and interview knowledgeable participants and travel to regions historically relevant to reparations work in the post-conflict period. Detailed below is an overview of the decision-making process for selecting the participants, the places where I interviewed, and some critical reflections that I have on how the interviewing and qualitative research process unfolded.

3.3.1 Participant and Location Selection

As mentioned, I connected with relevant local contacts in Norway, as well as contacts in Bosnia from the NGO and policy communities working on gender and security. Those invited and selected to interview were contacted directly by me and I organized an independent interview schedule, including solo in-country travel, as a part of my fieldwork trip. Though I spent a majority of my time in Sarajevo, for participants being interviewed outside the capital it was important that I traveled to meet them where their work was located. I also thought, for the benefit of simple participant observation, traveling between and basing myself in regions where local reparations work was ongoing would be a lucrative experience.

A total of twelve interviewees, both female and male and between approximately 30-70 years old, were selected as participants for this study. Everyone that was interviewed was a Bosnian national, and three interviewees specifically noted that they were internally displaced people having had to relocate because of the war or its aftermath. An overview of the research participants, their occupations and locations are listed in Table 1.

Table 1: Overview of Research Participants

Profession	Location	Female Interviewees	Male Interviewees
Health Center Worker*	Tuzla	3	0
	Mostar	1	0
NGO Worker	Sarajevo	4	1
Museum Curator	Sarajevo	0	1
Government Employee	Sarajevo	0	2

* *Health center workers pertains to people working at not-for-profit psychosocial welfare centers and mental health trauma centers.*

In selecting the participants to interview, I took their general age, gender, professional roles, and locations into account. Though I did not ask for the research participants to state their age explicitly in the interview, when researching to find appropriate subjects I looked specifically at people that would provide a balance in generational perspectives and represent different temporal experiences based on their approximate personal history with the war. I considered that given the Bosnian conflict ended twenty five years ago, those who were adults living in the Former Yugoslavia prior to the conflict's commencement would have an entirely different perspective from those who were born during or after the war was over.

Critically, having both younger and older participants yielded responses that represented different emphases on values and expectations of social norms, in deference to the changing of traditions and culture in the post-conflict period. Moreover, though the subject matter of rape as a weapon of war disproportionately affected women in the Bosnian conflict, and conversations around women, peace and security feel inherently skewed due to their vocabulary, it was of high importance to me to interview advocates of both genders. This was fueled by a need to represent perspectives from both sides given that in my background reading for the thesis I often found academic and movement-driven literature on rape culture to be populated exclusively by female voices.

With the Bosnian conflict occurring just before the Women, Peace and Security Agenda was passed as a United National Security Council resolution, the expectations and discourse surrounding policy action to address war rape has changed dramatically since the war ended. Truly, since change for conflict-related sexual violence survivors and affiliated reparations work can be affected from across many professional disciplines—not least from policy spheres, community organizations, large, international non-governmental organizations, health care, and government institutions—it was therefore imperative that I interview participants with work experience representing both internal and external actors in the reparations process. I speculated that analyzing their respective insights towards garnering and progressing reparations work would provide a diverse assortment of the limitations and opportunities available via these actors’ specific workstreams.

And finally, I sought to select participants regionally. As touched upon in the historical background section of the thesis already, the Bosnian conflict experienced several active conflict zones simultaneously across the country. Throughout the war, those zones changed with the introduction of different actors, including Bosnian-Serb fighters and United Nations Peacekeeping Forces. In looking to capture those varied geographic experiences, I contacted participants in three different cantons to investigate whether any potential challenges to reparations were connected to a proximity to live conflict areas or to places of power that were historically significant to governance, either during the conflict or in the post-conflict period. A more comprehensive background on the locations selected can be found in Table 2 on the next page.

Table 2: Overview of Location Selection

Location/ Region	Proximity to Live Conflict (1992-1995)	Historical Relevance
Sarajevo	<p>The capital of Bosnia following the dissolution of Yugoslavia, the Siege of Sarajevo took place when the Army of Republika Srpska (VRS) infiltrated and overtook ARBiH, the Bosnian government defense forces. It was longest siege of a capital in modern warfare.</p>	<p>Long-term building damage from terrorist activities still present across much of city and especially Stari Grad (the Old Town), with estimations calculating the capital city lost up to 25% of its population following the end of the siege. Culturally and ethnically diverse, Sarajevo today holds Bosnia’s main government institutions, the United Nations Headquarters, and religious buildings representing all faiths.</p>
Mostar	<p>In 1992, the town was seized by the Yugoslav People’s Army (JNA), so Bosniaks joined the Croatian Army(HV) to take back the city and fight VRS.</p> <p>Later, in 1993, tensions rose with Croats and HV launched its own offensive as part of the Croat-Bosniak War—dividing the city along ethnic lines.</p>	<p>Located in southwest Bosnia in Herzegovina-Neretva Canton, and bordering Croatia, the population is majority Bosniak Muslim and has long-held historical roots to the Ottoman rule of Bosnia. One of the only cities in Bosnia to encounter two war theaters, fighting in this region was mixed along numerous ethnic lines and grievances, which led to indiscriminate tactics of warfare and compounded instances of sexual violence.</p>
Tuzla	<p>In 1992, the city was seized by Serbian forces. Due to its proximity to Republika Srpska, during and after the conflict many people fleeing violence became permanently displaced and settled in Tuzla. In 1995, VRS launched an artillery attack on the city, killing 71 people, that became known as the Tuzla Massacre.</p>	<p>Located in northeast Bosnia in Tuzla Canton, the city is the third largest in Bosnia, an industrial economic center, and borders Republika Srpska to the east. Following the signing of the Dayton Agreement, Tuzla was the headquarters for US forces. Today, it features a balanced population with multi-ethnic/cultural mix.</p>

3.4 Critical Reflections

As Bryman purports, “we can never be absolutely certain about the truth of any account, since we have no completely incontrovertible way of gaining direct access to the reality on which it is based” (Bryman, 2008, p.382). Therefore, methodological researchers argue that “qualitative studies should be judged or evaluated according to quite different criteria from those used by quantitative researchers” (Bryman, 2008, p. 377). In this way, the reliability and validity that can be established based on a qualitative research project may need to rely on an alternative set of criteria of evaluation, namely: trustworthiness and authenticity. In breaking down my approaches across parallel qualitative dimensions taken from these two primary criteria, I will reflexively present support and criticism I have for my chosen research methodology. Those dimensions are covered below as credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, which seek to mirror a quantitative methodology’s internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity, respectively. Within this framework, I will share the inputs I embedded in my research design towards each of those dimensions, as well as address some of the challenges that occurred in attempting to confirm them.

3.4.1 Trustworthiness, Credibility and Transferability

There is no “single absolute account of social reality” (Bryman, 2008) p. 377). My study has a constructionist ontological orientation that relies on the supposition that “social properties are outcomes of the interactions between individuals” (Bryman, 2008, p.366) and not absolute truths waiting to be discovered. In this way, involving and representing several perspectives by inviting those involved to come from a variety of backgrounds age, gender, and location-wise, ensured that there was a mixed group of interview subjects representative of the construction of the norms and frameworks they are working within.

However, despite being a diverse selection, since they are all working on reparations for war rape survivors in the interest of post-conflict peacebuilding, they do still represent a ‘depth rather than breadth’ of potential knowledge; confirming the study’s transferability. Their feedback, drawing from their common experience, is characterized by Geertz’s *thick descriptions*, which entail having “rich accounts of the details of a culture” (Bryman, 2008, p.378). In this case, their first-hand experience and careers working towards reparations are communicated via their responses to provide a background of interview participants’ expertise. By putting a significant emphasis into organizing the research design to include multiple accounts of a social reality

representative of Bosnia's post-conflict experiences, I safeguarded the credibility of the findings, and as a credibility-building step in-turn I shared my transcripts and notes of the findings with my interview subjects via a process known as respondent validation. This gave my interviewees the opportunity to confirm that they had been correctly understood.

In speaking to having an understanding and effective communication within the interview environment though, challenges arose due to several factors. For instance, ten out of twelve of my interview subjects spoke English well enough to communicate with me independently and two participants used translators. For the in-person interviews however, when interviewing some older subjects, even though they did speak adequate English, I note that they requested having an additional person present (often a young person) to add a level of comfort should any miscommunication arise. Translators were used where the interview subject was completely unable to communicate in English, and in these roles the translators played an active part in providing knowledge production and interpretation. Of note, in one interview an argument occurred between my interview subject and the translator based on a question I asked that caused us to need to stop the recording and take a break. Naturally, responses can also be lost in translation, and in that particular interview, it was obvious that the responses were being truncated or generalized due (in my opinion) to the disinterest of the interpreter. From this experience, I learned that when interpreters are involved, there are special considerations needed to make sure transparent communication and sensitivity is prioritized (Skjelsbæk, 2016). For the second interview with a translator (which took place a few days later) I asked a friend to translate the interview guide to Bosnian in advance so I could avoid any other incongruities.

Additionally, interviewing subjects in-person and interviewing subjects digitally also brought challenges. Digital interviews were easier to schedule, which was chiefly helpful in getting access to speak with government employees who often had busy and unpredictable schedules, as well as security considerations, which made it difficult to meet in person. However, as mentioned previously, though my interview subjects spoke English well enough to communicate independently to me, sometimes language barriers arose which made it difficult to fully understand their points given that these were telephone and not video calls over Skype (*before COVID made it normal to have video calls*). I felt the conversations became strained or people became hesitant to dive deeper into a subject due to language deficiencies. Moreover, not being able to interpret body language took away an added dimension that proved helpful when similar circumstances occurred in my in-person interviews.

3.4.2 Dependability and Confirmability

Bryman (2008, p.378-379) asserts that to engage dependability, as it stands here in place of reliability, that a researcher should adopt an auditing process. In practice, that means both consulting with appropriate channels to confirm the merits of the research are on par with best practice and to “ensure that complete records are kept of all phases of the research process, selection criteria, fieldwork notes, interview transcripts, and data analysis decisions” in an accessible manner. To do so, I worked to conceptualize my research design with my supervisors and conferred with my peers in the peace and conflict studies master’s program as we all worked on writing our theses. Further, confirmability infers that though “complete objectivity is impossible in social research,” it is incumbent upon the researcher to never have “overtly allowed personal values or theoretical inclinations to sway the conduct of the research and findings” (Bryman, 2008, p. 379). Though it is important to acknowledge that I am an ardent feminist, I underscore that my interest and activism towards gender equality had no bearing or posed bias on the work conducted for this thesis. In addition, my behavior and analysis in performing this research were consistent with professional practices. In terms of authenticity, which as a criterion does speak to my aims with this research project, I would like to add that I hope this methodological approach and design will have contributed to adding some original ontological and educative authenticity. By illuminating readers to a better understanding of the social milieu, perspectives of those interviewed, and the wider political impact of research concerning Bosnia’s post-conflict peacebuilding processes, I trust that this project will have sparked a thought-provoking read.

3.4.3 Challenges Conducting Research During COVID-19

Undoubtedly in any research project there are aspects to the design and execution that could have gone differently. In this final part of the methods section, I want to acknowledge the various limitations I encountered in terms of the replicability needed to conduct this research design again and the real-world constraints on access I faced following the start of the pandemic.

Though I was blessed in being able to carry out my full empirical work, including fieldwork and interviews by February 2020, only two weeks after I returned the world went into lockdown. Like any research project of a short-term nature, I can remark that had I had more time to spend doing fieldwork, I could have arranged more interviews, collected more qualitative data, and accessed additional perspectives and voices. However, I attest that in the first weeks of

the initial corona virus lockdown, so many aspects of society were in complete disarray that it was barely possible to contact the participants I did include in the study for natural follow-up and confirmation of their interview content. Throughout the next year, as different countries changed rules and border controls, and people changed jobs, it was arduous to be able to contact and keep in touch with some of my participants and to seek further help from institutions and government offices in Bosnia that had singular access to documents for my background research because they were closed. Further, as has been mentioned, traveling to Bosnia for my fieldwork, though irreplaceably valuable, was also quite personally exhausting and was tedious to organize as one individual researcher.

For a study on this topic again, a larger team with more resources could have facilitated and performed a qualitative study beyond my capacity. Though I am grateful for the experience, writing a thesis on this topic involves the need for extraordinary sensitivity towards trauma. On top of that consideration, my mental health was negatively affected having to abnormally live through daily life in a global pandemic. This experience was emotionally taxing in a way that challenged me as no other academic experience has. Inherent in that feedback is also a potential weakness to my findings. Though in the lengthened time I have had to examine this case and this research design, I have worked as best I could to ensure that these shortcomings were met.

4 Empirical Data and Findings

4.1 Introductory Orientation

The International Center for Transitional Justice (International Center for Transitional Justice, 2021) states, in line with language excerpted from the United Nations' Basic Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation for Victims of Gross Violations of International Human Rights Law, that reparations "serve to acknowledge the legal obligation of a state to repair the consequences of violations...and express to victims and society more generally that the state is committed to addressing the root causes of past violations, ensuring they do not happen again." For survivors of traumas like systematic war rape, reparations work in a broad application can be seen as one of the most meaningful ways to receive justice after serious violation.

In this study, assorted research participants were interviewed about their work with post-conflict reparations in Bosnia and touched on points regarding restoring stability and ensuring restitution in a transitional state setting. Importantly, though they each brought unique perspectives with their responses, themes emerged that conferred similar challenges they encountered across three levels: the individual, the societal and the institutional. Summarized below are the key findings collected by my qualitative study with reparations advocates, encapsulating the obstacles and hindrances they were confronted by in their pursuits of justice.

I have listed these findings under the sections: *narratives of injustice*, *narratives of impunity*, and *narrative of incompetence*, in order to classify their reflections on their advocacy inclusively and categorically. An aspect of this work that differentiates the project's design from other master's theses on sexual violence is its use of time as a variable for discussion. Most literature regarding war rape advocacy is situated in the temporal perspective of a snapshot of current programming outcomes—one project or policy.

To capture the historical and long-term work done by the interviewees in addressing institutional wrongdoing and harms suffered, I encouraged respondents to give chronological accounts which provide a larger picture of the landscape of challenges they experienced in the post-conflict peacebuilding process. As a result, the findings I gained from my interviews and discussions with the research participants yielded accounts of challenges to and perceptions of these processes in Bosnia over longer periods of time. Processes communicated below, but briefly stated, include remarks from different interview subjects on topics such as self-development, healing and community, norms and conventions, laws and justice, governance and political will, and international aid/networks of support.

4.2 Narratives of Injustice: Historical Gender Norms and Situated Hierarchies

“Here in Bosnia the man may be the head, but the woman is the neck.”

- Health center worker #4

Observations and reflections in this section review the perspectives research participants had on the ‘individual self’ and their observations on hearing critical public responses to the naming of rape of as a weapon on war in Bosnia. Particularly, their remarks and comments revolved around the reactions of the survivors’ fellow citizens who were processing the trauma in real time

after the end of the war and who were struggling with the ubiquity of the incidence of war rape and the emerging challenges within victimization that were seen in their communities.

4.2.1 Stigma and Hardships in Healing

In talking to the health care workers, several spoke about revelations that survivors of war rape and other sexual trauma had in the period during and directly after the war, namely **stigma**. Noted by these advocates was that in the period just after the signing of the Dayton Agreement, many communities and villages in recovery across Bosnia embraced a mindset of transition. This meant moving away from the period of chaos, violence, and warfare, and into a new era where ‘communally’ people prioritized societal progress over individual needs. It was mentioned by a few participants that trauma was ‘everywhere’ given many other conflicts in the Former Yugoslavia region were still ongoing, so ensuring a more stabilized region as compared to Kosovo or other conflict zones would prove to the international political community that Bosnia was on track towards post-conflict peace. This, however, left no room for trauma, and in the pursuit of normalcy effectively silenced any person courageous enough to seek help. Though according to my interview subjects, publicly advocating support for trauma survivors, let alone vocally sharing one’s personal trauma, was impossible. Truly, the period directly following the ceasefire was marked by near ubiquitous denial, stigmatization and shame connected to war crimes of a sexual nature, and though many had experienced this fate, this silence made survivors think otherwise. Despite the documentation that there were rape camps and a high incidence of sexual violence, in the early days survivors were described as coming to health care centers in secret, under the guise of ‘other needs’ or making their own organic spaces for community through existing activist networks and by meeting furtively and locally in the homes of trusted supporters and friends.

“Most of the healing, and the associated burden of that, was victim-led.
The spirit of this time in the post-war years was spearheaded by our activism,
by female activists and victims who could speak together.”

- Health center worker #4

“In the time after Dayton, we didn’t see support from the anywhere- not the state- nothing.
Just silence. It was actually the Mothers of Srebrenica group that started organizing.
They spoke up in the media and used their platform to talk about the genocide,

which then opened up dialogue to begin to confront other traumas.”

- Health center worker #1

In fact, the stigma was not only significant and observable then, but has had an enduring spatial effect that can be seen today—blocking not only psychological space to speak openly about trauma, but also thwarting the physical space of communities by preventing centers dealing with trauma and war rape advocacy from existing openly. For example, while in Mostar I had trouble locating an office for one of my interviews. The name could not be found on any maps application, and those I asked directions from claimed to have never heard of it, despite it being a landmark entity in Bosnia cited across trauma literature. Once I did locate it, the secrecy of their location and the general difficulty I had in finding it was explained as an intentional feature of the design.

“Since the end of the war, we have been targeted by vandalism and violence. Women who have been seen coming here in the beginning were experiencing being outcast, being judged.

So, we changed the name and the sign to make it safe to say you were coming here for treatments and made it so that people who visited had nothing to do with trauma or rape.”

- Health center worker #2

Indeed, this blatant ostracization from the community was highly discouraging for survivors seeking help at psychosocial trauma centers. If their friends or families discovered they were frequenting these places, shame and blame would be placed on them for ‘going and getting themselves raped’. I heard advocates mention that they had had many conversations over the years having to reaffirm that survivors were not at fault for being raped; but the animosity towards survivors and towards their advocates working on trauma and healing has persisted. Several interview subjects mentioned that their centers experienced damages to the facade and bomb threats over the years when the purpose of their work had been discovered. Even today, the stigma around seeking help for a war-related sexual trauma has remained so strong that to protect the people seeking treatment at the centers, some are even concealed within locations that women will often go to, like the basement of a childcare center or near grocery stores.

However, this type of disguise didn’t extinguish the perpetuation of trauma altogether though. While women were in hiding, individually terrified to reveal that they had been raped or sexually violated in the conflict, they also had to live in their communities alongside soldiers

known to be responsible for perpetrating this kind of violence and who continued to exist and go about their daily lives unchallenged in the post-war period.

“Imagine, we had patients who had to live next door or down the street from their rapists. We still do! They never saw justice and that meant a daily emotional reminder every day of your life in your village of your greatest nightmare, and in some few cases, the nameless father of your child from an assault or from a rape in the war”

- Health center worker #2

And further, as can be said of any post-conflict nation-state in transition, no one is immune to the effects of violence or the life-long impact of warfare—including men. Indeed, noted in many interviews was that the extent of the trauma of war rape was felt community-wide and was gender-blind. For husbands whose wives were raped by someone else, for women who birthed children as the byproducts of their rapes, for those who lived in the community not knowing who they could trust. In reality, this experience of collective trauma permeated the boundaries of taboo and couldn't be confined to the walls of health care centers or the offices of local advocacy NGOs. And in failing to practically acknowledge and approach this trauma for decades after the war, as is advocated for via holistic transitional justice models, other factors and consequences have materialized as a result—namely, domestic violence.

“Everyone is living through and with unresolved trauma- both men and women- and that comes out in violent ways. Domestic violence is highly prevalent and highly problematic, and on top of the trauma survivors are still dealing with from their sexual violations this makes their home an unsafe space too. And that's a space we can't reach here at the center.

We can only talk about it. It makes the healing process even harder.”

- Health center worker #1

Undeniably, this type of additional violence, often described by my research participants as stemming from husbands to their wives, could continue to personally obstruct healing in the aftermath of experiencing war trauma. Particularly for survivors revisiting trauma, it was noted as being not only devastating for many on a visceral level, but also personally and emotionally taxing. When we discussed further, it was mentioned that the disproportionate gendered burden of caregiving and domestic responsibility in the home already tired many survivors seeking therapy and support for trauma. This type of exhaustion left little space for taking proactive steps

to address additional violence, like the domestic violence mentioned, or to work substantially with advocates in therapy to overcome the negativity of past violations.

“There simply isn’t enough time in the day for survivors to come here when they have to feed and take care of their families. The most some can manage, in a process that should optimally take place over years of consistent treatment, is to come for an hour or so once a month or when they can find time. We see they don’t make much time for themselves, but then neither does our society.”

-Health center worker #3

Narratives of great personal sacrifice and risk to seeking justice paired with the high opportunity cost in pursuing treatment meant that over the years advocates have seen fewer and fewer people return. In practice, today’s mechanisms for targeting individual healing provided by health centers and organizations alike are at this point not affecting the personal or community outcomes for relief and liberation from pain that were more prolific in the past. This interplay of old and new trauma affected both women and men, and along gendered lines. Though this research project primarily set out to investigate the experiences of female survivors of war rape and conflict-related sexual violence, what I discovered in interviewing my respondents was that gendered politics were not singularly limited to women’s experiences, especially and perhaps unexpectedly regarding the politics, interpretations, and emotional responses to Bosnia’s wartime sexual trauma.

4.2.2 Masculinity and Manhood

Reputationally known in Bosnia as Balkan Machoism, several interviewees mentioned this conceptualization of manhood as a jumping off point for discussion regarding their advocacy and reparations work on gender equality. Described in several ways, iterations of the phenomenon known as Balkan Machoism included: advancing as an historical influence carried over from the Ottoman Empire that shaped Bosnian gender relations leading into the 20th century, persisting as a point of contention and dismantling during Bosnia’s years as a part of socialist Yugoslavia, re-emerging at the onset of conflict through dissidents as part of a return to the traditional and ideal balance of gendered power, and contorting into a modern interpretation of ‘post-violence culture’ where it exists as an unspoken expectation of strength and fortitude to secure a new generation of boys and men resilient to Bosnia’s legacy of trauma.

“When I was a boy growing up in the 1970s there was a culture, at least an attempt, of equality between the sexes. Women could work and contribute, get educated. Gender norms and the nuclear family were not set in stone.”

- Government Employee #1

Despite several interviewees noting progress along the same lines as the quote above, Bosnia’s brief historical period striving towards gender equality changed dramatically after the start of the conflict in 1992. Notoriously, after the first few months of warfare, the use of rape as a weapon of war, both in genocidal rape leading to forced pregnancy and imprisonment in rape camps, represented a serious shift in the treatment of women and purported the rise of gendered power rooted in constructs like militarized masculinity through the use of this violence. Definitively, Bosnia’s extreme incidence of sexual violence was being observed by the international community and was named as one of the main reasons for Western intervention in conflicts in the Balkans.

“It was sick. Milosevic and his allies were making connections during the war to sex and power as part of the masculine identity. Saying that the possibility of overpowering a woman in the conflict would represent one’s great grasp of their manhood.”

- NGO Worker #3

Though given much time has passed since the signing of the Dayton Agreement, are reverberations of that labeling still being felt today? Some positive transformation in gender dynamics has been identified, but stagnancy remains and resistance to progress is still clearly indicated by the practices of Bosnia’s male-dominant, top-down politics. The future plans of Bosnian politics are determined by this system, so one can only speculate about the likelihood of predominantly male parliaments and canton political offices rallying for the successful implementation of gender-sensitive transitional justice outcomes, for women and men. Considering a contentious and highly fraught debate between male politicians (and to the exclusion of women) is still ongoing regarding the cohesion of governance between Bosnia-Herzegovina and Republika Srpska, there is little focus nor attention towards looking at micro-level, community or individually focused solutions for anything trauma-related unless it falls within the realm of cementing a stable, power-sharing solution.

“Only a few women are politicians or hold any real political power in Bosnia today. There is only one woman I can think of in parliament driving change. How comfortable is that supposed to make us feel about “their” fight for our equality?”

- Health center worker #4

Ruminating on this topic while I was conducting fieldwork, I sat watching the news every morning over breakfast with the hotel manager at my hotel in Tuzla. I commented that I noticed, despite not understanding what was being said, that the politicians seemed to radiate macho energy in his gestures and speech patterns towards another male politician in a debate they were having. The hotel manager commented that all of the optics for this particular showdown, their clothes and movements, were made to showcase the politicians’ statuses and authority to their constituents. On an individual level, their power and influence were determined by the diatribe they conveyed and by the exterior their appearances portrayed. For the hotel manager, it was obviously for bluster and for show, but to many young, impressionable men watching, he noted that they may not see the nuances that made up the illusion. Apparently, there is a Bosnian expression used for men in these types of scenarios; like two rams, horns locked and fighting, he’d said.

Additionally, research participants perceived that there was a concerted effort by politicians in the early 2000s to undermine community-based women’s groups who were also working towards reparations. With the passing of UNSCR 1325 and the creation of further mechanisms for the women, peace and security agenda in development to advance, several of the women’s health and social welfare organization representatives I interviewed mentioned being threatened or having their work seen as a threat by male politicians. Implementation and advocacy at the international level for war rape reparations were progressing, which was inspiring for advocates working at the community level. However, having these advocates, who were often women in their own communities as well, fighting for justice in the first place undermined the feminine ideal according to these politicians.

“They said I should go back to the kitchen. We were trying to change things and so much was happening with WPS that the momentum was really there. But the politicians saw that too and they threatened our work with retaliation and retribution, saying they would do something if we decided to keep speaking up.”

- Health care worker #3

“I’m trying to help to rebuild Bosnia and this local politician was saying ‘Go back to being a nice quiet lady rather than a screaming one on the barricades.’

But we wanted to fight.”

- NGO Worker #2

It was noted that some men in the society could have felt very threatened by the narrative that women were working harder than men, despite this relating to the work being done to subvert and regain their lives after their own trauma. For women to succeed, under the imposing views of Balkan Machoism, was seen as unbearable. Given the strength of the normative dimensions and narratives surrounding men as the holders of power, the work and advocacy towards healing and reparations in some regions became politicized. Turning into an image issue, and one that to this day certain politicians still remain, according to interviewees, committed to stifling and/or reconstructing to fit their chauvinistic political agenda. But in trying to fight these stalemates and impasses in politics, one NGO worker I spoke with said using their time and energy against these platitudes is a waste of energy and distracts from the essential rehabilitative work involved with survivors.

“The political battle, though important to take, is simply a distraction and dilutes important resources away from our repository of support, and away from treating and tending to the long-term needs of the survivors.”

-NGO Worker #1

Whether purposeful or not, this type of drain at the community level detracts from advocacy efforts to stabilize and build back the resilience of female survivors and patients that health centers and organizations are trying to help long-term. Indeed, the roles and the strength displayed by the healthcare workers early on in the postwar days and even recently with new flare ups has caused some politicians to openly question in media the role of women in Bosnian society because they find the expansion of women’s autonomy and rights in their pursuit for justice to be not only unorthodox but threatening as well. This power shift away from the entrenched political status quo of male superiority Undermines existing power structures which rely on purporting tropes of unequalled capability and strength keeping masculine political spheres intact. By disrupting, via processes and advocacy advancing reparations work, these advocates resist allowing power structures that work against their progress to stay in control.

So, in essence, something as singular, to either an individual or a community, as working to provide support for healing the trauma of war rape survivors actually infringes upon the carefully constructed, nationally relevant hierarchies seen in across many ministries, offices and government institutions that keep the practice of overarching male rule intact. These efforts are intimidating, and according to the research participants point to an historically caustic tension that exists between the governing and the governed and is palpable.

When I interviewed a male politician and we touched upon this dynamic he noted it often served as a catalyst for debate about the future of women's power and the responsibility men, and by extension the state, have in treating and tending to 'uniquely female wounds' in an otherwise peaceful society:

“Women, or people here in Bosnia in general, have a hard time letting go of trauma and everyone wants to complain about something. Everybody wants an apology, but that's where if women were in charge—if these policies were really in place – we would get nothing done. They can't move past it. They can only complain and that's why you've seen them harping on it while we are over in the legislature getting things done for the everyday man.”

- Government Employee #1

This quote, though perceivably arrogant in nature, neatly frames the mainstream insensitivity by politicians to these issues well. It highlights that the process of ensuring transitional justice, when seen at the individual level as a justice procurement process for survivors, and maybe more derivatively women, in an emotionally vapid argument and issue. In practice, regardless of gender, those who were affected by war rape are able to reflect on their experiences enduring obscene human rights abuses during the conflict. But, advocates, people working at the community and group levels, must not let trauma usurp the need for society to march on and for people to progress forward. It could be observed though that this politician spoke with this callousness potentially because he also felt that *all* war crimes in Bosnia perpetrated under Milosevic, trauma beyond just the 'gendered experiences like war rape', were under addressed and deserve more attention in national justice and advocacy work towards peacebuilding and conflict transformation. However, in early 2020 at the date of the interview, he still closed his interview by saying he felt it was best for everyone if Bosnia just moved on.

4.3 Narratives of Impunity: Views on the State in Transition

Observations and reflections in this section review the perspectives research participants had on the societal approach and their observations towards the state's narratives and practices in approaching justice for those who survived rape of as a weapon on war. Particularly, their remarks and comments revolved around the lack of a present and coherent narrative on trauma in the discourse following the ceasefire and the inattention of the state to bring about a swift, gender-sensitive transition to peace in the Dayton Agreement.

4.3.1 No Coherent Narrative —No National State of Mourning

A specific and important aspect of reparations work in post-conflict peacebuilding is allowing those who experienced trauma in a conflict to reflect and memorialize those affected via measures and mechanisms focused on naming suffering and initiating healing. Though often a case of literal memorialization put on by the state in cooperation with survivors of trauma, reparations work of this nature can also entail figurative discussion and be driven by public narrative or testimony that expresses grievance and grief. In the Bosnian case, as previously cited, taboo and stigma prevented not only individual, but the society at large from outwardly communicating their pain.

“Nobody from the state, government or legal system in the years directly following the war ever contacted us to hear our stories or ask us to share the stories of the survivors we were assisting. They were only interested in keeping up the silence.”

- NGO Worker #3

In post-conflict Bosnian society women were already akin to a lower status. In failing to highlight the unique struggles of all kinds of victims and survivors from the conflict, the national government failed its citizens. However, in specifically not acknowledging the hardships or the challenges facing war rape survivors, the state failed to provide a much-needed spotlight to advocates working on their behalf—for if there was no war rape that occurred, then what, if any, justice would be needed to transform something that never happened? This critical transparency would have served as a boon for many communities seeking validation at a crushing time following the fresh end of the conflict, and more pointedly would have given every Bosnian a state-endorsed conversational framework to begin more pointedly understanding the stigma and shame specifically associated with war rape that many survivors, their families, and communities

were facing at the time. Being able to have unlocked the deeply guarded trauma specifically permeating one subset of the society- women- would have greatly expedited discourse and potentially fomented political solutions for improved gender equality and justice processes related to sexual violence. But in leaving these experiences from the frontlines of the war to fester and go unaddressed, interviewees claimed that this silence could have contributed to furthering inhibitors of societal and economic progress in the post-war period.

“In this war, there was an untold narrative of women. Yes, the society is particularly patriarchal, and thus oblivious and uninterested in women’s experiences and challenges, but rather there is also a narrative specifically lacking on this group of survivors.

No one wants to say ‘In my country, women were raped and tortured for their gender alone throughout and following the war’.”

- NGO Worker #2

“In South Africa, the new government went on TV. They went and told the truth. They let the people who were hurt say they were hurt. And they didn’t get in the way in the courts when the ugly truth came out. Why couldn’t we have done that here? What were we hiding from?”

- Museum Curator #1

How the state’s efforts failed to grow despite an international movement building in solidarity with these gendered issues is important to dissect to understand the overarching experiences endured by war rape survivors, and to see how their advocates were challenged by communications and rhetoric that questioned the validity of these experiences despite massive, publicly available evidence and documentation of rape as a weapon of war. The impunity that was seen over the decades to come, combined with the lack of agency caused by the inability to tell the truth of their stories, stalled the re-entrance of many survivors to society and mired feminist calls to action in doubt and feelings of disillusionment when the state failed, even at the basic paperwork level, to respond institutionally or proactively to war rape considerations.

“What can be done for the survivors who have tangible evidence of their abuse when the state refuses to recognize it? A child born out of rape during the conflict is alive after all. It is living and breathing evidence of that trauma. And yet, in our system, when a woman is not able to report the father of the child to their school because of the taboo, where is the state then? How does that help her feel justice for that crime?”

- NGO Worker #1

4.3.2 Documents and Details: An Absence of Acknowledgement

Though some progress in terms of acknowledging war rape has happened at a national level in Bosnia today, those gains were won by advocacy work from civil society and did not stem from the government taking initiative. In fact, it was discussed in multiple interviews with the research participants that the national government had a terrible track record both in negotiating and legislating language used in the Dayton Agreement. This posed a challenge because that peace document catalyzed the post-conflict peacebuilding process, but for all its importance in setting the political agenda on peace following the war, its framework did not reflect gender or trauma sensitivity and did not in any way cite or address rape as a weapon of war categorically or mention it as a feature of the conflict.

“The Dayton Agreement? Don’t ask me about that worthless document.

It was made in America, with none of our interests in mind.”

- Health center worker #1

“At the time, it was most important to end the conflict. The government was pushing for that. There was no time or consideration given to any of the other traumas or experiences people had and that is why non-governmental institutions have had to pick up telling that story.”

- Museum Curator #1

Following the Dayton Agreement however, several structural and systemic efforts have been made. Generally summarized, there have been gender-based justice laws passed towards ensuring monetary reparations, a female minister has been elected, and a ministry for post-war reparations has been created. Overarchingly, these changes show signs that institutional progress, though delayed at the state level, finally seems to be picking up and advocates are optimistic towards those developments, but still think more could be done.

“It has been exciting to see the ministry created and to see gender quotas instituted in local politics. We should see this as a positive sign for things to come, but the work is never complete.”

- NGO Worker #3

Indeed, though in theory these policy initiatives indicate a start to some momentum building at the national level, laws and institutions have become infamous in Bosnia for their lack of progress in creating tangible results. Institutions themselves though are not solely to blame for the bland implementation or weak effectiveness of policies since much of the impediment in justice and advocacy work links back to the original sin of lacking gender sensitive language within the Dayton Agreement. Serving as the Bosnia's constitution, the Dayton Agreement functions as the backbone of law, and in having no flexibility towards adding language after being signed advocates for war rape survivors are at a policy standstill.

Though many in Bosnia find faults with the Dayton Agreement's stipulations, advancement on the subject of reform may remain moot unless the changes are of a political or economic nature.

“What we may need is a new constitution. The way things are designed now, the Dayton Agreement isn't adaptable to the needs of groups seeking reparations because the document is static. Unless the language is changed, the culture will stay the same.”

- NGO Worker #4

“There are discussions and dialogues happening right now concerning Bosnia attempting to join the European Union. This would be the only reason I could see for there being changes made to Dayton.”

- Government employee #2

Knowing the kind of energy constitutional changes could enact in the advocacy community for reparations work, it is hard for advocates to accept the tepid and economics-focused response policymakers are currently forwarding. Noting that considerable efforts were made at the time of the Dayton Agreement's creation to target and effectively address underlying ethno-national linked injustices, it is hard for war rape advocates to fathom why the dually linked committing of mass rape along ethnic lines could not also have been given space in that policy document; and especially after it was presented so dramatically in international media as a fundamental and jarring aspect of the conflict. Though by re-evaluating the dynamics of the conflict, visiting regions where these rapes occurred in my fieldwork and discussing why they occurred in these places, one can see how the Dayton Agreement, in its final iteration, could have failed to address all of the many grievances stemming from these region and population-specific atrocities. What advocates ask for now is for attention to be paid, especially twenty years later, to finding an

alternative at the national policy level if the Dayton Agreement cannot address the needs for appropriate transformation measures regarding justice for war rape.

“The Agreement was essentially a stop-gap measure just meant to temporarily enable a ceasefire. Experts though it intended to be only a transitional, penultimate document to a real and more deliberated over constitution. Sadly, it ended up being the final product and a lasting document with gaps and injustices we’re still feeling in certain sects of society today.”

- Government Employee #2

The takeaways advocates spoke to put the lack of impact of the Dayton Agreement up against other normative frameworks and governance mechanisms that did better to address other violence and trauma. Coherent narratives like the ones presented and told in the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia empowered those who suffered from trauma from and because of the war crimes addressed there. These narratives are needed when attempting to begin peacebuilding processes because they, according to advocates, can alleviate the pain of survivors by letting their truth ‘be free’. Not least, having pathway through a legitimate, legal apparatus enables many who suffered in Bosnia at the expense of ethnic competition for state power, for the advancement of ethnonationalism and for the sacrifice of beloved people as the human collateral of warfare to process their truth and really have it be heard.

4.4 Narratives of Incompetence: Letdown by the International Community

Observations and reflections in this section review the thoughts research participants had on work of the international community to advocate on behalf broader justice for conflict-related sexual violence survivors. Notably, they commented on an “insider” versus “outsider” perspective present within the international community’s approach to transitional justice and to their waning interest in genuinely partnering with and working alongside local, community organizations.

4.4.1 Making Meaningful Justice: International Efforts

As noted within the previous section, a great concern of Bosnian-based war rape advocates was the lack of state-driven institutionalized restitution and the absence for many years of focus on restorative approaches at the national level in Bosnia to ensure reparations for war rape survivors. Alternatively to that critique, research participants emphasized that where the

new government failed after the signing of the Dayton Agreement to ensure a space for providing survivors needed support, the international humanitarian community prevailed in coming to Bosnia and in starting a highly active internationally-funded suite of programs concentrating on conflict-related sexual violence and reparations work. Initially many in the Bosnian NGO space were pleased.

“When the UN had its mission, from 1995-2002, that was when you saw a surge of focus and energy converging around women’s issues and in the context of improving Bosnia. It was an intense time to be working at the higher level on cases, but constructive.”

- NGO Worker #1

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“We have been working in a long-term partnership together since 1995 with countries in Europe who also support the values of women, peace and security.

Namely it is Scandinavian countries who do a lot of work with us to support the advancement of gender equality.”

-NGO Worker #2

Advocates I interviewed who were working with the United Nations systems and agencies in the beginning of the post-conflict period reported feeling inspired given that local progress was slow and stigma at the community and policy levels was also high. Once Bosnia had joined the United Nations in 1992, facilitating international cooperation in-country became easier and the UN House, located in Sarajevo, became central to peacebuilding activities, including housing many UN-affiliated organizations and growing into a metropolitan political powerhouse that still holds significant spatial importance as the center of NGO work in the capital. Though as a consequence of the birth of this strongly international hub, a culture of internal and external workers was potentially created.

I discovered this peculiarity when I was invited to visit this complex during my fieldwork and noticed that despite its special relevance to the agenda and enactment of development policy in Bosnia, the building itself felt like a gated community and a compound reserved mostly for diplomats and elites, rather than everyday Bosnian citizens. For this project, I interviewed several people with some affiliation to the UN apparatus workings in Sarajevo and conducted two interviews in associated offices in proximity to the UN House. The difference in the experience in treatment, protocol and formality as compared to other interviews I held with NGO actors was

stark. This “insider” versus “outsider” space was remarked upon by some of my interviewees and made me question the superficial perception versus the actual impact of the work both the interview subjects were carrying out, as well as the possible impact the paradox of carrying out state building and peacebuilding work on scarcity and recovery presents when presiding over such topics from an opulent and exceptional setting. Moreover, besides the visual aspects up for observation, the approaches being used at the programming level were not yielding optimal results.

“At first, I felt powerful being able to work at the UN, but then I realized being Bosnian myself that there is too much turnover during the project cycles and not enough Bosnian people [work in UN-related offices]. The people that do are mostly international, but they don’t have the context or the language skills, so that’s why I think they have started hiring more Bosnians.”

- NGO Worker #3

“It is stressful to work with these projects. The funding changes year to year and you have to make outcomes happen sometimes on a very short timeline and with little interest in investing time or money beyond a very brief engagement. This has led to us driving advocacy in the wrong direction for some local contexts to meet the needs of grant applications.”

- NGO Worker #4

Bosnia was once at the center of international political attention in conflict and peacebuilding, and for many years after the Balkans were an important landscape for meeting gender equality norms in Europe. However, following the end of active warfare and given the emergence of other violent conflicts, I note in the next section that advocates have been challenged by the perceived abandonment of the international community. With different regional areas of focus and priorities for reparations work on sexual violence, Bosnian-based international NGO projects are now facing funding deficits and having to leave some communities that still need help behind.

“Bosnia is no longer the hot topic in warfare, and sadly to say, neither is the work required to maintain decades of reparations programming of interest to country’s financing gender-based initiatives right now.”

- Government Employee #2

As a final point of reference to conclude the empirical findings section, below is a photograph entitled “United Nothing” (Figure 1) that I saw at "Gallery 11/07/95"—a permanent museum and photography exhibition memorializing the artifacts and personal belongings found at the site where the Srebrenica genocide took place. Though it specifically displays graffiti that was intended to critique the UN Peacekeeping Mission in Bosnia, I include it here as it captures the mixed impressions that I encountered when interviewing my research participants regarding the overarching involvement of the United Nations in Bosnia in the process of conflict transformation and post-conflict peacebuilding.

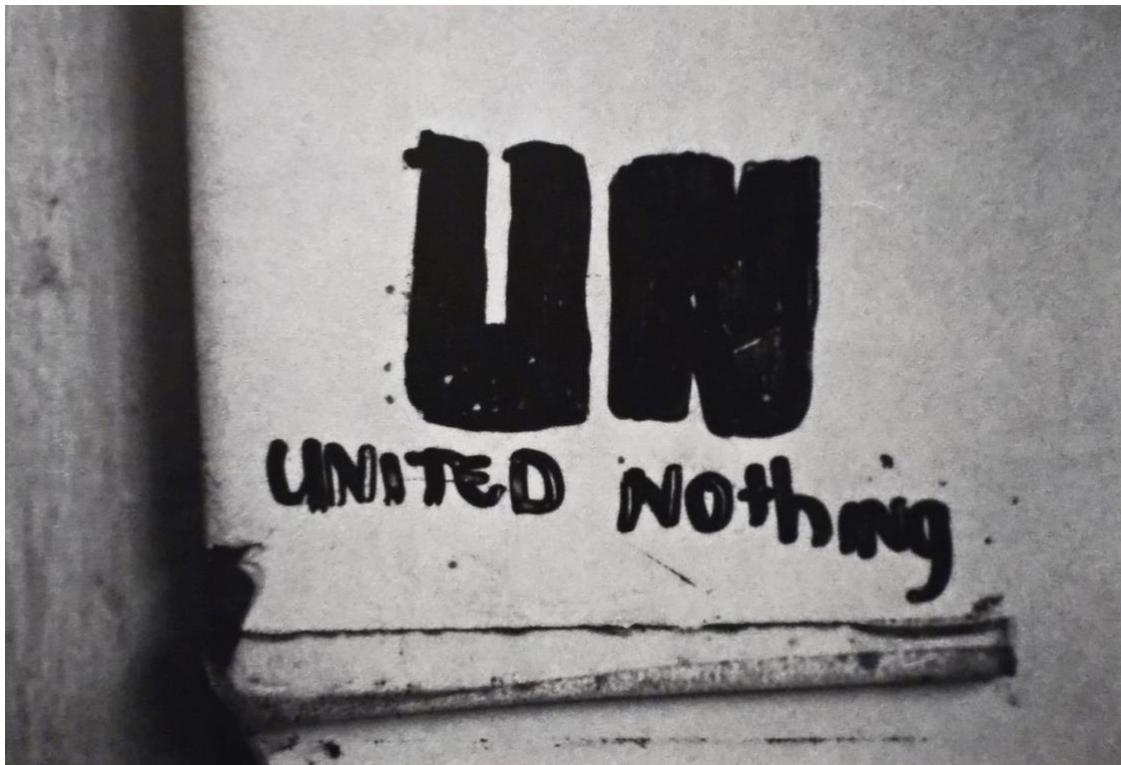


Figure 1: *United Nothing* (Tarik Samarah), Gallery 11/07/95 in Sarajevo, Bosnia

5 Discussion: Transformation through Holistic Transitional Justice Approaches

5.1 What is the “survivor-focused approach”?

As detailed in the previous section on empirical data, in compiling responses of the observations on reparations work, the findings pointed out that war rape reparations advocates have faced difficulties and shortcomings at various levels when working to secure reparations in the post-conflict period. To explore a complementary approach to how those challenges and frustrating dynamics at the individual, societal and institutional level could be addressed, I introduce the work and theoretical merit of Janine Natalya Clark’s “survivor-focused approach” on holistic transitional justice from her book *Rape, Sexual Violence and Transitional Justice Challenges: Lessons from Bosnia-Herzegovina* (2018).

Noted by Sveaass et al. (2018), p. 2), instances of torture, like the war rape suffered during the Bosnian conflict, have a destructive power that “affects life on so many levels: mind and body, values and relationships, and the capacity for work and leisure” for survivors and their communities who continue to live in a post-conflict society. In order provide opportunities that reconstruct lives after torture, providing rehabilitative support and access to reparations for torture survivors in a holistic way “should be a priority in the international effort to prevent” it future occurrences (2018, p. 2). Delving into “the importance of rehabilitation, which is holistic and multidisciplinary in nature,” according to Sveaass et al. (2018, p.14), Clark holds that classical elements of transitional justice reparations, such as psychological care and legal services, need to also be compounded with approaches and measures “that seek to address and overcome the limitations of individual transitional justice mechanisms” in a comprehensive and holistic to better prohibit torture (Clark, 2018, p.9). Thus, theorized in applicable terms, Clark (2019, p. 9) outlines her “survivor-focused approach” as consisting of “five ‘key pillars’ - namely accountability, truth recovery, reconciliation, institutional reform and reparations work” that combines retributive, restorative, and reparative justice in conjunction with the mandate that new political frameworks are designed with survivor’s needs and accommodations designed as a minimum benchmark for all future policymaking.

In applying its relevance to the narratives specified in the last section, Clark (2018, p. 162) supposes that despite having several measures of traditional transitional justice in effect, the

political situation in Bosnia is executing 'transitional justice' "without fully addressing the many obstacles that stand in the way," including failing to confront its insufficient "political will, ongoing denial and lack of cross-ethnic agreement" to create lasting, transformational change.

5.2 How can this approach be applied to challenges noted by reparations advocates?

Inherent in Clark's critiques are several of the challenges I noted the research participants in my study identified. Indicated in my first empirical section of narratives of injustice, interviewees noted lacking the political power themselves to transform gender-structured politics that are perpetuating inequalities, but also lacking the status and the positioning of male politicians who have better access and agency to enact national policies from the top-down. In her assessment, Clark declares that a central objective of effective transitional justice is to prioritize rehabilitation and the 'gender dimension' in a comprehensive political strategy—meaning it's not enough that reparations advocates are working in civil society to push for an agenda shift, but rather that the initiative for change must come from within the political system perpetuating inequality. This positions the needs of the survivors first; and shows broad support of an agenda that is people, rather than policy centered.

However, she states if the strategy, as would appear to be the case in Bosnia today, is "underdeveloped and appears 'tagged-on,'" then the sincerity and legitimacy of the policy could be in doubt. The potential ramifications of this meek, wishy-washy type of policy language are that it will not be taken seriously at the national political level given that it is an obvious farce and that it simultaneously won't appeal to constituent groups like reparations advocates, or more importantly war rape survivors, who could interpret policies of this nature as too diluted and vague (2018, p.163). What one must center as the basis of any "survivor-focused approach" is the inclusion of survivors of trauma and warfare in the construction of building new political systems and frameworks. As has been observed within countries following the recommendations of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda, ensuring the participation of women in the reconstruction process yields positive outcomes for gender equality and economic advancement in total (Alam, 2014). Further, when women who were directly affected by the conflict are involved at an integral level, their insights, or the insights of their advocates as is the case for this study, can provide highly constructive feedback to peacebuilding processes (Kirby, 2016). According to Clark, the inclusion of trauma survivors within policymaking processes shouldn't even be seen as a reparations issue *making wrongs right*, but rather as an equal opportunities

issue—because in a society functioning under holistic transitional justice principles equity, access and autonomy are features of the design regardless of gender or past grievance (2018, p. 164). This gender-blind connection to better peacebuilding processes reminds me of a phenomenon and concern many in the interviews touched upon, but that fell outside of the scope of the narrative themes that emerged: Bosnia’s brain-drain.

As explained to me, given the continuation of low-threshold hostilities, building nationalist rhetoric and the lack of growth in economic opportunities for young people, many young people are fed up and leaving the stagnant post-conflict situation in Bosnia behind to move abroad and build more stable lives in lucrative regions of Europe open to young talent. Many young men, born in the generation following the war, are highly educated and particularly tired of the perpetuation of Bosnia’s most ardent existing patriarchal norms, whose rules dictate the loaded political climate and fuel vitriol towards the advancement of women to be part of a more gender-inclusive society. As noted, there are generational differences present regarding gender norms. Therefore, despite strides and the tireless efforts by advocates to push for more equality in the post-conflict period, certain dynamics of masculinity-centered state preclude progress. The “survivor-focused approach” however, is also about targeting entrenched practices built on stereotypes by placing the most policy weight on improving the outcomes for the most vulnerable. That way, establishing transformation rather just transition for the least capable in a post-conflict society with strengthen relations not only along social and gender lines, but most importantly along economic lines where everyone in a societal recovery would have a chance at prosperity. Specifically, if policymakers were to see the economic value in women, including survivors of war rape, as human capital in modern Bosnia, perhaps more equipped and progressive young people would be less likely to leave, and regenerated economic participation would fuel unity while dampening rising tensions.

Lastly, Clark’s approach suggests both temporal and ecological elements should be considered critically and automatically when designing holistic transitional justice in post-conflict transformation. As Sveaas et al. (2018, p.14) impart “given the short-term and long-term emotional, social, and cognitive effects of torture,” integrative concepts mindful of temporal and spatial rehabilitation are vital for transformational success in post-conflict societies and for positive personal outcomes for survivors as a group. In practice, this would entail reparations work having a long-term view on post-conflict and rehabilitation outcomes, meaning large, international NGOs would no longer be able to run short programs or to offload poorly designed

projects onto local community organizations. The resources and tools utilized in reparations processes would need to be accessible, granting “broader operationalization of transitional justice as a process” across all sectors and making its mechanisms sustainably available long-term through knowledge and consciousness-building as well (Clark, 2018, p. 9). In practice, this requires instilling best practices on enacting transitional justice reforms across a broad swath of political institutions and organizations, in addition to incorporating cohesive and consistent educational reforms to end the stigma and taboo surrounding conflict-related sexual violence. As Clark (2018, p. 10) implores: “in order for societies to move on from and break with the past, it is essential that the past is dealt with.”

Facing topics like unlearning toxic masculinity, reorienting policymaking to overcome the ineffectiveness of the rule of law in application and designing strategic transitional justice so that it tackles long-term development goals, is not the sole responsibility of a group of reparations advocates to champion for. Clark asserts that in pursuing justice that seeks to correct the damage of trauma towards one group via the ‘survivor-focused approach’, we can affect change for everyone – because everyone in a post-conflict society is ‘surviving’ something.

From my perspective, having researched the pitfalls of the Dayton Agreement, 25 years on, and understood the lack of recent sizable progress after 20 years of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda in Bosnia, it is clear the search for justice is not a linear progression. Now that we have arrived at the juncture of these important milestones, it is time to open up to new ideas and welcome interdisciplinary policy initiatives like holistic transitional justice. Excitingly, to summarize some interesting developments following Bosnian civil society’s halt due to COVID-19, I wanted to share some small upcoming projects in development that inspired by transitional justice approaches and shared with me by some of my research participants: a children’s museum geared towards the latest generation of kids to learn about post-conflict peacebuilding, a memorial for women’s civil society organizations, and the expansion of a small business and start-up cohort for war rape survivors in rural areas.

6 Concluding Thoughts

I have shared many theoretical and practical reflections throughout the thesis regarding the Bosnian conflict's militant use of rape as a weapon of war and have discussed points of reckoning with reparations advocates who are still at work decades into their quest for justice. Though several measures of justice and peacebuilding were addressed, there are more connections left to unpack in the future work on Bosnia and sexual violence. Certainly, more interviewing and investigating into the topic could yield other modes of analysis that could be useful towards the advancing peace and conflict scholarship. Having encountered personal challenges and questions throughout this research process, for now I want to conclude with thinking about what is next for discourse related to conflict-related sexual violence, for both healing from trauma and political progress.

Though the advocacy work centers around garnering justice and reparations for the survivors themselves, it will be critical to inquire in future assessment not only about the experiences of those who experienced trauma, as has been done in sociology and psychology literature, but to evaluate the normative approaches within programming and political work done for and around the larger challenges. Unfortunately, due to the violent nature of the world, we have several present conflicts to evaluate and interrogate the first-hand experiences of war rape and conflict-related sexual violence survivors. However, with regard to connection, looking more deeply at derivative use of this type of violence, at the faults at the systemic level to meet the governance needs for more gender equal societies, and to look at post-conflict states that have successfully applied mechanisms to address women's unique experiences of war would be of substantial benefit to feminist political discourse.

Indeed, viewing the problems of sexual violence at the scales and within the relationships they are relative to influencing will widen our understanding of the policy needs to make better outcomes happen for affected communities and states. It's a mistake to solely view this as a survivor's problem and a survivor's struggle to resolve on their own—particularly when legal mandates dictate that survivors are entitled to support and it is the state apparatus that fails to acknowledge, reward, or secure appropriate remunerations or support for dignity-based reparations.

The accountability and ownership of responsibility on reparations also needs a re-think. As suggested, the burden of the trauma and the work needed to overcome it should not begin or emanate from the individual efforts of survivors. Rather, social theory like ring theory, which is used in individual therapy to address broken relationships and boundaries incurred after trauma, could be studied as a subject matter for further exploration to be employed on a relational level between the state, its citizens, and the rendering of reparation-based support services between them. What is critical and what I have picked up most from my empirical findings and analysis is that as an academic and research-driven community we must have a longer-term, multi-generational view on post-conflict societies and the operation of integrating peacebuilding mechanisms like gender mainstreaming, transitional justice and handling ethnic grievances.

Further, investigating approaches within singular fields is not enough and in political science it is imperative we move beyond dissecting rhetorical and policy instruments in a vacuum. Social and economic disparities critical to studying justice and transition processes extend beyond the vernacular of national action plans, security council resolutions, and parliamentary documents in practice. Utilizing interdisciplinarity is key in moving away from isolated discussion and borrowing approaches from complementary disciplines to peace and conflict studies that provide a human as well as systems-based approach, like political psychology, can only strengthen the methodology and impact of research on policy and governance solutions.

Some ideas that came to mind while conducting this research included looking at state-led holistic healing processes that combine theory and practice, given that my review of different approaches to reparations in Bosnia showed that looking at the ideas that took on the root causes had to be compared with policy and legal outcomes associated with these choices and their after-effects. To address this fully, one could further examine better strengthening the communal networks of those very trauma survivors to receive cohesive and comprehensive support from their networks at every level: the personal, local, institutional, and international.

Positively, as policy dialogue on sexual violence has shown us, from the awarding of the 2018 Nobel Peace Prize to the twenty-five years of gender and development in Bosnia after the Dayton Agreement, it is that trauma invariably leaves lasting scars – not just on the individual, but across a breadth of levels in the political and social fabric of a country. Elevating and designing policy and laws that enable intersectional agendas to tackle these schisms along the

pathways of transitional justice could enable be a new approach and target multiple parts of the political puzzle collaboratively within inclusive peace building processes.

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Appendix I: Interview Guide

Interviewer: Caroline Margaret Pledger

Participants: War Rape Reparations Advocates, including health care workers, NGO workers, a museum curator and government employees located in Bosnia

Preamble: Hello and thank you for participating in this interview. My name is Caroline Pledger, I am a student in peace and conflict studies, and you are a participant being interviewed as part of a research project I am conducting for my master thesis at the University of Oslo, in Norway. The study, which has been approved by the Norwegian Center for Research Data (NSD), is about the work of organizations and other advocates working towards reparations and social support for survivors of conflict-related sexual violence in post-conflict Bosnia. I will now cover some important information before we begin.

Some things you should note as an interviewee:

- *This interview is being recorded and I will be asking a set of predetermined questions about your experience using an interview guide.*
- *Your participation in this study will remain anonymous, and all recordings of this interview will be destroyed at the completion of this project.*
- *If at any point you are uncomfortable or need clarification from me during our interview, you are free to stop the conversation or ask any questions you have. (NB: If using an interpreter, I asked them to convey this point to the interviewee and expressed we had plenty of time to work through miscommunications, if any occurred).*
- *The interview will last approximately one hour, and do not hesitate to express yourself as an individual since you are a subject matter expert. My focus in speaking to you is to get your honest response to the questions.*
- *Finally, I'm so grateful for your time today, so let's begin!*

Questions:

- 1) What is your name, title, and position? Tell me about your organization, company, or department and where you work.

- 2) How long have you worked with survivors of sexual violence? And with reparations seeking for war rape survivors in Bosnia?
- 3) What is your view on the Dayton Agreement/accords and how the document addresses sexual violence survivors?
- 4) Can you detail a timeline of what work you or your organization/office has done to facilitate reparations for sexual violence survivors since 1995?
- 5) What has been challenging in your work to receive support for reparations? Has anything in particular stalled the process? Is state support limited?
- 6) What do you think about being a woman in Bosnia today? Has there been progress since 1995? Is gender equality advancing?
- 7) In what ways does reparations work contribute to the process of justice for survivors? To the process of justice overall?
- 8) How are reparation services meaningful to those who receive them?
- 9) Where do you see gaps in the system that prevent someone from getting reparations? Are there gaps from within organization that delay or inhibit providing services?
- 10) How do you feel about the Women, Peace and Security Agenda as a policy?
- 11) In what ways are the Women, Peace and Security Agenda and Bosnia's National Action Plan impacting sexual violence survivors in Bosnia?
- 12) Given recent court cases where monetary reparations efforts were successful for survivors, do you feel the justice system in Bosnia is improving for people who suffered? If so/not, why?
- 13) Any final comments on your work or this case?