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# Silencing Women's Agency and Forgetting Sexual Violence: Challenges in Realizing Women Survivors' Human Rights (abstract)

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## **The Social Practice of Human Rights: Charting the Frontiers of Research and Advocacy**

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**Research Panel:** Sexual Violence and Human Trafficking

**Presenter:** Katarina Lucas

**Title:** *Silencing Women's Agency and Forgetting Sexual Violence: Challenges in Realizing Women Survivors' Human Rights*

**Abstract:** Almost twenty years after the signing of the Dayton Peace Accords, which ended the physical violence of the Bosnian War, there remains minimal success in effectively realizing the social and economic human rights of women survivors of wartime sexual violence. Women survivors across ethnic groups continue to have limited or no access to health, social and economic services they are entitled to under international law, essential for their empowerment and agency as rights-holders. Employing a gender lens and findings based on interviews and an in-depth review of secondary resources, this research uses the stalled draft *Programme for Victims of Wartime Rape, Sexual Abuse and Torture, and their Families in Bosnia and Herzegovina 2013-2016* as a cite for analysis to help explain the minimal success of the State in securing basic services for women survivors, and argues the intersection between three factors, ethno-nationalist politics, patriarchal culture and problematic international engagement impedes efforts to establish a social service program for women survivors.

The inter-workings of these three factors points to the salience of sexual violence to the military conflict, and this intrinsic connection works to obstruct proactive engagement and policy-making on women survivors' interrelated human rights. The significance of this research is two-fold. First, this research strives to provide a baseline understanding of the political and gendered dimensions hindering the realization of women survivors' economic and social human rights, a necessary starting point for future scholarship and practical engagement on this issue. Second, it seeks to contribute to the broader critiques of post-war Bosnian politics and illuminate the political and gendered factors inhibiting action by the Bosnian government on issues associated with the military conflict by inserting a feminist, survivor-focused analysis into the discussion.

**KeyWords:** Women, human rights, gender, survivor, agency.

**Biography:** Katarina Lucas holds a Master's Degree from the Julian J. Studley Graduate Program of International Affairs at the New School and a Bachelor of Arts in Human Rights Studies and Political Science from the University of Dayton. She is currently the Project Assistant at the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace, and Security, engaged in policy research and gender analysis of the UN Security Council's Work in conflictaffected countries. Her research centers upon uncovering the power and intersection of gender and ethnonationalism in hindering the realization of women survivors' human rights in the context of post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). Her current research builds upon a field research project in Sarajevo, and her Master's thesis research that provided a gender analysis of attempts by international and domestic actors engaged in BiH to provide social services for women survivors of wartime sexual violence.