Victims’ protection: International law, national legislations and practice

Book of abstracts

Belgrade, 27th and 28th November 2014
Different Categories of Victims and Competition for Victimhood in the Stories after the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina

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My goal with this article is to analyse the retold experiences of 27 survivors of the 1990s war in north-western Bosnia. I focus on describing the informants’ portrayal of “victimhood” as a social phenomenon as well as analysing those discursive patterns which contributed in constructing the category “victim” and ”perpetrator”. When, after the war, different actors claim this “victim” status, it sparks a competition for victimhood. All informants are eager to present themselves as victims while at the same time the other categories’ victim status is downplayed. Different categories appear and they are: ”the remainders” those who lived in north-western Bosnia before, during and after the war; “the fugitives” those who driven into north-western Bosnia during the war; “the returnees” those who returned after the war and “the diaspora” those who were driven out from north-western Bosnia and remained in their new country. The competition between these categories seems to take place on a symbolic level. All interviewees want to portray themselves as “ideal victims” but they are all about to lose that status. The returnees and the diaspora are losing status by receiving recognition from the surrounding community and because they have a higher economic status, the remainders are losing status since they are constantly being haunted by war events and the refugees are losing status by being presented as strangers and thus fitting the role of ideal perpetrators. In this reproduction of competition for the victim role, all demarcations that were played out so successfully during the war live on.