

## What We Have (Not) Learned From The Past? Introducing a Research Project on The History of Violence Against Women in Bosnia and Herzegovina

### Geçmişten Ne Öğren(me)dik? Bosna Hersek'te Kadına Yönelik Şiddet Tarihi Hakkında Bir Araştırma Projesi Tanıtımı

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#### Abstract

Dr. Fahd Kasumović, an Associate Professor at the University of Sarajevo, participated in an interview with Assoc. Prof. Zeynep Kevser Şerefoğlu Danış and Ayşe Betül Ekici on June 1, 2025. In his role as the editor of the book “Nasilje nad ženama: Diskursi, perspektive, lekcije iz bh. povijesti” [Violence against Women: Discourses, Perspectives, Lessons from the History of Bosnia and Herzegovina],<sup>2</sup> Dr. Kasumović details the journey that led him to initiate an interdisciplinary project focused on researching violence against women throughout the historical timeline of what is now Bosnia and Herzegovina, from ancient times to the present. He discusses the academic and social objectives of the book, outlines its primary findings, and addresses the challenges he and his team encountered while undertaking such a complex project. Additionally, Dr. Kasumović evaluates the current state of women’s studies in Bosnia and Herzegovina, discusses the level of institutional backing for this type of research, and provides his perspectives on the responses from both the academic community and the broader public regarding the findings about violence against women featured in this book.

**Keywords:** Violence against women and girls, Women’s studies, Women’s history, Social history, Patriarchal society.

## Öz

Saraybosna Üniversitesi Doçenti Dr. Fahd Kasumović, 1 Haziran 2025'te Doç. Dr. Zeynep Kevser Şerefoğlu Danış ve Ayşe Betül Ekici ile bir röportaja katıldı. "Nasilje nad ženama: Diskursi, perspektive, lekcije iz bh. povijesti" [Kadına Yönelik Şiddet: Bosna-Hersek Tarihinden Söylemler, Perspektifler, Dersler] adlı eserin editörü Dr. Kasumović, Bosna-Hersek'in tarihindeki kadınlara yönelik şiddeti antik dönemlerden günümüze kadar inceleyen disiplinler arası bir projenin başlatmasına götüren süreci detaylı bir şekilde aktarıyor. Kitabın akademik ve sosyal hedeflerini tartışıyor, temel bulgularını özetliyor ve kendisi ve ekibinin böylesine karmaşık bir projeyi üstlenirken karşılaştığı zorluklardan bahsediyor. Dr. Kasumović ayrıca Bosna-Hersek'teki kadın çalışmalarının mevcut durumunu değerlendiriyor, bu tür araştırmalara yönelik kurumsal desteğin düzeyini tartışıyor ve bu kitapta yer alan kadına yönelik şiddet bulgularına ilişkin hem akademik topluluğun hem de daha geniş kamuoyunun verdiği yanıtlara ilişkin kendi bakış açılarını sunuyor.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Kadına ve kız çocuklarına yönelik şiddet, Kadın çalışmaları, Kadın tarihi, Toplumsal tarih, Ataerkil toplum.

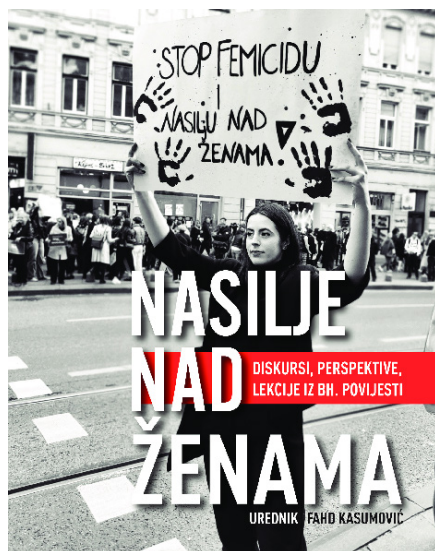
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<sup>2</sup> This book was published in Bosnian, featuring an extensive summary that covers the majority of the conclusion section, provided in both English and German languages. See Fahd Kasumović, ed. *Nasilje nad ženama: Diskursi, perspektive, lekcije iz bh. povijesti* (Sarajevo: Univerzitet u Sarajevu - Filozofski fakultet; Fondacija Heinrich Böll, Sarajevo; Berlin: Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung e.V., 2024), 1-476. The book is available in both print and ebook editions ([https://ebooks.ff.unsa.ba/index.php/ebooks\\_ffunsa/catalog/book/110](https://ebooks.ff.unsa.ba/index.php/ebooks_ffunsa/catalog/book/110)).

1. In the field of women's studies in Türkiye, we came to know you through your book *Violence against Women: Discourses, Perspectives, Lessons from the History of Bosnia and Herzegovina*. But can we get to know you better? Who is Prof. Dr. Fahd Kasumović? Would you tell us about your academic life?

I would like to start by expressing my gratitude for your keen interest in the book I edited that addresses violence against women. This presents an excellent chance to highlight my research and for us to establish collaboration in the field of women's studies. I want to share some information about my academic background and interests. At present, I hold the position of Associate Professor in the History Department at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Sarajevo. I have a PhD in history and teach a variety of courses that focus on the history of the Ottoman state and civilization, Ottoman Bosnia, as well as Ottoman paleography and diplomatics.



**Image 1.** From *Nasilje nad ženama: Diskursi, perspektive, lekcije iz bh. Povijesti* by Fahd Kasumović, (Ed.) (2024). Copyright 2024 by Sarajevo: Univerzitet u Sarajevu Filozofski fakultet. Reprinted with permission.

In terms of my research interests, I have dedicated over 22 years to studying the social, economic, cultural, and political history of the Ottoman Empire during the Early Modern Age and into the 19th century. Throughout my professional journey, I have been particularly interested in investigating Ottoman economic policies, center-periphery dynamics, social life in the Ottoman-Venetian-Habsburg borderlands, conversion to Islam, slavery, agency etc. My most recent research project centers on the topic of violence against women and girls during the Ottoman era, which is an area I intend to explore further in the future. I have served as a team leader for two projects that focus on violence against women.

I authored a book titled “Na periferiji svijeta islama: Osmanska poreska politika u Bosanskom ejaletu 1699–1839 [At the Periphery of the World of Islam: Ottoman Taxation Policy in the Eyalet of Bosnia, c. 1699–1839], and I both wrote and edited the interdisciplinary monograph “Nasilje nad ženama: Diskursi, perspektive, lekcije iz bh. povijesti” [Violence Against Women: Discourses, Perspectives, Lessons from the History of Bosnia and Herzegovina]. Furthermore, my interests also include history didactics, and I have co-authored three books in this area.

It may also be noteworthy that I was awarded the Imam Tirmizi Visiting Research Fellowship from the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies, allowing me to engage with the Oxford academic community for two trimesters, greatly enriching my academic experiences.

**2. First of all, we know that your book was published as the product of a project. Could you tell us about the process of how this project came about, the first questions that arose in your mind, and the exchange of ideas you had with the contributing authors throughout the project?**

Reflecting on the path that led me to organize a project researching the history of violence against women is a topic I frequently discuss lately, especially since the media have shown great interest in the inspiration behind my book idea. I must admit that this tale has its origins in my earlier research endeavors, but it only took its definitive form in 2023. Over the years, while investigating Ottoman court records in search of significant and intriguing subjects within the social history of Bosnia, I encountered a considerable number of cases involving physical, verbal, sexual, and economic violence against women.

Interestingly, despite these cases being present in the records and readily accessible to other researchers, they somehow remained at the periphery of historiography. For historians, it appears there were always other topics deemed more promising, significant, and desirable. I found this puzzling. At that time, I was contemplating how we could never fully grasp the sociocultural landscape of Ottoman Bosnia if we failed to consider violence against women as a social phenomenon and understand its roots

and mechanisms that allow it to persist year after year, generation after generation.

Nevertheless, the concept for an interdisciplinary project in this field arose only in 2023. That year witnessed a horrific murder of a woman by her partner in Bosnia, which received extensive media coverage. We witnessed public protests, and discussions highlighting the necessity of preventing further violence against women. Observing these events, along with other instances of violence against women that surfaced, made me reflect on how these murders and various forms of violence echoed cases I had previously noticed in Ottoman court records. Yet, people were unaware of this.



**Image 2.** *Dr. Fahd Kasumović*

in various times and places. Merely stating that violence has deep roots is insufficient. What does that entail? What specifics do we have?

It dawned on me that historians have much to contribute to this discussion and that their findings should be included in the public conversation surrounding violence. Then it struck me—the realization that violence against women is a subject we need to understand not only in the Ottoman era but across all periods in history,

Thus, I resolved to assemble a team of researchers to examine texts concerning violence against women in the history of Bosnia and Herzegovina from classical times to the present, collaborating with historians, literary historians, legal experts, and sociologists. I noticed that such an initiative had not been conducted even within much larger historiographies than that of Bosnia, and that this type of research could be relevant and inspiring in other countries as well. I consider myself fortunate to have garnered the support of nine colleagues, experts with PhDs, who were enthusiastic about this idea and were eager to participate

in the research project. My intention was for us to author a book on the history of violence against women, encompassing various eras and perspectives, but I also envisioned this as merely the initial step in the project.

After achieving our research objectives, we planned to implement a follow-up initiative focused on social goals. The intention was to organize a series of public lectures and educational workshops to disseminate the project findings publicly, particularly among the youth. The idea was that discussing past and present violence is crucial for preventing violence against women in the future.

We had numerous questions that were significant to us and sought to find answers. What is the perception of violence against women in various societies? Can we identify instances of physical, sexual, verbal, and economic violence within families and in wider social frameworks? What information can we gather regarding the murders of women, instances of rape, kidnapping, acts of torture, abuse, and violence directed towards children and girls? What types of texts provide information on violence? How is violence integrated into larger power dynamics within patriarchal societies? What responses did violence elicit? What mechanisms permitted violence to persist? How did victims perceive these experiences? What are some forms of violence against women that were accepted and went unrecognized? Were victims able to achieve justice in the courts? Can we identify instances where women actively battled against violence? What were the social and cultural backgrounds of both victims and perpetrators? What forms of violence are visible, and which remain concealed?

These were just a few of the inquiries we aimed to investigate. Throughout the research process, we learned about other questions and incorporated them into our study. In the end, ten contributors, comprising five men and five women, provided their writings. As the project leader, I edited the book, assembled these texts into a single volume, and authored one chapter, the foreword, the introduction, and the conclusion. The book was published in Sarajevo and Berlin in 2024 by University of Sarajevo –

Faculty of Philosophy, and Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung. Currently, it is included in the EBSCOhost scientific database, demonstrating that its significance has been acknowledged internationally.

### **3. How were the chapter titles and the content structure of the book determined? As the editor, were you the one who decided on the chapters?**

This book was envisioned as an edited monograph, meaning it was intended to be a thoroughly researched investigation into a singular topic. Consequently, it is not merely a collection of various writings, but rather an academic work characterized by a high degree of uniformity, wherein chapter authors investigate comparable research topics and methodologies that complement one another. Essentially, the goal of the book was to explore and present different yet interconnected facets of violence against women, ensuring that each contribution aids in forming a comprehensive understanding of violence against women in a unified conclusion. Achieving this objective necessitated close collaboration and a significant amount of quality teamwork.

As the editor, I selected the book's title, determined its overall structure, and chose the titles for each chapter. The chapters are organized as follows: I. Social Horizons of Antiquity; II. Above the Historical Sources of Medieval Bosnia; III. In the Civilizational Streams of the World of Islam; IV. Under the Two-Headed Eagle; V. Between the Two World Wars; VI. In the Flames of World War II; VII. The Socialist Epoch; VIII. The Winds of War in the 1990s; IX. Sociological and Culturological Discourses; X. Literary Discourses.

The content of each chapter was determined through collaboration with the authors of those chapters. There were ten contributors: Almir Marić, Dženan Dautotović, Fahd Kasumović, Amila Kasumović, Minela Radušić, Adnan Jahić, Mirza Džananović, Sabina Subašić Galijatović, Sarina Bakić, and Ajla Demiragić. In line with the overall theme of the book, each author presented a text with a title of their choice that aligned with the established concept.

For example, the first chapter includes a title called “From Fire to Chains: Violence Against Women in the East Adriatic During Roman Times,” while the second chapter addresses “Violence against Women in Medieval Bosnia.” The third chapter is titled “Violence Against Women in Ottoman Bosnia: Towards Mapping a Sociocultural Panorama of a Borderland Province.” The fourth chapter features a text named “Masculinity, Misogyny and Modernization: Sexual and Physical Violence Against Women in Habsburg Bosnia,” and the fifth chapter is called “Abused in Silence: Violence Against Women in Bosnia and Herzegovina, c. 1918-1929.” In the sixth chapter, the text is titled “The Great Suffering: Violence against Women in Bosnia and Herzegovina, c. 1941-1945.” The seventh chapter contains a work titled “Representation of Violence against Women in Printed Media in Bosnia and Herzegovina during the Socialist Era.” The text in the eighth chapter is titled “Violence against Women in Armed Conflicts: Crimes of Sexual Abuse in Bosnia and Herzegovina, c. 1992-1995,” while the ninth chapter presents a text named “The Legacy of Silence: Culture of Violence against Women and the Quest for Change.” Finally, the tenth chapter is titled “Canonical Literature and the Representation of Violence Against Women: Readings with *Resistance* in Required Literature for Grammar Schools and High Schools in Bosnia and Herzegovina.”

I feel incredibly fortunate to have collaborated with a group of committed and skilled individuals who recognized the benefits of teamwork and understood how to identify and address gaps in historiography.

For the compilation of this book into one volume, the Introduction and Conclusion were of vital importance. The Introduction features a text titled “Violence Against Women: Academic Challenges, Lessons from the History of Bosnia and Herzegovina”, and the Conclusion is named “When Long History of Violence is Critically Re-examined”. These sections of the book connect all the analyses presented in the chapters into a cohesive topic that can be easily navigated by readers.



**4. As the editor and intellectual driving force behind the project, were there academic or societal reasons that motivated you to address this topic? Could we also speak of a personal motivation in your approach?**

A variety of factors drove my colleagues to participate in this project. As the team leader, I elaborated on these motivations in the project proposal submitted to the University of Sarajevo – Faculty of Philosophy, Foundation Heinrich Böll, and the Canton Sarajevo Ministry of Higher Education and Youth. We received support and funding from all these institutions, which ultimately enabled our research and the publication of our book.

The primary academic motivation is the significant underrepresentation of the topic of violence against women in research, despite its critical importance. All of us are experienced researchers constantly on the lookout for opportunities to uncover new sources and present original ideas to the academic world. While we have considerable knowledge in areas such as politics, social history, cultural history, economic history, and women's history, our insight into violence against women is limited. Although information exists in journals and books, the depth of understanding falls short of what can be achieved through examination of archival materials. Therefore, the potential for scholarly contribution is substantial.

Additionally, the trends in historiography and social sciences are gradually evolving. More individuals today are interested in gaining insights into women's history and contemporary social phenomena, including violence against women. Conversely, there are still some groups and individuals who are inclined to continue neglecting this area. This drives us even more to demonstrate the significance and potential of researching violence against women.

Regarding the social implications of this project, we believe that scientific research should offer various benefits to the community, and that writing a book should not merely serve as an endpoint. So, how do we intend to accomplish this objective? First and foremost, producing

a scholarly monograph focused on violence against women serves the greater interests of society today. We acknowledge that violence against women is a pressing social issue that requires attention. We witness a global initiative aimed at preventing violence against women and girls. Declarations are being enacted, conventions are being ratified, reports are being generated, and national standards and regulations are being revised. This constitutes one of the pivotal issues included in global strategies, such as the Sustainable Development Goals established by the United Nations.

Nonetheless, all of this is insufficient if we do not shift perspectives on violence against women. To achieve this, we need extensive discussions surrounding VAW. Concealing information about VAW is not a viable solution, nor is it constructive to idealize and romanticize our history. In today's world, we recognize that there was never a utopian time without violence, and it is essential to expose this violence and the societal reactions to it. The various forms of violence and the mechanisms that enable its continuation often remain consistent. It is imperative that we create an environment for people to acknowledge this, to comprehend history, to learn from it, and to contemplate the future. I hope this book serves as a step closer to this objective and illustrates that addressing violence is critical. We owe it to the countless women who endured in the past and to ourselves to make our societies more cognizant of the roots and persistence of violence against women, enabling us to more effectively prevent it in the future. This is the overarching social aim of this book. As a team, we frequently discussed this matter and found we shared the same principles.

Regarding my personal motivation, I deeply resonate with the aforementioned social objectives of this project and desire to engage in a social and academic network that actively raises awareness about the harmful impacts of violence against women. I also hope we can establish connections with you in Türkiye based on similar values and research objectives for the greater good of our communities.

**5. How did your relationship with the institution that published your book develop? Were there any disagreements or differences in perspective regarding women's studies between you and the institution? If so, how did you manage this process?**

Before anything else, I would like to convey my appreciation to the institutions that contributed to our book's publication: the University of Sarajevo – Faculty of Philosophy, Heinrich-Böll Stiftung Berlin, and its office in Sarajevo. We received comprehensive organizational and financial support, with no interference in conceptual and academic aspects. Thus, I can confidently say that we operated in an environment that fosters academic excellence, freedom, and, importantly for us, the advancement of studies that address issues such as women's history, gender studies, equality, and human rights. For any researcher, such support is vital, and our situation was no exception.

However, I must mention that I was fully aware of the strategic objectives of these institutions before I submitted my project. After familiarizing myself with their policies and understanding that a project addressing violence against women would be positively received, I proceeded to submit my application. Our relationship evolved from these initial contacts, and they are very pleased with the attention this book and project have attracted, both internationally and domestically. We have organized book promotions, educational workshops, public lectures, and we now have a follow-up project titled "What Have We (Not) Learned from the Past: Educational Workshops and Public Lectures on the History of Violence against Women." All of this is a testament to the type of support we have received.

Our experience would have been quite different if we had applied to another institution. Nevertheless, making a thoughtful choice made our journey smoother. I must also highlight that institutional support for women's studies is increasing in Bosnia and Herzegovina, with significantly more projects in this area now than when I started my career 22 years ago. Still, we anticipate further progress in this field.

**6. We found the historical perspective you presented in your book especially valuable. Looking at the content, we see that you trace the history of violence against women in the Bosnia-Herzegovina region from Ancient Rome to the present day. What was your aim in approaching violence from such a historical perspective? Additionally, what challenges did this approach pose during the project's writing process?**

I greatly appreciate your feedback; thank you for that. One of the most fascinating aspects of social phenomena is that similar social situations can be observed across different eras and locations, even when dealing with distinct times and cultural systems. This is the allure of writing social history. Contemporary readers can easily identify both similarities and differences with the social phenomena they encounter in their own time. This often aids readers in relating to the topic and recognizing its significance.

There is a saying commonly attributed to Mark Twain (though its authenticity is uncertain) that states "history does not repeat itself, but it often rhymes". This idea has inspired me, as I have observed various forms of violence against women throughout different phases of human history, despite the cultural systems being far apart chronologically. I have been puzzled by the question of why this occurs. Can we consider violence against women a transgenerational phenomenon? What mechanisms enable its persistence and occurrence across centuries?

I have come to realize that it is insufficient to only examine violence against women within a single period or year. To gain a better understanding of this phenomenon, we must analyze it comparatively across various epochs. For example, we can find instances of sexual and physical violence against women from antiquity to modern times. Grasping the intricacies of this phenomenon and its roots is only achievable by delving deeply into historical sources.

Naturally, this is a challenging task, which partly explains why such efforts have not been made before. To accomplish such an ambitious objective, one must consider materials from various periods, written in multiple languages. Consequently, I recognized that fulfilling this task could only

be achieved through collaborative effort. We utilized numerous primary sources from different time periods, written in a variety of languages. For example, we examined texts in Latin, Ottoman Turkish, German, English, French, Bosnian, Serbian, Croatian, and their premodern variants. Frequently, these texts were dispersed across numerous archives, making it difficult to locate specific instances of violence against women. Many cases of violence against women were left unrecorded and are thus invisible to us. Discovering these recorded cases required considerable time, persistence, and specialized skills. In the case of ancient texts, researchers needed to possess knowledge of ancient languages and paleography. The challenges shifted in modern times, as there was a vast amount of material. It became impractical to consider all available sources; instead, researchers had to probe into archival collections that were often not organized to facilitate this search.

I am pleased to share that this approach proved effective as it enhanced our understanding of the complexity and persistence of violence against women. We discovered that all instances of violence against women occurred in patriarchal societies, where men held dominant roles, had access to economic resources, political power, and a greater likelihood of having their voices heard. Our findings indicate that there has never been a time free from violence. We successfully traced various manifestations of violence against women over the past approximately 2,200 years. It is reasonable to suggest that violence against women has a far longer history; however, due to the lack of written records, we could not substantiate this assumption.

We identified occurrences of domestic violence, killings of women during times of war and peace, instances of women and girls being beaten, sexual abuse, bandit assaults, both collective and individual acts of violence, the suffering of women during bandit raids, abductions of women, economic violence, structural violence, and psychological and emotional violence. It was particularly intriguing to observe that insults aimed at women in the 18th century were strikingly similar to those used to demean women today. We learned that during the enslavement of women and girls, warriors felt a sense of pride in capturing them; for these men, it was perceived as a legitimate act, a source of profit, and a symbol of dominance during Roman and Ottoman times.

Our research indicated that while the majority of victims documented in sources were male, women predominantly suffered from domestic violence in their own homes, where they should have felt safe. Our findings demonstrated that violence against women endangered females from a variety of social classes, ethnicities, religions, and age groups. It was crucial for us to uncover the exact names of these women and the hardships they endured. Thanks to our efforts, we will not forget the experiences of women named Ayşe, Fatima, Rista, Anica, Jela, Savka, Margarita, Micika, Šerifa, Verica, and Nizama. Their experiences serve as a lesson for us all, and we should take the opportunity to read about and discuss this topic. Suppressing and ignoring this type of information is not an option. This was also one of the goals of our book.

Furthermore, we learned that while mild forms of violence against women were tolerated in patriarchal societies, we also uncovered evidence that perpetrators of violence against women and girls faced consequences. Court documents reveal that some men who abused women were also beaten, while those who committed rape were executed. Accounts from 18th century Bosnia indicate that the sexual exploitation and abduction of women and girls sparked public disturbances, suggesting that it is essential to consider various viewpoints when investigating violence against women. Also, we found instances prohibiting insults directed at women, as well as fatwas stating that a woman who killed her assailant in self-defense was engaging in an act that could be considered a fight on God's path (*gaza*). We also identified women who actively sought justice and achieved it, alongside those whose cases in court were unsuccessful. Ultimately, readers will now have the opportunity to explore the history of violence against women in Bosnia and Herzegovina during various periods, allowing them to make comparisons for themselves. This extends beyond the audience of Bosnia and Herzegovina and could attract global interest. I believe that this book could serve as a source of inspiration for Turkish readers if it is translated into Turkish, and I sincerely hope we can accomplish this as soon as possible.

**7. We would also like to hear your thoughts on the role of gender in historiography. Were your views on this subject the same before the editorial project? Did they change after working on the book?**

Every research project is guided by fundamental assumptions and results that emerge during the research process. One of the primary assumptions we held was that gender functions as an achieved status formed through social interactions and beliefs. I would say that theoretical concepts associated with social constructivism closely aligned with our perspective. In the end, our research remained consistent with this foundational assumption, as none of the texts published in this book undermine this viewpoint. Certainly, all authors retained complete academic freedom to explore primary sources and develop their own conclusions on the subject.

As an editor and author, I continue to strongly believe that gender roles are influenced by specific social environments and that these roles, through the processes of socialization and internalization, affect people's social behavior. Explicit illustrations of these concepts can be found in the fourth chapter of this book, which addresses violence against women in Habsburg Bosnia. It has been demonstrated that Bosnian society during that time held established perceptions of masculinity and femininity, along with societal expectations for men and women. Males were seen as active and dominant, more focused on the external world, while females were regarded as passive and family-oriented. Males were also considered protectors of women, with the role of women perceived as subordinate.

An ethnologist from Habsburg Bosnia, Mijo Žuljić, asserts that men and women are not at all equal. He explains that a woman does not carry her man's purse or wallet, and he is not held accountable for his actions, while a woman must provide answers for hers. Furthermore, he points out that in society, men are more self-possessed, and in public spaces, they have greater freedom to speak openly. Clearly, this illustrates the roles of masculinity and femininity, which are not determined by biological sex but rather by cultural perceptions of social roles.

Masculine expectations and the roles assigned to women can also take on toxic forms, as evidenced by historical sources. In Habsburg Bosnia, we encountered cases of men who violently harmed their spouses and even killed them, claiming in court, “I am the lord of my wife, God in heaven, and an emperor on earth”. This vividly reflects patriarchal stereotypes regarding the superior position of men over women. Toxic masculinity may have resulted in acts of violence toward women, and even murder, as demonstrated in this book.

Interestingly, similar perceptions can be found in various historical sources, with comparable thoughts observed in Türkiye and the Ottoman Empire. Today, we examine these sources and consider how human experiences within patriarchal societies share numerous similarities. In the future, we hope to conduct more research that will uncover further insights into these similarities, which will help us understand how comparable perceptions in our contemporary societies are deeply rooted in traditional views of gender roles. We aspire to recognize that we, as a society, also have the potential to transform these roles and expectations, so that the “historical rhymes” of the future may be more positive, and violence against women becomes merely a relic of the past.

**8. Women’s studies, like some other disciplines, is often regarded as a secondary or complementary subfield in historiography. What can you say about the position and reception of women’s studies within the Bosnian-Herzegovinian academic community, particularly at the University of Sarajevo?**

Women’s studies represent an interdisciplinary field that places women’s lives and experiences at the center of research. From a historiographical viewpoint, women’s history is often regarded as a subfield of historiography; however, it is also evident that women’s studies can rightfully be considered a field that spans various disciplines. Thus, we can confidently categorize it as cross-disciplinary, interdisciplinary, and multidisciplinary, each of which carries distinct semantic implications. Regardless of the terminology we choose, it is clear that the significance of women’s studies is becoming increasingly recognized.



Regarding the status of women's studies and the related fields of gender studies and feminist studies in Bosnia and Herzegovina, I would assert that there have been notable advancements since the 1990s. Much of this progress has stemmed from individual initiatives and civil society efforts, and there remains ample opportunity to reach a level of institutionalization comparable to that of more developed societies.

Civil societies in Bosnia and Herzegovina have been conducting short educational programs focusing on themes we associate with feminist studies. For instance, the Sarajevo Open Centre organizes a feminist school named after Žarana Papić, which provides courses on gender, education, the history of the feminist movement, sexuality, and women's social contributions. This organization is a continuation of activities initiated by another civil society group in the late 1990s. Currently, these programs do not offer separate courses on violence against women and its historical context; however, there is a possibility that we may introduce a course on this topic based on a recent monograph we published. This remains an idea for the future, and we will see how it develops. Additionally, it is important to highlight that these organizations share activist goals and advocate for gender equality and human rights.

Unfortunately, the society in Bosnia and Herzegovina still lacks strong institutional support, and there is no journal or institute solely focused on women's studies. Hence, when I learn that you have managed to publish such a journal, I consider it a significant achievement.

When we are speaking about the University of Sarajevo, I must emphasize that gender equality and the promotion of human rights are part of our strategic objectives. Presently, UNSA has a center called UNIGeRC, established as a Human Rights Center tasked with coordinating activities related to gender equality. Additionally, the University hosts a Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies that is presently running an online program aimed at deconstructing gender stereotypes and creating egalitarian gender models.

Moreover, I must mention that many scholars at the University of Sarajevo are conducting research within the realm of women's studies. We have published books and articles on this subject, both domestically and

internationally, and the quantity of such research is increasing. I am also grateful that the authorities are supportive of these initiatives. Thanks to this support, our book was published and our efforts have received recognition. However, there is currently no specialized program at the university level that focuses exclusively on women's studies, unlike some other universities globally. At certain faculties, there are elective courses that focus specifically on women. As faculty members publish books and articles centered on women's experiences and lives, some of this work is integrated into academic programs. My goal is to include material from the book I edited on violence against women into the syllabuses for the History Department. I have already organized workshops where students creatively analyze primary sources related to violence against women and then present their findings to the group to foster discussion. This initiative was very successful, and I am proud of the participants.

Overall, there have been improvements compared to the previous situation when women's studies were completely marginalized. However, we are still significantly distant from our desired goals. I hope that we can further enhance women's studies at the University of Sarajevo, encourage new researchers to choose these topics for their MA and PhD theses, and develop additional university courses focused on women's studies. Certainly, we intend to promote this as a strategic plan, and perhaps in a few years, in another interview and report, we can assess our progress in this area. We are also eager to learn more about your experiences in this domain. It could turn out to be extremely beneficial for us.

**9. In Türkiye, we observe that women academics are predominantly active in the field of women's studies. How is the interest of male academics in this field within the academic circles of Sarajevo? Would you say your work is an exception in this regard?**

This is a significant observation and an excellent question. I would argue that not only in Türkiye but also worldwide, women constitute the majority of researchers interested in women's history. Their contributions to this field are invaluable, inspiring countless students and scholars, me included. However, in Bosnia and Herzegovina and globally, there are also male researchers contributing to women's history. In my lectures

on violence against women, I frequently pose a fundamental question: Is violence against women a topic for men, a topic for women, or a topic for everyone? My belief is that we can effectively integrate this issue into the university agenda and aim to raise awareness about the harmful impacts of violence against women in our societies by involving both men and women to collaboratively study this topic.

The likelihood of achieving our goals is significantly increased when more individuals are engaged and actively participate in the discussion on violence against women. As I mentioned earlier, in the book I edited, we collaborated with five men and five women to research a single subject. While the idea for the book originated with me, the final product was achieved through a team that included both male and female perspectives. I believe it was crucial for us to work together and exchange viewpoints on violence against women. Without the efforts, support, and energy of women, the outcome would not have been the same.

Reflecting on this experience, I have received congratulations from many males and females, and it is now quite evident that this project was a tremendous success. What accounts for this success? I would suggest that the timing of the book was ideal, coinciding with a growing interest in such subjects. Many people are appalled by acts of violence against women and are eager to learn more about the violence faced by women in historical contexts. Furthermore, significant effort, enthusiasm, expertise, and vision were invested in this study, and it was acknowledged by society. The media covered the book extensively, and I discussed it with various TV stations, as well as in print and electronic outlets.

We worked diligently to ensure the book gained visibility, resulting in both printed and electronic editions. We included it in international databases such as EBSCOhost and CEEOL. None of this occurred by chance. Careful planning was essential, and when drafting the project, I envisioned these outcomes and did everything within my power to make them happen because I deemed them vital for the social impact of the book. One unexpected development was receiving an award for best editorship at the 36th Sarajevo International Book Fair, which was warmly embraced.

You have inquired whether this was an exception. I do not view it that way. I prefer to see it as a beacon and a model for other researchers who aspire to have their work recognized: a good idea, impeccable timing, an excellent team, high-quality research, funding, innovative concepts, organization, planning, media exposure, and a considerable amount of hard work. Only through focus and dedication can all these elements come together to produce such remarkable results.

On the other hand, I would not claim that every male is excited about the success of this project, but certainly, some are. Among men in Bosnia and Türkiye, there are those who are resistant to changes in historiography and do not value enough new research on women. What could be the reason for this? Perhaps they perceive these fresh perspectives as a challenge to longstanding stereotypes. They may believe that it could adversely affect their preferred power dynamics. Regardless of their stance, we are committed to shifting perceptions surrounding violence against women and women's history. We possess a great deal of enthusiasm and energy and are eager for a productive dialogue on this subject. Academia often includes critics and skeptics, and we appreciate any comments and scholarly dialogue on this topic.

**10. Before we finish, do you have any plans to focus on other instances of violence against women and other rights-based topics within a historical context in your future academic work?**

While investigating this topic in the archives, I have amassed a considerable collection of primary sources pertaining to Bosnia as well as to other regions of the Ottoman Empire. At this point, I have only managed to integrate a fraction of this material into my research. As a result, I am persisting in my exploration of this topic with the goal of publishing articles and potentially a book on violence against women in Ottoman Bosnia. I have identified new cases and inquiries related to violence against women that could deepen our understanding of the social dynamics in Ottoman Bosnia.

Undoubtedly, this book has addressed a crucial gap in the historiography of this subject by offering significant new information and insights. However, the practice of writing history is an ongoing task, and we must continually explore new approaches for critical analysis, to challenge stereotypes, and to make contributions that hold both academic and social significance.

After receiving encouraging feedback from colleagues and the public in Bosnia, I feel very inspired. There is a possibility that I will publish some of my findings regarding this issue in Türkiye. You possess a rich academic heritage, and I am eager to inform your audience about the matter of violence against women in the Ottoman–Venetian – Habsburg borderlands. I could also draw comparisons with instances of violence against women in the central regions of the Empire, which are now a part of the Republic of Türkiye. Regardless, I appreciate your interest and the opportunity to discuss my research. Thank you very much for your attention and your insightful questions!

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