



Gender Considerations in Conflict Analysis: The Case of Bosnia

Anne Marrillet

During conflicts, women and men are affected differently by the violence and the changes at the social, economic, political and environmental levels. The security of both men and women is challenged though often in different ways. Women have for very long been more or less invisible for conflict analysis but since the implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (October 31, 2000) gender is being mainstreamed.

Gender is much more than a separation of needs regarding men and women as men, and especially young men, can also be strongly affected by gender-based violence (GBV), rapes and numerous other war atrocities. As a consequence, conflict analysts must take this trend into account when they are trying to make gender-sensitive recommendations. In the case of the Bosnian conflict (1992-1995), we can state that the Bosnian Serb strategy was “gender-selective” from the start. Anyone who wants to better understand this particular case should carefully take gender considerations into account in the analysis of the conflict causes, actors and dynamics.

Slobodan Milosevic’s ambitions of a greater Serbia free of young Muslim men and women reportedly sparked the onset of war in both Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The genocidal ethnic cleansing was in fact a “gendercidal” one towards this special part of the population. During the conflict, the Serb forces systematically concentrated their full attention on the “battle-age” men (e.g. from 18 to 55 years old) and on mass rapes of women. Although gender was not of course the root cause of the Bosnian War, it is worth mentioning that it played an enormous role in shaping the conflict dynamics and the mentalities up until the peace-building phase that is still taking place nowadays. For instance, it is a proven fact that in late Spring/early Summer 1992, the strategic “choke points” along east-west routes in northern Bosnia appear to have been the target of systematic gender-selective slaughters that strongly foreshadowed the nightmare of Srebrenica which was the theatre of a massacre of more than 8000 Bosniaks, men and boys, in July 1995 and has later been considered a crime against humanity.

Similarly, there are various mentions of mass executions of non-combatant men in August 1992: men were separated from women and executed at the edge of ravines. That being said, it is very surprising to learn that the Dayton Peace Accords (DPA), which set up a strong basis to end the hostilities, contain no separate provisions of their own about gender. As a result, this caused gender equity to be rather neglected in the early years of reconstruction in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) according to a 2000 UN Common Country Study. The Convention on the Elimination

of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) was ratified first by Yugoslavia, later by the newly independent BiH. Elizabeth Rehn, then Special Representative of the Secretary General to the United Nations Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina (UNMIBH), publicly acknowledged the phenomenon of public violence, serving as an inspiration to many Bosnian women and women organizations.

Psychosocial programs targeting women proliferated during and after the war but did not facilitate on-going programs to address gender-based violence as a social phenomenon. Local police have had limited training on gender-based violence and most centres for social work have received no training on these issues and are not required to collect data. Moreover, most policies seem to have been implemented by and for men and we can only note that a lot of recommendations did not directly address the needs of women who suffered from a lack of government level representation and support. In order to make the scenarios much more gender-sensitive, there is a vital necessity to improve collaboration between men and women in all spheres of life.

Legislations and even policies regarding gender as well as coordination projects can actually be evaluated and serve as a base throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina. Indeed, the programs on gender should introduce interventions for male survivors that embrace the specific concerns of men and boys. On the other hand, although a host of recommendations tackled Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) programs, the projects currently targeting men should also include gender and gender-based violence prevention and education services as well as psychological counselling. In addition, there should be efforts to improve collaboration among local NGOs since they are playing a real “peacemaker” role. Finally, the legislation and policies regarding gender and gender-based violence must be brought in accordance by the State in line with the European Union’s standards.

About the author

Ms Anne Marrillet holds a Master in History as well as a Master in European Studies with a major in International Politics from the European Institute of the University of Geneva. After working as Project Officer and Coordinator at the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, she specialized in Conflict Prevention and Resolution issues.