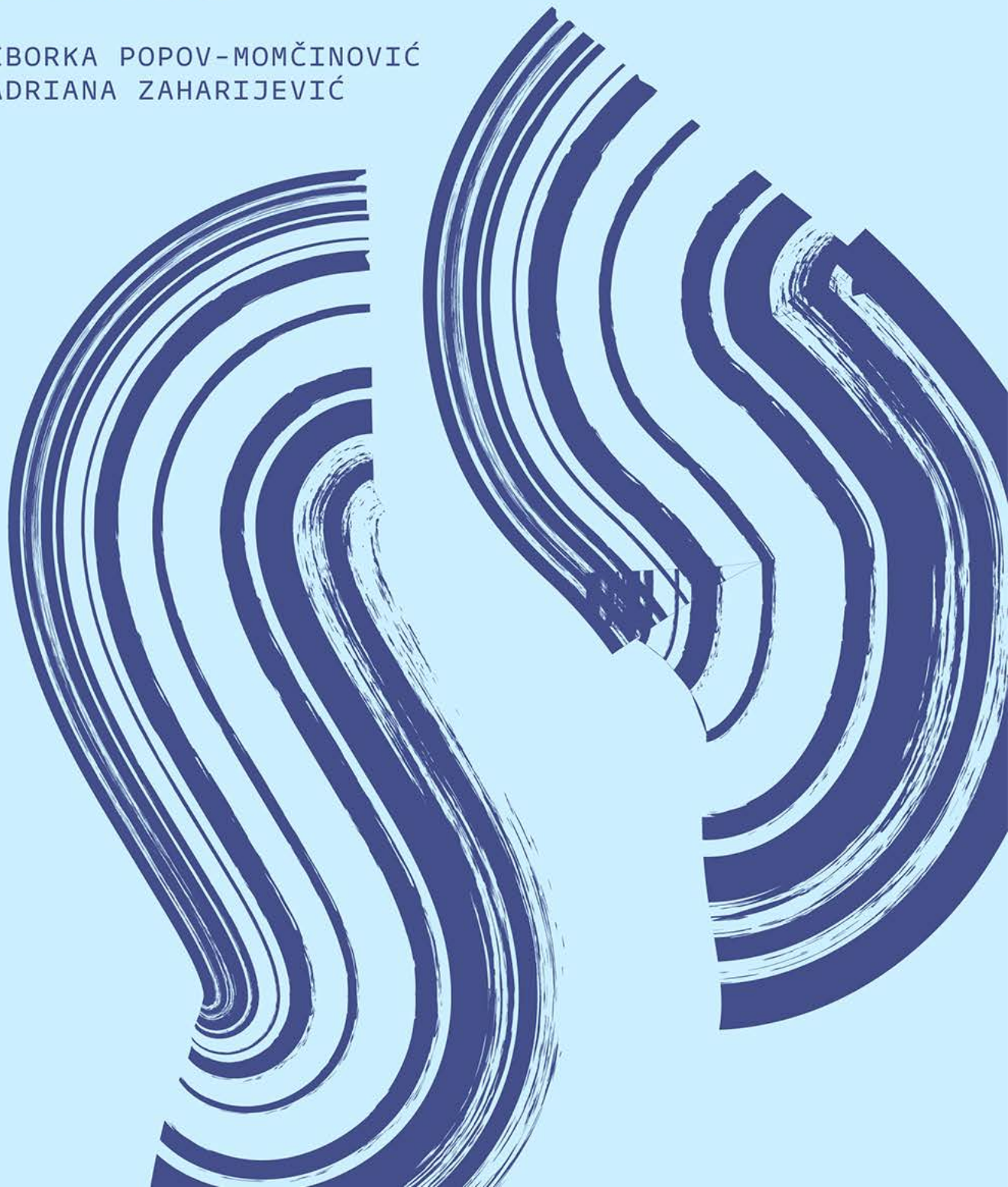


The Never-Ending Quest for Sense:

*Women and Peacebuilding
in Bosnia and Herzegovina
and Serbia*

ZLATIBORKA POPOV-MOMČINOVIĆ
AND ADRIANA ZAHARIJEVIĆ



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**The Never-Ending Quest
for Sense: Women and
Peacebuilding in
Bosnia and Herzegovina
and Serbia**

Zlatiborka Popov-Momčinović
and Adriana Zaharijević

*Jelena Šantić
Foundation*

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The Activist Legacy
of the Women from
The Western Balkans

Irina Ljubić

Peacebuilding processes represent a great opportunity for war-stricken societies to put an end to direct violence, but these also may serve as a starting point for deeper processes of social transformation. In this sense, they are irreplaceable in eliminating the causes which led to armed conflicts, as well as in creating the future policies addressing issues such as exclusion, poverty, or democratization. In this field of action, the role of women peace activists represents a bridge which connects the conflicting parties, working on reconciliation and cohabitation of different communities. In recent history, these women have not been always recognized as an affirmative factor contributing to reconciliation, providing that they have often been accused of putting an insufficient emphasis on the victims of their own nation. As Jelena Šantić (1944 - 2000) once said, *“The true consciousness occurs once you are aware of what you have done, rather than what has been done to you. Without realizing one’s own mistakes, no real sobering up is possible.”* Having this in mind, Jelena Šantić Foundation (FJS) initiated project “Activist Legacy - Women’s Stories behind the Western Balkans Conflicts and Crisis”, the goal of which is to identify the roles of women activists in the history of peacebuilding process in the post-Yugoslav region, and present their stories to a wider public. In this way, the FJS especially seeks to contribute to better understanding of the relations between Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, of their common history and the influence of civil society movements on the process of peacebuilding and reconciliation from women’s perspective. We present you with an opportunity to join us in upgrading our

knowledge concerning women's experiences, noting down some yet untold women's stories and discovering the role of women in the peacebuilding process in the region. Together with our partner organization, the CURE Foundation from Sarajevo, BEFEM collective, artists and researchers Adriana Zaharijević and Zlatiborka Popov-Momčinović we hereby focus on women activists from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia and their inspiring stories, which would facilitate a transgenerational exchange of knowledge and inspire us in our future work in the region. The study before you represents our attempt to present the activists' testimonies, leave a lasting record and thus commemorate women's effort, from 1990s to this very day. Simultaneously, Adriana and Zlatiborka offer us for the first time an insight in the activist practices that emerged in Bosnia and Herzegovina after the war, as well as in Serbia after 2000.

We believe that our regional initiative is a meeting point for the men and women representing civil society, culture and art world, as well as academia, media and politics, and an opportunity to exchange insights when it comes to potential cooperation, increased presence of women in the public sphere and further normalization of relations on the territory of the Western Balkans.

We hope that you would enjoy our new findings and find a way to start further initiatives which record the achievements by women in your own communities. We in turn continue to spread the word of the positive narrative of peace activism and activism in general on the territory of the Western Balkans.

To Cross Borders Daily

Dubravka Stojanović

“The 1990s haven’t been finished”. This sentence dominates public discourse in the states formed after the dissolution of Yugoslavia. It is true that the forms and means of conflict have been changing. No shots are being fired. Yet, those who led those wars are still in power. Their ideologies, their goals, and their destabilizing politics which facilitate the endurance of their authoritarian, corruptive regimes are all still here. And to paraphrase one of the interviewees in this book - war is here as long as we feel fear of the war. And we feel it indeed. Intensely. What are the reasons for such condition? How to overcome it? How can women’s initiatives contribute to this goal? Book by Zlatiborka Popov Momčinović and Adriana Zaharijević *The Never-Ending Quest for Sense: Women and Peacebuilding in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia* deals with these questions and provides answers? The book was made based on interviews with women peace activists from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia, in order to examine the scope of women’s activism.

The Yugoslav wars have lasted for so long, because these were total wars, and total war causes destruction of the society. This is evidenced by all the experiences, starting from 1914, when the first total conflict began, which established the standard of modern warfare. Total war implies that utilization of all means is allowed. Total war means that there is no difference between the frontline and the background, between soldiers and civilians, men, women, and children. Total war means that anything may be a target. And more sensitive the target, the more desirable its destruction, as it

causes greater trauma for the society. Defilement of sensitive targets is the ultimate humiliation for the enemy. Thus humiliated, the enemy is defeated even in victory. Therefore, in total war, the ideal targets are children, women, houses, and apartments, cultural and religious structures...

Civil war is a special form of total war. When I say civil, I refer to a war led among the citizens of a country, with all external support and aggression. Extensive ideological and emotional preparations are required for one such war to become psychologically possible. It requires making enemies out of one's neighbors, dehumanizing them, making the not only a legitimate, but really the only true target. The most effective way to achieve this is to manipulate collective emotions through abuse of the past, creating a paranoid outlook on history which incites fear, as the most reliable foundation and justification for any aggression. In such wars, motives are deeper and more personal, emotions more complex and crimes more brutal. One cannot escape civil war, because even if you leave, you carry it within you. It penetrates your homes, it is tangible. And it never ends.

Therefore, the post-Yugoslav societies still live in the 1990s wars, as these were both total and civil wars. There was no frontline, or background and everything was a target, especially women. As noticed in the book by Adriana Zaharijević "as a prominently featured category, women truly were far more exposed to different forms of material and symbolic degradation of the living conditions, to humiliation, expulsion, dislocation and relocation,

molestation, physical violence. Women's bodies were used as weapons and tools of the war, especially in systemic or sporadic rapes, which were treated as a legitimate form of ethnic cleansing". For this very reason, one of the interviewees of Zlatiborka Popov Momčinović justifiably concludes that "one of the greatest achievements of the 1990s war (...) is that the patriarchal culture reigned". We cannot leave the war, since our feet are bound by patriarchal culture as one of the key war products.

All this leads to the question of how to finally finish the 1990s wars, when we didn't know how to prevent them from happening. What can be done in this respect by women's peace initiatives, including the excellent book that we have before us? Whether these initiatives are but a humble feather which tickles the powerful war strategists to laughter? The feather which they use as evidence of their own open-mindedness and democratic inclinations? Or is it perhaps possible to make a move and leave this frozen war?

The book promotes the idea that one needs to start from the so-called Žarana's principle, referred to in the text a number of times, implying that "The principle is to cross the borders". The principle formulated by Žarana Papić at the beginning of the wars, was transformed into a long journey across borders, as written by Zlatiborka Popov Momčinović, across the borders of states, borders of gender, borders of gender essentialisms, borders of comfort... This principle is also crucial for Adriana Zaharijević, who quotes Jasmina Lukić: "At the time when the borders between the former republics

became war-produced state borders, this principle reflected disobedience towards the politics that had created them. Abstracting the borders, as well as the fact that they separated what had been one just the other day, crossing them physically or mentally, was an incessant act of resistance”.

And here is where the key lies. Throughout the wars, women were the ones maintaining communication. This is why the communication was proclaimed a treason, as the book says. And this is why it is also crucial for the future, as every example of such communication shows that things could have always been different, that the hatred is not genetic, or endemic, that all borders are unacceptable and deeply humiliating, that they degrade human dignity. The feminists of all generations interviewed for this book show that the maintenance of communication is the basic mean against enclosing, exclusion, intimidation and all those things that the nationalisms feed on. Making connections, which did not cease even in the hardest days of mass crimes and the genocide, is the best way to empower and expand the imaginary community of those women and men who refused the hatred being imposed on them. The imaginary community of those who will build it together, but also those who will never meet one another, but who, regardless of this, everyday build their space of normalcy, freedom, openness and self-reflection, and then continue to live in that space that no one can take away from them anymore. In addition to feminists who have never lost ground, for years now we have jointly organized literary and film festivals, joint scientific projects and co-produced

films, TV shows and commercials... Therefore, as an answer to the question asked by Žarana Papić of whether the future would even exist, after reading the book by Adriana Zaharijević and Zlatiborka Popov Momčinović we may say - it indeed would, as long as we cross borders daily. 15

The Never-Ending Quest for Sense: Women and Peacebuilding in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia

Zlatiborka Popov-Momčinović
and Adriana Zaharijević

This writing was produced based on the results of reflection on the reach of women's peace activism in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia, as well as on interviews with activists of different generations, carried out during the summer of 2021. Even before we started the writing process, we knew that women peace activists should get the most of the credit for saving the "face and honour" - to use these words rarely associated with feminism - of both these countries. However, we also knew that the experiences of war and destruction, and ergo peace building, had been largely dissimilar in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in Serbia, to the point where they were perhaps incomparable. Our aim was thus to try to explain the context in which we lived and acted, and to compare the reflections by those seeking for peace to be much more than the absence of war. This text is therefore, a chorus of women's voices joined together, as in a Greek tragedy, to explain what is not there, even though it could and should have been attained.

Many events immediately preceded or followed the writing process, such as the final judgement of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (better known as the Hague Tribunal) in the case of Ratko Mladić, yet another Potočari commemoration on 11 July 2021, as well as the Decree of 23 July 2021, by the outgoing High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina, Valentin Inzko, on the ban of Bosnian genocide denial. For the umpteenth time, the politics of negation, minimisation, banalisation and equalization of crim-

inals and their victims came to light. We wanted to utilise these in this text, not merely as media vignettes, but rather as a framework which would illustrate to the readers the language used in B&H and Serbia when talking about the war. This is, however, the very same language in which today, one should conceptualise peace. The media vignettes which introduce the sections on B&H and Serbia are also there to indicate how hard seems to be the attainment of this goal in today's context - in spite of the continuous action by women peace activists.

Women's peace activism has been present in the region for more than a century, always consistent with different eras in women's struggle against their own marginalisation, creatively overlapping with different waves within the global women's movement/movements, while simultaneously clashing with inconsistencies of these eras' social contexts and systems. Even though this is not a history of women's association, nor does it attempt to highlight the actions made with the intention to prevent or stop the war, we today perceive this tradition as the most valiant, and we thus attempted to consider the ways in which it has been preserved in the generations which stemmed from, or rely on this tradition. Therefore, it was important to deconstruct wartime, but also the so-called peacetime violence which has also consistently been gender-based in any given period, and affirm that what we have here is a continuity of peacebuilding efforts aiming to cancel out the institutionalisation and glorification of violence.

The very peacebuilding efforts are always realised through spatial and temporal dislocation, resisting the obdurate policies which, one way or the other, either directly or indirectly produce the culture of permanent violence, which culminates in the periods of open warfare and conflicts. The main question that we placed at the core of our research effort was that of the meaning of peace and women's perspective on peacebuilding in B&H and Serbia, as well as in relations between B&H and Serbia, based on what Žarana Papić defined as the principle of constant crossing of borders. Considering that the research focus was on its reach in the context of generational perspective, we were unable to adequately address all challenges, yet we attempted to at least touch on each and every one of them. In the context of the aforementioned continuity of women's peacebuilding efforts upon which the current challenges are built, while some new ones are apparently about to emerge, we may make reference to Sarajevo philosopher Ugo Vlasisavljević who, in his book *Rat kao najveći kulturni događaj (War as the Greatest Cultural Event)*, proposes that if a people is "small enough," while the war is "big enough," the latter tends to involve and engage the entire culture (Vlasisavljević, 2007: 64, 65), concluding that this makes peacebuilding activists even greater.

Bearing in mind the selectiveness of memory in the region, permanent politics of not facing the past and the domination of ethnic and war-promoting narratives in the public space, where hate speech is not only inadequately regulated, but is even incited and provoked by certain groups and domi-

nant politics, with the attempts to impulsively involve even younger generations which have never experienced the violence of war directly, women's peacebuilding voices have unfortunately been marginalised. The constant production of anxiety and the general atmosphere of uncertainty have particularly affected and targeted women as the Other, who in spite, or just because of this, have never given up on their peacebuilding activism and feminist engagement. Even though they are present in the public sphere in the context of peacebuilding, women are still reduced to the position of victims, yet even then in accordance with the dominant matrices which produce different hierarchies of victims (Berry, 2017: 843).

This is exactly why the aim of this study is to make contribution to a different, creative remembrance culture, based on the postulates of research as resistance (Strega, 2005), where there is no dichotomy between the so-called falsely neutral subject of research, and what is supposed to be its object. Namely, in this research, we confirm our "subjective" feminist engagement, both academic and activist, while simultaneously creating spaces, based on non-hierarchical principles, for interpretation of our own action and relocation of women's peacebuilding activism from margins to the centre. Thus our *conversation partners* occupy a significant part of this text, as participants, builders, thinkers and women who, at different points, have connected, informed, thought and spoken differently. This is especially important since the "silent majority" of our societies has not heard or does not want to hear about such opin-

ions, in spite, or just because of the fact that it remains entrenched in the positions that even now, 26 years after the Dayton Peace Agreement was signed, in line with Foucault's principles of microphysics of power, still penetrate and inhabit our bodies. This sought for re-territorialisation and claiming the space of normalcy for women and by women (since they are also people, which every war and war violence try to controvert, leading to general destruction and dehumanisation) make an active process which never ceases, just as writing about it should not ever cease either.

Zlatiborka Popov-Momčinović and
Adriana Zaharijević
Sarajevo and Belgrade, Summer 2021

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Srebrenica 2021 -
A Media Vignette from B&H

That the media in B&H are divided along the so-called ethnic seams is a notorious and ever so frequently confirmed fact which, for that reason, is often recognised as exceedingly banal. During one of my guest appearances, a journalist told me that people tend to clash here along the ethnic seams even when it comes to weather forecast, which is evident in comment sections of internet portals and on social networks. What can you say then about the genocide, even though it never happened if one actually asks any of these sides? And while different analyses by international NGOs dealing with transitional justice indicate that crimes are still not called their proper name, i.e. genocide, if we talk about Srebrenica, the ruling elites in Serbia actually propose something similar - that the genocide should be properly referred to as a crime, or at most, a great crime. That this is not the issue of the name as a mere signifier is confirmed by media coverage, also distinctly reeking of déjà vu. For the entire day, a great number of Sarajevo media solemnly and mournfully reported on the events and broadcasted the speeches from the commemoration. Online and printed media, via their internet portals, also had their hourly coverage of the major events and addresses by politicians, associations' representatives, family members and members of the movement of *Mothers of the Enclaves of Srebrenica and Žepa*. Representative of the Mothers, Kada Hotić, sent an important message which was conveyed by the majority of the media diligently reporting from Srebrenica on that occasion: "Today, Srebrenica is the

town of the dead, restore us to life, do not pity us, but help us.”¹ This sentence indeed confirms the role of victim in patriarchal society. It serves to negate death through returning to an imaginary community, where it could once again be forgotten and then cyclically returned to, considering that time does not lead to progress. As noted by one of the interviewees in this study, what we have here is a case of the Nietzschean eternal return.

The journalists in direct broadcasts from this commemoration, once again affirmed that everyone remembered Srebrenica, but on that day only, reiterating the sentence endlessly repeated in media every year. Both the mothers and other family members of the victims regularly send their appeals and warnings, asking who will, after their own death, remain to say what really happened in Srebrenica. The term “really” should not only be interpreted in the context of the genocide negation, but also in terms of the statistical approach to the victims, feeding the regional ethno-policies which, through remembrance administration, modify personal experiences and memories of the so-called life before death.

That Serbian media coverage overflows to Bosnia and Herzegovina, i.e. as a reflection of a reflection floats down the Drina to the Republic of Srpska, is also merely a phrase. The failure to face the responsibility for the Srebrenica mas-

¹ <https://balkans.aljazeera.net/news/balkan/2021/7/11/u-potocari-ma-ce-bitu-ukopani-posmrtni-ostaci-19-zrtava-genocida>. All internet sources were accessed for the last time on 6 September 2021. In the meantime, some of the content used in the analysis has been removed, so in such cases, no access link is provided here.

sacre is practically identical in both these environments. The media in the Republic of Srpska obscurely reported about yet another commemoration, which had smaller attendance than usual, due to the precautionary pandemic measures. The ATV (Alternativna televizija - Alternative Television) which used to be independent and is now under the control of Milorad Dodik, reported on a great number of believers attending the collective Salat al-Janazah. They flatly listed the officials in attendance and their countries of origin. The RTRS (The Republic of Srpska Radio and Television) expressed affected gratitude to Russia and its Ambassador to the UN, who prevented the adoption of the Srebrenica Genocide Resolution in the UN Security Council.² The BN television from Bijeljina, resisting Milorad Dodik's persistent assaults for being perhaps the only bastion of the opposition in the Republic of Srpska media, in addition to the statements by domestic politicians, unlike the RTRS, also reported those by the guests from Montenegro (Milo Đukanović and Dritan Abazović), and had a longer coverage, yet not even there was the word genocide uttered. The RTRS broadcasted a long interview with Milorad Dodik,³ rerun or quoted from in almost all media, including reactions to the interview.⁴ In this interview, Dodik condemned the anathematisation of the Serbian people by the Bosnian politicians who declared it genocidal, as well as the attempt by the High Representative

2 <https://lat.rtrs.tv/vijesti/vijest.php?id=437901>

3 https://www.rtrs.tv/vijesti/vijest.php?id=438069?utm_source=Klix.ba&utm_medium=Clanak

4 <https://www.klix.ba/vijesti/bih/kako-je-dodik-u-jednom-intervjuu-pokazao-sav-svoj-raskosni-primitivizam/210712101>

Valentin Inzko to presumably impose a legislation to ban the negation of the genocide, as Inzko's father, according to Milorad Dodik, had been an SS officer. The absurdity of these statements is all the greater, considering that Inzko, in addition to his customary concern for the situation in B&H, regularly mocked in the social media, had never shown that he had a serious intention to make such an endeavour.⁵ Dodik indeed condemned Srebrenica, but as the so-called "foundational myth" of the Bosniak people, who initially had declared themselves Serbs of Mohammedan faith, then as Muslims with capitalised or small initial M, and finally as Bosniaks.⁶ As stated by Sarajevo sociologist Esad Bajtal, and reported by the *Deutsche Welle*: "Instead of genocide, in line with the logic of the denialist ideology, this is the case of a 'great crime' committed by individuals. And once these individuals are finally sent to The Hague, then, in line with the same logic, these are not trials against them, slayers, executioners and commanders... but supposedly to the entire Serbian people. Accordingly, the uncritical public, encouraged by this denial, makes celebrations and through their threatening banners reading "Knife, Garrotte, Srebrenica" announces a repetition of the very thing that the Serbian authorities persistently try to conceal and openly deny."⁷

5 This vignette was written before the High Representative used his Bonn powers and imposed amendments to the criminal code banning the denial of genocide.

6 <https://balkans.aljazeera.net/news/balkan/2021/8/4/dodik-bosnjaci-su-konvertiti-i-podanicki-narod-a-ne-drzavotvozni>

7 <https://www.dw.com/hr/koga-osu%C4%91uju-rezolucije-o-srebrenici/a-58228839>

Almost all media from the Republic of Srpska finished their features and texts concerning the commemoration with common phrases that the gathering had been concluded peacefully and without incidents, while the police of the Republic of Srpska had been taking care of law and order. This highlighting of law and order confirms the entire corpus' firm determination not to be confused or swayed by international court decisions, declarations by different countries condemning the genocide in Srebrenica, or personal testimonies, coffins, or names inscribed in the memorial centre in Potočari. This unity in the regime media was once again confirmed after the second instance verdict to Ratko Mladić, when journalists toured villages and towns and with the aid of different interlocutors (especially members of war veterans' associations and similar organisations) reaffirmed the general was indeed a hero.

Due to the aforementioned reasons, what was left unsaid is perhaps more important than what was said. No one mentions the blockade by former Serbian President Slobodan Milošević against "disobedient" Bosnian Serbs and the then leadership from Pale, as today's capital is in Banja Luka. No one remembers the absurd diaries of Mirjana Marković, where the entry on the day of the fall of Srebrenica described the starry sky over Belgrade, observed from the comfort of the presidential villa paradoxically named Mir (Peace), located in Belgrade's elite suburb of Dedinje. Hardly anyone remembers late Sulejman Tihić, a former member of the Presidency and the leader of the SDA (Party of Democratic Action), who criticised the Bosniak people's

inclination towards the victims' cult. One of the rare who emphasised this was the editor of the *Buka* internet portal, Aleksandar Trifunović, also reminding of the words by the former President of the Republic of Srpska, Dragan Čavić, concerning the publication of the Independent International Commission Report on Srebrenica: "First as a man and a Serb, then as a father, brother and son, and only then as the President of the Republic of Srpska, I must say that these nine July days of the Srebrenica tragedy indeed represent the dark side of the Serbian people's history. The perpetrators of this crime cannot be justified in any way. Who committed a crime such as this one, simultaneously perhaps invoking the people he belonged to, if only by his name, also committed a crime against his own people." Soon afterwards, the political career of Dragan Čavić took a downwards course, as Aleksandar Trifunović indicates.⁸ The question that arises here is whether his decline was caused by him being a man and a Serb, and then a father, brother and son, and which among these were inconsistent with his statement. Even though they remain important even in today's context, these statements were, however, attuned to the patriarchal society of relatives, where one's humanity or nationality are suspected unless connected to one's familial relationships.

In addition to what was left unsaid, the media in the Federation also mentioned those who did not come. One of them was the Croatian President Zoran Milanović, who already the following day started his

⁸ <https://www.buka.com/novosti/aleksandar-trifunovic-srebrenica-cetvrt-vijeka-neisplativog-pomirenja>

pilgrimage through the towns with majority Croatian population, the fact noticed in a number of media.⁹ Even though he wore the Srebrenica flower on his lapel, he came with the mission to protect the Croatian people from “majorisation” and outvoting.¹⁰ He emphasised that he was not a nationalist, and that once in Sarajevo they used to call him “Red Zoran.” His statements such as the one about B&H being “the fifth wheel” were met with vociferous disapproval in one part of the public. In poor political taste, he significantly exceeded his antecedent, Kolinda Grabar Kitarović, who used to say that B&H was “not emancipated,” yet, as she was, conditionally speaking, a woman having some manners, she never uttered anything which resembled Milanović’s famous “Soap first, perfume later” statement.¹¹ Dragan Čović, the president of the B&H HDZ party and the Croatian People’s Union was also pretty quiet. His coalition with Dodik and negotiations concerning the election law which would enable the election of a legitimate Croatian representative in the Presidency of the Federation are obviously more profitable in terms of everyday politics than general civilizational values. Pretty much the same can be said about Dodik’s (Serbo-Croatian) veto on the blockade by the remaining two members of the Presidency concerning the construction of the Pelješac Bridge, after which the young Stanivuković greeted him in the People’s

9 <https://radiosarajevo.ba/vijesti/bosna-i-hercegovina/iako-danas-dolazi-u-bih-milanovic-se-nece-pokloniti-zrtvama-u-srebrenici/423619>

10 https://avaz.ba/vijesti/bih/665649/milanovic-nosio-cvijet-srebrenice-u-sluzbenu-posjetu-sarajevu-necu-jos-jer-komsic-nije-predstavnik-hrvata?fb_comment_id=4472371282787007_4473913712632764

11 <https://www.oslobodjenje.ba/vijesti/bih/prvo-sapun-onda-parfem-ostre-reakcije-na-milanovicevu-izjavu-o-bih-611723>

Assembly of the Republic of Srpska with “Bok, Mr President! *Kaj se djela?*”¹²

President of the Republic of Srpska, Ms Željka Cvijanović, was not visible in the media concerning the events in and pertaining to Srebrenica, and even though her statements do not significantly diverge from those of her party’s chief, they nevertheless have a different tone. Madame President appeared on the presentation of a report on Srebrenica, made by what they called an independent international expert commission, in which the term “genocide” was not used. On that occasion, Madame President said the following:

We need search for the truth in order to build a better and happier society. I believe that this report has such ambition and was made in that way. The intention was not to insult, or degrade anyone, or to underrate anyone’s pain and suffering. The actual intention was, by dealing with the entire duration of the war, to comprehensively examine what had happened on the entire involved territory and to identify the suffering on all sides.¹³

In spite of her conciliatory tone, what we identify here is nevertheless a case of certifiable media and political amnesia. Namely, Radio Free Europe on its portal has a series of photographs

12 „Hi, Mr President! What’s up?“ in colloquial Croatian language, alluding to Dodik’s presumably dubious connections with the Croats (translator’s note).

13 <https://ba.n1info.com/vijesti/komisija-za-srebrenicu-iz-rs-objavila-izvjestaj-bez-termina-genocid/>; <https://lat.rtrs.tv/vijesti/vijest.php?id=435045>

of the statesmen who paid tribute to Srebrenica victims. Picture no. 10 bears the following sub-script: “During the donor conference for Srebrenica held in 2015, Milorad Dodik, President of the B&H entity of the Republic of Srpska (RS), Željka Cvijanović, Prime Minister of the RS and Dragan Lukač, Minister of the Interior of the RS, paid their tribute to the victims of Srebrenica genocide, on April 16.”¹⁴

The question posed here, which will *inter alia* be dealt with in this book, is that of the so-called women’s peace politics in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia. The question is certainly pressing in the context of regional patriarchal policies, where women “leaders” just confirm the power of the heads of their ethnic groups, while the genocide and war crimes are most frequently talked and written about (or rather *not* talked or written about) by men, be they politicians, analysts, professors, editors, experts, etc. On the reverse side of these dominant narratives, feminists and peacebuilding activists have been present for more than three decades, in addition to numerous other women who created a kind of a movement that we may call *Peace with a Woman’s Face*.¹⁵ Thirty years after the outbreak of the war as a direct form of violence, this study is an attempt to write something about peace from women’s perspective and in an unpretentious way.

14 <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/memorijalni-centar-potocari-drzavnici/31349187/p2.html>

15 This was actually the name of an exhibition and initiative launched by Lara Foundation from Bijeljina, joined by a couple of women’s NGOs.

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Selectiveness of memory bears impact on the (lack of) perspective for the future, as even though no shots are fired, the war indeed continues, albeit in a different shape and by using different means. Traditional theories, or definitions of peace, articulated with modernisation, were positioned in relation to war, which was interpreted as a politics continued by different means (von Clausewitz), so peace was at best (or at worst) interpreted as the absence of war, or even a pause in between wars. Such conceptions of the so-called formal politics as *per se* conflict-based and the perception of conflict as something cyclically repeated have been a persistent characteristic of the region, which constantly fails to make this radical modernisation leap based, inter alia, on the postulates of peace studies concerning the possibilities of diagnosing, preventing and solving conflicts, either institutionally, or through civil society actions.

Women's activism in effect represents a departure from such fatalist claims which, consciously or unconsciously, fail to challenge gender roles. The absurdity of it all is reflected in the fact - also highlighted by different peacebuilding actors - that the war in this area was led on the territory that is currently being left by crowds of young and working-age population, facing the all-pervading sense of despair and lack of opportunities, which is placidly observed by the local

political elites (Popov Momčinović, 2018: 123). These emigrants harbour a subconscious hope that they would not become a part of precarious workforce, in case the class consciousness even exists today, considering that identity politics suppresses those based on the articulation of interests of the repressed and marginalised. And while politicians still send messages about e.g. some “Serbian world” as an imaginary community of relatives, which in turn leads to grouping and homogenisation in opposing ethnic groups, there is a glaring parallelism between the activities that have been realised within civil society on the one hand, and public policies on the other, or what appears to be the true outcome of their strivings. As emphasised by different involved actors, B&H politicians seem to be doing their best to stop peacebuilding processes and reconciliation, yet despite their efforts, these are actually realised and achieved in everyday life and among common people (Popov-Momčinović, 2018: 119, 123; Zotova et al, 2021: 76, 154, 204). On the other hand, the most important initiatives concerning these processes have been initiated by civil society. However, these initiatives are not only insufficiently respected by institutional politics, but even the citizens do not have enough confidence in the NGO sector, or sufficient information concerning these significant activities (Puhalo, Vukojević, 2015).

One of the most nonsensical claims concerning the causes and aims of war conflicts is perhaps crucial exactly for this reason, as it reflects the entire nonsense and impossibility of its own realisation. This claim which is frequently highlighted by Banja Luka university professor Miodrag Živanović,

and which was originally made by one of the war participants, reads: *“Our goal is for us to live up to our past...”*¹⁶ It seems that the very impossibility of attaining this goal resulted in the extreme bestiality of the war on the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the statistical outcome of which is death or disappearance of 95,940 people, 9,901 of which were women, and in 97.48% of cases civilian women victims (Aganović & Delić, 2015: 177). Around 1,200,000 people became refugees or internally displaced persons due to the ethnic cleansing strategy, while 2/3 of houses and buildings were destroyed (Thomasson, 2004: 10-11). As people no longer go to war, but war instead comes to them, in recent conflicts, Bosnia and Herzegovina included, the greatest victims were civilian, mostly women and children (Aganović & Delić, 2015: 179). Paradoxically, war also relegates women to protagonist roles and moves the boundaries between male and female roles. Some women consciously dedicate themselves to their peacebuilding roles, and in helping others, they exceed the so-called women’s humanitarian work, since they often risk their own lives, as was the case of some B&H activists and peacebuilding women (see Spahić-Šiljak, 2013). On the other hand, it is important to take into account different activities that women undertake in order to preserve the functionality of their own families, which also leads to shifting in gender roles. As stated by an activist who had spent the war as a little girl in besieged Sarajevo: “when I remember the war, I remember my three years of going to school, the conditions in

16 <https://www.6yka.com/novosti/miodrag-zivanovic-prozimanje-fenomena-i-dislokacija-smisla>

Sarajevo, my mother working, doing all sorts of things, so there was no division at the time to male and female work (...)” 39

For these and some additional reasons, and especially because of the fact that building peace and reconciliation involves and shifts between the past, present and future (Wilkes et al, 2013: 5, 6), it is important to take into account the generational perspective when it comes to women and peacebuilding efforts, where this does not represent a metaphor which brings to mind the hierarchy that the third wave of feminism wanted to cancel out in its relation to the second wave. It is these various perspectives in interpreting the generational aspect, which we do not interpret here as Otherness in relation to the normalised experience, that allow us a deeper understanding of peacebuilding, as a non-closed circle (as it would otherwise imply fatalism), as well as a line which is, however, not straight, nor does it necessarily lead towards progress. Interpretations by the actors concerning the war and peace, and their conceptions of generational similarities and dissimilarities as potential and evitable allow us to do just that. This temporal perspective also emphasises the importance of a short overview of different historical perspectives on peacebuilding, intertwining in different ways with gender and still relevant bearing in mind current contradictions in local and global hierarchies. Efforts to overcome these contradictions have been more or less successful and involved a clumsy marriage between local ownership and the globalist postulates of the so-called (neo)liberal peacebuilding.

Namely, the aforementioned territoriality as the framework for interpretation of the regional conflicts and subsequently the motive for war, represent an importation of the Westphalia model (*cuius regio eius religio*), which instituted the principle of territoriality. Even though it brought about the end of the religious war in medieval Europe, this model became enrooted in the soil, with folk romanticism and resentment beating underneath, waiting to become integrated as superstructure after the establishment of national states. Territory is protected and/or occupied by male warriors and political leaders, aided by pollicisation of religion and subsequent sacralisation of these principles actualised by clergy as a separate, privileged class in charge of distribution of sacraments. All but annulled symbolically and reduced to the "fourth class," woman becomes the fosteress of the territory, delegated, conditionally speaking, to preserve its purity. While the Westphalia principle has been suppressed through European integration and the global neoliberal model which undermines the traditional concept of sovereignty, the belated Balkan nations, after the collapse of socialism, entered the processes of nation building, where the focus was more on the territory which needed to be owned by one's own group represented by "ethnically awakened men,"¹⁷ instead of emphasising the building of institutions. The peacebuilding activists of the Women in Black organisation indicated that the so-called negotiations during the 1990s wars in B&H and Croatia had indeed been fo-

17 Phrasing by Danijela Majstorović.

cused on territorial issues, by both the warlords and international community (Žene u crnom, 1995: 60). The countries referred to with the bureaucratic, regional compound phrase of *West Balkan* still dwell within these traditional frameworks, now bound by “stabilitocracies,” where the lack of institutional democracy and authoritarianisms are tolerated for the sake of “peace and stability in the region” (Bieber, 2020). And while the European Union pretends to be wishing to take in the West Balkan countries under its auspices, as stated by an EU official, West Balkan political leaders pretend that they wish to reform their states and, in this kind of atmosphere, they try to create the image of gender-sensitive countries.

If we return to further historical sequence of events, with the advance of modernisation and rise of the modern republic, the role of women progressed to the ideal of virtuous mother who raised strong and ethical sons of the New Republic which excluded “liminal women” (Zaharijević, 2010: 57-67). As women’s movements issued different demands concerning equal participation of women in the public sphere, as well as their specific, social protection, especially in the contexts of motherhood and poverty particularly suffered by single mothers, patriarchal states responded to some of these demands, connecting them to their own burgeoning imperialist goals, the fulfilment of which required “healthy offspring” (Taylor Allen, 2005). The persistence of such manipulations of women was stressed by an interviewed activist who interpreted regional abortion debates and conservative assaults on women’s right that occurred globally,

in the context of possible wars in the Balkans, that would require new armies: “They need fresh blood since they want more wars, and God forbid that their children or themselves should go to war. These miserable and impoverished ranks need to be born by Balkan women, and the easiest thing that you can do is to ban abortion, there’s nothing easier than that.”

With the discovery of world wars, i.e. first the Great War which, paradoxically, started along the Sarajevo-Belgrade route, some issues that are still topical today become ever pressing, including the so-called rights of sovereignty (refusal of Serbia to let Austria-Hungary investigate the assassination in Sarajevo on Serbian territory) versus the inclination towards further imperial expansion under the pretence of modernising the retrograde Balkans. The Great War was also the period of the first occurrence of some important women’s issues, chiefly due to networking among the first wave feminists acting within the peace movement, primarily the *Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF)*. The important idea that originated within the WILPF upon the supposed resolution of the conflict, was that peace could not be created only with those who participated in the war directly, which had been the general presupposition of the peace process (Kuhlmann, 2007: 235). Women pacifists insisted that a long lasting peace required social justice and that it could not be attained with the exclusion of women, pacifist groups, and the defeated from peace negotiations (Kuhlmann, 2007: 232), thus paving the way to what would become, with the development of peace studies, a ho-

listic approach to peacebuilding, and would in turn be integrated into the *UN Resolution 1325 - Women, Peace and Security* of the year 2000.¹⁸

In his 1929 novel *Farewell to Arms*, Hemingway described the horrors of WWI, yet through the lens of a masculine adventure in which the male protagonist is not burdened by either patriotism, or any kind of ideology. He is characterised by indifference towards the absurdity of war which is stripped to its very core, while he finds his safest refuge, just like in the author's other novels, in alcohol and sexual relations. Three decades before that, the first woman who received the Noble Prize for Peace, Bertha von Suttner, published her novel *Waffen nieder!* (Lay Down Your Arms!), where by contrasting her female and male protagonists she cleverly highlighted that peace is not mere absence of war and arms being laid down but remaining still there, to be easily reached, clearly identifying the importance of the emotional aspect in peacebuilding efforts (see Kristić, 2012: 8-14). Women peace activists would indicate the importance of

18 Here, it is perhaps interesting to mention the reasons for the exclusion of women from the peace process after WWI, allegedly not because they were women, but rather for the fact that they represented a specific group of women. The arguments were made in the vein that educated women who were able to participate in the negotiations were not a representative group of women, as they were perceived as excessively willing to make compromises (Kuhlman, 2007: 231). Similar narratives have been used to this very day in order to exclude women's voices from peace processes, i.e. as an argument against feminist organisations' strivings for equal participation of women in decision-making processes, considering that feminists allegedly have not been representatives of all women. This is the very reason, as one of the interviewed pioneers stated, for the crucial role of education for as many women as possible, thus enabling them to resist manipulation and represent themselves and their own interests.

social justice and the problem of inequality as some of the causes of war conflicts. This would be included in contemporary principles reflected in the rephrasing of the traditional claim from “*If you want peace, prepare for war*” to “*If you want peace, work on social justice.*” It is not enough to merely declare war absurd, let alone contribute to it with one’s indifference, but quite the contrary, it is an active and steady engagement that one needs to invest his/her entire being into. In this vein, the interviewed women activists and actors pointed to the ways in which they perceive and understand peace, and remembered their wartime engagement, or when it comes to the younger generation of activists, perceived the engagement of pioneers.

The new paradoxes postulated on the global scene after the conclusion of WWII, in the form of the Cold War in which peace was maintained by means of the fear of a nuclear catastrophe and armament race, led to the establishment of peace studies as a separate discipline. This was especially contributed to by the horrific experiences of WWII as the first total war in the history of humanity. The founder of peace studies and peacebuilding practitioner Johan Galtung introduced the distinction between a positive and negative peace, simultaneously distinguishing between structural, cultural, and direct violence. While negative peace represents a mere absence of direct violence, positive peace implies structural equality and a balanced approach to resources, practices and postulates of antidiscrimination, as well as presence and promotion of the culture of peace and dialogue in the society (Galtung, 2007: 31). Even

though, according to Galtung, gender is one of the important variables that support and maintain conflicts, feminist critiques indicate a kind of gender blindness inherent in his theory, as he reduces gender to biological terms and leads towards an interpretation of a direct connection between male sexuality and male aggression (Confortini, 2006: 340). Galtung is certainly aware of the cultural violence which leads to symbolic annihilation of women and patriarchal socialisation which supports this kind of male aggression, yet he insufficiently analyses real social processes and multiple ways in which people live through and in spite of violence (Confortini, 2006: 347). Even though in a couple of different places, Galtung perceives women as agents of change, emphasising, for example, that negotiations are bound to be more successful if women participate in them as mediators (Galtung, 2007: 25), the problem of this approach is that it fails to identify complete and complex aspects of women's participation in war (Sharp, 2013: 159). While on the one hand it is emphasised that though being reductive, Galtung's perspective provides insight into the so-called male-vertical and hierarchical approach and female-horizontal and egalitarian approach to peacebuilding (Ćurak, 2020: 29), it is necessary to integrate gender into peacebuilding perspectives as the central core and constant, critical and reflexive approach, in order to attain a just peace (Björkdahl, Selimovic, 2013: 204). Feminist literature therefore tends to deconstruct the images of aggressive man and peaceable (that is passive) woman, who is like that primarily due to her motherly role and not based on a political choice, especially if we bear in mind

that combating against war does not automatically imply reconsideration of gender roles (Ždralović & Rožajac, 2012: 116). These images and fictions are deconstructed in different ways, starting from the analysis of the impact of ancient archetypes, as in interpreting the image of Ovid's Medea, where the image of passivity and peacefulness is shattered in a horrific way. Women who lost their family members in war are presented in the media in line with this archetype, as ravaged by pain, sorrow and fear that they lack control over their own actions (Sjoberg, Gentry, 2007: 31, 32).

The end of the Cold War leads to a great number of violent conflicts frequently designated as ethnic, civil, or social, while identity politics were also added to this list (Pankhurst, 2003: 155). And while during the Cold War, the attention of the public was focused on nuclear and chemical weapon, a great circulation of the so-called light weapons and surge in illegal arms' trade after the dissolution of the USSR, combined with the lack of international standards concerning this type of weapons (Cockburn, 2012: 211, 212), also contributed to the emergence of a new form of warfare. This involved a great number of actors, ranging from industrialists and lobbyists, corrupted politicians, and intermediaries, to traffickers and buyers, so the flow of armament was quite difficult to follow (Enloe, 2020: 17). What became evident is more frequent use of the word conflict, instead of war, as a reflection of the regional complexities where conflicts are both initiated and ended, fluidity of their perimeters, and enormous civilian casualties (Pankhurst, 2003: 155).

This was also the case with former Yugoslavia, where conflicts were interpreted as exclusively ethnic, which led to one-dimensional “distillation” of identities, amplified through actions by the so-called ethnic entrepreneurs, while the established identitary designations and orientation towards one’s own group became so strong that they persisted even after the direct conflicts had been finished (Potter and Abernethy, 2013: 164). Using ethnicity as a source of conflict also served as a *carte blanche* for killing, rape, torture, stealing, and destruction of property (Kajevska, 2014: 7). Furthermore, the perimeter of the conflict could not be clearly defined, characterised with periods of calm and “truce” on one territory and escalation of violence on some other. Peace negotiations focused on territories from the very start, while they secondarily dealt with political systems and institutions, even though some peace plans indeed failed for these reasons, as they offered decentralised and confederative organisation, or on the other hand, unitary (even though the main problem there was also related to territories).

The war in Bosnia and Herzegovina was put an end to in Dayton, through negotiations participated in exclusively by men. Holbrooke’s memoirs reflect the male-centric view of the world and dualism between the civilised men from the West, who regularly jog and have self-control, and the primitive Balkan men who smoke, drink and are impressed by American military power (McLeod, 2019: 672). Before the Dayton negotiations, B&H also sent a small delegation of women to 1995 Beijing conference, where participants were obliged to the so-called gendering principles and gender mainstreaming, the

fact which is little talked about in the context of the local remembrance culture, even though the legislation has been improved in line with those guidelines. The Dayton Agreement is perceived as the first failure of the Beijing Declaration and platform for action (Veličković, 2015: 29), which is, *inter alia*, based on the belief that “providing women with greater authorities and their full participation based on equality in all spheres of the society, including the participation in decision-making process and governmental structures, is essentially important in attaining equality, progress and peace” (Veličković, 2015: 28). *Resolution 1325 - Women, Peace and Security* represents the next international document arising from coordinated work by women’s organisations on the inclusion of gender perspective into the practices of peace and security, especially in the context of the wars and genocides in Rwanda and Bosnia and Herzegovina. However, in the context of weak institutions and ineffective mechanisms for the protection of human and especially women’s rights, B&H remains a country in constant need of external intervention and aid (which has been confirmed in the period of the Covid-19 pandemic and when it comes to the obtainment of vaccines). The political economy of producing memories and testimonies is also evidenced in the wider context of so-called post-isms, e.g. post-conflict, post-war, post-Yugoslav, post-socialist, post-Dayton, etc., which are taken as such and are never questioned (Husanović, 2014: 148). Equally unquestioned are the neoliberal postulates of peacebuilding which were uncritically being imported in Bosnia and Herzegovina immediately after the Dayton Agreement

had been signed. They are based on the assumptions about women's peace role practically per se, and in such conditions, the selective practices of gendering continued to thrive.

Hereby it needs to be emphasised that the aspects of gendering, especially those concerning the role of women in peace and prevention of conflicts, are based on the following false preconceptions: that women are not already involved in these processes in some way; that their work is free of charge and readily available; and that women would have automatic control over the fruits of their work (Pankhurst, 2003: 169). Truth be told, they oppose the positions of passivity and placing women exclusively in the roles of victims, bearing in mind that there were women who had active roles in combats, as well as in peacebuilding efforts, where in this first position they were in minority, while in the second they remained insufficiently heard and respected (Pother and Abernethy, 2013: 165). Furthermore, even when their work is recognised as important, one can identify a tendency and expectations that, once they played their peacebuilding roles, women are to return to their pre-war, default roles of mothers and housewives (Pother and Abernethy, 2013: 165). An interviewed pioneer warns against the patriarchal customs and attempts to reduce women's activism to its humanitarian aspect. On the other hand, the very perseverance of feminists and women peacebuilding activists enabled the feminism which is based on the so-called ethics of care to evolve into the transformative feminism which always seeks and demands changes (Bavčić, 2020: 212).

By analysing the interviews made with actors in these processes belonging to different generations of our feminists, we will try to evidence the discrepancy between the theory and practice, normative and real, as well as diachronous and synchronous formal and informal action. These conversations were methodologically realised as structured interviews, averagely lasting one hour each. They were all realised via the *Zoom* platform, bar one which was live. After the interviewing phase was concluded, these were fully transcribed and amounted to 55 pages, or 30.284 words in total. Two of the interviewees were so-called pioneers of the women's movement in B&H: prof. Jasna Bakšić Muftić and Mirjana Vilušić; two belong to the second generation: Aleksandra Petrić and Selma Hadžihalilović, while two belong to the third generation: Vildana Džekman and Hana Ćurak. Each of these interviews represents valuable material and constant impetus for further feminist peacebuilding engagement, as well as or a critical valorisation of what has been attained, and it can be considered separately. The analysis of their insights, recollections, reflections, and actions in different periods and in the context of current challenges would be presented in paragraphs involving the answers to the corresponding questions, simultaneously taking into account the generational perspective which, as it is aforementioned in the theoretical section, does not represent any kind of hierarchical grading of experience, considering that the main feminist principles include solidarity, equality and anti-hierarchy. The wealth and feminine beauty of the answers were partially sacrificed due to methodological strictness. As one of the activists stated:

This process cannot stop, nor can it be contained within a framework. You cannot say: C'mon Selma, talk to us for 5 hours, or just for 45 minutes about your experiences. I wouldn't perhaps have enough strength to even start to talk about my experiences, and what about my friend from some other country, neighbouring country, as she also needs to share her experiences. You can't frame this, or contain it within certain parameters. This is a continuous process, individual process which requires a huge amount of personal engagement and determination. In order to have personal determination, you must work a lot on education, and this is something that women abundantly and actively work on, in order to provide a safe space for people, where they can decide to speak about their experiences."

Feminists of Bosnia and Herzegovina Speak...

Peace is (not)...

All the interviewees, regardless of the generation they belong to, highlight that peace is much more than the mere absence of war. They describe peace in detail, frequently adding the intensifier "absolute/absolutely" in order to reinforce the demarcation line between their conceptions and the common sense perceptions of peace, which have been fully embodied in Bosnia and Herzegovina under the slogan: "Just no shots fired, please." As stated by our youngest respondent:

I grew up in a country in which peace is equalised with the absence of war, and this is not peace, but rather the absence of war and a state in which there's no room for progress, or expression of really clearly founded democratic values.

By describing in detail what peace is, the activists also identify what it is not. Even though peace is not a mere opposite of war, they remain in sharp contrast to one another, which becomes especially evident in the context of experiences by the most vulnerable:

I always say that war most harshly treats the unprotected, such as women, youth and children, not to mention men who did not really choose it, but they were forced to become a part of it all anyway.

It all points to the importance of the presence of different elements characterising the concept of positive peace, in contrast to the conception of peace as the absence of war and direct violence. Peace is defined in the context of wider systemic solutions and structures which imply the rule of law, equality before law and availability of different resources and services, enabling one to live a life worthy of a human. Civic values and human rights are still harnessed by the "sanctity" of nation, state and patriotism (Krasniqi, 2017: 107), even though democracy has long been introduced. Peace is allegedly there, yet it is somehow still absent. As stated by one of our respondents, what we have here is indeed "a deceptive peace":

My understanding of peace is in a way wide and absolute. This is not only the absence of armed conflicts, but also some kind of wellbeing for citizens of a country in which they are able to exercise and enjoy their human rights and benefits of civilisation in the context of social and political engagement, as well as in the private sphere, able to get education, live off their work and nurture their families, in fact to live in line with their own wishes. I absolutely believe that this is also paramount when it comes to Bosnia and Herzegovina and the perception of wartime events. So, for more than 25 years now, we've been living in a deceptive peace in B&H, and we always fail to achieve this level of people's engagement, so that we may say that their rights are fully realised. Especially when we talk about the social and political context, a great number of people live badly, they're unemployed, nationalism is still extremely present in the public discourse, and discriminatory tendencies thrive in every field, including gender-based discrimination. This is by no means good, and it all indicates that we need to dedicate ourselves to peace and reconciliation, and shows the importance of all structures, including civil society, continuing to influence this context and to be continuously engaged.

It is also emphasised that peace is primarily "a state of mind," so it cannot be fully attained through political means and institutional mechanisms, but is rather something inherently personal and should be reached through one's own engage-

ment. On the other hand, the activist who provided such a definition of peace, simultaneously expressing scepticism about institutional peace-building efforts, is aware that the structures which originated in wars, not only the 1990s war, but also those earlier armed conflicts, due to their unhealed traumas prevent the attainment of such a state of mind:

Well, I don't know whether I'd call it complete peace, since we still carry the burden of the wars we lived through, unfortunately not only those 1990s conflicts, but also some much, much earlier ones, and they in a way shape our lives. These are burdens that we didn't manage to shake off, nor do I see any particular effort to complete this process. I'm talking about an in-depth change of the peoples in the region, so every once in a while some burdens surface, let me call them that once again, some prejudices and stereotypes, some unfulfilled dreams, some experiences that we didn't manage to process, and they have their direct impact on our lives even today.

One of our pioneers referred back to the period before the war broke out, explaining what peace and war had meant for her then:

[W]hen I say peace, it also includes the time before the war, when I could imagine anything in the world happening to me, but war. War was the only experience that seemed to me unattainable, something I thought I'd never experience, as it belonged to movies, literature

and the experience of the elderly. So this memory of the times of peace also indicates that it meant the absence of the fear of war. So that you are completely at peace and you see a projection of a peaceful future, or at least in some steady environment. So we have this sense of peace no more!

This very incapability of imagining a different future, i.e. a future which is peaceful, is often emphasised as the greatest problem of today's B&H society, where young people are especially affected by this. Peace is thus simultaneously a memory, feeling and a figment of imagination, as it is permeated with both emotional and cognitive aspect of one's spirit that are disempowered by ruling structures which produce inequalities, injustice, and discrimination, while they feed on the fear of Other and Different through, inter alia, selective memory and avoidance of confrontations with the past. They hinder individual fulfilment and development, considering that peace is not merely the state of rest, but also, as stated by our youngest respondent, in its true sense:

[P]eace is in fact existence, when you are allowed to exist while fulfilling all your best capacities.

The incapability of one's own fulfilment and this eternal otherness of women and levelling of their values and needs, especially if these are women belonging to the ethnic other, in the general collapse of the society which has continued even after the war, are in fact diluted in the general atmosphere

of idling about and scraping to survive. On the other hand, such a condition represents a constant challenge and stimulus for peacebuilding activism which never stops. And just as war violence manifested the highest degree of brutality in “gendered violence against civilians” (Krasniqi et al, 2017: 103), the failure to face what was done is amplified by and cross-bred with the still existing forms of gender-based violence in the post-war period. Constant invocations of wartime memories in a ravaged society and dysfunctional state provoke constant action and reflection on the beginnings of one’s own engagement and in the context of one’s own experience, permeated with memories of the times “when peacemaker’s name was woman” (Liht & Drakulić, 1997).

Experience of War and its Impact on Feminist Engagement

The experience of war is still constantly present, both on institutional and personal levels, perpetually “clashing” with previously described conceptions of peace. The war still permeates all spheres of the society submerged in a culture of violence which erodes the society and people, while simultaneously maintaining the existing state of neither war nor peace for the benefit of the ruling patriarchal, ethno-nationalist matrices. In administering life post-trauma, an atmosphere is created in which personal memories of the war are harder to reproduce in a socially desirable way, while women’s peace experiences are selected and suppressed. In that way, they are used and abused

in order to resuscitate, according to feminist theoretician and activist Jasmina Husanović, the dead horse of ethnicity, which allegedly builds public memory “that has already integrated the constitutional oblivion” (Husanović, 2012: 17).

On the other hand, considering that this research already involves the activists with a clear feminist identity, this experience was a formative one when it comes to their engagement, unlike the tendencies of wartime and post-war politics to passivize people, especially women, in line with the patriarchal matrices of traditionally ossified gender roles, perceived as God intended. It is this very experience, i.e. memories of the war as an impetus in one’s own feminist engagement, which was the second question put to our respondents during the interviews. It also translates into current challenges, both private and public, which, according to Swanee Hunt, represent a complex mix of the losses that women need to accept and integrate, rather than overcome, as they create a new future (Hunt, 2004: 121).

All the interviewees said that this experience had been a formative one for them, including their personal experiences and traumas in their answers, connecting them to the experiences of other women and vulnerable groups in the context of the direct connection between patriarchy and the war, as well as of structural injustice which has persisted even in the times of peace. The youngest activist described her experience as more indirect, but it nevertheless fuelled her own feminist engagement in order to overcome the given reality and the

attempts to impose it in line with the traditionalist patterns “from generation to generation,” which maintain their epic seductiveness. In this context, what is particularly important is the so-called secondary transmission of trauma, the importance of which was highlighted by one of the activists who has engaged in the activities addressing this issue.

The experiences of our respondents have a common trait, as they were indeed spurred into action by the war and its horrors, institutionalised in post-war politics; yet they are also different in terms of the diversity of personal experiences, forms of engagement in different periods, and their respective generations, the experiences of which they represented. What they also have in common is the emphasis on their own personal experience, which confirms the power and worth of the feminist motto that “the personal is political.” Their personal experience itself has enabled them, either in the context of their own survived violence, or by following what was going on around them, to have insight into specific women’s wartime experiences, and to realise that they are dynamic, rather than fixed and defined for eternity. And as ethno-nationalism tends to place women under strict control in order to preserve its people and secure its generational ambitions (Papić, 2012: 316), which was immediately evident when women’s reproductive rights were put under assault in the early 1990s, with their actions and insights, the activists resist the sly advances of the patriarchy, trying to lull them into submission. What was required was resistance to these attempts to shape

feminine roles in line with the imposed customs, and thus the feminist formation began: 59

For me personally, so this is entirely my own experience, I was extremely sensitive towards feminist position due to my education, philosophical, sociological, literary, while my perception wasn't so critically sharp as it was the case during the war, when everything was entirely clear, that men and women have different experiences, different roles, that their positions of power are different, and their contribution or the lack thereof are differently valued. Call it what you like, but it involved disappearance of women from public life. Right there and then it all became defined for me - not only human rights, but also women's human rights. And as I consider feminist theory and commitment to making a contribution, and a liberal concept in enjoying recognised rights and the principle of equality, this was a formative time for me when it comes to my intellectual, professional, and activist experience.

One of the pioneers described her experience of being a pre-war widow and child from a mixed marriage, who personally experienced different forms of wartime violence and subsequently worked as a psychologist with women who experienced sexual violence in the war. Constantly being confronted by patriarchal customs demonstrated by her relatives, closer or wider environment, and in her struggle to survive, she managed, as she says, to build up her own strength and to "profit off the war":

And so I came home on foot and crying, and then I continued crying for 2-3 days, then I got up and said "C'mon girl, on your feet. You've no one to watch your back, get up now (...) I used to learn German in school, then I started learning English, continued with my education, so I profited off the war, so to say (...) The Norwegians paid for my very expensive German AWO education programme, to work with traumatised women. In addition to that, we had many other different seminars as well and we always used to say that we could not see this through, to do psychotherapy with women, as this wasn't even popular then, it was indeed unwise for you to call it a therapy, but instead you'd say "C'mon, women, let's go grab some coffee and have a chat" (...) Then this massacre at the Gate happened and we worked day and night, we had a duty roster, we introduced an SOS hotline. And at one point when we assessed it to be advisable, as I was the coordinator, I decided we would no longer call it coffee and chat. I said "my dear ladies, this is called psychotherapy and this is what we do with you." Then we explained everything to them.

Our middle generation activists also emphasise that the war and their reflections during the war, i.e. the activities they engaged in and problems that they encountered in their surroundings, triggering depression in one of our respondents, stimulated their feminist engagement:

[During the war] I was at the age when I was finishing my undergraduate studies and I

thought that this was the only good thing that I could do for myself at that moment. I had the privilege of living in a town where there were no direct war conflicts. But I anyway saw and read about what was going on in the country and all over the region and it extremely heightened my awareness of human rights and their protection, discrimination, and so on, I thought about these extensively (...) And somehow, at the very end of it, I graduated a couple of days before the Dayton Agreement was signed in Paris, a coincidence really, but... however, a breaking point in my life and the event that brought formal peace to B&H somehow coincided. Then I realised that I felt kind of empty, that I had to work on it, to do something concrete, to make contribution. In that period, I listened a lot about these organisations suddenly forming in B&H and in the region, and there were a lot of them that had operated during the war, whose activities I followed.

(...) I believe that I was totally defined in my activist life by these events, and in 1993 I fell into major depression due to wartime events in my birth town and the situation around me. My mother literally took me by the hand and dragged me to the *Medica* centre for women's therapy. I was around 18 then. And in a way, I joined in there and then. This was April, or May 1993 when I joined the *Medica* team and the team of *Infoteka*, and the rest is history, as they say. This was where I became, that's where I matured, as a women and human being. I encountered and realised that there existed

an entirely different perspective on life than what we saw in everyday life, I declared myself a feminist, became an activist, and so on.

An activist from the younger generation quotes her memories from the besieged Sarajevo, emphasising that the war defined gender roles and that, ever since she consciously engaged in peace activism, women's activism and resistance by women peace activists in 1990s have been her constant inspiration, while the additional motive for her feminist engagement is the fact that the activism by these women has been largely marginalised and insufficiently well-known:

When I remember the war, I remember my three years of going to school, the conditions in Sarajevo, my mother working, doing all sorts of things, so there was no division at the time to male and female work (...) those same women that resisted the war in the 1990s have been my inspiration to this very day, as they have stayed true to their goals, visions, ideals, call it what you will (...) the fact that I wasn't able to read such stories when I started being an activist was really sad to me, as I wanted to read as much as I could. See, this research too will be imbued with written testimonies, which is useful, and I missed that then, to be able to read about these all too courageous women survivors. This was a kind of inspiration to me - in these peacebuilding efforts that comprise a number of segments, I always somehow inclined towards women's remembrance culture, its written evidence, women

writing about themselves, about what they have achieved, sharing information, since all this could as well be forgotten and their contributions would become invisible, unappreciated, so we will have men once again creating policies and politics.

The youngest of the interviewees, who has no direct wartime experience, indicated that the wartime violence overflows into the post-war period in different forms, describing an entire range of forms of violence, from the genocide and war crime judgments' denial, to the patriarchalisation of men and internalised misogyny in women, which all helped her connecting these to the 1990s experience:

Yes, I was born in 1994 so I have no direct experience, or memories of the war. I also grew up in a really privileged situation, with both my parents being intellectuals and working in education, so they really made efforts to make me a child of peace, so to say. And I carry this with great pride... Even though I lived in this post-war atmosphere, I was completely unaware that I was in any way different from my peers anywhere in Europe (...). What really defined me in my early twenties, or even earlier, when I started engaging in feminist activism, were two things. The first was, of course, my growing realisation about where I actually lived, i.e. that due to an enormous pressure by the society, some well-bred men become patriarchal, as well as women who adopt internalised misogyny, and that patriarchy is really pronounced. Then I was able to connect

this with the trauma coming straight from the 1990s. (...) Now I am 27 and I believe that I have the complete picture of the entire situation, with the help of a great number of people who realised different research projects, concerning different fields, from the negation of the genocide and war crimes' judgements, to various other topics in cultural studies, such as folk music and so on. I was able to conclude that one of the greatest achievements of the 1990s war, and I know that this sounds horrific, is that the patriarchal culture reigned, while this hard core family was destroyed, traumatised and through this made to turn to these very patriarchal behavioural patterns. So we are totally living these 1990s still, and I have the impression that the people who try to address this issue in adequate ways, find it increasingly hard to live in this region, as there's less and less space for common sense.

The borders between war and peace, between what was experienced and what was inherited, are distorted and contorted, yet the activism and feminism which refuse to accept that, as Žarana Papić said, only the nationalistic is political, disturb them, if not actually destroy them with their principles.

Žarana Papić:

"The principle is to cross the borders"

Žarana Papić represents the generation of pre-war, wartime and post-war feminist theoreticians and activists, serving as a constant inspiration,

but also a warning against what happened after the dissolution of the socialist Yugoslavia: 65

The genocidal brutality of the ethnic wars in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina showed that ethnic hatred had been triggered and produced in order to construct the borders of *enemy-Other* by means of fluid and mixed up lines of religion, culture, ethnicity, and gender, reflecting in that way the contemporary redefining of racial hostility. Moreover, ethnic nationalism is based on the politics of a specific gender identity/difference, where women are simultaneously mythologised as the deepest essence of Nation *and* instrumentalised as its *producers* (Papić, 2012: 306).

This brutality is still produced through formal and informal patriarchal patterns, postulating violence as a form of behaviour which is tolerated, and even constantly invited. As its opposite, Žarana defined the so-called principle of constant crossing of borders, which became a part of common action and thinking of today's active feminists and activists. Our respondents were therefore asked what Žarana's quote that the principle is to cross the borders meant to them.

The activists highlight that borders leave different consequences on men and women and each of them offers her specific view on what borders are and what their crossing implies. They make a distinction between physical and psychological borders, and recognise a special way in which they are imposed on women, while they emphasise the impor-

tance of the activists and feminists that crossed these borders first. The borders are also examined in terms of their meaning in different periods, including the period of former Yugoslavia (SFRY), while the respondents also refer to the borders of entities, moved through the activism by women and feminists, as these barriers at the time were not only extremely pronounced psychologically (immense fear and pressure while crossing them), but also physically (points and barricades, disorganised public transport, etc.):

I think back, as in a movie, to the period when I was youth coordinator for the Helsinki Citizen's Assembly, and for me, this activism and work on the strengthening of youth's network and making connections among youth's organisations meant certain obstacles, meaning that I was unable to move regularly and freely within the country. For example, in 1996 there was no regular bus from Banja Luka to Sarajevo, so I had to take one to Doboј, then to cross Eufor checkpoints on foot, then to take a cab to Zenica, and in Zenica I would take a bus to Sarajevo, or perhaps to Tuzla, then go to the Arizona marketplace, where I would hitchhike a bus, or a private car. This was really challenging in that period. Thinking about it now, I often remember how many times it happened that I just stood there in darkness, near Arizona, and waited for the bus from Belgrade to Banja Luka, and it really felt like going from one world to another. So these were borders for us, not physically visible, yet they represented obstacles for us, but somehow, we were not scared, at least I wasn't.

In relation to this, physical borders are not only borders in the geographic sense, but they are also permeated with some ideological patterns. According to an interviewed pioneer, they are fluid and porous, as they disappear and re-emerge in unexpected places and in unexpected ways. She compares the borders for the second-wave feminists on the territory of former Yugoslavia, a group which also included Žarana Papić, with what suddenly appears today, thus building the continuity of resistance which ethno-nationalism tries to erase, providing that its goal, as it has already been mentioned, is to attain the mythical past and beginnings:

So, from within, this is a highly dynamic process which is not straightforward, but has its ups and downs. If you ask for an example, in an earlier period, in which the first generation of, let's say, feminists developed, and I refer here to those women who were members of the Communist Party, who tested the socialist concept of equality and discovered that violence is ever present, regardless of whether it's committed by the working class, or the class of capitalists, it was articulated regardless, and it was not the same. So if we talk about that generation, they had these ideological boundaries, but didn't have some others in terms of worldview, for example. Now, in this process of retraditionalisation and reinterpretation of certain religious values, we have some issues with respect to which we returned to the beginning of the 20th century (...) I refer to retraditionalisation, repatriarchalisation, new religious interpretative practices

which emerge, a pronounced interest in identity issues, certain myths being built, as well as women's active participation in these myth-building practices. I refer here to ethnic, nationalist myths, so it is quite interesting that regardless of your perspective, some borders have indeed disappeared, or been pushed far ahead, while in some other aspects, some other borders re-emerged from the past, concerning issues that were supposed to be long resolved.

The activist who had worked directly with Žarana Papić, explained that she did not need this quote, bearing in mind the years she had spent working with Papić. She described in detail and with great emotionality all those encounters, especially those in Budapest, the territory where during the war activists had provided different types of support, not only to women, but also to male deserters. Some borders were thus also transgressed even outside the borders of the former state, while simultaneously with the described activities, gender boundaries and gender essentialisms were also defied, providing that in deserting, men renounced their militant masculinity and transgressed its imposed limitations:

I don't need this quote, as Žarana Papić was a great friend of mine. My last memory of Žarana is the two of us sitting on the balcony of the safe activist house in Budapest, which was held by women (...). Žarana used to sleep there, while I slept with my boys, deserters, also in Budapest, in a safe house for

deserters. So we used to meet in this women's centre, cook food for twenty-odd persons that were accommodated in those safe spaces, for whatever reason, and enjoy having tea on that terrace there. On that last occasion, I'm not sure which birthday of mine it was, but it was in August. Žarana gave me a silk scarf that I've kept to this very day, and a glass, round incense holder. All those times having tea, we talked about nationalism, patriarchy, and the feminist rebellion against nationalism and patriarchy. This also brings to mind a wonderful experience of listening to Žarana's lecture at the feminist school in Novi Bečej. This was perhaps less significant for me academically, but much more in terms of activism, because this indeed concerns the transgression of borders, if you let me. This was in the period immediately after the war, when we crossed the border with Serbia in a way which I would not call harrowing, too strong a word, but we were always crossing it as Muslims, having Muslim names, and they always kept us for distressing informative talks with the border police. But me, and my two best friends who also worked in *Infoteka* and *Medica*, we were always so full of humour and we used to crack jokes with and about the policemen, and in the end they would be much more fed up with us than we with them.

Psychological borders are still in us regardless of being crossed again and again, inter alia, through the work of the new generations of feminists. The two activists from the younger generation interpret the crossing of borders as a form

of feminist rebellion and identification of the imposed gender roles:

I think that what Žarana said is much bigger than this personal rebellion of mine, we can interpret it in terms of geopolitics, and say that it certainly involves an exchange of experience across state borders, but I somehow don't think about the state borders, so for me, this is always about actually knowing who imposed this role on you and in what way the things you want in your life differ from it.

A respondent highlighted the importance of pushing the limits of one's own convenience and leaving one's comfort zone, as every actual transgression of borders is just that. There are also the limits of questioning what activism is and what its results and limits of one's own capabilities are:

(...) while we don't cross and transgress those borders and our own limitations, until we don't cross that border in terms of the prejudices and stereotypes we harbour, we can't make changes in ourselves, or in the society (...). Now, what indeed is a problem, another problem when we talk about activists, especially women activists, they tend to burn out quickly, because they always transgress those borders without dealing with their own internal borders. So we constantly crash into a wall in those changes that we wish to produce, but it is important to realise that these changes are slow and that we need processes for something to mature, but this doesn't mean that we can't progress fur-

ther. So this is in a way essential, for us to learn to respect our personal borders and limits, but on the other hand, to constantly cross them and push them, because what are we unless we push limits? If we are just fixed to a place then there are no changes.

In the context of the limits of activism, the importance of leaving one's comfort zone is highlighted, i.e. the problem of internal psychological barriers and stereotypes which lead to the translation of gender equality principles into practice:

(...) certainly transgressions of the limits of some intimate barriers that each and every one of us has, in the context of what we're ready to accept. In the context of fighting for the equality and equal rights of all people, regardless of the way in which they perceive themselves. In the context of LGBT[IQ] rights, as well as in the contexts of the rights of national minorities, women with disabilities, women coming from an entirely different social background. These are certainly philosophical principles, we all indeed support them, yet when you find yourself in a situation where you need to communicate and react to some incident of injustice and to implement all this in practice, perhaps some internal barriers are erected in us and they prevent us from accepting and practically applying what we theoretically and hypothetically believe in, in our heads. And then, in fact, our prejudices surface (...) women often said to me that they were for equality,

that for them, persons who are lesbian or gay were equal, but then they had a problem sitting by their side, talking to them and socializing with them. And these are actually some things that people simply fail to process enough within themselves and I don't know how sincere they are with themselves.

The word/term 'border' was also mentioned by the activists as they responded to other questions, even though the word was absent from the phrasing of the questions, which indicates the great significance of this quote from Žarana serving as a permanent pledge and inspiration.

The Other Side of Trauma: 1990s between Generational Issue and Transgenerational (Un)Reality

The next question concerned the opinion of the respondents about the extent to which the issues of the war and especially of the 1990s experience were a generational thing. The answers ranged from "of course it is" to "I think that it is," and "it is and it isn't". However, this is not the case of categorical, mutually exclusive answers, but rather of different nuances that supplement general answers. The interviewed described in detail their perceptions of generational experiences and in a great number of cases described their directions of actions, imbued with the generational dimension. The interviewees are keenly aware of the problem of transgenerational transference of trauma, and they provided their own examples of

working on overcoming this trauma, simultaneously highlighting the importance of the inclusion of new generations into different activities, especially in the sphere of informal education. As stated by an interviewed pioneer:

[S]ince we worked also with a group of young women and we realised this reproductive health programme, they needed to be acquainted with this part of our education. Women are the greatest victims when they aren't in the know, when they don't know their rights, then they are the greatest victims not only in their own, but also of their environment. And then we worked with young girls, we worked a lot. And it was not only us who worked with them, but also some other NGOs dealing with similar issues. Yet this is a small number when compared to the number of youth who were not covered with this education. In our country we often have two schools under a single roof, then also a third group which is really in minority as we belong to the Federation, they don't receive any kind of knowledge, just the uniform, rigid, nationalist outlook which insists that only the women of that nation were victims, that there were no others (...)

Peacebuilding and activist work is intersected with private life as feminist activity does not have so-called business hours to allow professional and private aspects to be separated:

I regretfully need to explain it to my daughter who these war crime suspects are, when we watch

TV news, or listen to a sentencing. When we are in the field, as I am one of the rare activists who take their children always with them, when we talk to women returnees about their experiences, when we visit crime sites, when we talk with those who are not like us, when various questions are asked, and so on, or when I show her marks on trees and tell her not to go because there's a minefield there. Unfortunately, we have a new, young generation which is growing up to a constant toll of the bells of war, they are asked to be ever ready for war. At a young age they know what mass graves and minefields are. They follow global events via the internet, so you finally have your nine-year-old explaining to you that Trump hates Tik Tok because Tik Tok was made in China, and you stand there amazed, thinking how come that a child knows this, yet these are the facts that we have to deal with right now (...).

In this sense, all the respondents highlight the importance of constant education for women and girls, bearing in mind the context of the existing formal education, which is an integral part of the regional ethno-politics whose intellectual elite, especially in the field of social sciences and humanities, produces "mythopoeic narratives of the givenness of nation" through "the discourse of naturalness" (Mujkić, 2010: 45). What we have at work here is a sort of re-appropriation of the economic and symbolic capital by ethnicity entrepreneurs, while on the other hand, there is a wide ethnic mobilisation, well-known since the period of the anti-bureaucratic revolution and happening

of the people, which “implies mobilisation of all material and spiritual resources that society has at its disposal, as well as energetic action with the aim of re-establishment of national unity” (Mujkić, 2010: 19). While the younger generation of activists does not remember directly the initial onslaughts of this pseudo-happening of the people, some questions stay universal, providing that there are universal feminist peacebuilding principles that are concretised depending on the predominant contexts and circumstances. As one of our interviewed pioneers highlighted:

Well, this is sort of generational, but it also isn't really. It is in the sense of a specific experience, and of the contexts in which certain attitudes, approaches and problem analyses are crystallised, as well as the context in which questions are articulated, and in this sense, this is generational. It's not generational when it comes to the general topics that feminism deals with. They only have different articulations depending on the concrete historical, political and economic context and events.

The activists thus avoid hierarchisation of primary and secondary experience, pointing to different activities organised by so-called new generations, but also to the importance of connecting with the experience of the 1990s peace activists, in spite of different contexts:

[W]hen I observe these young generations, I believe that there's hope, they do some re-

ally good things. They organise peace camps and many other interesting things. I simply believe that this struggle is for young women to inherit and I always make effort. For example, I went to Konjic the other day, where we had a workshop with journalists concerning ethical reporting. It is always important to me for us to have young journalists, as they will continue to push this story forward. The situation today is in no way different than how it was in the 1990s, apart from shooting, yet some shots are still fired, but in a different way, so we are constantly living in a time machine of sorts (...) And I believe that connecting the generations with extensive life experiences and these younger generations is highly important for peace activism, because those generations that lived through all this can tell us how to survive when you're being obstructed and ignored by the regime, when they don't respect your rights. On the other hand, what is this thing really that we, the younger generation, can explain to the experienced generations, concerning today's situation? The times are different today. We don't know who our enemies really are, we can't make SWAT analyses, while they could do that (...).

It is also highlighted that the activists from the 1990s "broke the ice" and through their modus operandi attracted new generations to try feminist engagement:

[W]hen I started to deal with these issues more actively, there were much more of these,

conditionally speaking middle-aged women, women above 30, who took interest in equality and thought about the issues of women's human rights, about the things bothering women, violence against women, the level of success of women in politics, what needed to be changed in order to help them thrive, what the key problems in our country were. However, now when I myself am in this more mature age and I observe the situation, I think that there has been a lot of progress, that there are many young women now interested in the feminist issues and protection of women's human rights, much more than immediately after the war. I believe that this has certainly been achieved by these, so to say, older activists, who were really visible and contributed greatly in the public sphere, regardless of that negative public discourse accompanying feminism and operation of the civil sector in Bosnia and Herzegovina. I believe that they managed to impose this voice of reason, voice of progressive ideas, and succeeded in engaging young activists to a point.

The younger generation activists value greatly the peacebuilding engagement of the 1990s feminists, in the context of peace activism, and especially their work with women victims of violence, but they simultaneously notice that there are still some residues of nationalism, spreading also to new generations:

(...) it seems to me that the older generations, considering that they had grown up and expressed themselves during the 1990s, did things

that were a little bit more concrete, so to say. First, immediately after the war, we had work with women victims of wartime violence, and these activists were some courageous women working in the field, marching into the fire, etc. Simultaneously, we had anti-war efforts by peacebuilding women activists all over the region (...) what I think is highly characteristic of this generation of ours are these national prefixes, which still exist regardless of the fact that we are feminists, and this is something really tragic what I felt on my skin. The fact that no matter how united we stand when it comes to the feminist principles, as soon as something related to ethnicity or nationality occurs, this prefix still holds some meaning. The number of the feminists and feminist activists that in their essence have no problem with it is really small, and this is what I find painful and think that it can be traced through every generation, ever since the 1990s.

The problem of the lack of appreciation for the contribution of women activists and peacemakers from 1990s, which Rada Iveković also explained in the context that they were oriented “to aid beneficiary, rather than on the promotion of aid mediators” (Iveković, 2000: 21) is something still highlighted by our respondents. She provided a probably reasonable prediction that women’s peacebuilding work of all these years “would be a footnote at best” (Iveković, 2000: 21), yet, at least for feminist activists, it has been the note against which they measured their own activism, as well as feminism in general:

(...) when I retreat from this region and think about everything that I know about all these women and feminists that were active, regardless of the stream they belonged to, this peacebuilding aspect is repeated over and over, and I really think that western feminists could learn a lot from us in this regard.

Women's Approach to Peacebuilding Does Exist

Although formally unappreciated, women's approach to peacebuilding does exist, suppressed among the contradictions concerning the institutional aspect of peacebuilding, activities and activism in civil society, and their mutual relations. Some of the problems that have remained do not diminish the importance of the so-called women's approach to peacebuilding. In this sense, all our respondents agree that "there is, of course, a women's approach to peacebuilding." One of the pioneers provided a somewhat different answer, pointing to the dominant ideological matrices within which this women's approach is situated, or against which it resists.

What is most frequently emphasised is that women were the first to cross/transgress borders in the beginning and make peace between people, the fact which has also been confirmed in different research projects (Thomasson, 2008; Spahić-Šiljak, 2013; Popov-Momčinović, 2013; Popov-Momčinović, 2018).

It is absolutely true that [the women's approach exists] (...) at least in my experience,

in what I personally experienced and survived, the first peacebuilding steps were made by women. They first offered their hands to one another, worked together, made contacts, opened up some important cooperation issues and began working on the problems which occurred after the war, just as they still cooperate with one another in this context, even today. And I do believe that their contribution is in a way different, because they deal with things from a different perspective, and they perceive the war and what has been happening after the war differently.

The respondents emphasised the consistency of the women's approach, which has not been swayed by the unfavourable institutional environment and other challenges, while two activists also name some differences between the women's approach to peacebuilding and the characteristics of, conditionally speaking, male part of the civil society sector, i.e. civil society in general. According to one of these activists, women peacemakers have not chased projects, but they have rather worked consistently on peacebuilding. Another activist quotes a greater openness and sensitivity of the women's approach in organising different kinds of activities, unlike the male actors within the civil society, or civil society in general, which are themselves prone to exclusivity and impenetrability:

[T]he very women who opposed the war during the 1990s have been my inspiration to this very day, because they stayed true to their goals,

visions, ideals, call it what you will, to their own agenda. Unlike some NGOs whose strategic directions change as the projects they work on come and go, they remained true to their peacebuilding efforts and resistance to war.

While on the other hand this “male approach” in the context of peace and reconciliation entirely rejects this mode of action. I somehow haven’t seen similar initiatives happening in the parallel civil society in Bosnia and Herzegovina dominated by men, that they tried to gather us all, both men and women, to the same table, so that we could offer our opinions on topics that concern us all equally. It was always kind of exclusive, alternative, different, and outside political reality, while we kind of think that we should not reject this political reality in which we act. We have to accept that, because this parallel action brings no results whatsoever. We want citizen-friendly institutions and that is why we have to work with them and we need to support women, regardless of the party that they belong to, so that they can fight for such a world. And I really think that this is a different approach when compared to what are the general principles of the civil society, to reject any kind of action through the political system and parties, and to a priori criticise all things institutional and mainstream. I really think that this is what differentiates the women’s approach and the general approach. Because it did happen and we criticised it many times when some other

organisations made conferences and gatherings on peace and reconciliation and they generally have male plenary speakers and participants. And the most frequent answer that we received, and this is really horrible, was that there were no adequate and competent women to talk about these issues, while the second most frequent answers was that women refused to talk about that. But I think that this is actually the path of least resistance. To this very day, in civil society, we have this divergence between the women's movement and the general civil society movement, and they do not operate in opposition, but rather in parallel. It is simply as two parallel worlds, while we work on the same issues anyway, and it's always really hard to reconcile some of the clashing aspects. And there are actually some exceptions, they sometimes even call women activists to talk about these issues, but these are mainly isolated cases, and there's no solid approach to cooperation, and I believe that this is the very reason that contributes to us not having a greater influence in the context of peace and reconciliation in civil society in general, not only in B&H, but also in the region. I believe that the same thing happens in Serbia, Montenegro, and Croatia. It is as if this patriarchal mentality has been translated into the civil society sector, that's how I see that.

One of the interviewees, in addition to the aforementioned crossing of borders, where women were pioneers, names another characteristic of the wom-

en's approach: creation of common spaces and narratives opposing the hierarchies of victims and experiences administered by different points of the seemingly dispersed political power, which *inter alia* leads to the negation of different experiences, i.e. their different evaluations:

[W]e were truly always the first to cross borders and to jointly define the narrative, meaning to believe that each of our experiences is of equal worth regardless of the side on which it originated, that each and every one of us has her story, her pain, her courage and her emotions, and that all these emotions are equal, they have equal weight and equal strength, and that we must respect lived experience. That we must talk about our experiences and that we actually have a responsibility towards new generations to talk about our experiences and repeat, always repeat the lessons learned, both positive and negative ones, and, of course, to talk about the positive aspects of survival and everything that we did.

Our youngest interviewee shaped her answer on the theoretical level, highlighting the problem of scientific disciplines, especially security studies, being masculine, and also emphasising that, in addition to institutional level, the women's approach also implies direct work in the field, which was also mentioned by other respondents as one of the crucial characteristics:

Absolutely one of my greatest inspirations is Cynthia Enloe. Her theory, in my opinion, es-

entially describes the very thing that is happening right now, that needs to be acted on (...) I don't know whether I would necessarily call it feminist, or perhaps feminine, and I think that we should start defining this more in international studies, political sciences, etc. (...) International security is quite a young discipline and it is exceptionally masculine still. Even the manner in which all the streams and theories within international security are divided, is essentially masculine, while Cynthia Enloe offers this feminine perspective on what is and what needs to be, and when I say feminine, I think that she takes into account not only those rigid structures and their dynamics as is the case in some theoretical approaches, but that she really takes into account the global picture and the dynamics between the micro-sociological levels of analysis and the grand structure (...). So, for me, the feminist approach to peace here is the only possible approach, and it involves more hope in institutions and holding them accountable, but on the other hand, also an incremental, bottom-up work with individuals from the communities in the field.

The great majority of the interviewed offers direct work with people, especially victims and survivors, as the crucial distinguishing characteristic of women's activism in civil society, and dealing with problems and essential issues that institutions neglect as unimportant or push under the rug. Breaking different taboos and transgressing borders on different levels is also character-

istic of the women's approach, and two activists described activities in which different groups were involved with the aim of diversifying the experience. The activism also contributed to overcoming prejudices and identifying what was human in every person, the fact that one of the interviewees quoted as perhaps the most important aspect of women's peacebuilding activism:

In the dire wartime circumstances, for periods of time that I spent in my hometown, I really believed that there were aliens, rather than humans living across the border, as I couldn't understand how anyone could allow for such things to happen. But then you realise that not all of them are aliens, when you meet the people, men and women, putting up equal resistance, equally courageous, to the wartime events, just like you on the other side of the border. You try to survive and they try to offer you support in your survival. And then, when you work on peacebuilding in the post-war period, during the transition (once again, I must stress that these are the phrases that make my skin crawl), you unfortunately can't be like the majority, the majority of common citizens simply thrown into the bag, and accept that what political leaders say is the default and take all this for granted.

Almost all the interviewed activists in responding to this question refer to initiatives *Women's Court* (*Ženski sud*) and *Peace with a Woman's Face* (*Mir sa ženskim licem*), and in their insights concerning these activities, they articulate the

differences as they see them, between the institutional approach and the approach by civil society, especially its feminist part.

(...) when peacebuilding is concerned, this is where women in Black have indeed made great things. I always mention them, but they really created a great boom in Serbia (...) and when I think about regional cooperation between B&H and Serbia, I always remember *Women's Court - A Feminist Approach to Justice*, organised in Sarajevo in 2015, and it's quite emotional, and I now might start to cry, but this Court, which gathered women from Croatia, Serbia, Montenegro, Macedonia, Kosovo, and Bosnia [and Herzegovina] showed me that we were really outside of the planning of the 1990s wars, and that we have absolutely never divided along the national or ethnic lines, or on any other basis. Instead, we have been connected and united in our common narrative, i.e. that the war eroded everything, especially the position of us, women, and that we didn't participate in the planning of this war, nor did we wish for it to happen, while on the other hand, we faced enormous loss, and were its collateral damage to the greatest possible extent. So this event, for example, was a great inspiration for me, as I realised how connected we were regionally, and what still inspires me is the extent to which women peacemakers from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia keep mutually connecting to this very day, holding regional meetings, etc. Those joint reactions, especially public announcements, are impor-

tant really, but what needs to be particularly stressed is that the regional cooperation between B&H and Serbia is largely visible. We have yet another annual commemoration of the Srebrenica Genocide approaching, just this Sunday, on 11 July, and the Women in Black never stopped coming and mothers of the enclave of Srebrenica always welcome them. This is what's important for me, in the context of these women who survived sexual abuse and wartime torture, from Bosnia [and Herzegovina] and from Serbia, that they preserved their cooperation. So this is a picture that needs to be sent out, especially to politicians, to show them ways of overcoming these barriers and borders, regardless of the fact that these are women who generally either lost someone, or were themselves victims of different kinds of wartime violence, rape, or any other crime, any other war crime.

(...) the thing for me was this exhibition *Peace with a Woman's Face*, a warm, human and humane, women's story, and an instance of breaking down the prejudice of women as the weaker sex, as all these women had survived the flames of war, so to say, had had their hopes shattered, and they all managed to rise as phoenixes, managed to lead their children to the right path, as we say, and managed to preserve their humanity, as they are all human rights champions and peacemakers. And this is something that I take as the most beautiful message of this exhibition, *Peace with a Woman's Face*, because this initiative started in 2013, and

we continued onwards, now we implement some other activities, but we have all stayed together, we are all support to one another and we are all peacemakers.

*Formal and/or Informal Approach.
Institutional vs. Civil*

The institutional approach to peacebuilding gives rise to certain scepticism among the general population; e.g. research on reconciliation processes has shown that official decision-makers, i.e. politicians, are far less trusted than other actors in these processes (Wilkes, 2013: 6). That the institutional approach has almost completely failed is explained in the following way by an interviewee of the younger generation:

[T]here is a great difference, by which I mean that institutional approaches to peacebuilding only observe the legislation and have done absolutely nothing in the processes of facing the past. So, I dare say there has been absolutely none, speaking of the legislative, 'cause as far as we can see there is not any strategy for victims and nothing even in the laws of the Republic of Srpska about the women who suffered wartime rape and so on; so, the institutional approach completely failed in this respect, and I have to admit, without this non-governmental approach, which took over the role of the state to the greatest possible extent - we know that non-governmen-

tal organisations made big things after the war. We can now debate on the ways in which they did it, whether it was transparent, it can all be discussed, but they did make great improvements through various donations and restructuring and reconstruction, and so on. And in my opinion, this institutional approach to reconciliation remained focused on houses only, as in: let us fix your houses, and it absolutely did not touch any other segment. So, it did not touch on the education system to see what the books are like from which children continue learning, it did not touch on history to make sure there is a single history of what happened in the nineties, it did not touch on the souls of people, the PTSD - no one talked about it and institutions did not work on any strategic programmes to come up with some answers and plans. Not to mention memorialisation because we still have memorials with fascist insignia, not to speak of the war criminals who came back after having served their sentences into their former local communities, which is yet another example of re-traumatisation of the victims who are also there. No one talks about it, they have simply just embarked on this process of reconstructing facilities after 1995 and took no interest in people.

On the other hand, civil society is not a clear-cut, homogenous concept, and neither is women's activism. Some women's associations, for example, reproduce patriarchal norms (Popov-Momčinović, 2013: 176), which is especial-

ly characteristic of some rural and smaller local communities in which these activists reproduce ethnical stereotypes too, creating divisions into “our” and “their” women, to which, truth be told, women’s organisations from urban centres are also not entirely immune (Helms, 2010: 19).

An activist expresses scepticism for the very concept of institutional approach:

I have a problem with the terminology of institutional peacebuilding because I don’t believe institutions can build peace; they can only provide incentive and support to building peace because I believe that in many people’s view, not only mine, peace is above all the state of the spirit.

Institutions are similarly not homogenous, and through their answers, activities, and thinking, activists question the possibilities and reaches of the so-called *gender mainstreaming*, starting from local communities and all the way to the so-called state leadership and other states’ leadership:

(...) we are currently active in 5 cities per canton, 3 local communities each, which is 3 times 5, that is 15 local communities in which we give education on the 5 models, from the problem of discrimination, through women victims of domestic violence, workplace mobbing, women’s cooperation with the authorities, to developing ecofeminism, and finally we will end it by hav-

ing these 15 local communities in 5 cities make 5 activities that women perceive as necessary for their environment to improve life in the local community. Because our local communities have been occupied by men, those beer-drinking domino-cards-chess players, and if a woman happens to appear there, they immediately assign her to make coffee, and this is something that we won't let happen any longer, we fight against it, and in these circumstances it is not enough, but with our state-level politics this is the only place into which we can bring women and where they can experience some positive effects and impacts of their work, because anything more than this is extremely difficult.

Say, what I have dealt with and found interesting, women entering high politics - it has in no way contributed to the building of the culture of peace that Kolinda Grabar Kitarović was the President of Croatia, that Brnabić is the Prime Minister of Serbia, that Željka Cvijanović is the president of the Republic of Srpska and Biserka Turković the Minister of Foreign Affairs (...)

The question of institutions is problematized by pointing out to how gender centres work and the way that party-related bodies such as women's forums function:

[W]e now have something like this Gender Centre, and as for that, whenever they contacted me, I was shocked at their non-feminist ways of address. We have these forums of women in

the parties, and they are all darling ladies who exchange Viber messages and recipes, they have their pretty women forums, and so on, it is like 8 March and the like. I mean, I really feel very tender about all that, I call it *hankapaldumism*, [after the singer Hanka Paldum], really, it is a sort of defence mechanism, and it can really be used in smart ways, but then again, it would simply be wonderful if those women who were building peace and fought for it during the 1990s were recognised as the principal members of our today's society - and as it is, even I don't know their names.

A younger generation activist speaks about the misuse of the synergy between the public and the private, the state and the civil. She also observes the institutional segment through the prism of labour and matrix of donors, emphasising that the state often unconsciously assumes those neo-liberal matrices, and what is to any extent institutionally resolved as regards women's rights (such as maternity leave, for example) is largely inherited from the previous system.

The absence of women, that is, the way in which women's presence in politics is manifested regarding their number, the decisions they support, and, finally, what they actually symbolise, produces disappointment on the one hand, but also motivation on the other, a reason not to give up:

So, in the formal war-related procedures, women are largely missing, which gives me, as a peace activist, a feminist as well as a law-

yer, a motive to put an effort in every aspect, not just in these written and public policies but also in all social segments, to point out the importance of women's visibility and their contribution's visibility. And this is basically my peacebuilding work, which is woven into all segments of what I do.

We have quite a variety of the scene, what the activists in the field of human rights, women's human rights, peace movements, and feminist orientation expect and what politicians do in governmental institutions, these sometimes converge to the effect of getting ad hoc support, but I do not believe there is any deep understanding and acknowledging of perspectives. I think it is more likely that the civil sector always hopes and lobbies for a greater visibility of women, their presence on the political scene, and it is always accompanied with this hope that things will perhaps be different (...)

On the other hand, women are not in politics only in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Croatia, and the other countries in the region; they are in politics everywhere in the world, influencing decision-making which affects Bosnia and Herzegovina, a country that still dwells in a kind of *Daytonia*,¹⁹ a protected state in the international community:

Two years ago in Geneva I witnessed the lobbying of certain women activists and diplomats

19 Phrase coined by peace studies professor Nerzuk Ćurak.

from Western countries for a reduction of the scope of women's rights, regarding the right to contraception, the right to make decisions about their own lives. In the forum, an international forum where people from over 100 countries were present, this person worked with her vocabulary, her attitude and so on, on changing the opinion of women's rights activists! And you, just sitting there in the auditorium watching what is going on. I was so shocked and could not believe they had gained access to those forums. Well, how can I even speak about it, women's rights - there's no negotiation about women's rights! And those same people then sitting in the company of their country's diplomats, and you know that in no time these countries will impose veto on certain humanitarian and development programmes, or that some person over there who decides about my life will order things to be the way they want.

Three activists from all three generations point out that the institutional approach sometimes appropriates women's activist initiatives to the effect of placing them within the framework suitable to the governing matrices, and they also list different forms of manipulation, stressing that in a seemingly paradoxical way women's peace activism has been used to maintain the status quo:

It is recognised and also used for some manipulative purposes; when needed, this happens, as we can show (...)

Such are all activist initiatives, rare were the ones that did not have this good humane action. Most of these peace initiatives that have been undertaken and that originated from the non-governmental sector or directly from activism, all of them had a good purpose, but a lot of them naturally did not come to life or become institutional part of the policies. Some did but to the extent that suited the institutional representatives. And, of course, most of these initiatives that were recognised were only recognised during the electoral campaigns with the aim of obtaining votes (...)

I am one of those women who were manipulated during the signing of the Dayton Agreement and Paris Protocol. We were invited by what was then so to say the government of Bosnia and Herzegovina to come to Sarajevo and in a way support the signing of the agreement, and we very gladly accepted, we came to Sarajevo only to attend a happening there that was not explained to us at all while we were unable to understand what it was about; we had not been given enough details. Later we realised that we were not consulted in any way although activists and women's organisations had worked very hard during the war. We worked on support for the survivors, victims, on humanitarian activities, and so on, and we were in no way consulted in the course of the preparations for the Dayton Agreement, in no way present during the negotiations, in no way present during the signing. From this point of view, if there is anything I can say about it, I can

share the key lesson that we learnt, which is that we have to speak about our experiences!

Borders between the institutional and activist approaches are, as stated by a pioneer, porous in this case too, which an activist from the middle generation has interpreted as, generally speaking, carrying the patriarchal model over to the civil society. What activists themselves go on questioning is whether peace with a woman's face can further be built through civil society only, without the presence of the institutional. Two of the interviewees consider themselves explicitly institutional activists, stressing that any parallelism between the civil and formally political is futile, which also pervades the others' considerations though not as explicitly. It seems there is a division here into two factions. According to one, any great achievements of the feminist peace activism are in the end disarmed and reduced to the margins within the existing institutional framework, e.g.:

(...) not sufficient without the top-level of the political, military, economic and diplomatic decision-making. So, I was a participant in all peace demonstrations before the war, I held hands, I made circles around places of religious worship all around Sarajevo during the war, so, I did all there was to be done, and what happened - nothing. What remains is a nice picture, one's experience, self-respect knowing you have been consistent, but without

the institutional support the non-institutional thing is not enough (...)

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According to the other, despite all this, efforts should still be put in promoting the practices of gender mainstreaming and, in particular, equal participation of women in decision-making processes. To this effect, particularly important are the personal examples set by some educated and enlightened politicians who have managed to step out of the political mainstreaming in which gender is fragmentarily and manipulatively treated. According to one of the interviewees, such individual women are exposed to different forms of pressure and violence, and should therefore be additionally supported because they are lonely:

If we had more of those Mirjanas and Selmas and other women, well, it would all be a lot more different, these women are lonely, and when you are lonely, it does not matter how strong you are - it is more difficult for you to handle it. More women are needed without any doubt, and I think that this should be our main activity, that we should all pull our socks up, because if a body cannot be formed without this person or that, it can definitely not be formed without women (I don't know where they came up with 40% when there's 51% of us!). Well if it cannot be formed it doesn't have to be, but there has to be 50% of us, and then we could mark our territory in all women's non-governmental organisations (...)

Both of these conditionally speaking factions, categorised differently for the sake of analysis, converge at one point, which is the belief in pronounced parallelism between what institutions have been doing and what represents women's peace politics.

This is why answers to the question "what would be different if more women had been included in institutional processes" additionally explain the stated problems and arguments. On this point too activists reject any gender essentialism referring to some kind of women's peaceful nature given per se, which society acknowledges "but only insofar as it is kept as a decoration in the description of woman, at a safe distance from society and system" (Perković, 2008: 307). There have been women on the other side too, that of warriors (e.g. the case of Biljana Plavšić), but they are visible in the patriarchal matrix because they shock us and disturb the "normal" limits of femininity (McLeod, 2019: 671). Those activists who defined themselves as institutional activists, that is, those who work on empowering women in politics through gender mainstreaming, still suppose that many things would probably be different, among other things, because

(...) what research has shown is that women are too fair to avoid deciding about some particularly important issues outside those political frameworks. So I believe that what was agreed in pubs and inns in the 1990s when draft agreement was made, on what territory and what

size of the land would belong to whom - I believe women would probably not decide on these things outside their political seats, and on the other hand, if you decide on something as part of a political body, the media also have access to this information and through them everyone would have access.

Those activists who were sceptical, bearing in mind that patriarchal structures absorb women's capacities including peace into their patriarchal frameworks, underline what actually all interviewees have stressed as important. Which is continual education of women in respect of their rights and strengthening their political capacities, considering that during the war women were mere objects and means to conduct destructive politics, the fact the masking of which was attempted by co-opting *some* women for political processes. Such forms of co-opting have been going on after the war, which is particularly obvious in the context of the challenges of the new right-wing populism.

Challenges of the New Right-wing Populism

New trends on the global scene, known as the new right-wing populism, have been creating new and, as most of the interviewees claimed, unfavourable frameworks for women's peace activism. On the other hand, in this part of the world these trends are obviously a simple continuation of the politics that has not changed for thirty years:

[I]t seems to be a turn to the right, towards the conservative, but in Bosnia and Herzegovina even these democratic parties, leftist parties, all parties for that matter, all have become right-wing. In all stages since the nineties, they have managed to switch allegiances in no time for the sake of their positions; they have no dignity and know no shame, nor do they have a strongly built political platform; they can shift in no time and run away to the right because it's easiest to rule a people from that side (...) This politics of manliness, coloured nationally only to hide the corruption and thievery, it does not consider women or faith or God - nothing at all except how to find the easiest way with least work to hide all their thievery because all they've been doing since the nineties is hassle us. It's a real hassle! Regardless of whether there's any reason and common sense, they have been reining us in, using our money and our means in their saddle, and behind it all there are these slogans of God and my people. Everyone is already sick and tired of these people, every single man and let alone woman or child or anyone from other marginalised groups of our society.

Different challenges are also illustrated, especially in the regional context, in which they might easily affect Bosnia and Herzegovina:

[Y]ou see what is happening with the Declaration of Istanbul. God forbid that Croatia or Serbia should introduce the law against abortion - if it was introduced on Monday in Croatia or Ser-

bia, it wouldn't take longer than Friday that same week for it to be enacted in Bosnia and Herzegovina. And I think all women share solidarity on this issue because the pressure is really great, because the Balkans need new military. They need it because they want new wars and naturally they don't want their children to fight them, or even worse, themselves to fight them. This poor miserable army should be born of the women of the Balkans, and the easiest way is prohibiting abortion, absolutely the easiest. These questions are always hanging over our heads, like the sword of Damocles, and we constantly monitor what is happening in Serbia and what in Croatia, because we know it would immediately be welcomed in Bosnia and Herzegovina. 101

Two of the activists do not think there is sufficient amount of consciousness in our countries of these problems, and that a strategy should be built for responding to such conservative counter-strikes. They stress that as society we are generally insufficiently educated and uninformed about geopolitical events and the global processes which in different ways, consciously or not, include us too:

(...) and it is a great shame that we do not deal more with these problems, and even that man (...) who was carrying the flag during the great protests in the USA two years ago, that man comes from these parts (...). We do not know and I don't think we understand, we are unfortunately not sufficiently educated to comprehend what happens geopolitically around the world

although these things bear relevance to our daily lives.

[W]e have to take a stance in this respect strategically. It is about having to talk about these problems, having to prepare (...). These organisations are very strong in Serbia, and also in Croatia there was a protest that even initiated the constitutional referendum about the questions of marriage and life and everything, so it's not that we are talking about something that happens on the other side of the planet. It is very close to us; we share the same mentality as well as political reality, so I think we have to be readier for what awaits us. We have to be aware that these things are not so distant, and we are somehow lulled into not seeing the things that happen around us and do in fact affect us. We have to be readier to respond to the problems and challenges, deal with them together and have some strategies of acting and also strategies of caring for ourselves. We also have the responsibility to protect one another and there has to be solidarity among us; I am not saying there is no strong solidarity, but it has to be more visible.

The question that is posed is how to resist and with what strategies apart from the mentioned feminist solidarity. According to the youngest interviewed woman, progressive movements, including the feminist one, become a reaction to what is going on, framed within the boundaries of decency and political correctness, whereas right-wing populists do not have any moral inhibitions:

[I]t is really clear that they have developed 103
certain strategies such as, say, labelling
some groups, for example as “Soros’s people,”
and then targeting the groups based on some
affects they have dragged out from history,
context, and what not, and we actually lag be-
hind them, and I find it horrible to see that
peace activists here have now mostly become a
reaction to these people (...). I can even give
a specific example: say, when the whole thing
about fake news started and debunking fake
news was initiated on the other hand, there
was a video of a young man who took fake news,
said it was fake, then described why it was
fake. That is not efficient because it is the
way in which things could have once been re-
solved, but what is in my opinion a proactive
approach now is to ignore the fake news and
use the same sensationalist style of the fake
news to write the truth - this is something we
desperately need. I mean, there are people who
really try hard, but it somehow seems to me
that feminists and often all the progressive
movements in general have this need to remain
decent... to promote some nice values, which at
this moment in time seems overly sterile and
is therefore not attractive to people.

COVID-19 Pandemic: Violence Exposure, Humanitarian Action

Like right-wing populism, the pandemic moves beyond
borders and imposes new challenges and limitations
to women’s peace activism. Some of the interviewed

activists made direct comparisons between the pandemic and the wartime period in respect of the general uncertainty that characterises both, as well as the trend pertinent to both the pandemic and the war, of women performing a great deal of humanitarian work. In this they recognised women's strength and the so-called ethics of care, but also the danger immanent in patriarchal society's penchant for reducing women's activism, again, to the humanitarian. One of the interviewees stated that the decisions made by the authorities had not even considered the needs of civil society and organisations, which also confirmed the previously mentioned gap between the institutional and activist approach, involving, even today, a great lack of understanding due to the failure to appreciate activists' contribution.

And while the war exposed the true essence of patriarchy, spilling the tolerated domestic violence onto the public forum (Iveković, 2000: 24), the pandemic exposed the extent to which we had actually remained a society of gender inequality, as different measures that were imposed (such as, e.g. restriction of movement) never took into consideration the consequences to marginal groups, especially women exposed to or at risk of domestic violence. According to an interviewed pioneer:

[E]verything was exposed during the pandemic just as it had been during the war. Violence against women, their weaker position in the labour market, their weaker position as regards the opportunity to profile their professional interests, promotions; so to speak, in all the

spheres, from domestic to political life, the essential economic and political inequality of men and women was once again exposed. 105

In this exposure of the actual position and role of women in society during the COVID pandemic, the youngest interviewee recognised strength and the fact that we had returned to the basic unsolved questions:

(...) but I am very glad that this whole debate about TERF and such things settled down a bit due to COVID and I feel that COVID took things back to the basics that had been unresolved, such as the division of household work, domestic violence, the economic status of women in our countries, such things. I mean, when that debate was launched and became the craze in the Balkans, I found it so funny to see some women whose neighbours get beaten around the clock by their husbands having these discussions about something called TERF; well, there was something I was actually very happy to see reset by the coronavirus - it showed us again what we actually talk about.

Such a return to the basic topics should not be observed without attention to the ability of activists themselves to address these topics in the proper manner. It is not only about changing ways, the so-called “zooming” and the internet burnout, which did enable a renewal of some feminist ties due to a large number of online conferences. An activist whose organisation works with women victims of domestic violence gave a detailed description

of the problems faced by the women who had left safe houses immediately before the breakout of the pandemic, as well as the additional psychological pressures upon these women:

I was especially affected by this in the context of my work with the victims of domestic violence since the United Women Foundation works a lot with women who have suffered violence. We had specific examples of women who lost jobs because of the pandemic, who had recently left safe houses, separated from the violent offender and then could not provide food for their family. Of women who were put on hold or lost jobs and whose existence was threatened. Or women and children in safe houses who wondered what would happen to them where they were, if the man would be sentenced, if the process would ever be finalised, where they would go and if they would be expelled from the safe house - they wondered about these and similarly horrible things. So we had to put in some extra effort for the sake of their safety and mental health; we had to provide psychological support while we were ourselves threatened. This affected women in Bosnia and Herzegovina a lot, but it also affected activists. It was just that so many questions were raised, and some of the questions about which we had achieved certain progress now again became problematic, as regards the protection of women against violence, the operation of courts, of centres for social work, which were completely closed for their beneficiaries, did not give any priority to those women whose

rights were under threat, and did not perceive women and children victims of violence as someone who should be protected against the risks they might suffer being closed in their homes with violent people. So, I think that the effects of COVID are yet to be felt in the field of our work and activism. 107

Activists were consequently faced with different forms of burnout, burdened with the worry about the vulnerable categories of women, whereby their own health and psychological state were in danger:

[G]reat and all-encompassing changes took place; unfortunately, apart from being active activists working on a myriad of different issues, we are all still parts of our families, and many of our families were afflicted by COVID; some of us had COVID and unfortunately have not recovered successfully, this is also something we have to take into account when considering what happens next. We have to reassess our actual women's physical strength and see if and to what extent we can keep going the way we did before COVID, if I may say so. First we need to analyse this thoroughly, and only then regard our possibilities and make a new plan of action.

New challenges also arouse hope of new forms of cooperation, especially with the regional activists. And while Serbia's government leadership strives to present itself as the "regional leader" with, among other things, welcoming everyone from neighbouring countries, regardless of which one, to get

vaccinated, that same regime advocates all those false values that are exactly opposite to women's peace politics. And while some of Bosnia and Herzegovina's activists underline that they have learned a lot from activists, especially peace activists, from Serbia through constant exchange of experiences and equality in defining needs by creating common spaces, the institutions of both countries have strived to violently suppress women's peace activism in war and in its aftermath alike, or perhaps used it to settle the accounts of recent and distant past. Despite or because of this, women's approach to peacebuilding does not cease and includes also a wide scope of struggles against forced marginalisation:

As I see this road we took, if we now stopped, it would be as if we had done nothing at all; wasn't I right to say I would be doing this as long as I live (...) they are desperate for us to stop working on it, they wish with all their hearts to put women back into religious institutions and turn them into those humanitarians who go around distributing parcels, visiting the sick in hospitals, and it's all fine with me, but woman's place is in the construction of Bosnia and Herzegovina's society, in building peace and better life, in building more just family relationships based on gender equality.

Serbia

“The bodies (and souls) of us all have been butchered, and we are all (whether we know it or not) refugees forced to leave our homes - our inner selves that we naively believed belonged to us only. The nation took them away from us. Why and where? It is not known, just as the future cannot even be imagined; the only thing left is to suffer the present that spreads death and destruction. Many things, perhaps worse things, will happen, but tolerance, understanding, civil order - and peace - will only come last. If they come at all.”

Žarana Papić, 1992

Twenty-six years have passed since the genocide in Srebrenica. Officials from Belgrade were not present at the commemoration in Potočari. Ana Brnabić, Serbia's Prime Minister, on that occasion said: "I would not attend although I do express great sorrow; what happened in Srebrenica is a terrible crime, and I have no problems with showing my sorrow and respect for all the victims, but until everyone is brought to justice who attacked the Serbian President, then Prime Minister, when he went there to pay his respect to the victims, their families, and the Bosniak people, I really do not see that any of us officials belong there."¹

This inarticulate statement is important on several levels. Although its focus is on the President, who is used as an alibi for the (mis)deed - which is the current government's general pattern of action - it does not essentially deviate from the language of the Declaration on Srebrenica that was in 2010 voted by a narrow majority at the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia. In the Declaration, 'Srebrenica' is defined as a place of *crime*; this crime was determined by the International Court of Justice, and it is denounced along with the processes that led to the belief that national interests are best defended with force and physical violence. The Declaration text also contains the words *condolences* and *apologies*, as well as an invitation for all the parties to continue the reconciliation process so that the committed crimes would never be repeated. However, eleven years ago, Ratko Mladić was still free, and the

1 Jutro (Morning) Programme, Prva TV, 11 July 2021.

promise of locating and arresting him could have been taken as a pledge declared by the Republic of Serbia for the stated reconciliation process.² What is curious about this short administrative statement is its fourth and last point, in which the National Assembly expresses the expectation that others will likewise condemn the crimes committed against members of the Serbian people and also extend apologies and condolences to the families of Serbian victims.³ This *quid pro quo* logic overshadows the initial intention and equates all war crimes that come to be, so to say, coincidentally referred to by the name of 'Srebrenica'. Hence, "horrible" and "gruesome" it may be, and even bigger than all the others, but this crime is still not genocide according to the Declaration, and no true reconciliation can be achieved until everyone kneels down before everyone else. Eleven years later, especially now that Montenegro and Kosovo have adopted Resolutions by which denying the genocide in Srebrenica is forbidden, it transpires that this logic is unsustainable in a continuous peacebuilding process.

Members of the Assembly from the Serbian Progressive Party did not vote for the Declaration on Srebrenica in 2010. Despite a new party, different rhetoric, and the ambiguously conciliatory atti-

2 Ratko Mladić was arrested one year later, in May 2011, and then President of Serbia and the initiator of the Declaration on Srebrenica Boris Tadić on that occasion said: "We ended a difficult time and managed to remove the stain from Serbia and its people." (Ratko Mladić uhapšen u Srbiji [Ratko Mladić Arrested in Serbia], *Slobodna Evropa*, 26 May 2011)

3 Declaration of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia Condemning the Crime in Srebrenica: 20/2010-3.

tude, the current president of both the party and the state Aleksandar Vučić has remained the same person that, standing at the speaker's rostrum at the Assembly in 1995, declared: "If you kill one Serb, we shall kill one hundred Muslims, and then we'll see whether the international community or anyone else can attack Serbian posts."⁴ At that same rostrum, Vučić said in 2007 that "the offices of our party at the Assembly of Serbia are and will be a 'safe house' for Ratko Mladić. My home, and all the homes of the Vučić family - and our family is not a small one - will also be safe houses for general Ratko Mladić, man hunted only because he was protecting his country. I am proud of it and ready to bear the consequences."⁵ The metaphor is not coincidental - it was precisely at that time that the first safe house in Serbia was being built,⁶ though not for generals on the run but for women and children victims of domestic violence. 113

Two facts make this anniversary of 'Srebrenica' special. The first is that Ratko Mladić has been lawfully sentenced to lifetime imprisonment because of the Srebrenica genocide and war crimes in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The second is that Serbia is for the first time in history ruled by a sort of "women's government": led by the Prime Minister with 10 women among 23 ministers. Additionally, women make up as much as 45.8% of the total number of MPs and

4 Video available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UGqv9CJbd3U&ab_channel=shiomiga1djura

5 Beta, 4 October 2007.

6 A. Apostolovski, Prva sigurna kuća (The First Safe House), *Politika*, 20 October 2007.

ministers.⁷ In the context of the present research, the second fact would have to be featured prominently although the quoted statement by Ana Brnabić does not contribute to any such expectations.

Media Vignette from Serbia

The news of Ratko Mladić's verdict was published in all Serbian media, with more or less precision regarding the content of the indictment, more or less cheering enthusiasm, and more or less trivial details (such as the one about the ring that helped informants identify him in hiding).⁸ *Telegraf* did not even mention the word 'genocide'; *Informer* reported from Kalinovik, Mladić's birthplace, and reminded of the general's four wishes expressed upon his detention;⁹ *Politika* ended the news with the statement that "General Mladić calmly listened to the verdict in the courtroom,"¹⁰ while *Blic* stressed that he had been smiling and waving to the camera.¹¹ A day before, *Novosti* reminded its read-

7 Jovana Stanković, Od ukupnog broja poslanika i ministara u Srbiji skoro 46 odsto su žene (Almost 46% of Women in the Total Number of Serbian MPs and Ministers), *Danas*, 12 March 2021.

8 Ratko Mladić pravosnažno osuđen na doživotnu kaznu zatvora (Ratko Mladić Lawfully Sentenced to Lifetime Imprisonment), *Telegraf*, 8 June 2021.

9 Mladić osuđen na doživotnu robiju! Haški sud nije imao milosti prema generalu! (Mladić Sentenced to Life in Prison! The Hague Court Showed No Mercy for the General!), *Informer*, 8 June 2021.

10 Ratku Mladiću potvrđena doživotna kazna (Ratko Mladić's Lifetime Imprisonment Confirmed), *Politika*, 8 June 2021.

11 G.N., Ovako je reagovao Ratko Mladić u trenutku kada mu saopštavaju da je definitivno osuđen na doživotnu robiju (This Is How Ratko Mladić Reacted When Told He Was Definitely Sentenced to Lifetime in Prison), *Blic*, 8 June 2021.

ership of “the general’s most powerful statements in the courtroom,” stating that the make-believe court that he does not recognise sentenced him to lifetime imprisonment “without rhyme or reason, just because he was defending his country and people from NATO,” not allowing the fragile Serbs to be thrown into pits as they were in Jasenovac.¹² Instead of treating this verdict as the removal of the stain from the Serbian people, as the former President of Serbia wished, it is today treated as the ultimate form of injustice which that same people meets with dignity or defiance. Mladić is becoming a hero for the generations that can just barely and vaguely remember the bombing of 1999, and have no recollections of what preceded it, for whom Srebrenica is the word of accusation, and the mention of ‘genocide’ intolerable form of humiliation and degradation of the living Serbs and Serbian victims from the same war. The last 26 years have also blurred the line between the Serbs from the Republic of Serbia, who reached Bosnia and Herzegovina via military and paramilitary routes, and those who lived in Bosnia and killed or were killed in its territory. In the general equalisation of historical and geographic facts, Mladić has become the symbol of the fight against NATO, and 11 July equatable with every crime against anyone. 115

This is confirmed by newspaper articles published in Belgrade on that day. Apart from *Danas*, the

¹² Ratko Mladić nije hteo da se pokori Hagu: Najmoćnije izjave generala u sudnici (Ratko Mladić Refuses to Yield to The Hague: General’s Most Powerful Statements from the Courtroom), *Novosti online*, 7 June 2021. <https://www.novosti.rs/vesti/politika/1004485/ratko-mladic-nije-hteo-pokori-hagu-najmocnije-izjave-general-a-sudnici-video>

only newspaper that writes about the Serbia of today - accentuating the consequences of denying the genocide¹³ - there are no texts that in any way deal with the "crime" in Srebrenica. There is no information about marking the anniversary in Potočari - about what happened and why, and why it is important - except casually mentioning who will attend (which is this year, after the "Montenegrin Resolution," crucial to adding strain to the neighbourly relationships and increasing the rhetoric of everyone being against us).¹⁴ Instead of reporting on Srebrenica, Politika informs that "by the central memorial cross at the Bratunac cemetery a memorial religious service was performed and respect paid to the 3,267 Serbs who were killed in the Middle Drina region during the last defensive patriotic war,"¹⁵ and this war - which is, so it seems, acquiring a new name - refers to the period between May 1992 and January 1993, when Muslim forces launched at least 60 attacks on unprotected Serbian villages and settlements in the area of

¹³This indeed qualifies this paper as "renegade." *Danas* features a short analysis of the possible regional consequences of denying the genocide (Aleksandra Popović, Srbija će ostati izolovana u regionu zbog negiranja genocida [Serbia To Remain Isolated from Neighbouring Countries for Denying Genocide], *Danas*, 10 November 2021), it announces the meeting of Women in Black at the Republic Square and Zlatko Paković's theatre show *Srebrenica. When We Who Were Killed Rise Up*, alongside Bojan Tončić's long text titled "Innocence without Humanity," where the author states, among other things, that "institutions stand for millions of accomplices who absolutely do not think they share any responsibility, or, more precisely, whose compassion has been amputated by propaganda clichés about the fictional proclamation of Serbs as genocidal people."

¹⁴ M.T., Jake bezbednosne snage na obeležavanju godišnjice (Strong Security at Anniversary Commemoration), *Blic*, 11 July 2021.

¹⁵ Duška Stanišić, Pomen za Srbe stradale u srednjem Podrinju (Memorial Service for Serbs Killed in the Middle Drina Region), *Politika*, 11 July 2021.

Bratunac and Srebrenica. In a completely direct way and using comparison, *Kurir* states the same - foreigners and regional leadership alike avoid to remember the Serbs killed in Bratunac while they go on pilgrimage to the graves of the Bosniak victims of Srebrenica.¹⁶ Counting the present officials, equating the crimes committed in the same area (Srebrenica surroundings), stressing the need to initiate a “new history” in which Serbs are not convicted as criminals even without trial, emphasising, as *Kurir* does, that the possibility of a genocide in Srebrenica is absurd - all this is complemented with “shocking claims of a politician who knows everything about the crime” and “the sinister deal between Clinton and Izetbegović,” on which *Srpski Telegraf* reports.¹⁷ The Serbs who suffered are not talked about, “they remain solely Serbian grief” - that is, as the war of more than three decades ago has now become defensive and patriotic, so the government-related media are creating isolated Serbian grief. *Srpski Telegraf* makes reference to Greif’s commission report, which is little or not known at all to the Serbian public, and the text referring to it does not offer any helpful information. *Informer*, on the other hand, relies on Israeli’s commission, not even dealing with Srebrenica (or Bratunac) and directing attention instead to the role of the West in aggression against the Serbs with the

16 Ivana Kljajić, Tužno (Sad), *Kurir*, 11 July 2021.

17 Tanja Kovačević, Pakovali genocid na ova četiri načina! Čak su i Srbe sahranjivali u Srebrenici (They Staged Genocide in These Four Ways! They Even Buried Serbs in Srebrenica), *Srpski telegraf*, 11 July 2021.

purpose of their ethnical cleansing.¹⁸ Finally, *Novosti* deals with the topic in the most detailed and serious way, featuring two pages in the name of “never-forgetting,” filled with poignant confessions of the families of Serbian victims from the Srebrenica and Middle Drina areas, accompanied with a text authored by the former Minister of Defence and board member of the Serbian Progressive Party, Zoran Đorđević, which stresses that the verdict to Mladić is an “open wound” - all this nestled between an exclusive interview with Oliver Stone, who reveals why Serbs and Russians are bad guys in Hollywood, and the appropriately titled article, “Serbs are First Victims of Genocide,” which relates Serbophobia to anti-Semitism and ends with a reflection of “respectable German intellectuals on the North-Atlantic Treaty Organisation’s aggression against FR Yugoslavia in 1999.”¹⁹

Peacebuilding

To say that society in Serbia today is deeply divided is banal. It is, however, questionable to what extent the old division into first and second

18 M. Dobromirović, Rafael Izraeli iz Komisije za istraživanje stradanja: Zapad u Sarajevo slao mudžahedine da istrebljuju Srbe (Raphael Israeli from the Commission on the Suffering: The West Sent Mujahedeen to Sarajevo to Eradicate Serbs), *Informers*, 11 July 2021.

19 Srđan Mišljenović, Prezime im u trenu ugasili Orićevi krvnici (Their Family Name Was Extinguished in an Instant by Orić’s Executioners); Zoran Đorđević, Srebrenica - ratni zločin, ne i genocide (Srebrenica - War Crime, Not Genocide); Ana Popadić, Intervju: Oliver Stoun (Interview with Oliver Stone); Ivana Stanojević, Srbi su prve žrtve genocida u Evropi (Serbs Are First Victims of Genocide in Europe), Ursula Štefan, Zapad nije briga za NATO zločine (The West Does Not Care about NATO Crimes), *Novosti*, 11 July 2021

Serbia is still justifiable. It is also questionable whether there is any discussion about the key point of conflicts being the choice of dominant narratives and images of the past, since the hovering present has been somewhat imprecisely torn away from the past, and the latter returns on calendar anniversaries when, as this brief overview seems to show, all past becomes one, something, without any context or actors, where absolute forgetting and never-forgetting stand side by side. If 11 years ago a civil war of memory was still waged (Kuljić, 2009), that is certainly not the case anymore. In Serbia, people live in the blaringly stifling present, while the past comes in handy for inciting resentment, strengthening the process of forgetting, or capitalising on insidious guilt through current abuse of and violence against common sense, to which people living in this country are exposed on a daily basis.

Serbia is also a state with two important characteristics. It was defeated in the wars in which it did not participate: during the nineties, the state of war was declared only once in Serbia, for the bombing of 1999. Additionally, Serbia is the last independent state among the successor states to the SFRY and the only one which - thirty years after the breakup of the common country - still has uncertain and on the international level ambiguously treated borders. Although this refers primarily to Kosovo, which is by the Republic of Serbia still treated as Kosmet, symbolically it is also applicable to the Republic of Srpska. It suffices only to think that the issue of peacebuilding does not in fact refer to the relationship

between Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia, but strictly speaking applies only to the authorities in Sarajevo and Belgrade. These two characteristics are crucial to understanding the process of peacebuilding, which is, or should be, initiated by the Republic of Serbia - in both outward and inward direction. If in Bosnia and Herzegovina a sort of reconciliation without peace is taking place (Popov-Momčinović, 2018: 20), what is underway in Serbia is “reconciliation without war.”

In the country that was not at war but came out of wars defeated, denial and violence are being accumulated. The symbolical admission that Srebrenica is a crime, which was made 11 years ago, was made in such a way that the International Court verdict was interpreted arbitrarily, in a gesture that itself called for an equation of this crime and other crimes, which in turn led to the situation that 11 years later the only unfulfilled expectation is for someone to acknowledge “our” victims - the expectation built *on no grounds at all* as the “crime” was in every possible way denied and obliterated. But since the state’s attitude towards the war is (purposely, one would say) confused, since it is still not known what kind of war was waged, by whom and against whom, since this is blurred and moved into ever more distant past, it also remains unknown how the “sadness that only Serbs can feel” can be determined in relation to the borders of the state in which this sadness is nurtured. Instead of tiredness from facing the past, what is in action is - personal, social, as well as state-level - denial of the past, and tiredness from denial, fragmentation,

and arbitrary reading of the past that was never 121
officially dealt with.

Acts on which reconciliation is built - admission, apology, condolences, forgiveness - demand acceptance of what happened and the shaping of emotions in such a way that it can still be lived with. Reconciliation without war - best sustained by the fact that participants in the war have been socially obliterated and made invisible, though not their traumas, which have by now become transposed onto other generations - breeds violent behaviour, the feeling of rejection, never-ending victimisation that moves indefinitely towards the future as well as back into the past. *Peace is not the condition of a country that was not at war in which it was defeated.*

Women in Black standing on the Republic Square in Belgrade every 10 July, thus publicly “saying” for years that genocide did happen in Srebrenica, represent the crucial point in shaping an alternative civil calendar which rejects denial and ethno-nationally signified relativisation of pain (Friedman, 2015: 221). This year’s standing was disturbing. The central black banner, in front of which, as usual, a police cordon was positioned, was saying the unspeakable: Srebrenica - the name of genocide. Along with this truth, which is in Serbia by no means self-explanatory, and based on which Women in Black have for years been labelled as traitors, smaller banners were also held up, with the words “Srebrenica genocide took place with direct support from Serbia” and “Posthumous remains of the killed have been found in over 60

mass graves.” Hence on one side of the cordon unmitigated facts were presented, formulated in accordance with the verdicts of relevant authorities and in the spirit of suffering that marked the most gruesome moments of the 1990s war, whereas on the other side of the cordon flags with Ratko Mladić’s face were flying, with a banner that expressed “our side” of the truth on Srebrenica – “There was no genocide.”²⁰ Although the people gathered here were mostly young men, members of the extreme right groups whose narrative exceeds by far the tragedy of Srebrenica (encompassing Mladić the Serbian hero as well as Chetniks and Kosovo), their essential message expressed the attitude of the present government, clearly formulated by Serbia’s Prime Minister, as well as of the previous ones that stood by the Declaration on the *crime* in Srebrenica.

Women in Serbia and Peacebuilding

Women in Black have to all governments been an unbearable daimonion, the conscience standing silent on the city’s main square (Athanasίου, 2017). Their actions are not only coercion to face the past but also permanently repeated demand for admitting what was done, as well as the real apology which the governments refuse to extend in our name. Nowadays, however, Women in Black are also a persistent war archive – their standing does not

²⁰ Performans Žena u crnom o Srebrenici, prisutni desničari skandirali Ratku Mladiću (Performance by Woman in Black on Srebrenica, Present Right-wing Supporters Chanting to Ratko Mladić), *Danas online*, 10 July 2021, <https://www.danas.rs/drustvo/performans-zena-u-crnomo-srebrenici-na-trgu-desnicari-skandiraju-ratku-mladicu/>

only confirm that the real name of the crime is genocide, but also that there was a war and that Serbia participated in it. Commemorating various events through names of various places from the map of former Yugoslavia reminds citizens of the capital of what they have forgotten, of what was shaped in such a way to be forgotten, suppressed, and denied - to which one reacts with either indifference, because it is not ours, or retribution, because it is ours, in which case it becomes a mixture of Mladić/Kosovo/Košare/Kravica becoming one and the same, the name of defeat in the war that did not happen.

Women in Black are the only group today that was formed in the early 1990s and still does what Jelena Šantić referred to as streaming desperation and horror into “specific work against hatred, nationalism, chauvinism, para-fascism, and violence.”²¹ There have been similar initiatives,²² and the title of an important text that deals with the relationship between war and gender on the Serbian side is still suggestive when it comes to who initiated and maintained the consciousness of the necessity of peace and the horrors of war: in Serbia, the name of the peacemaker was woman (Liht and Drakulić, 1997).

Probably the most significant initiative after the war, which drew a straight line between wartime and living “in peace” happened in Sarajevo in 2015, in

21 Monografija o Jeleni Šantić: Do poslednjeg daha (Monograph on Jelena Šantić: To the Last Breath), *Vreme* 771, 13 October 2005, <https://www.vreme.com/cms/view.php?id=430362&print=yes>

22 See: Žilić, Savić and Milosavljević, 2020: 104-113.

the form of women's court. Women's Court for the countries of former Yugoslavia, the last in a series of such courts around the world and the only one ever held in Europe, started from the following premises. The number of women included in the political processes of decision-making and producing ethnic tensions, as well as in war efforts themselves, as members of the military or paramilitary units, was negligible: designing and waging war on the territory of former Yugoslavia was mostly an exclusively male issue. Rarely, and mostly in a merely indirect way, did women profit on the wartime and subsequent transitional spoils, but they were disproportionately more exposed to poverty and scarcity due to the war, sanctions, and economic restructuring. Women are usually featured in the "women, children, and the elderly" category, which as a rule should offer them a status different from the one pertinent to the men capable of being in the army. And as a prominently featured category, women truly were far more exposed to different forms of material and symbolic degradation of the living conditions, to humiliation, expulsion, dislocation and relocation, molestation, physical violence. Women's bodies were used as weapons and tools of the war, especially in systemic or sporadic rapes, which were treated as a legitimate form of ethnic cleansing. The war in Bosnia, finally, led to rape being recognised as a crime against humanity.

The Women's Court for the countries of former Yugoslavia was also based on the premise that neither the courts of successor countries nor the Hague Tribunal had brought any reparation to the women who had borne a great burden of this war against

civil population and of the incessant militarisation of society. Additionally, there is a feminist premise at the very core of the Women's Court - it was specifically shaped and advocated in Serbia by Women in Black and similar groups - that there is a continuity of violence and injustice even after wars are ended, and that it is based on ethnic homogenisation, militarisation of consciousness, as well as on the negation and relativisation of crime (Zajović and Urošević, 2017).

Where are we today? Considering the media overview from the beginning of this text, it is obvious that peacebuilding process is not over. How is peace built in this country, and how do activists - those belonging to the generations who needed a special permit or a passport to enter Bosnia and Herzegovina - understand peace? How do they understand peace activists' contribution, and do they find this contribution socially respected and politically visible? Is there, according to them, a women's perspective on peacebuilding, and what are its characteristics? These questions were answered by Zorana Antonijević, Zoe Gudović, Anja Ilić, Jelena Memet, Jovana Netković, Iva Parađanin, Žarka Radoja, and Natalija Simović - women engaged in feminist and/or peace movements in Serbia, who were either children or very young women during the war in Bosnia.

What Is Peace?

To the first generation of peace activists, the brutal war happened. It caught them in their former activities, ending the existence of the country

and social-economic system in which they lived. In the middle of the war, Žarana Papić writes from Belgrade:

I find it extremely hard, perhaps even “perverse,” to write about the war and the tragic situation in the former Yugoslavia – with very bleak (if any at all) future. The “perversion,” to explain it briefly, is in the fact that I can still write about this tragedy in the sufficiently safe and civilised circumstances, which *enable me to sit and write in the first place* (Papić, 2012: 180-181).

Feminists in Serbia protested publicly against the war, maintained communication at the time when that was the surest sign of betrayal, distributed food and medications, and provided accommodation for those who were suddenly left without it, and also gave support to the women who had suffered violence, either at the front or “at home.”²³ It was imperative to them that the war should end and the bleak future (if any at all) take place.

The interviewed activists live in that future, in peace. However, they are all shaped by the war, both personally and in respect of their future engagement:

23 *Žene za mir* (Women for Peace) volumes, published by Women in Black, as well numerous other publications such as *Ženske studije* (Women’s Studies), *Feminističke sveske* (Feminist Volumes), *Profemina*, documented these actions in detail, also documenting the desperation, fear, trepidation, and incessant support for the sisters across the border that was precisely at that moment being established in the middle of the former country.

Of peace, that never was there but was a sort of a given, like we are in peace - I started to think when I became an activist... to me, peace activists and feminists are one and the same, they can't be separated. And there simply is no other kind of activism than peace activism. (JN)

It turned out that peace activism is not the activism that ends the actually ongoing war, as the war formally ended twenty, that is, twenty-six years ago. It entails a deeper reach into reality shaped thoroughly and from all sides by war.

Peace does not exist but is something we should all strive toward, as individuals as well as sharers of certain common identities. It entails honesty, rational solution of conflicts, communication as the most perfect tool for understanding among living beings, dedication, and sensitivity for the other... In a way, solidarity and peace are synonyms in my opinion, I see peace as the positive culmination of solidarity and security, which will provide everyone with equal opportunities and equal rights. (IP)

War on the territory of the former country entered the pores of all the societies it struck. No one was spared from the destruction of the connections that only the day before had existed, from transformation of close friends into enemies, from the created hatred, or representations of devastation that shaped the perception of common citizens on a daily basis.

War affects everything, it destroys everything. No one can be “spared” from that. You can only up to a certain moment not be conscious of how much it has affected your life and your personality. There is no other way because society has changed, families have changed. Even if you lived in Belgrade until 1995 and did not feel any wartime actions, you did perhaps see soldiers going to war and coming back from the front, you did see the sanctions in effect, you didn’t have electricity, you saw the protests, you saw those tanks in the streets in 1991... It was enough to be exposed to the news during the nineties, those years of the perversion of informing, in which images of disintegrating dead bodies of our fellow citizens came one after another - it had to affect you (ŽR).

Peace that the interviewees talk about is not reduced to the “liberal-democratic peace” which promises reconciliation and the reconstruction of war-torn societies, relying on participatory democracy, rule of law, and peacebuilding processes that are equally applicable in every part of the world (“peace from IKEA” to be assembled anywhere [Mac Ginty, 2008], not taking into consideration the circumstances based on which peace processes in East Timor should differ from those in Cambodia or Bosnia and Herzegovina - or the different circumstances of individuals who experienced the war “from Belgrade” or “from Sarajevo”). Peace, according to them, has to be related to dedication and solidarity, to making sense again - because “all sense is lost in war” (ZG) - and, finally, to the absence of violence:

There is no true peace until all forms of violence are stopped, until war and warmongering discourses are stopped, as Cynthia Cockburn put it. For me, peace is the absence of all kinds of violence, where I also include violence against women, and economic violence, which addresses social justice and all forms of equality. (ZA)

For the generation of women who lived in peace, in the future that happened to us peace became something more, a much greater demand than ending the war and reconstructing the country: peace is non-violence (ŽR), utopia, a dream, and it has become the most complex “philosophical issue”:

I can address all other concepts except peace because that is for me the most complex in the context of where I grew up and have lived until this very day. I come from the context of Yugoslavia, I was raised in the spirit of socialism, which represented a platform for sharing, understanding, respecting... If we face history, we can see that there was no peace even back then. There were various persecutions of dissidents, different factions, for those not serving the system or supporting the leader, so that brings up the question of what peace is politically. This concept is very elusive. I have never experienced peace, I’ve only dreamt about it. (ZG)

“Liberal peace” easily slipped into non-democratic, illiberal, and neoliberal “peace,” ingrained in the privatisation of social goods (Korać, 2016:

432), into the abolition of the social dimension of citizenry, austerity measures which caused and normalised hyper-poverty, stratifying society into a thin layer of the extremely rich and a humongous number of the so-called losers in the process of transition. This is the reason why well-being and security are constantly questionable in the peace in which we live. According to Jelena Memet,

peace is for me a faraway elusive goal towards which we strive, and which cannot be glimpsed at this moment. For me peace is also the feeling of security and well-being. When I say security, I am not referring to the military forces guarding the borders of a country but economic security, access to healthcare for everyone, the right to have a home, education, life without violence and discrimination. (JM)

Peace as a Generational Issue

Therefore, to the first generation of peace activists the war happened in a brutal way. It ended lives, connections, serenity, everydayness; it tore at the seams of what had been the predictable texture of life. The second (and third) generation of peace activists grew up either with the war or its consequences, which in Serbia - a country that did not participate in the war and was punished most of all for its non-participation, as the often given interpretation of the 1999 NATO intervention goes - are more ambiguous than in the neighbouring countries. Men born in the seventies, especially early and late in the decade, were in

the army when the war broke out in Croatia, that is, in 1998 during the actions in Kosovo which were to bring about the bombing of Serbia. "My generation was decimated" (ZA), people losing lives on the front or at home from the consequences of heroin addiction, or else emigrating to more secure countries - or silenced and unacknowledged if not decimated, left to recover from its war traumas as best it could. Participation in the war, as well as the complete silence about it in the years that followed, are a source of both denial and different forms of violence, starting from domestic and intimate partner violence. 131

The first generation of peace activists has been most often talked and written about. However, in order to understand what it means to build peace and be in the time that seems distant from the perspective of 1992, when Žarana Papić wondered whether there would be any future at all, it is necessary to consider how the war affected those who believe to be building peace today. This question is especially urgent in the context of Serbia, in which there is no single accepted narrative about what happened - in fact, there has never been.

The generation of women born in the SFRY, the last generation of pioneers, witnessed directly or indirectly the violence that for years was turning into a "violent conflict," rolling from one area of the formerly common country to another:

I went to all protests because I believed we had to confront violence. It was always important to me, not letting violence be the

focus of life in this country. And all this time, just like back then, we have been experiencing constant torture and either perfidiously masked or - as in the nineties - open violence. *We are a generation steeped in the normalisation of violence.* If violence is a constant, you cannot say that, hey, you know peace. I don't know peace. (ZG)

However, the younger generations only remember one fragment of the war, which shapes the understanding of Serbia's role in the wars, as well as the extent of the meaning of peace, and in this the state helps them generously, openly instigating the revanchist instead of peace-making attitude towards the earlier times:

I was born in 1995 and have spent all my life so far in Belgrade, so my unmediated memories of war are primarily related to the 1999 NATO bombing. I have pretty vivid recollections of it, and so do, as far as I know, other people of or close to my generation - although we were just kids back then. I would say it has certainly shaped me towards peacebuilding, not as a revanchist, although it was only years after 1999 that I started translating unmediated life experience into one of the reasons of my political engagement. (AI)

It is a lot harder for the generations born in the state that was no longer socialist, although it was still called Yugoslavia, to draw a straight line between war-induced violence and normalised violence, which has become a constituent part of

institutions, memories, and daily behaviour. The line is sometimes difficult to draw in feminist activism itself, where the connection between the nineties peace activism and the current feminist questions can be lost. The reason is not only in the difference of the narratives that shape the public, in the fact that all forms of peace activism have been permanently labelled as treacherous (especially those that did not end with the end of the wars but continue to remind of what was done and call for not forgetting it), or in the waves of new interpretations that have obscured the significance it had.

I sometimes have the impression that they left no room for new interpretations and new topics, that instead what was talked about in the nineties just continues nowadays. And it is somehow difficult not to feel resistance towards something that is constantly repeated and is not adjusted to the younger generations so that they would know why talking about it matters. I am not sure if someone born in 2000 - that's already a university student now - can understand why it was important that such a great number of women and activists should be involved and should devote so much of their time to this. (JN)

It takes a lot of self-instruction, training in alternative communities, and disobedience against the dominant image of the recent past to understand the question of peace, as Iva Parađanin puts it, as "the question of all of us born during and after the war as well as those born now."

While the right-wing ideologies dominate in institutions and over their decisions, while the question of the autonomy of woman's body becomes topical every now and then, while we witness the continuous choice to keep silent about certain issues and war-related responsibility or to glorify war criminals, this war will concern all of us and remain a part of our lives. (IP)

"The Principle Is To Cross Borders"

Žarana Papić hugely contributed to feminism in Serbia by naming its basic principle. In a recorded conversation with Svenka Savić, which Reconstruction Women's Fund published for the occasion of the tenth anniversary of her death, she utters the famous words:

The fall of the Berlin Wall and the wars in the former Yugoslavia showed us feminists and other activists... just how much needed political mobilisation is, and that one actually has to work against the current, against the trend of exclusion, the trend of racism, against ethnic cleansing and closing within one's borders. Actually, the principle was to constantly cross the borders, and women's groups did this consistently (Papić, 2012a: 27).²⁴

24 In another text I claimed that Žarana Papić's immense contribution is not only in the feminist principle but also in the thorough understanding of what feminism here is, which also has generational dimensions: "feminism is essentially a grassroots, non-governmental, perhaps even counter-governmental movement; feminism is ideologically self-sufficient, a source of its own politicalness; the intertwining of theory and practice in feminism itself cannot be untangled." See Zaharijević, 2015: 14.

At the time when the borders between the former republics became war-produced state borders, this principle reflected disobedience towards the politics that had created them. Abstracting the borders, as well as the fact that they separated what had been one just the other day, crossing them physically or mentally, was an incessant act of resistance against the politics that had generated the war (Lukić, 2011). It is precisely this resistance in the name of the politics of friendship and (sisterly) solidarity that Zoe Gudović's statement reflects:

I have always been interested in invisible questions and people, invisible voices, and therefore it was important to me in that period to exchange messages and know where my friends were, to be precise, lesbian artists. What were they doing, how were they living? It was for me the crossing of all borders, identity, political, and private... The story of generations and encounters, of the consciousness of where we were and how we functioned separated and yet so close, with so many external factors constantly oppressing us - for me that was the greatest fortune. In so much destruction, there was also so much communication and love... The politics of friendship and the politics of love have no borders. My heart crossed them without a passport. (ZG)

Not forgetting the ways in which borders were created and women's choice not to remain closed within themselves remains the foundation of the politics of peace, which, as has been demon-

strated, shapes the understanding of feminist engagement:

I think that women in the anti-war movement, those who managed at least to a certain extent to save the reputation of this country - if they had not crossed those borders, I think we'd hardly have anything in the history of our country to hold on to today. The whole anti-war movement was in Serbia mostly carried out by women. (ŽR)

However, borders have in the meantime become real, accepted and confirmed by every passport control at the crossings. Borders are not any more something to be willingly accepted but rather a presence in our lives and, in going as citizens of one country to another, we take them for granted. This is why "Žarana's principle" has acquired new meanings that have to be taken into consideration each time we strive to understand how to think feminist activism in Serbia, which is - as always - dedicated to building peace.

Of course, along with the meaning that is literal and *physical* - and extremely important, especially in today's era of "fortifying" against all things unknown, which are by (incorrect) analogy also inimical - Žarana's beautiful motto is for me metaphorically a trigger. To cross the borders of knowledge, the borders of the normalised and imposed, the borders of divisions in the fights that we should conceive as solidary and common in order to win them against the strong enemy. For

me, this is the principle of openness, critical disposition, and self-reflection. (AI) 137

I remember that when I heard it for the first time, the sentence sounded totally abstract, and then it became an association for women crossing their limits. (JN)

Personally, it means that I cross my own borders of the comfort zone, that I try to observe things from different angles, that I try to step out of myself in order to understand things better. On the level of activism, it requires a lot of courage to step out of the borders of what is socially acceptable, to constantly question authorities, observe the world critically, and speak publicly against official policies. (JM)

For me, this is a great thought that often comes to my mind, and I think it describes women's movement here very well... People create borders in their minds because current social frameworks often constrict them and force them to do so... In respect of women's movement and women's struggle, crossing the borders is the metaphor for that which constantly takes place: the presence of change, expanding, branching, stirring up, and refusing to stay framed in one place. Women have always organised themselves into networks and removed borders in order to breathe freely. (IP)

“Žarana's principle” has found different modes of expressing and stressing itself although the

borders have remained stable, as they were firmly fixed by the war. In today's Serbia, observing the world critically and being open, self-reflexive, and cooperative is inevitably working against the current, against exclusion, enclosure, or treating people as merchandise and negating all forms of dignity. This is why, as several interviewees have pointed out, it is necessary to cross one's own borders, which women as a rule do more frequently - in activism as well as in life.

Women's Approach to Peacebuilding

The history of the feminist movement, especially in its early stages, when it was focused on the right to vote - that is, on women's entrance into the political sphere - formed firm connections between women and peace. The principal argument was that women would introduce into the politics of cold reason and belligerence the warm logic of the heart and pacifism, which would in due time lead to the changes of the very essence of the political. Radical pacifists such as Bertha von Suttner, the first woman to be awarded the Nobel Prize for peace in 1905, believed that the "woman question cannot be separated from the question of peace. Both concern the struggle against the force of the law and the law of force" (Kappeli, 1993: 494). However, this connection proved dubitable in the specific wartime circumstances. During World War One, when it was possible to put to the test the feminists' devotion to a different form of politics, the leaders of women's movements in the warring nations acted contrary to the belief that

only women, *with united efforts*, can lead to the improvement of entire mankind. Frenchwoman Jeane Misme said then that “while there is war, women of the enemy will also be enemies” (Thébaud, 1993: 58), German Gertrud Bäumer said that “it goes without saying that during the national struggle to survive we, women, belong to our people and *only* to our people” (Bok, 2005: 231), and the champion of the suffragette movement in England, Emmeline Pankhurst, declared a temporary end of “the war of women against men. As it has always been, women are now again mothers nurturing their men, their sisters and companions with no complaints of their own” (Phillips, 2003: 292).

This old debate, which for a moment takes us back to the time when there were no women in politics, hence neither in the processes of deciding about war and peace, is significant for two reasons. It shows us how women *imagined* their future participation and how they perceived its transformative power, but also how the war thwarted their imagination. Secondly, it reappeared in similar forms in different places where there was a war, dividing women into radical antimilitarists and those who decided to belong above all to their nation, at least for the duration of the war.²⁵ This, certainly, refers primarily to those women who took part in the political life and were actively involved in conducting the politics of war. “They would do the same today, for sure. Biljana Plavšić, the former president of the Republic of Srpska, who was sentenced in the Hague for crimes against hu-

²⁵ See Ana Miškovska Kajevska, 2017 for more information on this issue in the context of Zagreb and Belgrade.

manity, eventually repented having repented for war crimes in the first place” (ŽR).

If it is not the logic of the heart, what is it then that determines women’s perspective in politics? Zorana Antonijević insists that it should not be searched for in simple identification of women as mothers and peacemakers. It should be understood as “biological disposition which makes women calm, caring, and nonaggressive, because they were born to be mothers, so caring is something they are born with” (IP). Still, our interviewees equally insist that women’s perspective or women’s approach to peace should be talked about since it is precisely women who, in a great majority of historical cases, “regardless of the side, lose the most in wars; they lose their children and their dignity, and they are used as territories to be conquered” (JM).

I think this women’s approach is socially carved precisely because of everything that women go through every day, that simply by living in the position that they live in, they have learnt and built mechanisms of approaching peace and reconciliation, which is still the most powerful means to build peace processes. (IP)

Not on the grounds of “nature” but based on the historical social experience that becomes “carved” into social roles – “she’ll give birth, he’ll wage wars” – can women be more sensitive to the questions of sustaining life without violence. It is not about any logic of the heart that repeatedly maintains the supposedly natural differences be-

tween women/emotions and men/reason: to keep peace is to build sense, not shatter it. As Jovana Netković puts it, women's perspective involves comprehensiveness and "strategic work on including different aspects. Women's perspective is characterised by persistence, readiness to accept that the process will be long, and consciousness that everyone will be affected by the war." 141

In Serbia, women have been the first to initiate dialogues and persistently oppose war, whereas "on institutional level, the state of fear is continuously maintained by clicking guns, protracting negotiations, not admitting responsibility for war crimes, etc." (JM). Unfortunately, this perspective is little known in Serbia because it

remained marginalised, not recognised anywhere by the political elites. Women's contribution was acknowledged when refugees arrived, when humanitarian aid was distributed, or psychological-social support given... However, it is not politically recognised because we live in negative peace, in the illusion of peace, and therefore what is a different perspective on peace cannot get on the agenda. (ZA)

Although there have been attempts to explain why pacifists in Serbia were largely women, and why feminism is/was here so strongly determined by antimilitarism and antinationalism, the question remains of how "women's perspective" can in today's circumstances be made less marginalised and, even more importantly, how it can be made common perspective. In Anja Ilić's words,

I think that in order to achieve peace as a radical political ideal, we have to go further, dig deeper - build anti-war/pacifist movements and organisations along with men, not neglect those economic triggers of war and war profiteering logic, and fight against the production and export of war. (AI)

The Role of Women in Building Peace between Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina

Significant written records have been preserved on the role of women in building peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Moreover, it could be claimed that it was largely this experience that built (and honed) the idea of the importance of women's perspective and possible consequences of its absence. More recent critical views have directed attention to the problems of the "IKEA strategy of reconciliation" and the dictated introduction of women's perspective - without taking into consideration the gender-based experiences of war, patriarchal and structural inequalities that have remained or multiplied, becoming part of the peace processes themselves,²⁶ neglect historical forerunners of women's organisation in Yugoslavia as well as peace activism during the war, and the complete absence of the feminist perspective in institutional processes, although its significance

²⁶ Maja Korać points out to an important dimension of "liberal" peace, explaining that, along with retributive justice, the significance of "economic reforms" prevailed here, instead of working on the political development, which in turn led to centralisation and corrupt privatisation. See Korać, 2016: 439.

did, at least to a certain extent, shape the efforts in the civil sector and the focus on donors' interventions that have "led to individualising equality and depoliticising activism in the sphere of women's rights, which limited its potential to grow into a feminist movement capable of formulating the political demands for solidarity, social justice, and equality" (Porobić-Isaković and Mlinarević, 2019: 187).²⁷

On a different note, looking at the role of women in building peace *between* Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina reveals a considerable lack of research. Reasons for it are different. With the exception of the years of war and the importance of peace activism in Belgrade, little has been done to build the relationships between the two countries towards reconciliation. In the years following the war, women's peace activism remained on the margins, sometimes even consciously so, and considerable energy was devoted to different forms of institutionalising feminist engagement after the fall of Slobodan Milošević's regime. Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia, with an entity of the former in a specific alliance with the latter figuring between them, have after Dayton done little in the institutional sense - and political gender mainstreaming from the early 2000s did not have any significant effect on the institutional production of positive peace.

There are no institutional processes in Serbia that lead towards peace. We have the

²⁷ For more recent research see also Björkdahl, 2012; Popov-Momčinić, 2018; McLeod, 2019.

Declaration on Srebrenica, which is based on the verdict by the International Court of Justice, and that's all we have... The role of women in peace processes in B&H and other countries from this region is partly the result of work. More than eight thousand men and boys were killed only in the Srebrenica genocide. Mothers, sisters, and the closest relatives are still trying to find their bones, still fighting to bring the perpetrators to justice. In B&H and Kosovo systematic rapes took place, with women being tools in the war. Only now are they given the status of war victims, two decades after the war ended. On the other hand, as Serbia was never officially in war, as is claimed by the government, it rarely deals with "its warriors" - war veterans, let alone mothers who lost their children, families who are still looking for the missing. Because they are still looking... (ŽR)

In the absence of institutional processes of reconciliation, one can only admire the processes that feminist activists conducted and to a much lesser extent still do. It is, however, necessary to consider the perspective of the capital as a limitation caused by political centralisation:

As a girl who was brought up in Kraljevo, I was not aware of the peace activism in Belgrade, and I am now completely aware of how huge the contribution was and that it convinced some people to persist and keep trying. (JN)

It is also necessary to consider the limitations of the actual scope of this contribution: 145

From an insider's perspective, it seemed great and important to me, but I am not sure the impression is the same if you look from the outside. (ZA)

I believe that the work by women, feminist anti-war activists, on peacebuilding is neither seen nor acknowledged formally, and even informally outside activist circles, mostly because of the domination of the right-wing nationalist politics in all the countries of the former Yugoslavia. Feminist activists are stigmatised as mercenaries or traitors for having merely "crossed the borders" of their gender roles, which dictate that women should nurture family values and remain in the domestic sphere. (JM)

Finally, we must also take into consideration the limitation of our capability to correctly perceive what has been done and what could have been done - in the country that not only fails to apply gender-just peace in either its interior or foreign affairs, but also denies having ever participated substantially in the war.

I do not think it was in the interest of the war-mongering regime of the nineties, or its successors of today, for us to remember the resistance to war and women's initiative in building it. Their farthest affirmative reach would be to turn anti-war engagement into a

symbolic relict, but they don't even do as little; they try to keep it invisible, and when women themselves step out into public space and visualise resistance (even in an extremely symbolic, commemorative, or performative way), they discredit them, as well as the resistance. (AI)

Institution and/or Activism

Following this thread, it is also necessary to consider whether differences in approach can be discussed, that is, the different values of institutional and activist approaches to peacebuilding and normalising the relationship between the two countries. "Normalising" would assume a common aspiration to grow and develop - not only for the two states but also for the entities within Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia, in such a way that development is not defined merely by economic parameters, which in the spirit of negative "liberal" peace, guarantee a very empty kind of stability. Institutionally speaking, when it comes to Serbia, we are far from this ideal, to which media headlines from the introduction to this part of the study testify sufficiently. Looking at the actions "from below," especially those that rely on women's peace activism, the perspective changes considerably because connections have survived although they have in the course of time grown into different forms of cooperation. In other words, there is an unbridgeable chasm between the activism-built and institutional relationships between the two states.

Our values are in every sense diametrically 147
opposed. To put it banally, the institutional approach is based on the territorial integrity of a state dominated by conservative policies, which rely on the majority religion and national identity, whereas the feminist approach is based on justice and human lives regardless of the territory, nation, and other differences. (JM)

The values of the institutional and activist peace were in this case diametrically opposed, which is why this war continues to leave big scars even without weapons. What I often think about is whether the institutional framework always a priori has to be like that. Will institutions here ever think beyond the scope of capital, profit, interest; will they ever be relieved from the damage of nationalism? Institutional oversights did not end with the Dayton Agreement; they are still made and made more serious by refusing to admit war crimes and giving war criminals pride of place. (IP)

This “diametrical opposition” between the approach and values advocated by activism - and how activism resists its own professionalization and NGO-isation is certainly an issue - and institutions - in the country where, a long time ago, all institutions have been “hijacked” and distinguishing between them and the governing regime became hard, if not outright impossible - survives in Serbia. The division into “us” and “them,” which has been shaping Serbian society since the breakup

of the shared country became dubitable in different ways to the younger generations that call for and design different forms of organising. Natalija Simović considers that

peace as any other politics had to be built “from below” in the places where people live, work, love, and form mutual relationships and interactions. I think that the activist approach was the first good step towards essential reconciliation. However, there was no political will or courage to support the uncompromising advocating for peace institutionally and to face war crimes. My personal impression is that the anti-war organisations of the civil society and politicians in power, as well as the opposition, addressed one another and the international community, while common people were somehow left in the fissures of reconciliation. (NS)

Direct organisation of people for struggle (in the specific case, for peace)... is not a sufficient condition for the success of resistance or rebellion. Anti-war protests of the nineties showed that because they weren't what eventually ended the war. They also lacked the mass character and needed a tactic different from the one they adopted, which was the non-violent resistance tactic... Therefore the institutional approach led towards building peace, however fragile and frail, in the Balkans of the nineties. The war did end, but what was left of peace? Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina as territories under the protec-

tion of Western imperialism... I am not saying 149
there shouldn't be a link between these two
approaches - the activist and the institu-
tional. On the contrary. But I think that the
starting point should a lot more than is the
case be in organising massive and militant
resistance *from below*. And I think we have
to be ready for violent methods too, because
peace must be conquered - we take it over from
those who promote war, hatred, and poverty,
sitting in their institutions and making de-
cisions with the support of international in-
stitutions. (AI)

Could It Have Been Different?

Considering the fact that the Dayton Agreement was not signed by any women, that women were not included in the immediate peace processes, that later they became included in the political life based on quotas, which neither in Bosnia and Herzegovina nor in Serbia had the marked effect desired by feminists, the question remains important of whether a greater number of women in the political lives of both countries would have contributed to different solutions in peacebuilding.

I am sure that a situation in which women win their place at the desk authentically (without being positioned there by men) can transform the processes of reconciliation. (NS)

Considering how long they advocated for certain laws, women in politics [Lejla Ruždić

mentioned by name] should have the persistence to fight till the end. If they had had greater freedom, I think they would have tried to make it more than a piece of paper, to make it take real effect - they would work on that strategically, not politically and for the sake of their careers, as men in politics do. (JN)

Women's presence in politics, that is, gender mainstreaming, is certainly important as it still has the potential to reconstruct the political. However, it is not in itself the guarantee of qualitatively different shaping of institutions. Today we globally witness a significant number of women supporting (extreme) right-wing and/or neo-liberal politics, which is essentially not peace politics - finally, it suffices to remember the confused statement by the Serbian Prime Minister quoted at the beginning of this section, which is by no means isolated from the other activities she carries out as head of the government which contains nearly 50% of women.

It is precisely the current government in Serbia that has continuously been generating resentment, encouraging the processes of denial, and approving of violence on all social levels - the government led, at least formally, largely by women, which proves that women in politics do not automatically need to have "women's perspective." Also, the experience of the activists who entered institutions with the intention to introduce and institutionalise this perspective has shown that a lot of factors have to interact in order to make any improvement:

I think it is very important that women are present, but it is not nearly important enough. There have to be knowledge and resources, and knowledge as a resource, as well as money and, most importantly, power. When activists enter an institution, we enter as someone with very little and limited power, limited not only by the term of office but also specifically by our position within the system and by not being a member of the party. Being an outsider in the mainstream, that's an almost impossible position. I think there would have been some improvements if there had been more and more visible women, and if international actors who have been supporting all this from the start had had a different approach and chosen different contextualised strategies. (ZA)

This is why we must not be surprised by the hesitation that largely characterises feminist activism in Serbia, which refers to the possibility of cooperation between the institutional and activist sphere, to building bridges and transformative learning that would reshape institutions, as was noticeable in the nineties and today, as well as in the period when these two spheres came closest to each other.

What characterises women's movement is resistance, refusal to compromise, and firm determination to achieve clearly set goals. As such, the movement fights precisely against formal political frameworks (...) On the other hand, there was the war, an urgent and vulnerable situation that left no room for thinking the form of ac-

tion - it was only important to act. To be on the street, be with women, think of others. (IP) Including women in peace negotiations and other institutional processes is of paramount importance to building peace. Of course, by this I mean activist initiatives, because we have so far learned that merely being a woman in politics is not enough, and that parties of right-wing orientation frequently abuse the position of women for carrying out their conservative politics. In the ideal situation, had women activists been included in the processes of peace negotiations, I believe we would have contributed to admitting and taking responsibility for the war crimes on the territory of former Yugoslavia, which would have considerable influence on normalising relationships with the neighbouring countries. (JM)

Had being with others been gradually built into the way some institutions work, perhaps we would now have this unattainable peace delivering the generation steeped in the normalisation of violence from the bleak future about which Žarana Papić wrote in 1992. Had there been more women at negotiation tables and had those women crossed the borders after the war, thinking of others, then everyone would think of other people. Had these borders been crossed in order to support life in the situation of devastation and death, we would not have islands of sadness created today to continue waging symbolical wars against one another. We would not be searching for sense in places where there (maybe) is peace, far outside from the borders of both states. We would have a

language grown from knowledge and the experience of destruction, and use it to end all future destructions. Instead, as Žarka Radoja notices, we have somehow remained back in the nineties: actors today have completely new tools, and we do not have a language to talk about it. In building these new tools, among other things gender equality, peace, and organisation from below have been taken away from us.

Pandemic Peace

When in March 2020 governments around the world started, with more or less reluctance, to confirm that the pandemic caused by SARS-CoV-2 virus would not end soon or remain restricted to certain parts of the world, measures were being introduced with a view to stopping the crisis locally. With lightning speed, Serbia shifted from the talks of “the funniest virus” to long barrels patrolling the streets during the inhumanely long curfews. As opposed to the civil shock beyond the borders of the Balkans that was the first to give considerations about the state and effects of the “crisis,” the citizens of Serbia were at first prepared for the state of emergency. In the first days of the “lockdown” there was, so to say, a general consensus that we are all quite familiar with such a state. People evoked memories of former curfews, of which in Serbia there has been an abundance as compared to many other countries, and which social consciousness mostly related to the nineties, various shortages, limitations to basic human rights, and anxiety about the future. The radicalness of

the measures, initially experienced in particular by citizens above 65 years of age, as well as the completely uncontrolled relaxation of measures in the subsequent period, testify to something else: not only did we know very well what curfew is, unlike the Czech, Norwegians, or the French, but we were also ready for a complete lack of trust in the measures imposed for our sake, on our behalf, and for our own good. Last but not least, with our own money.

Although the pandemic has all around the world produced (and continues to produce) collisions among the state, society, and individuals (Zaharijević, 2021), these collisions here specifically reflect the three decades behind us as well as the present deeply polarised society and extremely authoritarian regime. The pandemic situation exposes them daily, in a way similar to the one in which it shows how the relationship of trust is structured between the state and individuals, how social institutions are abused, underrated, or outright ruined, and the social bonds of solidarity demolished, leaving individuals to decide alone on their well-being, assess alone what is good and useful for them, protected by the Constitution (which is referred to, forgotten, or suspended as needed) and in the midst of the media clamour, where it is difficult to identify what could in the first place be socially good. In the country where peace is incomplete, negative, and violent, the social good has for a long time been thoroughly compromised. The conditions into which the pandemic in Serbia has settled are such that they continue to incite and encourage polarisations,

“taking things into one’s own hands” or trusting 155
unreservedly in the state leadership and its management of this or any other crisis, the deepening gap between institutions, or what is left of them, and citizens on the other side, who are becoming either isolated in dissatisfaction or rebellious individuals.

Although in the first months of the pandemic a lot of people predicted the appearance of a new kind of world, either harshly apocalyptic or prosperously utopian, it seems that the governments around the world have after all managed to keep the status quo despite the restrictions on different freedoms of their citizens. The “new normal” essentially seems, at least from the perspective of the radical changes scenario, very much like the old normal. In any case, it seems so in Serbia, where it was high time for crisis even before one struck.

Conclusion

Women’s efforts towards peace do not cease, and women’s peace activism keeps crossing the borders. New wars, new refugees, new people halted at border crossings and detained in reception centres, new stories of demolished homes, memories reshaped, futures uncertain, and the forgetfulness of horror replaced by new horrors – all reminiscent of the old ones. Although one must never neglect the importance of the context in which lives are ended, women’s efforts towards peace transcend individual contexts and are directed towards supporting women in the situations of conflict in other parts of

the world, who should be encouraged to participate in peace negotiations through an exchange of experiences. Women's peace activism shows that peace in one part of the world does not guarantee peace everywhere, and that peace is temporary if it is based on violence.

This is perhaps precisely why women's efforts in peace activism are the first to be forgotten. Regardless of whether the official narratives treat them as traitors or "our" greatest victims entitled to the commemorative role in measuring pain and calculating sadness, these women are always in the end left out of the institutional narratives of peacebuilding. Such peace is unstable and without any long-term sense, temporary and steeped in violence. It does not rest on creating alternative models of justice, but remains negative, "liberal" - and it was precisely on the example of Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina shown how little it needs to become a mixture of neoliberal and illiberal peace, whose constant (and only, as it sometimes seems) support is the possibility of new wars.

Our context shows it is necessary that the officials finally admit the war crimes and genocide, thereby stopping the creation of history that would continue to undermine all attempts at defining, locating, and finally recognising them. In this game of selective forgetfulness and newly created memories, a greater promotion of women's peace activism is, as we believe, needed, especially if we take into consideration everything that women did in the nineties and that crossing the borders today would be even more stringent had they not been crossing

them. Serbian peace activists – although the interviewees from Bosnia and Herzegovina always mention Women in Black, there are other organisations, too, such as Autonomous Women’s Centre – provide an example of perseverance in “going on to create new models of justice from the feminist perspective” (Zajović, 2017: 22). During our conversations, interviewees from Bosnia and Herzegovina frequently evoked memories of this unique women’s peace legacy. The power of this legacy seems paradoxically the stronger the more it is disregarded, unacknowledged, and unknown. To this effect, this text is also an attempt to make heard, through the rattle of guns, the voices of those who will not allow their search for peace and justice to be declared insignificant. We should bear in mind that, considering that “this was not our war” (Hunt, 2004), such official and semi-official attitude towards peace heritage can take away from us even the “illusory peace” that we live.

Women’s exclusion and marginalisation pose the question of the essence and scope of their participation in the institutions that should be building peace and in fact do not. In the existing political framework, where the population on the whole harbours suspicion of the political being immoral, something that spoils and corrupts even “the best of men,” the women who start dealing with politics become morally suspicious.²⁸ In order to avoid such suspiciousness, the role of women in politics is often reduced to the so-called peaceful and passive *ikebana*, which

28 Helms points out to the proverbial saying that “politics is a whore,” which is largely in use in our countries, and which leads to the “conclusion” that a woman in politics is a whore.

perhaps becomes visible if involved proactively into the “manly” politics, advocating patriarchal ethno-nationalism or quasi-liberalism of the Serbian, Bosniak, or any other kind. If they try to step out of the given framework, women in politics face different forms of verbal and non-verbal violence, which is on the rise due to social networks which blur the borders between the public and the private. The culture of violence is a model of the political non-culture of the posttraumatic society, whose traumas know no borders of generations, entities, states, or anything else. It prevents active women from adequately addressing structural and other problems of the society, which is necessary in order to reach, or at least approach, the positive peace that entails equality, just division of resources, and a certain degree of well-being available to all the citizens regardless of their gender.

Such peace requires adequate public policies and a proactive civil society, whose women’s side has been partly “numbed” due to the liberal postulates of gender mainstreaming (Zaharijević, 2015: 97). It is on the other hand also threatened by the global rise of the (extreme) right-wing populism and the general climate of uncertainty created by the pandemic. Building peace with a woman’s face is, therefore, often reduced to remembering the time when “the name for a peacemaker was woman” (Liht & Drakulić, 1997), evoked only by feminists, theoreticians, and activists. This is why, amongst memories, new trans-generational connections should be made between Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, and answers to new challenges and threats should be formulated through joint efforts.

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Book Review

Over a quarter of century has passed since the Dayton Agreement was signed and war actions ended on the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Croatia; it has been more than twenty years since military operations in Kosovo and the bombing of Serbia, and yet our societies still live under the long shadow of war-mongering narratives, which every now and then fill media and public space. How can one struggle against this logic of governance that rests on the effective mobilising of fears of the Other and *others*, fears which entrench us in our supposedly natural and primary national identities, and which we are then invited to defend and advocate, thus contributing to the continuous normalisation of violence as the ordering principle of the social order? The answer is: among other things, by actively remembering all those who opposed violence most loudly, and by increasing and making more visible the purposely marginalised efforts of those who unite to work against the politics of division, war, and any kind of violence.

This monograph is an extremely important step in that direction. In a very direct and approachable way, it introduces us - almost face to face - to women activists for peace from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia, as well as to their struggles, personal and social alike, and efforts to fight for peace in our part of the world. Reading about their memories of the wartime engagement, their post-war disappointments and new struggles, as well as their thoughts on what kind of violence threatens us today, we become aware of the essential importance of women's perspective in peacebuilding and the tirelessness of the feminist principle,

as Žarana Papić put it, in constantly crossing the borders. Testimonies, confessions, and views that we can here read relate how these courageous women kept crossing the borders, physical ones – even during the war, when it was difficult and dangerous – and, more importantly, those mental and internalised, all with the aim to establish new, borderless territories of understanding, mutual support, and common struggle for a society without violence.

Book Review, Jelena Vasić

It is especially important to emphasise that this book is not a contribution to the history of *one segment* of anti-war activism, the segment of the feminist engagement. What this book convincingly reveals is that this engagement was the very heart and soul, the essence and core of anti-war activism, or, in the words of one of the interviewees, “[t]he whole anti-war movement was in Serbia mostly buttressed by women.” To this effect, the memory of women’s perspective and its contribution to the anti-war and anti-violence struggle is a vital part of our collective history. This book significantly contributes to building collective memory, not as an addendum to the history of the feminist struggle in our countries, but as the centrepiece of the history of resistance to violence and the mindlessness of war.

Particularly valuable about this study is its methodological approach: using interview as the main tool for collecting material, the authors built this narrative of searching for sense during and after the war relying on the authentic voices of women activists themselves – devoting a lot of

space to their reflections, conclusions, and uncertainties. Skilfully combining social-political analysis with the statements of the very actors in the struggle, the authors manage to conjure up for us the point of struggling against the unacceptable definition of peace as the mere absence of war; we find out what it means to advocate for peace as the ultimate triumph of sense and coexistence over the tyranny of violence which, having retreated from the battlefield, moved into politics and public speech, threatening to become completely normalised in our everydayness.

The combination of perspectives depicted here is also of special interest: for women from Bosnia and Herzegovina, the lived experience of the war was formative in the most direct sense possible; for women from Serbia, fighting against the war in which their country took no official participation was a fight for common sense, dignity, and meaning in a society made dishonourable and meaningless. Their common efforts crossed paths, merged into dialogue and solidary struggle for justice, aid for victims, and peaceful coexistence. Additionally, different generational perspectives which this monograph unites give us an important insight into the complex dynamic of the development of feminist struggle against violence, as well as into the existence of its continuity, which is a part of our collective history - precisely the one which we should caringly cherish and be proud of.

This monograph is, therefore, a precious contribution to the development of the culture of remembrance of peace activism on the territory of

the former Yugoslavia, a memorial of a kind to its most vital part - feminist activists' engagement. At the same time, this book is also a kind of vivisection of our societies today - an overview of and insight into the crushing fact that the rhetoric and logic of war still control social worldviews, perpetually institutionalising violence on all levels. Apart from this bleak insight, the book also directs our attention towards new, contemporary challenges to the perspective of non-violent society, such as the rise of the extreme right, new forms of exclusion and discrimination, and new attacks on the autonomy of woman's body and experience. It is, however, precisely in the testimonies and living voices of the activists presented in this book where we can find signposts for the struggles that await us: we need to enter them using all the experience, knowledge, and alliances that have been built with care, and whose foundations will not be easily shaken. This is why it is necessary to build and promote knowledge of the tradition and continuity of women's solidary struggles for meaningful life in a society without violence. This extraordinary book makes a priceless contribution to these efforts.

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The book authored by Zlatiborka Popov-Momčinović and Adriana Zaharijević, *The Never-Ending Quest for Sense: Women and Peacebuilding in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia*, presents the results of research into women's attitude towards the peacebuilding process in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia. Interviews with women activists of different generations were conducted in the summer of 2021. These conversations were methodologically shaped as structured interviews, and they lasted approximately one hour each. All of them were conducted via Zoom, except for one which was live. The interviews were afterwards transcribed. The authors' aim was to compare the different contexts, which would show the language used in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia to speak about the war, and the language used to speak about peace. The main question posed by this research was: What is peace, and what would women's perspective be in building peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia?

What the authors recognise as the biggest problem is the constant production of fear and the general climate of uncertainty which in a special way has been crushing and continues to crush women as Otherness; still, they recognise the power of women's activism in the fact that despite this (or precisely because of it) women do not give up on their peace activism and feminist engagement.

The authors confirm that their academic work follows "subjective" feminist engagement. This is why they gave their interviewees significant space in the text, considering that the "majority" have not

heard this different opinion or do not want to hear about it.

The book is divided into two sections: the first, which is with justification twice as voluminous as the second one, deals with Bosnia and Herzegovina, whereas the second is dedicated to narratives from Serbia. Both sections start their comparative analyses by tackling the problem of Srebrenica, which is an open wound in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The authors present their research by analysing media reports and quoting the statements given by those in power. On the other side of these dominant narratives and ways of acting, the emphasis and focus shift towards a parallel story, which has been present for more than three decades in civil society, about the women who created a movement of its kind, which we might call *Peace with a woman's face*, and which was initiated by Foundation Lara from Bijeljina and joined by several women's organisations from civil society. Feminists from Bosnia and Herzegovina point out that peace is much more than the mere absence of war, describing in detail what peace is. Peace is defined in the context of wider systemic solutions and structures that assume the rule of law, equality before the law, and availability of different resources and services, which allows for living a dignified life. However, the war still pervades all spheres of the society which still dwells in a culture of violence, which devastates society and people, while on the other hand maintaining the exiting state of neither war nor peace for the benefit of the ruling patriarchal, ethno-nationalist matrices.

The driving force of women in Bosnia and Herzegovina stems from personal experience, which confirms the significance and strength of the feminist phrase *the personal is political*. The personal has enabled an insight, either in the context of experienced violence or in monitoring what is going on, into the specific experiences of women during the war, as well as a critical reflection on the gender roles imposed during the war, along with the realisation that they are a dynamic, not a pre-given concept.

I would like to single out two quotes from the book: one opinion from Bosnia and Herzegovina, and one from Serbia, both describing women's perseverance and intent on the road they have taken:

“As I see this road we took, if we now stopped, it would be as if we had done nothing at all; wasn't I right to say I would be doing this as long as I live (...) they are desperate for us to stop working on it, they wish with all their hearts to put women back into religious institutions and turn them into those humanitarians who go around distributing parcels, visiting the sick in hospitals, and it's all fine with me, but woman's place is in the construction of Bosnia and Herzegovina's society, in building peace and better life, in building more just family relationships based on gender equality.”

“Including women in peace negotiations and other institutional processes is of paramount importance to building peace. Of course, by this I mean activist initiatives, because we have so far

learned that merely being a woman in politics is not enough, and that parties of right-wing orientation frequently abuse the position of women for carrying out their conservative politics. In the ideal situation, had women activists been included in the processes of peace negotiations, I believe we would have contributed to admitting and taking responsibility for the war crimes on the territory of former Yugoslavia, which would have considerable influence on normalising relationships with the neighbouring countries. “

The authors also contribute with their discussion of the New Normal and the current state of the pandemic. In conclusion, the authors write: “New wars, new refugees, new people halted at border crossings and detained in reception centres, new stories of demolished homes, memories reshaped, futures uncertain, and the forgetfulness of horror replaced by new horrors - all reminiscent of the old ones. Although one must never neglect the importance of the context in which lives are ended, women’s efforts towards peace transcend individual contexts and are directed towards supporting women in the situations of conflict in other parts of the world, who should be encouraged to participate in peace negotiations through an exchange of experiences. Women’s peace activism shows that peace in one part of the world does not guarantee peace everywhere, and that peace is temporary if it is based on violence.”

The book, not voluminous but laden with clear messages and attitudes of both the interviewed activists and numerous authors quoted in bibliography,

is worth publishing because of its topicality in 177
the specific conditions of the two states from
which the interviewees come but also for the uni-
versal question, which in the title itself, *The
Never-Ending Quest for Sense*, points to the values
worthy of lifetime engagement because they encom-
pass a common good. I therefore recommend this
book for publication.

Prof. Zorica Kuburić, PhD

In their recognizable academic and activist handwriting, Zlatiborka Popov Momčinović and Adriana Zaharijević in their book titled *Women and Peacebuilding in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia*, analyse the reach and limitations of women's perspectives in peacebuilding. The research is theoretically founded, methodologically well-conceived and made based on the interviews with peacebuilding process actors belonging to different generations of feminists in the region. As the authors stated themselves, these conversations with activists were "realised as structured interviews, averagely lasting one hour each", while "after the interviewing phase was concluded, these were fully transcribed and amounted to 55 pages, or 30.284 words in total". In this way, significant source material was collected for further critical reading and theoretical studying by the authors, concerning the reach of women's peace activism in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia. The argument being developed on the pages of this book involves a dialogue where the central stories by the interviewees are intertwined with personal experiences of academic and activist work by the authors of this study and observations by feminist writers (Žarana Papić, for example).

Even though it is not primarily a review of women's movements' history (nor was this the intention of the research), the text excellently pinpoints women's association, as well as the continuity of women's peacebuilding efforts in the socio-cultural context of the culture of violence. Additionally, it must not be neglected that the study also examines significantly divergent contexts of B&H

and Serbia, and it opens all sorts of questions. 179
Even though it is possible to separately read the two sections of the study dealing with different experiences - i.e. the first referring to Bosnia and Herzegovina and the second, Serbian part - the authors manage with the arrangement of the material, manner of presentation and selection of central problems, to maintain the unity of the study. Therefore, for example, the analyses for B&H and Serbia are both introduced by marking the specific characteristics of their respective media images of reality, their characteristics largely depending on the location of the media outlets producing these images. The discussion then easily moves on to women's peace activism which is largely inconsistent with different (pre)dominant narratives in the region. The authors also address the issue of the absurdity of war conflicts, outline obstructions in the process of peacebuilding in the sphere of formal politics, while also noting the processes which take place on the levels of both everyday life and institutional level, providing illustrations for some activities in the sphere of civil society, show that these initiatives have been at times ignored, or contested, describing perception of these activities in the public...

Propaedeutic outlining of the condition concerning the studied issues provides a good foundation for presentation of the findings of the qualitative research, interspersed with continuous critical remarks by the authors and a wider consideration of the plurality of what peace is for the feminists in the region. The authors certainly open a number of questions in their study (e.g. the question of

war experience and reflection of these experiences in feminist activism, or that of the “new right populist” challenges to feminist activism). However, it is particularly important to highlight two aspects of this study.

Firstly, particularly interesting, as well as important is presenting the positions by feminists belonging to different generations in different shades and nuances. The results of the research show that the resistance by the 1990s peace activists inspires and motivates work by the younger generation of feminists who also further develop categorical apparatuses of feminist analyses.

Secondly, the authors once again highlight the existence of women’s approach to peacebuilding, and in spite of all divergences within and between feminisms and, based on their personal experiences and testimonies by the peace activists, reveal the specific characteristics of such approach. Thus, for example, unlike the predominant narrative of generally project-oriented activist engagement, women’s peace activism which is indeed its significant part, is perceived as a consistent, open and sensitive approach which is more directly connected to local communities.

By articulating their observations concerning women’s peacebuilding activism through different perspectives and from the point of view of a lasting peace, and simultaneously reminding of the transformative power of feminism in peacebuilding, Zlatiborka Popov Momčinović and Adriana Zaharijević offer a high quality analysis which is not

only a significant contribution to the depository 181
of interdisciplinary knowledge, but also a useful
piece of literature for further peace policy cre-
ation efforts. Therefore, with great enthusiasm,
I recommend manuscript *Women and Peacebuilding in
Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia* by Zlatiborka
Popov Momčinović i Adriana Zaharijević for publi-
cation.

Prof. dr Amila Ždralović, Faculty of Law,
University of Sarajevo

Short Biographies
of the Authors

Adriana Zaharijević (1978, Belgrade) is Senior Research Fellow at the Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory of the University of Belgrade. She graduated in Philosophy from the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade and completed all levels of post-graduate studies at the Faculty of Political Sciences, combining political philosophy with feminist theory and social history. She has been a member of the Association of Literary Translators of Serbia since 2003. Her texts are written in Serbian and English, and also translated into many languages used in Europe. She is the author of the books *Postajanje ženom* (*Becoming Woman*, Reconstruction Women's Fund 2010), *Ko je pojedinac? Genealoško propitivanje ideje građanina* (*Who is an Individual? Genealogical Inquiry into the Idea of a Citizen*, Karpos 2014, 2019), and *Život tela. Politička filozofija Džudit Batler* (*Life of Bodies. Political Philosophy of Judith Butler*, Akademska knjiga 2020), which won her the "Anđelka Milić" Award for feminist creativity in the field of science and culture.

Zlatiborka Popov-Momčinović (1975, Vršac) is Associate Professor of Political Sciences at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of East Sarajevo. She graduated in Sociology from the Faculty of Philosophy in Novi Sad, completed her master studies at the University of East Sarajevo and doctoral studies at the Faculty of Political Sciences of the University of Belgrade. She has participated in many research projects regarding women's activism, reconciliation and peacebuilding, the position of women in journalism, LGBTI population, women's political participation and gender mainstreaming in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as

the role of religion in society. She published the books *Ženski pokret u Bosni i Hercegovini: Artikulacija jedne kontrakulture* (Women's Movement in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Articulation of a Counterculture) and *Žene i procesi pomirenja u Bosni i Hercegovini: Izazov rodnim ulogama, usta(nov)ljenim narativima i performativnim praksama s osvrtom na religiju* (Women and Reconciliation Processes in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Challenging Gender Roles, Established Narratives and Performative Practices, with reference to religion). She has co-authored a series of studies on peacebuilding and reconciliation processes in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in cooperation with the University of Edinburgh and the Centre for Empirical Research of Religion. She is a member of the Board for Political Sciences at the B&H Academy of Sciences and Arts. She is the mother of a boy with autism, hoping and fighting for life without discrimination.

Jelena Vasiljević is Senior Research Fellow at the Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory and Associate Professor at the Faculty of Media and Communications. She obtained her PhD degree at the Department of Ethnology and Anthropology at the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade. Her academic expertise is in political anthropology and citizenship studies. Her research interests so far have included the politics and transformations of citizenship in post-Yugoslav states, debates on culture and rights, politics of memory and remembrance, media narratives in the context of the breakup of Yugoslavia and the 1990s wars. Her main interests currently focus on the issues of political solidarity, activist citizenship and social

movements in the Balkans. She is also the national coordinator of the European Horizon 2020 project *EnTrust. Enlightened trust: An examination of trust and distrust in governance - conditions, effects and remedies*. She was a Research Fellow at the University of Edinburgh and University of Graz. She is the author of the book *Antropologija građanstva (The Anthropology of Citizenship, Mediteran and Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory, 2016; awarded by the Institute of Ethnography SASA as the best monograph in the field of ethnology and anthropology)* and several dozen scientific and professional papers, as well as policy analyses. She is an expert member of BiEPAG (*The Balkans in Europe Policy Advisory Group*).

Prof. Zorica Kuburić, PhD, was born in 1954. She studied psychology at the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade and pedagogy and psychology at the Faculty of Philosophy in Sarajevo, where she defended the thesis titled *Effects of Early Learning on Personality Development*. She obtained her master's degree in 1989 from the School of Medicine in Zagreb, with the thesis titled *Relationship between the Acceptance of Children within the Family and Psychological Disorders in Adolescence*. In 1995, at the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade she defended her doctoral dissertation titled *Self-image of Adolescents in Protestant Families*. She also completed the four-year education programme in systemic family therapy at the Institute of Mental Health in Belgrade.

She worked at the College of Education in Belgrade, and after she defended her doctoral disserta-

tion, she moved to the Faculty of Philosophy in Novi Sad, where in addition to teaching Sociology of Religion and the Methodology of Teaching Sociology, in 2001 she also founded the Centre for Empirical Research of Religion and initiated the academic journal *Religion and Tolerance*, which she has been editing since 2002. She is also a lecturer and organiser of accredited seminars for the professional development of sociology and philosophy teachers. She is the leader of the continuing education programme titled “Different Techniques for Reducing the Effects of Stress on Children and Adults.”

She has published more than twenty books, including: *Porodica i psihičko zdravlje djece, Odnos prihvaćanja djece u obitelji i psihičkih poremećaja u adolescenciji* (Family and Children’s Psychological Health: Relationship between the Acceptance of Children within the Family and Psychological Disorders in Adolescence); *Religija, porodica i mladi* (Religion, Family and Youth); *Vera i sloboda, vjerske zajednice u Jugoslaviji* (Religion and Freedom: Religious Communities in Yugoslavia); *Vjerske zajednice u Srbiji i vjerska distanca* (Religious Communities in Serbia and Religious Distance 2010; 2019 in English); *Vjeronauk u školi* (Religious Education in Schools), co-authored with Slađana Zuković; *Metodika verske nastave* (Methodology of Religious Education), co-authored with Snežana Dačić and *Metodika nastave sociologije* (Methodology of Teaching Sociology), also co-authored with Snežana Dačić; *Filozofija teologije i univerzalnih vrijednosti, Analiza sadržaja Biblije i kurana* (Philosophy of Theology and Universal Va-

lues: Content Analysis of the Bible and the Quran, 2018). With Ana Zotova she co-authored the book *Uloqa reliqije, obitelji i obrazovanja u procesu pomirenja, razlike u stavovima manjina i većine u Bosni i Hercegovini* (Role of Religion, Family, and Education in Reconciliation Processes: Differences in the Attitudes of the Minority and the Majority in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2019); *Reliqija i psihičko zdravlje vernika* (Religion and the Mental Health of Believers, 2021). She wrote entries for Serbia and Montenegro in *Worldmark Encyclopedia of Religious Practices*.

Amila Ždralović is Associate Professor at the Faculty of Law, University of Sarajevo. She obtained the title of philosophy and sociology teacher from the Faculty of Philosophy in Sarajevo and the titles of MA and PhD in Sociology from the Faculty of Political Sciences in Sarajevo. In addition to teaching at the Faculty of Law since 2006/2007, she has participated as visiting lecturer and researcher in educational and research programmes at other institutions. Among other things, she was engaged in the academic 2011/2012 as an associate for the course in Gender and Nationalism, within the postgraduate gender studies programme at the Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies of the University of Sarajevo. From 2000 to 2006 she worked as a journalist, high school teacher, and instructor for the programmes by non-governmental organisations. She authored the book *Teorijski sporovi o pravdi: Liberalne perspektive i odgovor na kritike* (Theoretical Disputes on Justice: Liberal Perspectives and Response to Criticism). She has presented the results of her scientific research

to the academic and professional public in more than fifty papers published in co-authored monographs, proceedings, journals, as well as in the presentations given at academic and professional conferences and seminars.

Dubravka Stojanović, PhD, is a historian and professor at the Department of History, General Contemporary History Section, of the University of Belgrade. She works on the questions of democracy in Serbia and the Balkans at the turn of the 20th century, interpretations of history in recent Serbian textbooks, social history, modernisation process, and the history of women in Serbia. She is a consultant to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in the fields of culture and education. She has participated in many conferences in Serbia and abroad and given lectures at Sorbonne University, Columbia University, Stanford University, Humboldt University, University of Ljubljana, Zagreb, Sarajevo, Athens, Sofia, Copenhagen, etc. With Milan Ristović she edits the *Annual of Social History* journal. She is vice-president of the Balkan Committee for Education in the field of history, organised by the Centre for Democracy and Reconciliation in Southeast Europe (Thessaloniki, Greece). She has published nine books, including one on the world history: *Uspon globalnog sveta 1885-2015 (The Rise of the Global World 1885-2015)*. She won the 2003 City of Belgrade Award for Social and Human Sciences for her book *Srbija i demokratija: 1903-1914 (Serbia and Democracy 1903-1914 - A Historical Study of the "Golden Age of Serbian Democracy")*. She received the Peace Prize from the Belgrade Centre for

Peace and Democracy in 2011 for her peace activism 191
initiated in 1993, during the war in the former
Yugoslavia. In 2012, she received the Winning of
Freedom Award for women activists who are fighting
for human rights. She is a recipient of the French
Order of Merit *Chevalier de L'ordre national du
Mérite*.

Biographies of
the INTERLOCUTORS

Mira Vilušić was born on 3 May 1949 in Tuzla and graduated from the University of Sarajevo, Faculty of Pedagogy and Psychology. She is a psychotherapist and specialist for working with women survivors of rape; AWO ZENTRALE FORTBILDUNG. She attended a number of seminars organised by international organisations including Norwegian People's Aid (NPA), CARE International, Swedish Foundation Kvinna Till Kvinna, IRC - management, strategic planning, fundraising, communication skills, human rights, leadership skills, working with persons with psychological traumas (women, children, war-disabled persons). Since 1994, she has worked in the "HO HORIZONTI" association in Tuzla, and has remained an active member to date. She is a lover of yoga, beautiful poetry and socialising with optimistic people, and always and forever a women's rights activist and peacemaker.

Vildana Džekman is a feminist, LGBTI activist and legal expert. She has dedicated more than a decade to empowering women and advocating for gender equality in institutional and public policies. She had been one of the main initiators of the adoption of the Law on Treating Infertility through Biomedically Assisted Fertilisation in FB&H, which was adopted after seven years of active efforts. She participated in the development of the set of gender related amendments to the Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Constitution of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, of numerous laws, as well as a number of submissions for international reports in the field of women's human rights. She currently works on legal affairs in the BH Journalists Association, where she advo-

cates freedom of expression and protection of the rights of journalists and media professionals in B&H. She is sensitive to inequality and injustice, and she perceives fighting for a just and democratic society as her life mission.

Hana Ćurak (21 March 1994, Sarajevo) is a sociologist (feminist and activist). As the founder of advocacy platform *Sve su to Vještice* (They're All Witches) she has been active in the fields of media advocacy, political communication and art production. After her practice in German Parliament, she worked at the Hertie School University as a consultant for different international organisations. She lives and works between Sarajevo and Berlin.

Zoe Ćudović is a feminist, activist, lesbian and multidisciplinary practitioner of art. As a theatre pedagogists, performer, drag king transformer, or a toilet artist, she combines artistic and activist methods in order to change the existing level of awareness and social relations. Since 1995, she has been involved in practice and research of informal and engaged theatrical forms. She either founded, or has participated in different groups and collectives, such as *Žene na delu*, Act Women, Queer Belgrade, Charming Princess (music bend) and Reconstruction Women's Fund; taught Feminist Art in Public Space at Women's Studies (Faculty of Political Sciences in Belgrade); organised engaged street performances fighting violence against women and numerous visibility campaigns for LGBTQ +, women's human rights and marginalised persons. Since 2001, she has con-

nected artists from all over the world with Serbian activists, through initiative titled “Women’s Movement – Women’s Theatre – Women’s Body”. She received Jelana Šantić Award for combining art and activism, as well as the BeFem Award for Feminist Achievements for her promotion of feminism outside the feminist movement. She is the editor and host of the radio show Ženergija (Womenergy).

Iva Parađanin is a journalist and documentary filmmaker. She currently works as the editor of Elle Active and hosts podcast titled Tampon Zone. She graduated from the Faculty of Philosophy, Department of Art History, and subsequently continued her education by finishing the Communicology Master Programme at the Faculty of Media and Communication. Shortly after finishing her studies, she focused her interest on journalism, as she found employment at the B92, where she worked as a journalist and reporter. Her interest in women’s rights and attainment of gender equality through media started in 2016. She has authored a number of articles and documentaries dealing with these issues, the most notable of which was the documentary film “Unwanted Daughters of Montenegro”, selected for a number of regional festivals. She advocates for the promotion of the accurate media image for women and prevention of violence against women through adequate reporting. She received the BeFem Award for the feminist media contribution and is a member of the group Women Journalists against Violence.

Aleksandra Petrić is a feminist and women’s human rights activist with 25 years of experience

working in civil society organisations, on institutional development programmes in the fields of protection of human rights, gender equality, combating violence against women and position of youth. She has worked as a researcher, analyst and consultant for local and international NGOs and state institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in the region of former Yugoslavia. From 1997 to 2001, Aleksandra was one of the coordinators of the hCa Youth Network of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which after the war connected local youth initiatives in activities of peacebuilding and empowering youth's voices. She cooperated with the portals of Frontal and Radio Sarajevo and published more than 70 texts concerning feminist criticism of the social response to violence against women and children and breaches of women's human rights. She participated in numerous local, regional and international initiatives aimed at fighting for women's human rights, combating all forms of violence against women and strengthening of women's voices in public.

Aleksandra graduated from the Faculty of Law in Banjaluka in 1995, and got her master's degree in international human rights from the Josef Korbel School of International Studies at the University of Denver, USA in 2002. Since 2003, she has been working in the United Women Foundation, Banjaluka, currently as their Executive Manager.

Žarka Radoja worked and cooperated, in her two decades of working in journalism, with media in Serbia and other post-Yugoslav countries, dealing with topics such as propaganda, post-war society,

exile and migration. In 2013, with her colleague Dušan Komarčević, she founded kontrapress.com internet portal. She edited the book of interviews *Integritet u novinarstvu - razgovori sa novinarkama i novinarima Zapadnog Balkana* (Integrity in Journalism - Conversations with journalists of the Western Balkans) published by the Centre for Cultural Decontamination (Belgrade, 2020). The collection entitled *Forced Migration and Social Trauma* (Routledge, 2018) includes her article on reporting about refugees and migrants in the media. Her article "Dnevnik iz parka" (A Park Diary) published in the *LiceUllice* magazine was selected as one of the ten best texts in 2015 by the International Network of Street Papers. She co-organised exhibition "20 godina poslije - suvremena dubrovačka scena u Kotoru" (20 Years Later - Contemporary Dubrovnik Scene in Kotor) which was organised to commemorate 20th anniversary of the start of the assaults on Dubrovnik (Palazzo Bizanti, 2011), co-organised the first post-war collective exhibition of the independent Dubrovnik art scene in Belgrade (Podroom, 2014), as well as the return exhibition of Belgrade artists in Dubrovnik (Otok, 2015). She cooperated on the documentary feature *Midnight Traveler* by the Afghanistan director Hassan Fazili, which won a series of awards at festivals such as Sundance, Berlinale, Thessaloniki, Nyon...

Anja Ilić (1995, Belgrade) is a student of the final year of sociology at the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade and a political activist. She started her engagement in activism and political organising in 2015, when she became a member of the

revolutionary socialist organisation Marx21. She has participated in different leftist initiatives. She worked as a correspondent of regional leftist portals, and she currently writes for the Prometej (Prometheus) portal from Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Zorana Antonijević received her PhD from the University of Novi Sad, in the field of gendering of family support policies in the context of European integrations in Serbia. From 2009 to 2021, she worked as gender equality advisor in the OSCE Mission. Before that, she worked as the advisor for gender equality in different international organisations and CSOs, as well as in public administration. She was the first gender equality advisor in the Government of Vojvodina and the founder and director of the Gender Equality Institute of the Government of Vojvodina. She was the editor of a number of publications concerning gender equality in the sector of security, gender responsible budgeting and gendering. She published her papers in journals such as *Sociologija*, *Temida* and *Genero*. Her research fields include institutionalisation of feminist theories and practices, public policies in the field of care and security, as well as theoretical and practical consequences of public policies' gendering in Serbia and the region.

Jovana Netković was born in Kraljevo. She graduated from the Faculty of Culture and Media, Department of Public Relations at the Megatrend University. She worked as a journalist, in the field of communication, coordinated events and projects concerning women's and human rights in

the NGO sector, worked for Vice Serbia, *LiceUlice* magazine and other media, as well as in the Department of Gender Equality and Anti-Discrimination of the Ministry of Labour. Since 2017, she has been a member of the UNDP group Journalists against Violence against Women. She has been a member of the BeFem since 2012, and has worked there since 2019, predominantly in media production. Together with her colleague Milica Batričević, she received Media Award for Tolerance, awarded by the OSCE Mission to Serbia and Commissioner for the Protection of Equality, for their short documentary “Heroine from the Neighbourhood: Dragana Đapić”.

Selma Hadžihalilović is a feminist activist with more than 25 years of work experience in improving the quality of life for women and children in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In the past two decades, she has worked on the issues of the right to conscientious objection to obligatory military service, prevention of human trafficking in B&H, women’s political participation and violence against women and girls.

She has been a co-founder of a great number of women’s organisations in B&H. In her work, she particularly deals with the problems of socially marginalised women, such as single mothers, mothers of children with disabilities, women from rural areas and war violence survivors. She advocates for the establishment of the unique alimony fund on the level of the entire B&H, adoption of ZERO tolerance to violence and discrimination against women and girls, and she actively works on the

promotion of women's perspective on current social and political issues. She regularly participates in different public events, such as conferences and roundtable discussions, and appears in the media to talk about socially marginalised women's groups and their perspectives in the context of Bosnia and Herzegovina. With her essays on the position of socially marginalised women, she contributes to the B&H CEDAW Shadow Reports.

She is a polyglot and actively uses English, French and German language. She enjoys travelling and learning from the experiences of women from all over the world. She believes in lifelong learning, and has studied political sciences, women's studies, Islam studies and gender-responsible tourism. She is currently enrolled in a communicology Master's programme.

In 2016, she received the Snow Clyde Social Justice Award given by the Center for Social Justice of the State University of Oklahoma (USA).

In 2019, she was invited by the Government of the Republic of India to attend the largest spiritual gathering in the world – Kumbh Mela 2019, held in the state of Uttar Pradesh, on the banks of the Ganges.

Jelena Memet (1978) is a feminist, and a long-time peace activist in Serbia and the region, as well as one of the founders and the President of the Alternative Centre for Girls since 2013. For more than 16 years, she has empowered girls and young women in the field of prevention of gender-based and digital violence, peace policies, and digital

and integrated security. She was one of the founders of the Feminist Spring School programme for young women from Kosovo and Serbia, which has been organised for seven years now in order to promote peacebuilding, eliminate prejudices and open dialogue between young women from Kosovo and Serbia. She has recently been engaged in philanthropic efforts focused on supporting and empowering girls. 203

THE NEVER-ENDING QUEST FOR SENSE: WOMEN AND PEACEBUILDING
IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA AND SERBIA

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