FEMALE ACADEMICS' ROLE IN PEACE-BUILDING, STATE-BUILDING AND GENDER EQUALITY IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

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Abstract

Twenty-seven years after the end of the war, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) is still considered a post-conflict state dealing with war memories, geno-cide, socio-political divisions, and political and socio-economic challenges like ethno-nationalism, unemployment, social inequalities, a complex edu-cation system, high levels of corruption, migration, and depopulation. The article aims to investigate the role of female academics in peace-building, state-building and gender equality in Bosnia and Herzegovina. For this pur-pose, a survey questionnaire was distributed to female academics aiming to obtain data regarding female academic's role in the post-conflict society, how they have contributed to peace-building processes and the future of the country, the main issues and challenges they face as women in academia, their engagement in gender equality and women empowerment activities, the ways they cope with the COVID-19 pandemic in their professional and private life, and their work-life balance. Descriptive statistics and a the-matic analysis of the participants' responses to open-ended questions were conducted. Female academics in Bosnia and Herzegovina hold that women play a pivotal role in post-conflict societies and that they should be actively engaged in peace-building and state-building processes. Women themselves should be the leaders of positive changes and female empowerment through education and by providing support to other women.

Keywords: female academics; Bosnia and Herzegovina; higher education; gender equality; peace-building; state-building

Introduction

> *"Men alone cannot rebuild war-torn societies... As countries emerge from the rubble of war, women must be equal partners in rebuilding. Supporting women's participation in reconstruction means giving women access to the rooms where decisions are made." (Rehn & Sirleaf, 2002, p. 134)*

In post-conflict countries, peace-building, state-building, and gender equality cannot be achieved through international intervention and higher authorities alone, but the society at large must play an active role, including industry and business, academia and education, faith-based communities, media, and local NGO's (Mulalić, 2014, pp. 438-448; Kivimaki et al., 2012). In the past decades, many attempts have been made to adequately respond to different challenges in post-conflict societies. The role of women in such societies, even though essential, is often overlooked and neglected. It is noteworthy that "women and young people are rarely consulted during the political process of peace negotiations, yet they are often the ones who keep their communities alive emotionally and physically during the times of war" (Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, 1995, p. 3). Women should aim to increase women's representation in post-conflict governance, secure women's economic, and social rights and prioritize gender equality in the security sector (True, 2013).

When discussing the roles of women in peace-building, they are often referred to as caregivers and nutritionists, which, in a sense, extends their role as mothers and housewives. Their role as politicians or decision makers is usually neglected. However, women can contribute to peace-building and state-building in different ways. For example, Somali women in Mogadishu initiated NGOs which, among many other activities, organized peace education for women (Jama, 1996). Bouta and Frerks (2002) wrote extensively on women and their engagement in conflict situations and in working towards peace and stability in their societies. They especially pointed out

that the situation in which women can act "has been identified as a unique opportunity by many women living in conflict situations to become organized at all levels of society, particularly in the non-governmental sector, which in various countries did not even exist before the conflict" (p. 32). Women contribute to the connection between individuals and society via their understanding of what is happening in their households and outside of their homes. This connection can then be used by women in their effort to contribute to and achieve peace and transformation in society: "increasingly, women are realizing that, in order to change society, they must begin with the family and the community, for 'women's capacity to challenge the men in their families, their communities, or their political movements will be a key to remaking the world'" (Enloe, as cited in Ferris, 1993, p. 47). According to the United Nations (1996), "women make an important but often unrecognized contribution as peace educators both in their families and in their societies." There are many examples in which women improved their status in society after conflict. One of the examples is Rwanda, in which some female entrepreneurs received rights to own land property and equal rights to inheritance. They also changed the approach to education to a great extent. More girls started to go to school and pursue higher education (Berry, 2018). Women must be seen in light of a positive shift from being housewives and care-givers to a more prominent role, as a source and driving force of change at different levels in society.

Women in the field of education can initiate dynamic developments in society, especially women in academia. However, there is a huge disparity in equal gender representations at all levels of education and particularly at the universities (Macfarlane, 2012). According to Howe-Walsh and Turnbul (2014), the number of women academicians is minikmal and there are many challenges that women encounter in their careers. Several reasons are assumed for this: gender institutional cultures, formal and informal gender practices, individual factors, and caring responsibilities. The countries

of former Yugoslavia are experiencing different trends regarding women's roles in peace-building (Sorenson, 1998). Women face challenges in exercising their political rights and power. Those who work at higher education institutions have a personal and collective responsibility to be educated and informed about public life so that they can equally participate in policy-making processes that are relevant for the lives of all citizens (Mulalić & Karić, 2020, pp. 27-42). The most promising way to increase women's participation in decision-making processes is through democratization (Aganović et al., 2015; Mulalić, 2011, pp. 40-55). While some progress has been made, in Bosnia and Herzegovina democratization processes are still underway.

The Position of Women in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Bosnia and Herzegovina is a country in the process of a post-conflict transition. As a result of the Bosnian War (1992-1995), the country today consists of two entities and the Brčko District. Even 27 years after the end of the war, Bosnia and Herzegovina remains deeply divided, not only geographically, but also through a decentralised and fragmented system of government. The latter is one of the major obstacles for the country in its aspirations to join the European Union and NATO.

According to the 2013 census, the population of BiH is around 3.5 million people, with 50.9% women and 49.1% men (Agency for the Statistics of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2022). Regarding the position of women in its society, the country has made significant progress in ensuring relevant legal frameworks to promote and protect gender equality: the country's Constitution guarantees equal rights to all its citizens and prohibits gender-based discrimination in exercising citizens' rights and liberties, the Law on Gender Equality was adopted in 2003, and a Gender Equality Agency was established on state-level. However, there is an evident disconnect between the elaborate network of gender equality mechanisms at all levels of government and the real-life issues and experiences of women living in the country.

It is noteworthy that different international organisations, such as USAID and the OSCE, provide active support to gender mainstreaming processes in BiH and the region. The OSCE Mission to BiH promotes gender equality in the country by organizing different activities, such as a workshop to strengthen legal provisions for women in the armed forces, workshops to support women working in police and law enforcement, training women candidates from major political parties on media skills in preparation for elections, as well as trial monitoring of cases of gender-based violence and raising awareness of gender equality in education through its work with teachers (OSCE 2017, 2018a). Women themselves have initiated a variety of organisations in the country to promote women empowerment and gender equality, but also general values which need to be addressed in the country, such as a better education system, improved health protection, welfare and social security policies. Nevertheless, women still face different forms of gender-based discriminations and issues such as unemployment, lack of adequate political representation, and family violence.

Regarding the unemployment rate, BiH shows the lowest level of women's participation in the labour market in the region (Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees of BiH, 2018, p. 26). Some of the problems women face include the following: a longer waiting period for the first job, gaps in their career due to maternity leave or care for elderly or sick family members, and an inability to return to labour marker due to old age (Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees of BiH, 2018). The Law on Gender Equality prescribes that equal representation of men and women exists when one sex is represented with at least 40% in bodies at all levels of authority in BiH. However, representation of women at the state and the entity levels in BiH is below 25% (Agency for the Statistics of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2022, p. 108). On the other hand, the EU average for national parliament stands at 30.2%, while the percentage of female members of the European Parliament stands at 36.1% (EPRS, 2019). Family violence and violence against

women are one of the prevalent issues in BiH society. A study has shown that 47.2% of women were exposed to some form of violence during their adult life (physical, mental, sexual, or economic violence), but only 5.5% of women who were victims of violence sought support from the relevant institutions (Babović et al., 2013).

The position of women working in academia is particularly important, given the pivotal role of the education system for any society. Especially in post-conflict countries in transition, education does not just represent an individual's human right, but also contributes to transitional justice and reconciliation (OSCE, 2018b). There is a lack of research about the role of female academics in the peace-building, state-building, and gender equality. How can female academics contribute to these processes? What are the main issues women face in society and how can their position be improved? What is the role of female academics in academic institutions? How did the COIVD-19 pandemic affect their lives? How do female academics maintain work-life balance? This paper investigates these issues to shed light on this important topic, using BiH as a case study. In BiH, female teachers are predominant at pre-school, elementary school, and secondary school levels, whereas at the university level, men make up more than half of the academic staff (Agency for the Statistics of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2022, p. 52). On the other hand, more women than men enrol in and complete tertiary education. In 2020, 34% of women aged between 30 and 34 had a university degree, compared to 23.2% of men (pp. 50-51).

Methodology

The methodology applied in this research is the survey method and the qualitative analysis of the participants' responses. The survey research method is a means of gathering information through self-reporting using questionnaires or interviews. This is a non-experimental or correlation research design in which there is no manipulation of the variables. The survey method is used to describe a certain condition or to examine re-

lationships between variables (Miller, 1983). Following the literature review, the authors composed a survey questionnaire. We used Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) for a descriptive statistics analysis of the participants' responses. In addition, we conducted a thematic analysis of the participants' answers to the open-ended questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Their answers were perused carefully and classified under the four predefined main themes: the role of female academics at higher education institutions in bridging social divides and building peace; their opinion about the main issues women face in society; their suggestions pertaining to improvement of the position of women in the society in general; and suggestions to improve the position of women at higher education institutions in the society. The analysis of the participants' answers resulted in different subthemes which were identified for each main theme, whereupon the subthemes were analyzed in detail and refined.

The instrument of research was the survey questionnaire developed by the researchers. It consisted of three main parts. The first part of the questionnaire explored the participants' demographic details, such as age, education background, their field of expertise, and years of work experience at higher education institutions. The second part of the survey questionnaire consisted of a series of statements which the participants rated on a 5-point Likert scale. The third part of the questionnaire consisted of four open-ended questions, in which participants were asked to reflect on the role of female academics at higher education institutions in bridging social divides and building peace; to share their opinion about the main issues women face in our society; to suggest steps for improvement of the position of women in our society in general; and to suggest steps to improve the position of women at higher education institutions in our society.

The survey questionnaire was distributed among female academicians working at both public and private higher education institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina. A total number of 40 female academics at higher education institutions participated in the research (n=40). Table 1 provides an

overview of the participants' age, country of formal education, academic title, field of expertise, and years of work experience at higher education institutions.

Table 1: Overview of the participants

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent
Age	In their 20s	3	7.5
	In their 30s	17	42.5
	In their 40s	17	42.5
	In their 50s and 60s	3	7.5
Formal education	Completed in BiH	25	62.5
	Completed abroad	2	5
	Partly in BiH, partly abroad	13	32.5
Academic title	Assistants	2	5
	Senior assistants	4	10
	Assistant professors	18	45
	Associate professors	8	20
	Full professors	4	10
	Other positions	4	10
Field of expertise	Humanities	15	37.5
	Natural sciences	3	7.5
	Economics, marketing and management	16	40
	Technical sciences and architecture	6	15
Work experience at higher education institutions	Up to 10 years	11	27.5
	Between 10 and 20 years	24	60
	20 years and above	5	12.5

The average age of the participants is 39, with the youngest participant aged 23 and the oldest aged 60. In total, 7.5% of the participants were in their 20s, 42.5% were in their 30s and another 42.5% were in their 40s, while 7.5% were in their 50s and 60s. Regarding the participants' education background, 62.5% of them completed their education in BiH, 5% completed their education abroad, while 32.5% completed their education partially in BiH and partially abroad. As for the participants' academic titles, they were assistants (5%), senior assistants (10%), assistant professors (45%), associate professors (20%), full professors (10%) and other positions in higher education institutions (such as methodologists, research assistants, experts in practice, etc.) (10%). Most of the participants were appointed to assistant professor positions. The participants were academi-

cians from different scientific fields: humanities (37.5%), natural sciences (7.5%), economics, marketing, and management (40%), technical sciences, and architecture (15%). The academicians from the field of humanities were experts in language, education, linguistics, psychology, law, history, and civilization. The academicians from the field of natural sciences were experts in the field of genetics and bioengineering, biochemistry and microbiology, and food science. Most of the academicians were from the field of economics, marketing, and management (40%). The academicians from the field of technical sciences and architecture were experts in electrical engineering, mathematics, and architecture (15%). Concerning the participants' work experience at higher education institutions, 27.5% had up to 10 years of work experience, 60% had between 10 and 20 years, while 12.5% had 20 years of work experience and above.

Data Presentation and Analysis

The second part of the survey questionnaire consisted of a series of statements which the participants rated on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), neutral (3), agree (4) and strongly agree (5). The statements were related to the following subtopics: the role of female academics in the post-conflict society and the ways in which they can contribute to peace-building processes; their vision of the future of the country; the main issues and challenges they face as women in academia; their engagement in gender equality and women empowerment activities; the ways they cope with the COVID-19 pandemic in their professional and private life; and their work-life balance. The descriptive statistics of the results present mean values of each subtopic as a variable subsuming the individual items of the questionnaire, and mean values of the individual statements comprising the subtopics, whereby the central tendency of the answers was established. We also provided median values and standard deviation values for a better insight into the variability of the dataset.

When observed as single variables, the subtopics and their means provide

an overview of the women's perception of their role in the post-conflict society and contribution to peace-building processes, the view of the future of their country, of women's position at higher education institutions, any mobbing or harassment experiences, their activities in promoting gender equality, the way they cope with the COVID-19 pandemic, and their work-life balance (Table 2). They neither agreed nor disagreed with the statements related to their role in the post-conflict society and contributing to peace-building processes (M=2.99). The participants agreed with the statements related to positive views of the future of their country (M=3.69). They also agreed with the statement related to the position of women at higher education institutions in BiH as being equal with their male colleagues (M=3.89). The participants disagreed with the statements related to experiencing mobbing and harassment at workplace (M=2.39), with the standard deviation value at 1.26 for this item. They were neutral related to the statements about their activities in promoting gender equality (M=3.01). On the other hand, they agreed with the statements expressing worries about the COVID-19 pandemic (M=3.65) and their management of their work-life balance (M=3.46). Table 2 provides the list of items in this subtopic.

Table 2: Main subtopics of the questionnaire

Main Subtopics	N	Mean	Median	Std. deviation
The role in the post-conflict society and contributing to peace-building processes	40	2.99	3.00	0.92
The view of the future of the country	40	3.69	3.83	0.91
Position of women at higher education institutions in BiH	40	3.89	4.20	0.90
Mobbing and harassment	40	2.39	2.25	1.26
Activities in promoting gender equality	40	3.01	3.13	0.87
Coping with the COVID 19 pandemic	40	3.65	3.80	0.74
Work-life balance	40	3.46	3.50	0.69

With regard to the role of women in the post-conflict society and their contribution to peace-building processes (Table 3), the participants agreed with the statement pertaining to discussing issues related to peace-building and conflict resolution in the post-war society with their colleagues, friends and family members (M=4.15). However, they were neutral regarding participating in activities related to conflict resolution in our society (M=3.02). Also, women academicians are neutral relative to the statement that they discuss issues related to peace-building and conflict resolution in the post-war society with their students (M=3.25). With regard to the statements pertaining to their attending and participating in conferences related to post-conflict peace-building, the participants disagreed with the statements (M=2.42; M=2.07). It is noteworthy that the standard deviation values are above 1.0 for each of these items. Table 3 provides the list of items in this subtopic.

Table 3: Role in the post-conflict society and contributing to peace-building processes

	N	Minimum (1=strongly disagree)	Maximum (5=strongly agree)	Mean	Median	Std. Deviation
I participate in activities related to conflict resolution in our society.	40	1.00	5.00	3.02	3.00	1.17
I discuss issues related to peace-building and conflict resolution in post-war society with my students.	40	1.00	5.00	3.25	3.50	1.32
I discuss issues related to peace-building and conflict resolution in the post-war society with my colleagues, friends and family members.	40	1.00	5.00	4.15	4.00	1.10
I attend conferences related to post-conflict peace-building.	40	1.00	5.00	2.42	2.00	1.34
I present papers at conferences related to post-conflict peace-building.	40	1.00	5.00	2.07	2.00	1.25

As for the participants' view of the future of the country (Table 4), their answers reveal their optimism related to the items of this subtopic. The

participants strongly agreed that the future of Bosnia and Herzegovina is in the EU (M=4.27). Also, they agreed that they see the country as an equal partner of the other countries in the region (M=3.92) and as competing with other countries in the region with its economy (M=3.67). They agreed with the statements that they see their country in the future with a leading role in post-conflict peace-building (M=3.52), and that the country would provide equal opportunities to men and women (M=3.47). The participants were neutral regarding the statement that their country would respond success-fully to challenges of social inequality in the future (M=3.27). The standard deviation values are above 1.0 for each of these items except for the first item related to the future of the country as the EU member. Table 4 pro-vides the list of items in this subtopic.

Table 4: View of the future of the country

	N	Minimum (1=strongly disagree)	Maximum (5=strongly agree)	Mean	Median	Std. Devi-ation
I see my country in the future as a member of the EU.	40	2.00	5.00	4.27	4.00	0.85
I see my country in the future as an equal partner of other countries in the region.	40	1.00	5.00	3.92	4.00	1.19
I see my country in the future competing with other countries in the region with its economy.	40	1.00	5.00	3.67	4.00	1.29
I see my country in the fu-ture with the leading role in post-conflict peace-building.	40	1.00	5.00	3.52	4.00	1.22
I see my country in the future responding successfully to challenges of social inequality.	40	1.00	5.00	3.27	3.00	1.22
I see my country in the future providing equal opportunities to men and women.	40	1.00	5.00	3.47	4.00	1.15

As far as the position of women at higher education institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina is concerned (Table 5), the participants agreed that wom-en are treated well at higher education institutions in the country (M=3.65).

They also agreed that they have the same promotion opportunities as their male colleagues (M=3.87) and the same salary as their male colleagues in the same position (M=4.00). Women academicians agreed that they publish articles with male colleagues as co-authors (M=3.95) and that the articles they submit for publication in journals are frequently accepted by their male colleagues (M=3.95). Regarding the topic of sexual harassment and mobbing at workplace, the participants disagreed with the statements that they experienced at least one form of sexual harassment at work (M=2.35) and that they were victims of mobbing at their workplace (M=2.42). The standard deviation values are above 1.0 for each of these items. Table 5 provides the list of items in this subtopic.

Table 5: Position of women at higher education institutions in BiH

	N	Minimum (1=strongly disagree)	Maximum (5=strongly agree)	Mean	Median	Std. Deviation
Women are treated well at higher education institutions in our country.	40	1.00	5.00	3.65	4.00	1.25
I have the same promotion opportunities as my male colleagues.	40	1.00	5.00	3.87	4.00	1.22
I publish articles with male colleagues as co-authors.	40	1.00	5.00	3.95	5.00	1.34
My salary is the same as the salary of male colleagues in the same position.	40	1.00	5.00	4.00	5.00	1.36
Articles I submit for publication in journals are frequently accepted by my male colleagues.	40	1.00	5.00	3.95	4.00	1.06
I have experienced at least one form of sexual harassment at work.	40	1.00	5.00	2.35	2.00	1.55
I was a victim of mobbing at my workplace.	40	1.00	5.00	2.42	2.00	1.52

Regarding their activities in promoting gender equality (Table 6), the participants were neutral relative to the statements that they have been en-

gaged in activities that promote gender equality (M=2.82) and women empowerment in their country and society (M=2.97). They strongly agreed with the statement that women should be more actively involved in politics in their country (M=4.27). However, they disagreed with the statement that they would like to be more involved in politics (M=1.95). The standard deviation values are above 1.0 for each of these items. Table 6 provides the list of items in this subtopic.

Table 6: Activities in promoting gender equality

	N	Minimum (1=strongly disagree)	Maximum (5=strongly agree)	Mean	Median	Std. Deviation
I have been engaged in activities that promote gender equality in our country.	40	1.00	5.00	2.82	3.00	1.34
I have been engaged in activities that promote women's empowerment in our society.	40	1.00	5.00	2.97	3.00	1.39
Women should be more actively involved in politics in our country.	40	1.00	5.00	4.27	5.00	1.04
I would like to be more involved in politics.	40	1.00	5.00	1.95	2.00	1.13

As far as coping with the COVID-19 pandemic is concerned (Table 7), female academics agreed with the statement that they are worried about the COVID-19 pandemic (M=4.17), while they strongly agreed with the statement that they are worried about the threat the COVID-19 pandemic poses to their families (M=4.40). The participants were neutral about the statement that they are worried about the threat the COVID-19 pandemic poses to their careers (M=3.25). On the other hand, they strongly agreed with the statement that they are worried about the threat the COVID-19 pandemic poses to the economy of their country (M=4.57). Finally, the participants disagreed with the statement that they are satisfied with the way authorities in their country deal with the COVID-19 pandemic (M=1.85). The standard deviation values are above 1.0 for some of these items. Table 7 provides the list of items in this subtopic.

Table 7: Coping with the COVID-19 pandemic

	N	Minimum (1=strongly disagree)	Maximum (5=strongly agree)	Mean	Median	Std. Deviation
I am worried about the COVID-19 pandemic.	40	1.00	5.00	4.17	4.00	1.08
I am worried about the threat the COVID-19 pandemic poses to my family.	40	1.00	5.00	4.40	5.00	0.98
I am worried about the threat the COVID-19 pandemic poses to my career.	40	1.00	5.00	3.25	4.00	1.43
I am worried about the threat the COVID-19 pandemic poses to the economy of my country.	40	1.00	5.00	4.57	5.00	0.96
I am satisfied with the way authorities in my country deal with the COVID-19 pandemic.	40	1.00	5.00	1.85	2.00	1.03

The final subtopic in this part of the questionnaire investigated the participants' stance on work-life balance (Table 8). They agreed with the statement that they successfully balance their private and professional life (M=3.57). The participants strongly agreed that they have the complete support of their husbands or families in the development of their careers (M=4.30). They were neutral about the statement that they feel guilty for not spending more time with their family (M=3.32). The participants disagreed with the statements that they feel guilty for not allocating more time to their professional obligations (M=2.50). They were neutral about the statement that it is more difficult for women to work at higher education institutions than for men (M=3.32), with the standard deviation value at 1.65 for this item. On the other hand, women academicians agreed with the statement that women are expected to do all the housework in their country (M=3.72). The standard deviation values are above 1.0 for each of these items. Table 8 provides the list of items in this subtopic.

Table 8: Work-life balance

	N	Minimum (1=strongly disagree)	Maximum (5=strongly agree)	Mean	Median	Std. Deviation
I successfully balance my private and professional life.	40	1.00	5.00	3.57	4.00	1.13
I have the complete support of my husband / family in the development of my career.	40	1.00	5.00	4.30	5.00	1.16
I feel guilty for not spending more time with my family.	40	1.00	5.00	3.32	3.50	1.44
I feel guilty for not allocating more time to my professional obligations.	40	1.00	5.00	2.50	2.00	1.38
It is more difficult for women to work at higher education institutions than for men.	40	1.00	5.00	3.32	4.00	1.65
In my country, women are expected to do all the housework.	40	1.00	5.00	3.72	4.00	1.26

The final part of the questionnaire consisted of four open-ended questions related to the role of female academics at higher education institutions in bridging social divides and building peace; their opinion about the main issues women face in their society; their suggestions pertaining to the improvement of the position of women in their society in general; and suggestions to improve the position of women at higher education institutions in their society.

Regarding the role of female academics at higher education institutions in bridging social divides and building peace, the total number of 35 participants, 87.5%, answered this question (N=35). Their answers can be classified into the following categories (Table 9): the role of women academicians is important; the role of women academicians is not any different

from the role of men academicians or people in general; no opinion or no time to have an opinion about it; their role is limited and insignificant; their role is negative.

Table 9: The view of the role of female academics

	Frequency	Percent
The role of female academics is important.	24	60
The role of women academicians is not any different from the role of men academics or people in general.	5	12.5
No opinion or no time to have an opinion about it.	3	7.5
Their role is limited and insignificant.	2	5
Their role is negative.	1	2.5
No answer provided.	5	12.5

A total of 60% of the participants noted that the role of women academicians in bridging social divides and building peace is important. The following aspects of their roles have been noted: (i) female academics as initiators of positive changes in society with their activities in education and communication; (ii) female academics as representatives of their ethnic group in the inter-ethnic dialogues, as representatives of their country and as role models to young generations. Regarding their role as initiators of positive changes in society, they primarily have the role of educators of young generations. They encourage continuous education of their students, promote peace, living together and the main values of our society. Women academicians can build peace by treating all their students with equal respect, and all the people they work with who are of different ethnicities. In addition, they should initiate discussions about the topics which are not discussed enough, and which may contribute to peace-building among different ethnic groups. They may also develop multiculturalism in their students. In addition, they have a responsibility to ensure more rights for women and improvement of their position, especially given the fact that the county went through aggression and genocide. The state institutions should also be involved, but, unfortunately, it is not the case. There is a general

lack of activities aimed at bridging social divides between people of the country. Female academics are involved in different activities, such as lectures, conferences, publishing articles in the area of social psychology, and discussing stereotypes, prejudices and discrimination. Also, they partake in projects, such as education for peace, conflicts in society, Student council in BiH, project classes, creative workshops, lifelong learning activities, etc. They promote professionalism, stability, and equality in all aspects of life. Women are often much more successful in negotiation processes.

The second important aspect of their role that was emphasized by the female academics is the fact that they are representatives of their ethnic group in the inter-ethnic dialogues in the country. Women have an important role in bridging social divides in any society, including BiH. They are also representatives of their country to the outside world, given their participation in networking activities, academic exchange programs and research cooperation and projects with academicians from the region and beyond. This is important for the motivation of their children and daughters especially. They provide opportunities to others to cooperate with women and to inform them about their opinions on a variety of topics. They represent multicultural society and pluralism. They have an important role primarily because they are role models for young generations of girls and they pave the path for them. They need to set an example for the next generations with their knowledge, success, and behaviour. They set an example to everybody and fight against stereotypes related to social divides by communicating with others, promoting peace, and informing the public about relevant topics. Their voice is respected, whereby their support to other women is crucial.

The participants highlighted the fact that the role of female academics is important in society. Some participants noted that the role of women in peace-building processes is as important as the role of all other academics who work at higher education institutions, but also the role of all people in general. On the other hand, some participants noted that they do not have an opinion of this topic or have no time to contemplate or engage in

peace-building due to work and family obligations. Two participants underlined that the role of female academics is very limited. One participant noted that women in general do not contribute to peace-building, but rather deepen conflicts, adding that this was the case throughout history too.

In their answers to the second open-ended question, the total number of 39 participants (97.5%) provided detailed answers and listed the main issues women face in society. These may be classified in the following categories: (i) predominant traditional view that women should stay at home and take care of the family and the household; (ii) unequal employment opportunities for men and women; (iii) gender inequality, marginalization, discrimination, misogyny and violence against women; (iv) lack of protection of mothers and poor maternity leave policy; (v) lack of educational opportunities for women; (vi) lack of understanding for women who are not mothers and who are stigmatized for that reason; (vi) the main problem for women are women themselves (noted by one participant).

Most participants pointed out that the main issues women face in society are traditional roles in which women are responsible for all the housework, even the women who are employed and work full time. The traditional view of women was that they should be confined to the house and in charge of raising children and maintaining family contacts. Nowadays, however, many women are also providers and working full time. But the view of their household role has not changed. As a result, women play both parts and try to juggle these roles. A woman is a mother, an educator, a wife, a cook, and a cleaning lady in her own family. Consequently, women become overwhelmed, whereby the entire family suffers.

The second major issue women face are unequal employment opportunities for men and women. Men are generally in a much better position. A woman is observed by potential employers as somebody who may want to use pregnancy leave or maternity leave in the future. Personal questions put to women about their marital status or plans for future pregnancy are

not rare in job interviews. Men have better chances to be employed, even at higher education institutions. Women who are employed experience different treatment and double standards at work. They are expected to work overtime for low pay. Their family obligations are disregarded. Women academicians note that it is much easier for their male colleagues to be promoted, given women's family obligations and their housework duties in addition to all their professional duties. Sometimes, business arrangements are discussed and agreed upon over dinner or at a bar at night, which gives male employees an advantage, since women generally do not attend such meetings. One participant noted that women are not taken seriously, even in academia, because of the still widely held belief that they should stay at home.

In society in general, there is gender inequality, marginalization, discrimination, misogyny and violence against women. Women experience different forms of violence: psychological, physical, financial, and economic violence. Women are marginalized at different levels of society. Only a few women are included in political elites, are in the top positions in companies or in positions of power. They face many prejudices, different forms of discrimination, sexism, disrespect and humiliation. Among the most common prejudices is that women cannot be as successful as men, that they should not be entrusted with important positions and that they cannot successfully balance personal and professional obligations. There are socially acceptable jokes about women, while comments about their physical appearance are not rare.

Women who are mothers are particularly vulnerable, due to the lack of protection by authorities and the government. Inadequate and poor maternity leave policies make many young mothers leave their one-month-old babies and go back to underpaid jobs. Employers discriminate against mothers, who feel stigmatized for using maternity leave or a leave when their child is ill. The participants are acutely aware of the importance of education for women, and they pointed out that one of the main issues women face is the

lack of educational opportunities for women in the country. The state does not provide adequate support for the education of women.

Some participants noted that research studies generally discuss women who have their own families, whereas none of the studies discusses women who do not have a husband or children, but who take care of their parents or their wider family. Such women are marked as a failure because they do not have children, while nobody even asked them whether they could have children or not, due to an illness for example. Women who are not mothers, but who are just workers, are considered unsuccessful and are stigmatized. One participant pointed out that the main issue women face are women themselves, noting that whenever women complain about someone, they are usually other women, be it a teacher, a doctor, a patient, a worker at the court, a worker or a customer at a shop, etc. If an employee experiences mobbing, for example, the mobbing is done by women.

In the third open-ended question, the participants were asked what needs to be done to improve the position of women in their society. A total number of 38 participants answered the question (95%). Their answers may be classified into the following categories: (i) educating women, men and young generations; (ii) changing the traditional role of women doing all the housework and ensuring better work-life balance for women; (iii) better social policies and family policies; (iv) providing women with equal opportunities as men; and (v) changing women's perception of themselves.

Most participants underlined that education is pivotal in improving the position of women in particular and society in general. Being pillars of society, women need to be educated, well-read, self-confident and happy in order to fulfil their role. Men should be also educated about the importance of the role of women. Many participants pointed out that educating young generations of boys and girls is essential for ensuring improvements in the position of women and our society. Educated and confident women will be able to resist the pressures of society which are commonplace nowadays,

such as the pressure to "accept their destiny" and to accept other people's decisions regarding what is best for them. They will be more likely to make their own decisions and choices, pursue management positions in different sectors, to be involved in decision-making processes and politics. The entire society needs to be educated in that regard. Only then, deeply rooted stereotypes and inequalities will be eliminated.

The traditional view of a woman who does the entire housework, even though she is employed full-time, should be changed. This means educating and changing men too. One participant noted that even when men are involved in chores and housework, the imposed view is that they "are helping their wives", which is a distorted perception of women needing help to manage the household. Instead, even and fair division of chores and household obligations among all family members should be reinforced. Women who are employed need to have a high-quality work-life balance so that they would not feel chronic fatigue, dissatisfaction, or guilt.

It is essential to have better social policies and family policies in order to ensure women empowerment and improvement of their position in society. The authorities and government have that responsibility, but also non-governmental organizations. More flexible laws may protect women who are employed full-time, enable flexible working hours and better maternity leave policies. Unemployed women should be especially protected and provided with adequate welfare. Institutionalized support for women is essential. Their economic inequality is a major issue, and it is necessary to empower women's economic position.

Women need to be provided with equal opportunities as men in terms of education, employment, involvement in politics, positions of power and authority. Women are raising the next generations in each society. Women's physical and mental health is of the essence for the entire society. Finally, it is necessary that women themselves change the perception of their own roles. They need to stop seeing other women as their enemies. They should

develop true empathy toward others, especially toward other women. Also, they need to stop perceiving themselves as victims and need to take initiatives to improve their position.

In the answers to the fourth open-ended question, the participants provided their suggestions for the improvement of the position of women in higher education institutions. A total number of 38 participants answered the question (95%). Their answers may be classified into the following categories: (i) flexible working hours for women and better work-life balance; (ii) better promotion opportunities, research, education and training opportunities; (iii) accepting women as equal to men at higher education institutors and eliminating stereotypes and prejudices; (iv) the position of women at higher education institutions is satisfying and needs no improvements.

The participants underlined that flexible working hours for women working at higher education institutions and better work-life balance would improve their position to a large extent. They should have support from their co-workers and their families, given the importance of their role for a healthy family and society. Female academicians also need better promotion opportunities, research, education and training opportunities. Women should occupy higher administrative positions at higher education institutions too, such as the positions of deans or rectors. Continuous research, education and training opportunities are crucial for the advancement of their career.

The participants noted that it is important for women to be accepted as equal to men at higher education institutors and eliminate stereotypes and prejudices towards women. In order to do that, the awareness of women's position within a family must be changed, as well as the perception of her household duties, work-life balance and support she gets from her family members and her colleagues at work. A total number of 10 participants (25%) noted that they find the position of women at higher education institutions in BiH satisfying and that there is no need for any improvements.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Female academics in Bosnia and Herzegovina hold that women have an important role in peace-building, state-building and gender equality activities in the country. Women in academia are educators of young generations of students who will build the future of the country. They promote peace, respect and reconciliation among their students, along with multiculturalism, pluralism and inter-ethnic dialogue in the country that is still marred by the war. Women face many issues in society, such as the traditional view of women staying at home and taking care of the family and the household, unequal employment opportunities, gender inequality, marginalization, and violence against women. Mothers face poor maternity leave policy and lack of protection by institutions, while women who are not mothers are often stigmatized.

The solution for improving the position of women and the entire society is primarily the education of women, men, and young generations. It is necessary to change the perceptions of traditional roles of women doing all the housework and ensure better work-life balance for women and better social and family protection policies. Above all, women need to start changing their perception of themselves. Concerning women's position in academia, it may be improved by implementing flexible working hours for women and better work-life balance, along with better promotion opportunities, research, education and training opportunities for women. Stereotypes and prejudices against female academics need to be eliminated. When it comes to work-life balance, women are especially struggling to maintain a high-quality balance between their private and professional life in cultures in which women are generally expected to do all the housework. Bosnia and Herzegovina traditionally has such a culture, as the participants confirmed too. However, the participants in this study overall consider themselves successful in maintaining a work-life balance. They have complete support of their family members in the development of their careers. Regarding the COVID-19 pandemic, female academics expressed their wor-

ries, especially about the threat to their families and the economy of their country. On the other hand, they are hopeful and optimistic about the future of the country.

Future research of the role of female academics in peace-building and state-building may be expanded to include a larger sample and a variety of relevant variables, all with the aim of improving our understanding of the topic and its effects. Improvements of the position of women lead to improvements of the entire country and the world. Female academics reiterated the importance of education for society. Education is crucial for women: they need to be provided with quality education and equal education opportunities as men at all stages of their lives. Women themselves should be the leaders of positive changes, including women empowerment through education and mutual support, but also gender equality activities. Inspiring young generations to challenge social stereotypes and raising their awareness of the importance of the role of women in society will ensure the country's steady progress in the future.

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