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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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