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Locating the stigmatisation of children born of wartime rape on a continuum of violence

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ABSTRACT

Children born of wartime sexual violence remain a marginalised group whose lives and needs have largely been overlooked. Over the past two decades, scholarship has emerged addressing some of the multiple issues they face. This research shows that stigmatisation is central in the children's lives, but rarely provides a deeper definition of stigma that interrogates its structural and political dimension. Bridging feminist peace scholarship and new streams of stigma research, this article sets out to conceptualise stigmatisation as a complex form of violence that concurrently reflects and reproduces gendered power dynamics across the peace–war spectrum. Drawing on narratives by children born of war in the Central African Republic, Uganda, and Bosnia-Herzegovina, this article examines how stigmatisation materialises as different forms of 'everyday violence' that intersects at a personal, social, and structural level. By untangling their stories, the study shows how stigmatisation profoundly impacts the children's experiences of peace and sustains the 'conditions of war' in the everyday space while perpetuating structural cycles of gender-based violence that persists in transitional and post-conflict environments. The article highlights the importance of placing the children's perspectives at the centre when analysing stigmatisation and offers new insight on how stigma operates as violence.

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Introduction

In most conflict and post-conflict spaces, children born of wartime sexual violence are a hidden population who often live on the margins of society.[1] In policy debates, these children have frequently been discussed as 'side-effects' of sexual violence rather than as a separate group of victims with unique lives, needs and challenges.[2] However, over the past two decades, a growing field of scholarship investigating children born of war has emerged, offering a corrective to this understanding. This interdisciplinary field has discovered numerous issues related to being born from war, including mental health issues,[3] problems with community integration,[4] contested social identity, kinship,[5] and ethnic

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belonging.[6] Although this scholarship demonstrates that stigmatisation is a central part of these children's lives, it rarely provides a deeper definition of stigma, drawing on newer research. Additionally, only a small subset of the literature directly builds on the children's own stories and voices to examine the phenomenon of stigma specifically.[7] Recent stigma studies have highlighted how stigmatisation must be understood beyond social exclusion and discriminating acts at the interpersonal level and instead be seen as a structural and political phenomenon that is simultaneously shaped by and perpetuating the social norms, inequalities, and power hierarchies in which it is embedded.[8] By bringing this understanding of stigma into dialogue with feminist literature on everyday peace and violence,[9] this article explores the experience of stigmatisation as it is narrated by children born of war across three diverse conflict settings: the Central African Republic (CAR), Uganda, and Bosnia-Herzegovina.

The article starts from an observation made while reviewing stories by children born of war in existing research, which exposed a subtle yet puzzling similarity across cases. One study on children born of war in Northern Uganda that how several children who returned to their communities after being born in captivity by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) described to be longing for the war because when they lived in 'the bush,' they were not perceived as outcasts and stigmatised.[10] Similarly, in a study from Bosnia-Herzegovina, a teenage girl who was born from wartime sexual violence during the war in the former Yugoslavia described her post-conflict life situation was 'a state of war,' stating that: 'I don't know peace.'[11] These examples suggest that the stigmatisation faced by children born as a result of wartime rape can be so severe and pervasive that the end of conflict is not experienced as peace. This highlights the need to rethink this type of stigmatisation beyond the interpersonal level and instead conceptualise it as a broader form of violence in itself. In this article, I explore how stigmatising violence materialises and makes the condition of war continue within the children's lives at multiple intersecting levels, transcending binary notions of peace and violence.

Feminist peace scholarship has long contested state-centred, patriarchal, and militarised definitions of peace, war, and violence,[12] demonstrating that these are not mutually exclusive notions but rather processes that can exist concurrently.[13] In particular, this approach takes seriously the different forms of everyday violence often experienced at the micro-level within intimate, personal, or communal relations,[14] and asks us to interrogate how such violence in the private is linked to broader power structures and injustices in the public, thus blurring this distinction.[15] In addition to the spatial dimension, a core feminist critique is centred on how conventional understandings of peace imply a *return* to pre-war societal relations which were not necessarily peaceful nor free from violence to begin with.[16] This adds a more complex temporal dimension to the understanding of peace and violence, illustrated in the 'continuum of violence,'[17] which displays how different types of violence overlap, transform, and flow between wartime and peacetime.[18]

Building on feminist conceptualisations of violence as a multifaceted,[19] and multidimensional phenomenon,[20] I establish a typology of 'stigma as violence' to make sense of the experience and impacts of stigma among children born of war. This typology is not intended to provide an exhaustive list of the various types of violence that stigma can materialise. Rather, it serves as an analytical tool to unpack the practices and experiences of stigma from the perspectives of the stigmatised children. Through bridging feminist

peace scholarship and recent streams of stigma research, the article contributes with new reflections on how stigma can be theorised as a form of violence, which are still missing in the literature. By using the children's own experiences and stories as the primary empirical foundation, I examine how stigma materialises as different types of 'everyday violence' at multiple levels within their lives and I examine how these levels intersect across the private and the public spheres. Hereafter, I turn to untangle how gendered power structures and norms shape and reproduce this dynamic across the peace–war spectrum. This includes a discussion of the role played by patrilineal constructions of identity and kinship, the roots of sexual violence stigma, and the gendered burden of reproductive responsibilities and lack of reproductive rights. In this way, the analysis aims to improve our understanding of how 'everyday violence' at the micro-level (stigma) is deeply interconnected with political events (war) and social structures (gendered power) at the macro-level.

To investigate this connection, I gathered a diverse 'narrative archive' consisting of testimonies and stories from children born of war and, to some extent, their relatives. The stories are collected from a variety of existing sources, including organisational reports, United Nations (UN) documents, International Criminal Court (ICC) trial hearings, documentaries, scholarly literature, and news articles. The ethical advantages of using existing material, when possible, are often ignored, as much social science research is compelled toward constant data generation. However, this approach can be particularly viable when investigating sensitive topics and vulnerable populations, particularly children, whose stories can be difficult to access while providing sufficient levels of care, consent, and anonymity. Revisiting existing data allows researchers to build studies from the voices of the marginalised while mitigating the potential risks of re-traumatisation, community exposure and disruption of the protective silences maintained by the participants.[21]

The article, employ a multi-cases study design to identify and analyse the similarities and patterns in the experiences of stigma among children born of wartime sexual violence across different contexts of conflict. This approach aims to inform a broader theorisation of how stigmatisation embodies violence across cultures, to shed light on common themes and traces. The three cases were selected based on different criteria, elaborated on in the method section, including the prevalence of wartime sexual violence, and thus the numbers of children born of war, the availability of data, and variations in the circumstances in which children born of war were conceived.

The article is structured as follows: The first section unpacks the notion of 'children born of war,' positioning my contribution within key findings from existing research. The next part bridges new stigma research with feminist concepts of peace, everyday violence, and the continuum to conceptualise stigmatisation as a form of violence. I then build a typology of 'stigma as violence' to analyse how stigmatisation materialises as distinct yet interconnected types of violence at an emotional, social, and structural level. The following section explains the methodological approach, focusing on the ethical implications of using existing material. Finally, the empirical section explores narratives of stigmatisation among children born of war and how stigma is experienced as a continuum of violence.

Children born of war

Tens of thousands of children have been born as a result of conflict-related sexual violence.[22] Mostly, these children are born by local women who were sexually assaulted by armed actors, including national armed forces,[23] paramilitaries, guerrillas,[24] and peacekeeping soldiers,[25] either during or in the aftermath of armed conflict. While some children of war are born from consensual relationships between foreign soldiers and local women, as observed in Denmark and Norway during WWII,[26] these circumstances do not seem to generate more positive (nor negative) societal perceptions compared to children born from rape.[27] Ingvill Mochmann has identified four broad categories of children born of war, encompassing both consensual relationships and rape: 1) children of enemy soldiers, 2) children of child soldiers, 3) children of members of peacekeeping troops, and 4) children of occupying soldiers.[28] This study specifically adds to the literature focusing on children born of rape in armed conflict and examines how stigmatisation is embodied and experienced by children belonging to the first three of Mochmann's categories: 1) Bosnia-Herzegovina, CAR, and Uganda, 2) Uganda, and 3) CAR.

Local understandings of and the terminology for children born of war vary across regions but mostly carry some form of derogatory meaning, reflecting the negative, and often hostile societal perceptions of children born of war. Many terms associate the children with their enemy father's ethnicity, nationality or actions, such as 'tyskerunge' [German brat] in Denmark,[29] 'paraquitos' [little paramilitaries] in Columbia, 'los regalos de los soldados' [the soldier's gifts) in Peru.[30] Some names have a symbolic meaning such as 'Bui Doi' (dust of life] in Vietnam,[31] 'children of bad memory' or 'children of hate' in Rwanda,[32] and 'I am unfortunate' in Northern Uganda.[33] While these local terminologies have mostly been interpreted within the literature as means of insulting and excluding the child, Kimberly Theidon suggests such naming practices can also be understood as an act of agency by the mothers. In Peru, for example, a mother named her boy 'Chiki,' which means 'danger' in Quechua.[34] Theidon argues that by choosing a name that constantly remind the community of the violation she suffered, the mother insists on the father's involvement and her right to support from the community. According to Theidon 'these names are both accusations [against the perpetrators] and a demand [to the community].'[35]

This novel analytical point adds a new dimension to our understanding of naming practices for children born of war. However, it does not account for how Chiki perceives his name and its impact on his opportunities and everyday life experience within his community. Placing the children's voices at the centre of analysis enables such 'situated knowledge'[36] to be exposed, which enriches the understanding of the children's lived experiences[37] and conceptualisations of phenomena such as violence, peace, belonging, and exclusion that otherwise may escape attention.

Several studies have been carried out in which the main method employed was interviews with children born of war, which were conducted either in their adulthood[38] or during their youth or childhood.[39] These interviews reveal that many children born of war experience several forms of identity crises and a diminished sense of self and belonging, as they are often seen as belonging neither to their father's nor their mother's group or family.[40] This research highlights that stigma constitutes a core part of their

experiences but often lacks a comprehensive definition of stigma that moves beyond the interpersonal level, thereby overlooking the structural dimension of stigma and how it operates as a complex manifestation of power and violence. By examining closer how this stigma materialises as different forms of 'everyday violence' within the children's lives, this study seeks to provide an expanded understanding of the structural aspects of stigmatisation and its impacts on the personal experiences of peace and violence and vice versa.

A feminist conceptualisation of stigmatisation as violence

Stigmatisation is a social process in which an individual or group is perceived as somehow devalued, degraded, or socially deviant, which makes them less human and consequently less worthy of equal treatment and full social acceptance.[41] Erving Goffman's book *Stigma: Notes on the Management of a Spoiled Identity* (1963) inspired extensive stigma studies, mostly focusing on conceptualising and examining stigma at a micro-level, particularly within social psychology and health research.[42] In this stream of literature, stigma has predominantly been portrayed as an apolitical phenomenon, often studied at the interpersonal level, where stigma is described as a negative characteristic, an attribute, or mark 'possessed' by the individual.[43] This understanding does not account for the actual act of stigmatisation and how it is located within existing power relations.[44]

Recent studies have broadened the conceptualisation of stigma, focusing on understanding its structural and political dimensions. These studies are interested in investigating by whom and for what purpose a particular stigma is produced and enacted[45] and pays increased attention to the lived experience of stigmatised individuals and how stigma manifests in structural (and often gendered) ways within their lives.[46] This understanding prompts a deeper exploration of how stigmatisation, within a specific context, not only reflects societal power structures but also operates as a tacit mechanism in perpetuating these social inequalities and normative structures.[47] In 1970, Robert Pinker argued that stigma is among the most common forms of violence in societies.[48] Despite this observation, newer stigma research has pointed out that stigma is rarely theorised as 'a violent practice or a form of power.'[49] Building on this new focus within the stigma literature, this article aims to explore how stigmatisation is compatible with different forms of interrelated violence experienced at the micro-level while reproducing power structures and inequalities at the macro-level. The connection between stigma and violence becomes particularly apparent when transcending conventional definitions of violence and the analytical starting point is situated in the everyday experiences of those who are subjected to the stigma.

Extending beyond minimalist understandings of violence as physical events, feminist peace researchers have critically scrutinised the practices and meanings of the less visible forms of violence, which occur and persist in the everyday.[50] These types of violence unfold within mundane experiences of everyday life and are often diminished or sidelined when compared to more 'spectacular' forms of violence.[51] In practice, this often means that certain forms of violence are privileged over others, which has normative and political implications, as it determines whose experiences will be taken seriously and which issues will be prioritised and cared for.[52] It also means that important continuities between different forms of violence and how these interact are overlooked or neglected.

The securitisation of wartime sexual violence, arising from 'the rape as a weapon of war discourse,' has, for example, been criticised for 'fetishising'[53] and 'exceptionalising' this crime,[54] thereby overlooking the broader spectrum of gender-based violence and power dynamics from which this crime originates and perpetuates within the same local context.[55] Research from Northern Uganda, for instance, found how sexual violence survivors continuously narrated sexual violence perpetrated by enemy armed forces as being connected to intimate partner violence in the home.[56] The survivors do not perceive intimate partner violence as separate from 'outsider sexual violence' but rather as a response to it because it disrupts gendered power structures and norms within their intimate relationships. Simultaneously, both types of violence are contingent upon the gendered inequalities that structure everyday life before, during, and after armed conflict.[57] Likewise, a similarly dynamic understanding of violence is visible in Columbia, where civil society activists from a local women's organisation narrated conflict-related sexual violence not as an exceptional phenomenon but as a perpetuation of already existing patriarchal gender structures and practices within society.[58]

This continuity between different forms of violence demonstrates how the static conceptualisation of violence not only fails to capture the connection between the different forms[59] but also tends to prioritise physical, 'spectacular,' and 'exceptional forms.'[60] Because the dominant conceptualisation of violence predominantly leans towards a 'perpetrator frame' instead of a 'victim frame,' harm is mostly measured by the intention of the perpetrator rather than by the experience of the victim. A feminist intervention challenges these minimalist notions of violence by questioning who determines which types of violence 'count' as important and whose experiences and insecurities become marginalised in that process.[61]

In her study on violence, reproduction and the everyday, Jenny Hedström (2021) shows how knowledge derived from the everyday experiences of a local woman from rural Myanmar contributes to elucidating how peace and violence are constantly negotiated in the everyday space. The study highlights that the transition to peace is not experienced as the absence of violence but rather as 'a continuum of insecurities' that women have to navigate in their everyday lives.[62] In transitional periods and post-conflict spaces, there is often a 'backlash' of violence against women and marginalised groups.[63] This can manifest as increased levels of intimate partner violence, as shown above, and also as economic violence, whereby post-war economic processes amplify women's vulnerable economic position.[64] Moving from 'expert' to 'experiential knowledge' when conceptualising violence and peace fosters a deeper understanding of how seemingly mundane practices of 'everyday violence' interact with other forms of violence that structure people's lives and their access to experiencing peace.[65]

Stigmatisation is often practiced and experienced in the mundane spaces of everyday life, which makes it a somewhat hidden form of violence, as it is rarely linked to physical attacks. However, when paying attention to how stigmatised individuals narrate their experiences of stigma, it can be noticed that stigmatisation materialises not only as exclusion but as different types of violence operating on several levels. By bringing stigma literature into dialogue with feminist peace research, I identify three types of violence that are particularly useful for conceptualising 'stigma as violence.' These are psychological violence, semiotic violence, and structural violence.

The practice and experience of 'stigma as violence:' a typology

Two important points must be highlighted regarding the typology of 'stigma as violence.' First, the typology should be seen as illustrative rather than exhaustive. Stigma can embody other types of violence than the three forms I have selected, for example, as economic or political violence. I concentrate on these three specific types as each represents different levels on which this violence occurs: the emotional level (psychological violence), the social level (semiotic violence), and the structural level (structural violence). As such, this typology enables me to carve out the interconnectedness between the experience of violence at the 'micro-level' and the embodiment of violence at the 'macro-level.' Moreover, these categories of violence are empirically inseparable, as different types of violence rarely have clear distinctions. Instead, they overlap, reinforce, and flow into one another, thereby constituting a continuum on which the manifestation of stigmatising violence is ever-changing. For analytical clarity, however, I will explain them separately, focusing on showing their connections to stigma.

Psychological violence refers to the deliberate infliction of emotional harm and trauma on an individual's mental state or emotional well-being. 'It seeks to disempower targets by degrading, demoralising, or shaming them, often through efforts to instil fear, cause stress, or harm their credibility.'[66] The mechanisms of stigmatisation closely align with the characteristics of psychological violence. Stigmatisation, for example, encompasses various forms of degradation, shaming, and the imposition of mental and emotional harm, such as ridicule, harassment, and exclusion. These actions often have significant impacts on the mental well-being of the stigmatised individual, as shown by existing studies.[67]

Mona Krook introduces the term 'semiotic violence,' describing a type of violence that works at a social or 'public' level. Semiotic violence involves the mobilisation of, for instance, words, images, and body language to harm individuals, with the conscious or unconscious aim of disciplining or subjugating them. The power of this type of violence lies particularly in its capacity to shape public opinion by generating and perpetuating negative images of the victims and the group they are perceived to belong to.[68]

> A defining feature of semiotic violence is its public signification: while perpetrated against individuals, it seeks to send a message that the person's group is unworthy, aiming to affect how the public at large views members of that group.[69]

Stigmatisation shares several similarities with semiotic violence because stigmatisation precisely involves the mobilisation of degrading words and images which works to punish, discipline and/or subjugate the stigmatised.[70] In addition, shaping public opinion is a crucial aspect of the process of stigmatisation, as this is a fundamental part of legitimising the stigma.

Structural violence operates at a broader level and often goes unnoticed because it is ingrained in the social structures of society. This normalisation makes it a largely invisible form of violence because it is 'accepted as part of the status quo.'[71] Like semiotic violence, structural violence is socially sanctioned and legitimised, but whereas semiotic violence is mostly expressed in symbols and words, structural violence often materialises in the form of tangible deprivations. Lubna Chaudhry defines structural violence as the unequal distribution of 'life chances, usually caused by great inequality, injustice, discrimination, and exclusion, needlessly limiting people's physical, social, and

psychological well-being.'[72] Stigmatisation exhibits several commonalities with the characteristics of structural violence. A stigmatised person often encounters diminished life opportunities, including limited access to social services and emotional and sometimes economic resources, thus constraining their physical, social, and psychological well-being. Similar to structural violence, stigmatisation is often legitimised and normalised within society, and is even socially expected as a form of punishment for perceived 'social deviation' from established normative structures.

These various types of violence overlap both spatially and temporally. For instance, semiotic violence in the form of degrading language and public ridicule can be experienced as psychological violence, but it can also escalate into physical violence, such as harassment and attacks at an interpersonal level and armed conflict at a broader state level. Similarly, physical violence, including conflict-related sexual violence, can transform into more hidden forms of violence, such as psychological, structural, and semiotic violence – for example, in the shape of stigmatisation of the survivor. These overlaps are illustrated in the following sections, in which I draw on this typology to explore the experiences of stigmatisation among children born of war. The subsequent section details the methodological approach used in this analysis.

The ethics of building narrative archives: a feminist methodological approach

The empirical foundation of this study consists of what I term 'narrative archives.' It refers to a broad collection of stories, statements, and testimonies from children born from wartime rape and, to some extent, from their relatives. The narratives in these archives are gathered from a wide variety of existing sources, including International NGOs and academic reports, scholarly literature, documentaries, video material, and transcripts from trial hearings by the ICC.

The idea of creating narrative archives from existing sources originated from my aspiration to predominantly build the study on the children's own voices and experiences while avoiding some of the ethical risks involved in engaging very vulnerable research participants. Although interviews and participant observations can be invaluable methods for producing new material and deeper knowledge, they also risk potentially re-traumatising the participants, particularly if proper aftercare is not included in the research strategy. Moreover, these methods risk drawing negative attention towards the participants as they expose them in their communities by potentially breaking silences that were meant to be maintained for self-protection. Silence is not necessarily an expression of subordination but can also be a matter of choice and an expression of agency by the person who may appear to have been silenced.[73]

Naturally, using existing sources also has its limitations, particularly concerning the availability and quality of the material. I have focused on gathering sources containing stories and information on how the children describe being treated within their families and communities, how they understand themselves as a result of this treatment, and the impacts this has had on their lives. However, some of the sources used for this analysis only contain quotes and fragments of an interview, which makes it difficult to grasp the full context of the conversation, and important details may be missing. To avoid the misinterpretations that can occur when analysing fragmented material, I was careful to

constantly compare the children's narratives with additional information about the cultural context, conflict dynamics, and narratives from other sources. For example, I juxtaposed the children's stories with additional sources of information that contributed to a contextualisation of how they experienced stigmatisation and how this stigma materialised as violence in their lives. These sources include ICC court material, such as ICC expert reports and testimonies given by expert witnesses at trial hearings; official documents such as the Central African Republic National Recovery and Peacebuilding Plan (2017-2021); UN documents; and news articles.

Another drawback of this approach is that I did not have control over which questions were asked, who was asked, and the availability of background information about the participants. This limitation constrained my ability to conduct an intersectional analysis since the financial, ethnic, and religious backgrounds of the children were not consistently available in this material. Yet, I believe researchers should challenge the notion that the continuous generation of new data is always the best way forward and instead explore the existing resources available, particularly when researching sensitive topics and vulnerable populations. A significant amount of collected material exists, which remains unused or underused but holds the potential to produce valuable knowledge that could benefit the populations who have shared their stories, sometimes at high social or emotional costs.

This study is grounded in an interpretivist approach, employing feminist narrative analysis, with a particular focus on advancing knowledge about how 'everyday' narratives are connected to broader social structures and inequalities.[74] The study centres on elucidating how everyday narratives about stigmatisation of children born of war are embodied as a form of violence and embedded in a framework of unequal gender structures. In alignment with Annick Wibben's conceptualisation, I understand narratives to be 'sites where power is exercised.'[75] Narratives are, therefore, both expressive of the 'story' they convey and of the conventions, norms, and expectations in which the narrative is constructed.[76] It is exactly this connection between narratives (of stigma) and structures (of patriarchy) that must be unravelled to examine how the stigmatisation of children born of war materialises as violence.

The analysis explores how stigmatisation against these children embodies various types of violence, and I scrutinise the children's descriptions of their life situations and how they are portrayed and perceived within their communities. This involves unpacking which (nick)names they have been given, how they are treated within their family and community, as well as their access to health care, education, land, identity, and financial and emotional support to understand their life opportunities. Additionally, to depict how stigmatisation is embedded in broader gendered power structures, I pay particular attention to the logic underpinning these stigmatising narratives. This includes an investigation of which words, metaphors, and images are used to stigmatise the children and the social structures that inform these logics. In the analysis, I pay specific attention to unpacking the connection between pre-war patriarchal gender relations and the embodiment of stigmatisation as violence within the context of three cases.

Case selection

Three core criteria guided the selection of the cases: first, the high incidence of children born of wartime rape; second, the opportunity to examine the stigmatisation of children born of war in diverse cultural and geographical settings; and third, the variation in the circumstances of the

conception of these children. In the Acholi region of Northern Uganda, it is estimated that 4000-6000 children have been born of war, mostly by very young mothers who were forcibly recruited by armed groups, notably the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA).[77] Many of the resulting children grew up within an armed group, often aware of their father's identity, and later returned to their mother's communities upon release or escape.[78]

The war in former the Yugoslavia witnessed forced impregnation as an integral part of ethnic cleansing, particularly targeting Bosnian Muslim women and girls. This resulted in an unknown but presumably high number of children being born, with estimates ranging between 2000 and 4000.[79] Some children were abandoned, others possibly killed, or the mother hid the circumstances of the child's conception, making it impossible to know the true scale. Although the sexual slavery that was committed in the infamous 'rape camps' was part of this strategy, most of these children in Bosnia grew up without any contact with their perpetrating fathers.[80]

In CAR, the precise number of children born of wartime rape is unavailable but it is well known how conflict-related sexual violence has been pervasive during the past two decades of armed conflict, with reported cases exceeding tens of thousands.[81] Limited and often completely absent access to abortion suggests that a considerable number of children have been born from wartime rape in CAR.[82] The circumstances of conception vary quite significantly, ranging from a singular incidences of rape to prolonged sexual slavery. Moreover, anecdotal evidence exists of children born from sexual exploitation by UN peacekeepers, and it is documented that UN forces have perpetrated sexual violence and exploitation in CAR. These variations which are represented in the three cases in this study contribute to the nuanced analysis, enabling me to locate patterns and similarities in how stigmatisation against children born of war is embodied and experienced as violence across different cases. Moreover, the variation enables an exploration of how local gender dynamics shape this process.

Exploring experiences of 'stigma as violence' among children born of war

This section explores how stigmatisation is narrated by children born of war across the three cases. The main focus is to locate the interconnection between the experience of stigma and how it materialises as different types of violence within the children's everyday lives. To unravel how this violence operates across the peace–war spectrum, the analysis is structured in two sections: 'post-war' and 'pre-war.' The first section explores the multiple ways in which stigma is embodied in the everyday space, at the personal, social, and structural levels, illustrating the interconnection between these by drawing on the typology of stigma as violence. The second part untangles how this stigma is part of a broader continuum of gender-based violence. It dissects how the stigmatisation experienced by children across the three cases is concurrently produced by gendered logics, practices, and hierarchies that pre-exist war, while perpetuating these inequalities. Figure 1 illustrates this dynamic, demonstrating some of the key findings from the analysis.

Linking the private and the public: how stigmatising violence perpetuates the 'state of war'

A recurring pattern in the children's narratives across the three cases, is that the experience of stigmatisation not only corresponds with different types of violence but also that

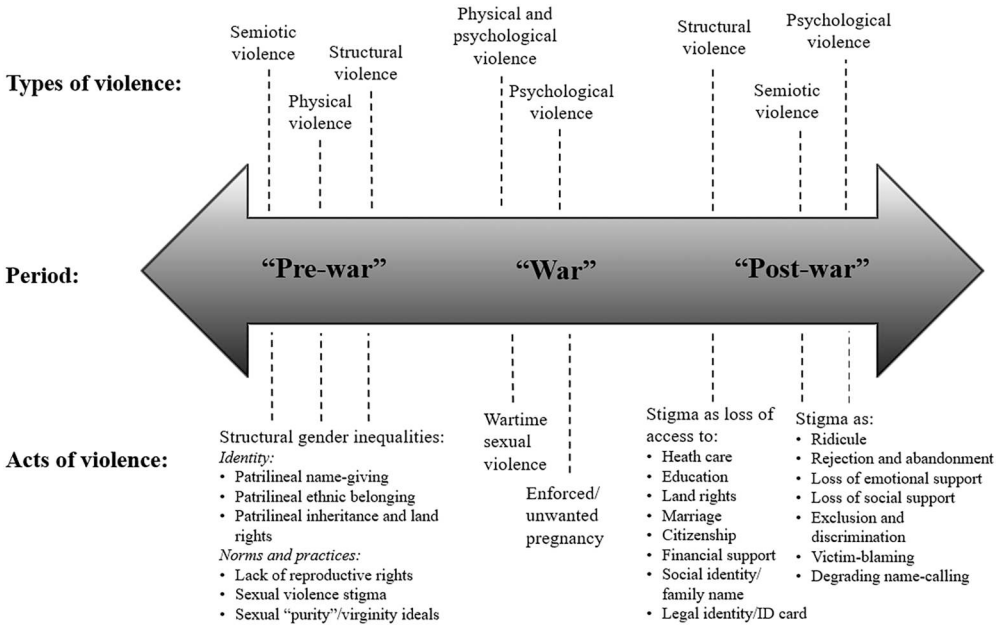

Figure 1. Locating the stigmatisation of children born of war on a continuum of violence.

this violence often operates at multiple and intersecting levels simultaneously. For instance, the children face numerous challenges with accessing social and communal services such as identity cards, health care, and education compared to children who were not born of war.[83] While these 'material' deprivations manifest at a broader structural level, they are deeply intertwined with psychological violence. The everyday stigmatisation that leads to these deprivations is itself experienced as emotional harm. Many children describe how being excluded from equal access to communal support and basic goods leaves them feeling worthless and undeserving:

> My auntie feels that it is not useful to invest so much in a child from the bush. She sees so little in me. There are times when no one provides you with basic needs because they feel you don't deserve it. (Uganda, 15-year-old boy)[84]

In Northern Uganda, many children who were born in LRA captivity later returned to their mother's community. However, upon their return, they often experienced a hierarchical ordering that negatively affected their social status within their families and the community as a whole. Paradoxically, as shown by Denov and Lakor, this means that many of the children found everyday life within their communities after returning from captivity to be even harder and more distressing than living in 'the bush' where life was dangerous and unpredictable.[85] Upon their return, stigmatisation often materialised as an unequal distribution of goods, where children born of war had less access to health care, food, and education than their siblings who were not born from sexual violence. This situation fostered a profound feeling of being different and unloved:

> My parents do not love me. They discriminate me against my siblings who were born from home. Right now, they are not paying for my school fees. But they are paying for my siblings to go to school. (…) Life is not good. I am not allowed to go to the hospital for treatment

> when I am sick, while the other children are taken for treatment when they are sick. (Uganda, gender unknown)[86]

In CAR, the link between psychological and structural violence is also evident, as stigmatisation not only obstructs equal access to life opportunities but also inflicts emotional and mental harm due to the discriminating treatment that fosters exploitation and feelings of being unloved. In one example from CAR, a young woman who had a girl after being raped by Congolese soldiers (the Banyamulenge) recounts how her family stigmatises her daughter by exploiting her labour and subjecting her to degrading names. These mistreatments seemed to intensify long after the Congolese soldiers had left the region.

> I was living with my aunt, and her children mistreated my children, they treated them like employees. They called my daughter (the one that I had because of the Banyamulenge) 'monkey' [a term for Congolese citizens living in CAR and working in menial jobs], she was the servant around the house. As time went by, the little kids around the neighbourhood also started to call her that. Now she feels frustrated, and she doesn't want to play with the other children.[87]

This narrative illustrates how the stigmatisation gradually extends from the intimate space of the home to the public sphere, thus exacerbating the experience of exclusion and alienation and contributing to psychological violence.

In the material used for this article, Bosnian children tended to place a strong emphasis on the emotional consequences of stigmatisation, highlighting experiences of psychological violence more frequently than structural violence in their narratives. This is somewhat different from CAR and Uganda, where the structural and material deprivations caused by stigma are often emphasised more frequently. In Bosnia, for example, the children mostly describe how stigma manifests as feelings of being disliked and hated by everyone because of harassment on the street, experiences of exclusion at school, and problems with making friends.[88] These narratives often involve reflections on how their 'existence' reminds the community of the traumas of war, thus making them scapegoats and objects of hate:

> I see myself as a scapegoat because I have a Serbian blood, and in this way, I am kind of … available for everyone to hate me. I am a channel for their sadness … I am guilty for their pain. I am guilty for their misery, that lives on. And no one likes me, everyone avoids me, everyone hates me. (Zerina 15 years)[89]

It is possible that more questions were asked about the emotional well-being of children in the material from Bosnia I studied, leading to a 'discrepancy' in the emphasis on psychological violence compared to Uganda and CAR. However, socio-economic factors are also likely to play a role, as CAR and Uganda rank significantly lower in GDP on the Human Development Index than Bosnia. Because of the fragile economic situation of children born of war in CAR and Uganda, the children's concerns about accessing education, healthcare, and sufficient food often precede emotional and mental impacts when narrating their experiences of stigmatisation. This does not mean that stigma is experienced less as psychological violence in these cases but reflects another prioritisation due to life situations.

In Bosnia, despite many children being from lower social classes, their narratives do not focus on inadequate access to education, food, or healthcare due to stigma. Nevertheless, stigmatisation does materialise as structural violence for these children,

specifically in form of restricted access to essential legal documents necessary for applying for scholarships and student aid. Ajna, a Bosnian activist who is born of war, explains how the father's missing name often causes problems:

> Children born of war are not recognized as victims of war in Bosnia and that often leads to discrimination. The most common problem these kids face is with documents. That's because their documents have names missing on them, so these kids have problems when they want to start university.[90]

In CAR and Uganda, similar issues with obtaining the necessary documentation for identity cards and birth registration cause unequal access to social services for children born of war. In some cases, this situation can even lead to statelessness for some children if their nationality is disputed because of their father's origin.[91] In Uganda, evidence shows that a practice has emerged in which mothers pay 'Boda Boda' men (motorcycle taxi drivers) to register as 'fathers' to secure a birth certificate which is necessary for entering the education system.[92]

These narratives illustrate how stigmatising violence, operating at a structural and material level, deeply impacts the intimate experience of mental and emotional well-being within the everyday life of the individual child. This pattern is evident across the three cases. Additionally, this process operates in reverse, whereby interpersonal experiences of stigmatisation, whether at school or home, lead to emotional distress that hinders educational attainment or performance. For example, a 15-year-old Bosnian girl referred to as 'Dina' shared how she did not pay attention in school and preferred listening to music by herself to avoid mockery from others. This alienation not only affected her academic progress in school but also her future life opportunities.[93] Similarly, in Uganda, one girl's experience of stigma and abuse by her stepfather resulted in her discontinuing her education, underscoring how stigmatisation experienced in the everyday space of the home can translate into structural violence over time, thus depriving the child of equal life opportunities:

> My stepfather had a son with my mother. Unfortunately, I used to perform better than the boy in school and this was not taken well by my stepfather who looked at me as a mere girl and worst of all one from the bush. In the end he resorted to mistreating me and this caused me to drop out of school.[94]

Semiotic violence is part of the dynamic that makes stigmatisation a form of violence. At the same time, it can also be understood as 'the motivator' or 'enabler' of the other types of stigmatising violence. Semiotic violence is reflected in the social mobilisation of negative words and images, which frames children born of war as social deviants who do not deserve the same treatment and rights as other children. I suggest that semiotic violence is understood as a core element in legitimising stigmatisation at a social level because it contributes to shaping public opinion, not only about the individual child but about children born of war as a group.

This is particularly visible when looking at how the children in this study describe being portrayed and perceived within society. One girl from Uganda, for example, stated: 'There are some teachers who claim that all the short, stunted, and dull children are Kony's children, and this breaks our hearts' (Uganda, girl 16 years old).[95] As shown in existing research, such as Theidon's example of the boy 'Chiki,' mothers to children born of war, sometimes contribute to perpetuating semiotic violence by internalising

stigmatising narratives and names that position the children as outgroups. As one mother described: 'I did not want it. Who will take care of it? My family is all dead, and I have a murderer's baby' (young woman, CAR).[96]

These narratives are deeply embedded in social discourse and persist even in supposedly safe spaces, such as a school in Uganda established for sexual violence survivors and their children. Some children at the school explained how teachers would perpetuate stigmatising images of children born in LRA captivity: 'One teacher described children born in captivity as "totally brainwashed. There is nothing in their brain"' (girl, 16 years old).[97] In Bosnia, children born of war describe how they are told that they are 'mentally sick,' 'smell,' are 'bad blood'[98] or 'found in the garbage bin.'[99] These derogatory narratives and words aim to position the children as unintelligent, unworthy, and even dangerous, thereby legitimising the stigmatising violence against them.

Negotiating stigma, peace, and violence in the everyday

Some children attempt to navigate the stigma by contesting or actively opposing the stereotypical portrayal of their identity and abilities. Drawing on the stigmatising logic used against them, they construct counter-narratives and a more positive self-representation. In Uganda, for instance, two girls in my material challenged the narratives depicting them as unintelligent and societal burdens by asserting their ability to pursue an education:

> I think I can do anything on earth like any other person. I think I can go to school and complete my studies. People think I am from the bush. They think I am mad. They think I am useless. They think I am a monster.[100]

One girl from Bosnia even narrated herself as an agent of reconciliation and peace because of her mixed origin:

> I perceive myself as a rescuer, as someone who can connect enemies. Having blood of both sides in me, the Bosniak and Serbian, it is my duty to speak out about injustices and continuing struggles. I can work toward a better future of Sarajevo – it is here we could all live together, without anger or hate. (Saeda 16 years old)[101]

These examples highlight how peace and violence are constantly reproduced, enforced, and negotiated in the everyday spaces and personal lives of the children. Although some children manage to challenge the recurring stigmatisation they encounter, their narratives also reveal how violence is an integral part of most of the children's lives. In Uganda and Bosnia, some children explicitly use war metaphors to depict their lives, pointing to how everyday stigmatisation obstructs the experience of peace both within their lives and within their country as a whole:

> The people around me, you know, almost all my classmates, our neighbours, even my relatives despise and hate me. … And that's why I tell you that the war has not ended yet. (Mirsada 15 years old, Bosnia)[102]

Mirsada's narrative illustrates how everyday life is shaped by conflict, as the stigmatisation she faces is itself experienced as a continuation of the violence and social divisions created during wartime. This violence has taken a new form and 'travelled' into peacetime, taking a new form.[103] Conceptualising violence from the 'bottom-up' reveals how everyday experiences of stigmatisation and deprivations make peace absent in the

life of children born of war. This conceptualisation emphasise that stigma cannot solely be understood as an interpersonal phenomenon, as this perspective both diminishes the severity of the stigma and fails to account for how stigma operates across multiple levels within the lives of these children. The children's narratives demonstrate how peace is experienced as a fluctuating concept that is detached from more conventional notions such as 'the end of conflict' in Bosnia, 'the return from captivity' in Uganda, or 'the retreat of armed groups' or 'ceasefire agreements' in CAR, which have been settled several times but tend to be short-lived.

In the analysis, I have identified some of the multiple levels in which stigmatising violence operates and untangled how these levels intersect in the everyday experiences of children born of war. I argue that this contributes to a deeper understanding of how violence transforms and adapts to accommodate and perpetuate existing power relations within society. As noted by Porter, although war may create 'something new (and exceptions), that creation did not come from nowhere.'[104] The next section unravels how the stigmatising violence experienced by children born of war concurrently draws on, shapes, and reproduces patriarchal power dynamics and norms.

How patriarchal power dynamics shape stigmatisation across the peace/war spectrum

The stigmatising violence experienced by children born of war unfolds in the mundane spaces of everyday life. However, stigmatising violence is created, negotiated, and transformed through pre-existing experiences of gendered power relations and norms. This process encompasses multiple interrelated aspects and power dynamics that simultaneously draw on, reproduce, and reaffirm 'prewar' gender orders. I find it particularly helpful to focus on three aspects of these power dynamics when analysing how they shape stigmatisation of children born of war: patrilineal understandings of identity and kinship, the patriarchal logic underpinning the perceptions of sexual violence survivors and the gendered burden of reproductive responsibilities and rights. This analysis aims to unravel how stigma is not only part of the dynamic of violence that is reflected on the continuum but also plays a core role in the functioning of the continuum.

Patrilineal perceptions of kinship, inheritance, and identity

Across the three cases examined, stigmatising naming practices reflect a notable tendency to associate the children with their perpetrating fathers, reinforcing communal perceptions of the child's 'outsider' status within the community. In Uganda, for instance, children describe being labelled 'Kony's child,' 'bush child,' and 'rebel child,'[105] and in Bosnia, many are called 'little Chetniks' or 'Serbian blood.'[106] Similarly, in CAR, children may be named after the various armed groups or nationality of peacekeeping forces that operated during different periods in CAR, such as 'the Banyamulenge,' 'child of the Séléka,' and 'Ugandan baby.'[107] This practice reflects a patrilineal understanding of identity construction, in which children are perceived to inherit core identity markers such as ethnicity, name, kinship, and religion from their father. This implies that the child's identity is perceived to be shaped by the father's identity, irrespective of where the child was brought up. When the father's group is viewed as the enemy and has caused suffering and

harm to the community in which the child is situated, this understanding becomes particularly problematic.

One grandfather in Uganda described how community members responded after he decided to care for the child his daughter had after being held captive and sexually exploited by the LRA: 'They [community members] will only tell me, "Why do you keep Kony in our community? They should just be killed."'[108] This narrative depicts how children born of war are not 'only' seen as children of the enemy but as the enemy themselves. The association between the child and the father contributes to constructing the children as enemies who do not belong in the group because they are perceived as dangerous, like their fathers. Furthermore, this means that it is not only the father's identity that is understood to be inherited by the children but also their behaviour. One girl for example described: 'It is common for some people to make such statements as; "she is a rebel child with a bush mentality"' (girl, Uganda).[109] This logic is facilitated by a patriarchal ideology in which the paternal origin is seen as the determining factor in shaping children's identity and behaviour.

In patrilineal societies, inheritance and property rights are typically passed down from fathers to their children, which emphasise the importance of male kinship and illustrates how these gendered power dynamics have tangible impacts on the everyday lives of children born of war. This system has implications in both CAR and Uganda, where land rights are traditionally transferred from fathers to sons. As a result, boys born from war do not inherit land, which in turn exacerbates their status as outsiders and their economic and social precarity throughout their lives. The patrilineal land right system thus plays a significant role in their stigmatisation and how this stigmatisation materialises as structural and psychological violence in the children's everyday lives: 'What hurts me most and worries me is that when I become an adult, I will not have land to inherit. I will have nowhere to go, so the only thing will be for me to die and leave this world' (boy, Uganda).[110]

In Uganda, children of war often lived most of their formative years with both of their parents in the bush where they were born. Many of the children, therefore, experienced difficulties integrating into the Acholi culture and adhering to a new set of cultural norms. These specific challenges exacerbate the stigmatisation, which contributes to alienating the children and positioning them as belonging to a different group, but similar narratives are also present in the two other cases in which the child had never been in contact with their father's group. In Bosnia, for example, several children from this material highlight their frustration at not being able to escape their 'Serb identity,' although they were born and raised in the Bosnian community: 'I have nothing to do with the Serbs; I hate them, too, but everyone sees a little Chetnik in me' (Jasenka 16-years old).[111] Similarly, in CAR, most of the children whose experiences were studied for this article had no connection to their fathers' group, although they were strongly associated with it:

> She [her daughter born of war] doesn't know who her father is. She doesn't know where he is. She has no news of him … I ask God if I die, what will happen to that child? The three others which I had, I know that their father's families are there, and if something happened to me, those children could go and live with the family of their father. But when it comes to this child, what will her fate be if anything happens to me?. (CAR)[112]

Although the other children are cared for by their paternal relatives in accordance with tradition, this girl is excluded due to her paternal origin. These examples illustrate that while aspects such as the inability to adhere to cultural norms clearly affect the perception of children born of war as being outsiders, the gendered power dynamic that constructs ideas about identity and kinship appears to have a greater impact in generating stigma. In turn, this stigma reinforces existing gendered inequalities and hierarchies, leaving some boys without land and the girls out of the system entirely, which will have lasting impacts for the lives of these children, even when 'peace' is restored.

Narratives from CAR indicate that the stigmatisation remains consistent, regardless of whether the father was an enemy soldier or a stabilising force. This aligns with prior research on children fathered by peacekeepers, who also face exclusion.[113] Interestingly, one study discovered that children fathered by fairer-skinned peacekeeping troops in Haiti were sometimes perceived as more desirable but still stigmatised.[114] This underscore how gender norms intersect with racial power dynamics in shaping the stigmatisation. 'Rebecca,' who was raped by a member of the Ugandan stabilising force in CAR, said: 'People in the neighbourhood call my child 'the Ugandan.' The other kids make fun of her and tell her I am the abandoned wife of a Ugandan.'[115] It depicts how stigma is produced by the association of the child with the father's 'outsider' identity but also the mother's tainted social position of as a survivor of sexual violence.

The gendered burden of sexual violence, reproductive responsibilities and rights

As demonstrated in the existing literature, most survivors of sexual violence encounter severe stigmatisation within their communities and families.[116] One prevalent narrative labels sexual violence survivors as 'sexually impure,' 'loose,' and 'promiscuous,' mirroring a common community perception that blames the survivors for purportedly 'engaging in relationships' with the perpetrators despite the violence involved.[117] This narrative simultaneously reinforces a patriarchal perception that positions sexual violence survivors and their children within the perpetrator's group while framing the survivors in opposition to established gender norms that dictates appropriate feminine behaviour and emphasise chastity and monogamy for women. These gendered understandings generate and legitimise the stigmatisation of both the survivor and the child and are clearly informed by gendered power dynamics that moves across the peace–war spectrum.[118]

Across the three cases, the stigma experienced by sexual violence survivors extends to their children born from rape, negatively impacting the social status of the children and their mothers. This link is evident in some of the derogatory terms used to stigmatise the children. For example, children born of war in Bosnia are sometimes referred to as a 'Chetnik's whore child' by community members. On social media platforms, these narratives are echoed in statements such as: 'Your mothers are prostitutes; they sold their bodies for a little food.'[119] Such language perpetuates a discourse that legitimises stigmatising violence, making it appear righteous, as it simply 'corrects' unacceptable gender behaviour. Similarly, in CAR, the stigmatisation directed at children born from rape tends to be strongly influenced by the mother's perceived association with the enemy group: 'Your mother is Bemba's wife,' 'You are Bemba's child.'[120]

These stigmatising narratives appear to disproportionately impact girls born of war, who are more vulnerable of being perceived as promiscuous, which mirrors the

stereotypes imposed on their mothers. Drawing upon the same gendered logics that position sexual violence survivors as disruptors of the gender order, girls often face similar social 'punishment' as their mothers. In Uganda, one 16-year-old girl, for example, was singled out from class and taken to the staff room: 'The teachers began to talk about my shoes [because they had holes] and started calling me a prostitute.'[121] These gendered manifestations of stigma generate and reproduce different forms of gender-based violence, both within and outside the home. In Bosnia, a girl shared her experience of being threatened with sexual violence by local boys: 'The boys threaten that they will rape me. I am really afraid of this' (Jasenka, 16 years old).[122] Several accounts from Uganda reveal instances of sexual exploitation by stepfathers. As noted by one mother: 'Stepfathers always show love to girls when the mother is around, but when the mother has gone somewhere, he can have sex with the girl' (mother to girl born of war).[123] This violence affects girls born of war on an everyday level during their youth and continues to shape their experiences and opportunities on a structural level into adulthood, perpetuating cycles of gender-based violence and injustices.

Amidst these gendered power dynamics, notions of reproductive responsibilities and the lack of reproductive rights hold a central position. Across both low- and high-income countries, reproductive responsibilities tend to fall disproportionally on women. Women are expected to both plan and prevent pregnancies[124] and ensure that children are born within culturally acceptable constellations, such as marriage. In CAR, reproductive responsibilities are predominantly assigned to women, often leading to situations in which women are blamed for pregnancies outside marriage, including in cases of rape, and are, therefore, left to deal with the consequences alone:

> My family knows [about the rapes] and they said it's not their problem. They said I went and got myself into a mess and gave birth to a baby without a father, and I should go back to Bambari to find the father. I have spent two months in Bangui. No one in my family has helped me. (Angéle 27 years old)[125]

The treatment of Angéle by her relatives, reflects how stigmatisation perpetuates patriarchal power dynamics, wherein women are both burdened with the bulk of reproductive responsibilities and denied agency over their own bodies and reproductive choices. In CAR, for example, abortion is legal in cases of rape but highly inaccessible due to a lack of functioning health care facilities, the stigma of the survivors, and possibly a deprioritising of women's reproductive rights, as other issues are perceived as being 'more important,' particularly in wartime. One study from Uganda, have highlighted the significant impact of armed conflict on access to maternal and reproductive healthcare facilities.[126]

However, the gendered violence underpinning insufficient access to reproductive rights and control, including the ability to terminate unwanted pregnancies, is often overlooked in discussions about children born of war. These discussions have focused disproportionally on what could be done for women to make them keep and care for their child born from rape instead of 'what would have made termination safer and easier' as highlighted by Kimberly Theidon.[127] This is a central aspect of the unequal gender dynamics that not only facilitate the birth of children born of war but also contribute to the production of stigmatising violence that makes war continue for the children and their mothers long after the conflict is 'over.'

Conclusion

During the analysis of the experiences of stigmatisation as narrated by children born of war, a pattern emerged across the cases, which showed how this stigma embodies multiple types of violence at deeply intersecting levels. For the children, these levels of stigma are not experienced as separate sites but as interconnected spaces of continued insecurity, violence, and degradations, materialising in their everyday lives. Using the typology of 'stigma as violence' as the theoretical backdrop to make sense of these experiences contributes to a renewed understanding of how stigma operates both spatially and temporally on a gendered continuum of violence.

Spatially, stigmatisation for example, takes the shape of structural violence, generating tangible deprivations, such as restrained access to health care, education, land rights, and social support for many children born of war. These deprivations are legitimised through the mobilisation of negative words and images at the social and communal levels, which positions these children as underserving of equal treatment and rights. At a personal and emotional levels, the children's stories illustrate how this creates intense feelings of being excluded, overlooked, and unloved. At the same time, these emotional harms and the psychological violence experienced by children born of war lead some of the children to withdraw from activities that could advance their future prospects, such as participating in the education system, as was evident in both Bosnia and Uganda. These dynamics uncovers how stigmatisation, as a deeply fluctuating experience that continuously moves from the private to the public sphere and vice versa.

Moving from 'expert' to 'experiential' knowledge in making sense of this stigma and how it materialises, uncovers how it not only takes different shapes of violence, but makes this violence travel across time within the children's lives. As such, the article highlights the importance of drawing on the children's perspectives when conceptualise and making sense of the impact of the stigmatisation they experience. The children's stories illuminate how stigmatisation works as mundane practices of violence, which fundamentally impacts the children's understanding of peace within their everyday lives and in even broader contexts such as their state. The social divisions and war-related traumas are visibly reproduced in everyday practices and interactions, in which terms like 'child of the enemy' allow these tensions to seep into transitional and post-conflict environments, thereby keeping the conditions of war alive for the individual child over time.

Although some of the children studied in this article resist the stigmatising narratives against them, the data on their backgrounds are too limited to draw meaningful interpretations regarding the factors contributing to such resilience. However, there are indications in the case of Bosnia that children who have actively contested the stigma come from socially and economically stronger homes, with the presence of a loving and adoptive stepfather in their lives. The presence of a positive stepfather-role mirrors a more socially accepted family structure that empowers the children and making them appear less 'disruptive' to established gender norms and structures, and potentially makes them less vulnerable to some forms of stigmatising violence.

Examining the children's stories reveals how the manifestation of stigma as different forms of violence is deeply connected to the functioning of gendered power relations that are perpetuated both structurally and in the everyday space. In this article, I have discussed how stigma simultaneously draws upon and reproduce established gender

norms, hierarchies, and practices and identified three core dynamics shaping this process. First, patrilineal perceptions of children's identity construction and kinship inform how the children's are associated with their perpetrating father, consequently contributing to positioning them as outcasts and enemies. Second, the patriarchal logic positioning sexual violence survivors as disrupters of the local gender order taints the social position of both the survivors and the children born from this violence. Gendered narratives of 'promiscuity' and sexual impurity' attached to the survivors even seem to be directly transferred to girls born of war, thereby exacerbating their precarity.

Finally, due to the disproportionate burden of reproductive responsibilities and the lack of reproductive rights faced by women and girls in most contexts, pregnancies outside socially acceptable contexts are often interpreted as 'mistakes' which are attributed to the woman or girl. This understanding condones the stigma that isolates the mother and her child, leaving them without family and community support, thereby perpetuating cycles of gender-based violence in different shapes and over periods of time. By merging new stigma research with feminist peace literature, this conceptualisation of stigma as a violent phenomenon advances the feminist continuum literature, by revealing how stigma functions not merely as an isolated act but as a structural form of violence that extends across both private and public spheres, and the conventional peace–war spectrum. It emphasises that stigma, like gender-based violence, is deeply entrenched in social structures and reproduces power imbalances over time. By unravelling the children's stories of stigmatisation, I have exposed how this stigma not only exists on a continuum but plays a crucial role in the very functioning of the continuum of gender-based violence in conflict and post-conflict spaces.

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