FEMINIST EXCHANGE ACROSS CONTEXTS:
THE BOSNIAN PEACE PROCESS THROUGH THE LENS OF
SYRIAN PEACE ACTIVISM

By

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Abstract

This thesis is looking into an initiative that gathers women peace activists from Bosnia and Syria, and the process of experience exchange is in the focus of the analysis. I argue that Syrian women's transversal approach to the peace process has positively influenced Bosnian women activists and motivated them to get together, discuss and recapitulate their mistakes in the last twenty years, since their collaboration on this matter has been weak so far. I conclude that this cross-context experience exchange between Bosnian and Syrian peace activists was valuable not only for Syrians, but also for Bosnians, because it demonstrates a potential to produce a movement within the 'movement' that looks back in order to look forward. This refers to acknowledging mistakes and oversights from the previous experience and recapitulating the past, in order to create and develop strategies for demanding and accessing their own rights in the context of post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Key words: peace process, transversal politics, cross-context exchange, activism, Syria, Bosnia and Herzegovina

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1   INTRODUCTION

Women in the sites of conflicts and violence around the world are undergoing through very difficult and life changing experiences, regardless of their positions and opinions on the women's human rights and/or feminism as such. This is not to claim that women are more vulnerable than men just because they are biologically women. It is to point out that due to generally accepted gender roles which intensify in the times of conflict, women are being left behind, unprotected and with no means to defend themselves, they are being economically weakened, sexually assaulted, killed, and above all, they are being silenced and excluded from all the major decisions which directly affect their lives. In an attempt to prevent, redirect and/or stop conflicts, women organize into societies, networks and movements. This thesis is addressing such movement.

"Women Organizing for Change in Bosnia and Syria" is an initiative of the *Women's International League for Peace and Freedom* (hereinafter: *WILPF*) and it represents an international reaction on the Syrian War, focusing on strengthening Syrian women's rights in order to achieve full and equal participation in the peace processes.[1] In addition, this initiative seeks to connect women peace activists from Syria to women peace activists from Bosnia for a series of meetings in which they would exchange their experiences and knowledge.[2] The role of Bosnian women activists is to share valuable lessons with Syrian women peace activists, but also to engage with development of strategies for demanding and accessing their own rights

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[1] Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (28[th] November 2013) *Call for Syrian Applicants: Women Organi[z]ing for Change in Bosnia and Syria*, online edition: http://www.wilpfinternational.org/call-for-syrian-applicants-women-organising-for-change-in-bosnia-and-syria/
[2] Ibidem.

in the context of post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina.[3] Since this initiative is currently the only initiative that connects women peace activists from Bosnia and Syria, I have used it as a platform for my research on feminist exchanges across contexts.

I am looking into this experience exchange in order to analyze how do women activists from Bosnia use this process to reflect on their own war and post-war experience, i.e. I am interested in *how do women activists from Bosnia reflect on the Bosnian peace process through the lens of Syrian peace activism?* In order to answer my research questions, other questions should also be addressed. These questions lay in the background of the two contexts that will be thoroughly elaborated, but also in the existing scholarship that addresses feminist analyses of intersections and interplays of gender and peace. However, the questions of the biggest importance are the ones regarding overcoming identity, spatial and temporal differences between women activists in order to engage in productive discussions and reflections on their previous and current experiences. Hence, the concept of *transversal politics* will be used as a central concept in the following analysis, where I will try to answer whether principles of transversal politics apply to the exchanges across contexts, Bosnian and Syrian context in particular, and if it does, how is it done? Also, I will try to identify the role of Syrian women peace activists in the Bosnian women activists' reflection on their own experience during the Bosnian war and in the post-conflict period of peace building.

As I will show later in the chapter three and its section on existing literature in the field, there is a lack of analysis of the cross-context experience exchange, i.e. on how

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[3] Ibidem.

do these processes affect women peace activists from different contexts that are not necessarily conflicted. I find this to be important because further analyses of the respective experience exchange processes would serve as a potential foundation of more efficient cross-context exchanges. On the other hand, the importance of this analysis also lays in the fact that this process is currently being developed by the two groups of women, one being from Bosnia and Herzegovina, a society that is, twenty years after the War, still struggling with the war profiteers that are in power, and another being from Syria, a country that is currently in the midst of an armed conflict.[4] In a more narrow sense, from a perspective of gender studies scholarship, importance lays in the initiative to include women in all peace processes, from peace negotiations, to later inclusion in the post-conflict peace building.

In this regard, my findings and analysis that will be elaborated later have prompted me to claim that *Syrian women's transversal approach to the peace process has positively influenced Bosnian women activists in terms of 'awakening' them* in the midst of the riots and unrest that have been escalated from the social protests against Bosnian Government,[5] which Bosnian women activists have been ignoring or neglecting due to (1) their positioning in the overall social context of Bosnia and Herzegovina, in which they have accepted passive roles, instead of seeking for a space that would open up opportunities for transformation towards active participation in the decision-making processes; (2) their positioning towards activism itself, where the only legitimate women's network rejects a feminist foretoken and whose significant part of member organizations claim to be women's human rights organizations, but not feminist; thus the overall feminist analysis of the broader social

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[4] Syrian War has started on 15th March 2011 and was still ongoing at the time this thesis was written.
[5] Social protests started in February 2014 and ended in April 2014.

context in Bosnia and Herzegovina is missing. In the light of this argument, I will also argue that *Syrian women's transversal approach to the peace process has motivated Bosnian women activists to get together, discuss and recapitulate their mistakes in the last twenty years*, since their collaboration on this matter has been certainly weak so far. By supporting these arguments throughout the following chapters, I will conclude that this cross-context experience exchange between Bosnian and Syrian peace activists was valuable not only for Syrians, but also for Bosnians, because it demonstrates a potential to produce a movement within the 'movement'[6] that looks back in order to look forward. This refers to acknowledging mistakes and oversights from the previous experience and recapitulating the past, in order to create and develop strategies for demanding and accessing their own rights in the context of post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The significance of development of the transversal politics practices lays in potential transformation of feminist activism, or women's rights advocacy in case of Bosnia, beyond identity politics activism, while problematizing women's homogeneity and strengthening solidarity beyond limitations of one identity. In addition, feminist approaches would consequently get more pragmatic and situational, thus would prosper towards issue-based cooperation.

1.1   Thesis outline

Here, I will briefly present the outline of my thesis, by pointing out the main segments of specific chapters. After this introductory chapter, in chapter two I will briefly present

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[6] Refers to the 'women's movement' in Bosnia and Herzegovina, i.e. the *Women's Network of Bosnia and Herzegovina.*

the research methodology that I have used in this research project. I will present the research design where I will explain the process of my qualitative research and the specifics about the interviews I have conducted during my research period. In addition, I will briefly introduce my interlocutors' backgrounds. Finally, I will present the major challenges and limitations that I have faced during my research phase.

In the third chapter titled *Feminist exchanges towards inclusive peace building*, I will first briefly present the conceptual framework that I have used in the analysis of the collected material. Additionally, I will give an overview of the existing literature in the field, i.e. literature that addresses intersections and interplays of gender and peace, and discusses different cases of peace negotiations in which women were or were not included. This will serve as a good introduction into a discussion on essentialism in the context of women's peace movements, which will illustrate different approaches and representations that are used by women peace activists in different contexts. In regard to these contexts, I will present the two cases of my interest, i.e. the cases of Syria and Bosnia and Herzegovina; after a short summary of the background contexts of the two respective countries and the conflicts that they were and still are facing, I will say more on the role and position of women in the peace processes in both Syria and Bosnia. In the section 3.5 titled *Women's International League for Peace and Freedom*, I will more thoroughly introduce the organization of the same name and its role in the overall process of experience and knowledge exchange between women activists from Bosnia and Syria. In addition, I will present their initiative called *Women Organizing for Change in Bosnia and Syria* that has served as a platform for my research, and will explain the background context of the respective initiative, together with elaborating its major ideas and objectives.

The fourth chapter titled *The effects of cross-context exchanges on women's (feminist) activism* is entirely dedicated to the interviews analysis through which I will use the conceptual and theoretical framework presented in the chapter three. I have divided this chapter into three sections. In the section 4.1, I will discuss the differences among women activists from Bosnia and Syria, both separately and as a group. This discussion will be based on the observations of my interviewees that have participated in the project of experience exchange between women peace activists of the two respective countries. In addition, I will present the means of overcoming those differences through utilization of the principles of transversal politics. In the section 4.2, I will engage in further discussion on transversal politics, and will try to introduce a distinction between two forms of the concept, i.e. in-context and cross-context approach. This will be a valuable contemplation in the light of the rest of the fourth chapter, in which I will further discuss the role of Syrian women activists in Bosnian women activists' reflections on their war and peace process experience, where I will present and analyze the major findings in this research.

Finally, the conclusions of my analysis will be presented in the chapter five, where I will restate my arguments once again, restate my answers to my research questions, and propose questions for further, more detailed analyses.

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2   RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The aim of this research is to look into process of feminist exchange between women peace activists from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Syria, in order to explore how their cross context learning affects their activist engagements, and to show the overall effect of this exchange on Bosnian women activists. The main question that generated the study was whether and how do Bosnian women activists reflect on their war and post-war experience through the lens of Syrian peace activism i.e. its feminist segment. Furthermore, I was interested in Bosnian women activists' utilization of feminist agenda and feminist analysis in their work, with regard to their activist approaches to social and political situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Last, I inquired how they see themselves in the overall social context in Bosnia and Herzegovina, particularly in regard to the social protests that took place in February 2014 across Bosnia. All of the above was approached in the context of Syrian women's experience that has been shared with Bosnian women activists through the WILPF's initiative titled "Women organizing for change in Bosnia and Syria", that has started in 2013 and continues to the time this thesis was written.

In this chapter, I will present my research methodology and design, the women activists that I have interviewed, and limitations and challenges I have faced and dealt with during and after conducting my research. The research methods I have utilized in my research are based on the principles of feminist research proposed by Reinharz, meaning that I have used a discussion approach instead of interrogation, my study is based on valuing my interviewees' knowledge and experience and is conducted while developing "nonexploitative *[sic]* relations" with them (1992: 267).

2.1 Research design

This research is focused on Bosnia and Herzegovina and its capital Sarajevo, since more than half of my interviewees live there. I have conducted seven semi structured interviews with women activists who identify themselves as feminists and work on promotion and protection of human rights. Semi structured interviews were a combination of structured and unstructured interviews in a way that I have prepared a set of questions on different topics that I have intended to discuss in my thesis, but were open-ended and aiming to serve as triggers for more spontaneous answers i.e. questions that "[allowed] interviewees to volunteer their own accounts, to speculate on matters, and have enough time to include all of the material they think relevant to the subject" (Ritchie, 2003: 92).

As mentioned in the introductory part of this chapter, the interviews were discussion based, thus have produced casual conversations with my interviewees whom I allowed to be flexible with their answers and have not interrupted them even if they diverged from the original subject in question. However, in cases when I did not get the answer to my question, I was restating my question by repeating it again, or by reframing it. I have not asked all my interviewees the exact same questions, because not all questions were applicable to all of them due to their different backgrounds, experience, knowledge, and activist engagements.

The questions covered areas of my interviewees' activist engagement and their personal experience, their position on utilization of feminist agenda and feminist

analysis in the work of Bosnian and Syrian women activists, their engagement with WILPF's initiative "Women Organizing for Change in Bosnia and Syria", their role in the process of experience exchange between women activists from Bosnia and Syria, their reflections on the effects of this exchange on Bosnian women, and lessons learned from both direction, particularly by Bosnian from Syrian women.

The average length of the conducted interviews is one hour and twenty minutes. Interviews were conducted in person and via *Skype*, depending on the location of interviewees in the time when interviews took place. All of the interviews were voice recorded except one, during which I have taken detailed notes. Some of the interviews were fully transcribed, while others were only partially transcribed, depending on the usefulness of the content for my overall analysis. All of the interviews were conducted in Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian (BCS) languages, except one that was conducted in English. All translations of interviews' segments from BCS languages to English language are my own.

2.2 Interviewees

In alphabetical order of their surnames, the interviewees are: Jasminka Drino-Kirlić, Selma Korjenić, Gorana Mlinarević, Aleksandra Petrić, Nela Porobić Isaković, Nawal Yazeji, and Memnuna (Nuna) Zvizdić.

Jasminka Drino-Kirlić is a peace activist and "natural feminist" from Gornji Vakuf-Uskoplje, a municipality in the Central Bosnian Canton, and one of the oldest cities on the territory of Bosnia and Hercegovina. She is a retired professor of literature and

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an activist in the *Youth Center (Omladinski centar) Gornji Vakuf-Uskoplje* that deals with peace building, youth activism, civic education and democracy building, culture, and psychosocial work with youth and children. Her role in the process of experience exchange between Bosnian and Syrian women activists is important due to years of her experience in the ethnically divided community of Gornji Vakuf-Uskoplje. The school where she worked was conceptualized as the so-called 'two schools under one roof' in which the ethnicity based segregation of Bosniak and Croat children is still current. She is an activist for more than twenty years now.

Selma Korjenić works with the Swiss-based organization *TRIAL* (*Track Impunity Always*) as the Human Rights Officer in charge of Sexual Violence Program of the organization. Due to her expertise on the issues of sexual violence against women, Selma was a member of the group that discussed the issues around access to justice and process of transitional justice, having an important role in the overall discussion on wartime sexual violence. She lives and works in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Gorana Mlinarević is a feminist activist and researcher on the prosecution of wartime sexual violence and post-war issues and experiences affecting women primarily in Bosnia and Herzegovina and former Yugoslavia. Her interest lays in intersections and tensions between identity politics and economic and social realities of the post-war societies and societies in so called transitions. Gorana was one of the key actors of the module on transitional justice. She is currently PhD Candidate in Women's studies at the National University of Ireland, Galway, and a researcher on the project "Gender of Justice" implemented by the Goldsmiths College, University London.

Aleksandra Petrić is a Program Director at the *United Women (Udružene žene)* organization in Banja Luka, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Prior to that, she worked with the Helsinki Citizens' Assembly Youth Network in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In her public advocacy work, Aleksandra concentrates on political participation and women's initiatives. Aleksandra lives and works in Banja Luka, *de facto* capital of the second political entity in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serb Republic. She has not participated in the WILPF's Conference in Sarajevo.

Nela Porobić Isaković is a feminist activist from Bosnia working with WILPF as a Project Coordinator of the "Women Organizing for Change in Bosnia and Syria" initiative in Bosnia and Herzegovina. She holds an M.A. in Political Science from the University of Lund, Sweden. Her work scope covers a range of issues within Human rights and Women, Peace and Security agenda. Nela currently lives and works in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Nawal Yazeji is a researcher on women's issues and a feminist activist working on the promotion of inclusive peace negotiations in Syria. She works with the *Syrian Women's League*, one of the oldest women's organizations in Syria, operating since 1949. Nawal currently lives and works in Damascus, Syria.

Memnuna (Nuna) Zvizdić is a co-founder and Director of *Women for Women (Žene Ženama)*, a Bosnian women's center for human rights, peace and security. She is a feminist and peace activist. Currently she is a board member of Regional Women's Lobby group. She is also a facilitator of non-violent communication and peaceful

conflict resolution. At the WILPF's Conference in Sarajevo, she was a coordinator and participant of the module titled "Peace negotiations and women in public life in post-conflict BiH". Nuna is an activist for more than twenty years now. She lives and works in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

2.3   Research limitations and challenges

My position in this research was the one of an "insider" who is also a member of the group to which the most of my interviewees belong, i.e. the *Women's Network of Bosnia and Herzegovina*. Thus, some of my interviewees already knew me before the arrangements for the interview took place. Others were familiar with my previous work, or the organization(s) that I have worked with. Hence, I did not have problems with contacting and accessing my interviewees, at least not from the group of Bosnian women activists. Regarding Syrian women, my initial plan was to interview five to six women activists, however, many of them never replied my e-mails, and some of them did not wanted to participate because of the language barrier. Unfortunately, not many of them speak English.

However, regarding accessing Bosnian women activists, my in-group position proved to be helpful, especially since all of my interviewees work in the field that I am exploring with this thesis. Hence, my impression was that all of my interviewees have warmly welcomed my research since they have been very supportive and cooperative. Regarding the material that was audio recorded and was supposed to be included into my analysis, all of the interviewees have agreed on using their own

names and everything that has been said during our conversations. In addition, I have prepared consent forms which they have all gladly signed.

One of the issues was the fact that six out of seven interviews were conducted in Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian languages, thus the transcripts have been translated into English. This process has altered the selections that I have decided to translate in order to use them as a supportive material for my analysis. However, I have tried as much as possible to render interviewees' words so they still have their original meaning, but using the direct quotes do leave my reading of meanings open to criticism and debate.

3 FEMINIST EXCHANGES TOWARDS INCLUSIVE PEACE PROCESS

In this chapter, I will first briefly present the conceptual framework that I have used in the analysis of the collected material. Additionally, I will briefly introduce the concept of transversal politics that will be thoroughly discussed later in this thesis. This will serve as a good introduction into a discussion on essentialism in the context of women's peace movements, which will illustrate different approaches and representations that are used by women peace activists in different contexts. In regard to these contexts, I will present the two cases of my interest, i.e. the cases of Syria and Bosnia and Herzegovina; after a short summary of the background contexts of the two respective countries and the conflicts that they were and still are facing, I will say more on the role and position of women in the peace processes in both Syria and Bosnia.

3.1 Conceptual framework and introduction to transversal politics

In order to properly address the main questions that were proposed earlier, I will briefly present the conceptual framework and theoretical approach that I have used in my analysis. Some of the concepts that are discussed in the following chapters are not integrated in the analysis of qualitative data collected, but are crucial for the overall understanding of the ideas that frame the main argument of this written work. For example, in the section 3.2, I use theories of representation and strategic use of essentialism, in order to illustrate differences in approaching peace politics, but also in order to problematize true essentialist approaches. Cockburn's (2012a) analysis

here is important in terms of critique of essentialist approaches to women's peace movements, but also for later better understanding of her position in discussion about transversal politics.

The crucial theory that I am applying in the chapter four fits the framework of transversal politics. As stated earlier, the significance of development of the transversal politics practices lays in potential transformation of feminist activism, in the direction that leads beyond identity politics activism, while problematizing women's homogeneity and strengthening solidarity beyond limitations of one identity. Additionally, feminist approaches would consequently get more pragmatic and situational, thus would prosper towards issue-based cooperation. As it will be seen later in the analysis, transversal politics as such is not a testing subject of this research, but rather its forms and results. These refer to *in-context* and *cross-context* transversal politics. In-context transversal politics refer to strategies of overcoming identity differences through diversity, which are used within one specific context, i.e. one conflicted situation in this case. This has been supported by many feminist scholars, out of which I single out Yuval-Davis (1997) who has taken up the term and developed it into a theory, and Cockburn (1998) who was one of the first authors to test it and write a study about it. Cross-context transversal politics, on the other hand, is a non-explored area; according to Yuval-Davis' (1997) theory, proposed meaning of cross-context transversal politics would refer to conflicted situation of two or more different contexts such as contexts of current Syria and Bosnia that are in the process of feminist exchange. However, since Syria and Bosnia are not in conflict, principles of transversal politics do not directly apply to the respective process.

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Nevertheless, there are still elements of transversal politics that are identifiable in this initiative, and will be elaborated in the following chapters.

3.2 Essentialism and women's peace movements

In order to understand women's roles and importance in peace processes, it is crucial to understand how women activists position themselves towards these processes as such. In the dominant peace and conflict discourse, many women's peace movements are characterized in an essentializing manner by seeing women peace activists as peace loving and nurturing by their nature and in their essence.

Women peace activists have recognized that their activism gets called into question when they are engaged in openly feminist movements, and rarely when they are engaged in, for example, motherhood movements. This is due to patriarchal and militarized discourses that have generated a propaganda that links masculinity, nationalism and militarism, and specifically try to educate women how to be good mothers to both their children and their nations (Turpin, 1998: 11). This discourse encompasses the idea of the patriotic mother who should feel honored and privileged to sacrifice her sons for the sake of the nation, and opposes what is seen as the disloyal mother who stands up and protests against the war (Turpin, 1998: 11). This good mother – bad mother binary was perfectly illustrated in the case of *Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo*,[7] where it was socially expected for good mothers to be invisible

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[7] During the "Dirty War" in Argentina in the 1970s, the military government abducted, tortured, and killed left-wing militants, and it prevented any discussion on this matter. That is why a group of mothers began to meet in 1977 for non-violent demonstrations, wanting their children back. These women were the first women to publicly speak against the brutality of the regime. After the movement has grown, thus drew international attention, it became difficult for the regime to continue with their harassment, especially since women activists presented a moral symbol. Finally, the civilian

in the public life, stay in the private sphere, and thus fulfill their patriotic duty on a daily basis for the sake of both their children and their country (Taylor, 1994: 294). Consequently, from the perspective of patriarchal nationalisms, the abandonment of this role and organizing for obtaining visibility in the public sphere makes women bad and disloyal, or as Taylor has noticed, non-mothers and anti-mothers (1994: 294). Another example of this narrative is notable in the case of the *Mother's Front* of Sri Lanka where the government used counter rhetoric to delegitimize women's organizations founded on representations of motherhood; good mothers are not expected to stage demonstrations but to look after their children, hence their capability for performing the role of good mothers is brought into question, especially because they failed to show gratitude to the regime for taking on their responsibility and 'rehabilitating' their children, although in the most vicious ways (de Alwis, 2008: 156).

These ideas are dominant in nationalist discourse in which women's patriotism is depicted through their roles as mothers, whereas the symbolism of motherhood can be equated with symbolism of being a soldier; both represent means of nation building. In this regard, Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1989) have listed five ways in which women tend to participate in ethnic and national processes and in relation to nation building. They single out roles that women have as

    (1) biological reproducers of members of ethnic collectivities,
    (2) reproducers of the boundaries of ethnic/national groups,
    (3) ideological reproducers of collectivity and cultural carriers,
    (4) signifiers of ethnic/national differences, and as
    (5) participants in national, economic, political and military struggles (1989: 7-10).

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government returned in 1983, and the principles of the *Madres* were used as a foundation for forming other *Madres* organizations in other authoritarian regimes. Source: Women in World History Curriculum (n.d.) *Speaking Truth to Power: Madres of the Plaza de Mayo*, online edition: http://www.womeninworldhistory.com/contemporary-07.html [1st June 2014].

This categorization illustrates the reproductive role often expected of women and is constructed discursively, rather than necessarily one that all women actually fulfill. Reproduction in this case refers to both biological reproduction and symbolic reproduction of nation. Whatever the case, her social significance is proportional to her productiveness – the more she reproduces, the more significant she is in the sense of broader social context. Here, motherhood can be seen as an instrument of a nationalist agenda or even a weapon of war; giving birth to and raising children who will embrace socially accepted patterns of behavior and their nation/people's ideology, and soon become soldiers for the purpose of its protection, is a *conditio sine qua non* of any ethnic or nationalist ideology that aims towards sustainability, or as Peterson has pointed out, biological and social reproduction of one group is "fundamental to nationalist practice, process and politics" (1999: 39).

Motherhood and other women's peace movements are frequently infused with principles of non-violence and antimilitarism, and from all of the above, it can be said that women's peace movements are often essentialized because of the strategies women use in their peace activities. In dominant war and peace narratives, men and masculinities are associated with war, while women and femininities are usually linked to non-violence, antimilitarism and peace. In other words, men are depicted as violent and killers, while women are seen as peaceful, life-giving and mothers.

When it comes to feminist theory, a heated debate on gender essentialisms exists, both in general and when discussing women's position towards peace and conflict. As noticed by Ždralović and Rožajac-Zulčić, "an essentialist position of *the women as the peaceful sex* is not universally accepted and a significant number of feminists

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reject it, seeing it as a militaristic construct" (2013: 120). Many feminists such as Nira Yuval-Davis engage with this debate from a non-essentialist position by emphasizing patriarchally established gender roles as a reason for the specific position of women in peace processes. She elaborates that since women are rarely obliged to serve in the military and fight the wars, their anti-war and anti-militaristic movements may be a part of their broader feminist beliefs, and in addition they see their participation in these peace movements as a fight against the patriarchal system in general (Yuval-Davis, 2004; in Ždralović and Rožajac-Zulčić, 2013). This implies that women are not driven into anti-militaristic and anti-war activism because they are innately peaceful, but the reasons they are engaged are strongly connected to the fact that they are unable to serve the army, their experience with performing unpaid jobs and engagement in non-competitive activities, making it safer for women to act against militaristic regimes, as noted by Mlađenović (2003; in Ždralović and Rožajac-Zulčić, 2013).

However, not all women's peace movements and anti-militaristic or anti-war actions are feminist actions, which could be seen from the mother's movements that were elaborated in the beginning of this chapter. This is due to the fact that fighting against war does not necessarily mean that gender roles in the society are being challenged. Nevertheless, the way the women perform their roles as mothers contributes to a transformation of the meaning of motherhood. Occupation of public spaces in protest opens a space for transformation of passive maternalism into active maternalism. Motherhood performance does not openly challenge traditional women's roles, but it rather "play[s] into the narrative" (Taylor, 1994: 301) and conforms to socially accepted feminine behavior by creating an image of peaceful, caring, crying mothers

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praying for peace. However, although conformed, those women shifted the notion of what it means to be a mother – they become present in the fields, in the streets, and at peace talks, and they speak their positions, opinions and objectives.

On the other hand, renowned feminist scholars such as Cynthia Cockburn present an alternative scenario; Cockburn claims that we can "confidently use the words 'feminist peace activism', 'feminist antimilitarism' or 'a feminist analysis of war'" for women's antiwar movements of any kind (Cockburn, 2012a, para. 1). She explains that "the trope 'women oppose war on grounds of women's life-giving role' is part of a critical anti-essentialist discourse: biology determines nothing" (Cockburn, 2012a, para. 2). On the contrary, Cockburn found that essentialist approaches to women's peace movements by using a "women's peaceful natures" maxim are usually inspired by anti-feminism, and they "provocatively overstate[ ] women's presence in peace movements" (2012a, para. 3). Besides that, Cockburn convincingly refutes the argument on the peaceful nature of women, by stating that:

> (…) to believe the best of women is to believe the worst of men: that they are irremediably violence-prone. If women believed human beings [are] dichotomous and fixed in their natures, they would see no sense in campaigning for change. Antiwar activists are necessarily social-constructionists (2012a, para. 3).

Cockburn's (2012) experience with women peace activists shows that they tend to emphasize their political views and ideologies in the first place, making the socialist, radical and liberal views on anti-war and peace for that matter intertwined, but not competing: radical anti-militarist feminist see "men and masculinities (socially shaped) as sources of women's oppression" (2012a, para. 6), socialist and anti-racist anti-militarist feminists see the problem beyond the gender system since the "war is often caused by, or exploits, politicized difference, of national identity, religion and

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ethnicity" (2012a, para. 7), and finally liberal anti-war feminists are creditable for "'women's rights as human rights' [campaigns], for the development of a system of international justice, for rape to be defined as a war crime" (2012a, para. 8), and for achieving instruments such as UN Security Council Resolutions on Women, Peace and Security that promote inclusion of women in peace processes. Cockburn concludes her observations with a statement that "it is a pretty holistic feminism that is forged in the crucible of war" (2012a, para. 9).

The question here is whether such a holistic approach is a consequence of "the crucible of war", or it fits the essentialist views on women's peace movements elaborated earlier. I will support Cockburn's view here and agree with her critique of gender essentialism; women peace activists are by default challenging traditional gender roles that are constructed on the essentialist views of gender – otherwise, as Cockburn claimed, "they would see no sense in campaigning for change". Hence, it is self-explicatory that gender roles and essentialism are justifying one another. For the purpose of this conclusion, I will define gender roles as socially constructed set of behaviors that are in general being prescribed as socially acceptable and desirable for individuals of specific biological sex, and essentialism as the view that gender roles, i.e. the prescribed set of behavior, belong to the same biological process that determines one's biological sex. In other words, essentialism is a descriptive claim that all women, regardless of their background, have similar behavioral attributes, while gender roles are prescriptive claims about how women should behave.

Syrian peace activists are yet another example of social-constructionist anti-war, thus non-essentialist movement; they are challenging the traditional gender roles by

claiming their place in the Syrian peace negotiations and with their peace activism that is utilized as a vessel for highlighting their political views and ideologies, not their gender. The next section will further elaborate Syrian women's role and position in the Syrian peace process.

3.3 Syrian women in the peace process

The Syrian War, also known as Syrian Civil War, Syrian Revolution or Syrian Uprising, started as a protest against the current government in the beginning of 2011. The protest that soon spread nationwide was initially a part of the wider Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) movement that is popularly known as the Arab Spring. Demands for democratic and economic reforms within the existing Syrian government soon turned into military siege and armed rebellion. Belligerents in the Syrian War are the Assad government with the capacities of the Syrian Army and its supporters on one side, and the opposition composed of different armed organizations led by the Free Syrian Army on the other side. Data from February 2014 reports more than 140 thousand deaths as a consequence of the conflict, half of that being civilian (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, Feb 2014). The same source reports on deaths of more than 7 thousand children, and around 5 thousand women over the age of eighteen. The last available report on violence against women in Syria shows that more than 6 thousand women have been raped from the beginning of the conflict until November 2013 (Nasar, 2013). However, Nasar notes that the number of victims of sexual violence is most certainly much higher, but many cases remain unreported due to deaths, displacements, and stigma that is put on the victims of sexual violence who are consequently silenced from speaking about their

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experiences (2013: 8). Nasar (2013) also reports on women's human rights violations and their most common forms; violations of the rights to life (killing of women in the context of military fighting, execution of women during massacres, using women as human shields), sexual violence (rapes during incursions and raids, rapes during kidnapping, rape inside governmental prisons, detention facilities and at checkpoints, sexual harassment and humiliation during detention), arbitrary detentions with torture and denial of fair trial, medical care and the right of detained women to receive visitors, forced disappearances and the growing phenomenon of abductions, random kidnappings and using women as hostages.

When it comes to the women's peace movement in Syria, women activists are taking a specific position towards peace negotiations and the peace process itself; interviewed women peace activists agreed that Syrian women are using a *third party approach* by demanding substantial participation of women, not as a negotiating side at the table, but as an independent part of that process. Nawal Yazeji, activist at the Syrian Women's League from Damascus, said:

> We (women), as groups and small organizations, gathered and decided to go to Geneva to be a part of the peace negotiations, and we have established the, what we call, Syrian Women's Initiative for Peace and Democracy. Our first demand was to be an independent part of the peace negotiations; to be at the table as a third party.

Demands[8] of *Syrian Women's Initiative for Peace and Democracy* are divided into three segments: (1) Demands related to the participation of women in the peace process, (2) Demands on the Negotiation Process, and (3) Priorities related to ending the fighting, promoting the peace process and improving the humanitarian situation. Regarding the first ones that are related to the participation of women in the peace

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[8] Syrian Women's Initiative for Peace and Democracy (n.d.) *Demands of Syrian Women's Initiative for Peace and Democracy*, online edition: http://swipad.org/our_initiative [17th May 2014].

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process, Syrian women are calling for implementation of the UN Security Council Resolutions on Women, Peace and Security[9] and are requesting "effective participation of women (…) in a proportion of no less than 30%".[10] They are further demanding women "to be included as observers in the negotiations", and "meaningful participation of women in the entire political process".[11] Other than that, and regarding participation of women in the peace process, *Syrian Women's Initiative for Peace and Democracy* is demanding for appointment of a "gender advisor to the mediation team and establish[ment of] communication channels, (…) protect[ion of] women who participate in negotiations, (…) [and] [b]uild[ing] [ ] capacity[ies] of Syrian women activists (…) in the areas of negotiation and peacebuilding skills".[12]

The respective demands of *Syrian Women's Initiative for Peace and Democracy* are concerning only participation of women in the peace negotiations. However, their other demands are gathered around

> proposing political solutions to the conflict, state building based on citizenship and the rule of law, democratic transition, pluralistic, civil and democratic state, principles of peaceful transfer of power, separation of powers, independence of the judiciary, rule of law and neutrality of the military, equality of women and men, gender-sensitive transitional justice, ending all forms of military support to the parties, and rejecting any political solution based on ethnicity, confession, religion or military balance on the ground.[13]

Syrian women's demands are by themselves problematizing the essentialist views on women's peace movements since they are not focused on protection and equal treatment of women solely, but the peaceful resolution of Syrian war. Syrian women's

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[9] UN Security Council Resolutions 1325, 1820, 1888, 1889, 1960, 2106, 2122.
[10] Syrian Women's Initiative for Peace and Democracy (n.d.), *Demands related to the participation of women in the peace process*, online edition: http://swipad.org/our_initiative [17th May 2014].
[11] Ibidem.
[12] Ibidem.
[13] Syrian Women's Initiative for Peace and Democracy (n.d.), *Demands on the Negotiation Process*, online edition: http://swipad.org/our_initiative [17th May 2014].

agenda is challenging Syrian militarized political system by demanding structural change of the regime, which is consistent with previously presented Cockburn's view on feminist non-essentializing peace movements. Their reasons and motivation behind their goals and actions show that even their excluding position in the peace process is constructed by their social and cultural contexts. However, they are representing the goals of their society as a whole, but when it comes to representation by the *Syrian Women's Initiative for Peace and Democracy*, women are contesting that the respective initiative is a representative of the whole population:

> No one can say: 'I am representing the whole population', not the regime, not the opposition, not we, not anyone can say: 'I represent my people, Syrian people'. It's not real, no one can do that. We are a group who represent *some* Syrian women; we are not representing *all* Syrian women – no one can do that (Nawal Yazeji, activist at the Syrian Women's League, Damascus).

Although the respective group of Syrian women negotiates with both the regime and the opposition, they are not granted a 'place at the table' during the peace negotiations. About their experience of exclusion from the peace negotiations, Nawal Yazeji says:

> We were 47 women and many of us were representing informal groups and civil society organizations. We had few preparatory meetings and then the conference in Geneva in December. (…) We met all the main actors in the field, from the war: Americans, British, and we had 25 meetings with different actors, ambassadors, foreign ministers and others, asking for their support. Unfortunately, we couldn't get to the table, but we met Mr. Brahimi[14] two to three times, and we were talking about how we see the solutions and so on. And then, the whole negotiations stopped.

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[14] Lakhdar Brahimi, an Algerian United Nations diplomat, who served as the United Nations and Arab League Special Envoy to Syria till May 14, 2014. He resigned from this position in May 2014. Source: New York Times (13 May 2014) U.N. Mediator on Syria Quits, online edition: http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/14/world/middleeast/Syria-war-abuses.html?_r=0 [13 May 2014].

This is a familiar experience of many women's peace movements around the world, and is a consequence of privileging majoritarian, male and monolithic cultural and social values that deny the space for women (Banerjee, 2008: 201). Although there are instruments such as UN SC Resolutions on Women, Peace and Security that demand inclusion of women in all peace processes, including peace negotiations, the denial is still evident and it is "legitimized through liberal and social democratic discourses of state formation that camouflages the political will that consciously decides who belong and who does not belong to a particular space" (Balibar, 1990; Yuval-Davis, 1991; both paraphrased in Banerjee, 2008: 201).

This section's purpose was to serve as a brief introduction to the current situation with the Syrian conflict and Syrian women's peace activism, which leads us to the other side of the comparison that this thesis deals with, which is Bosnian women's peace activism. Both initiatives will be elaborated in the section 3.5, where the joint project on Syrian and Bosnian peace movements implemented by the *Women's International League for Peace and Freedom* will be introduced.

3.4   Bosnian women in the peace process

Bosnian War was an international armed conflict that took place in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the period from 1992 to 1995 as a result of Bosnian succession from the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) The warring sides were the forces of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina and self-proclaimed Bosnian Serb and Bosnian Croat entities in Bosnia who were directed by the Republic of Serbia in the name of SFRY, and the Republic of Croatia respectively. According to the last

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pre-war population census,[15] Socialist Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina was inhabited by 43.5% of Muslims[16], 31.2% Serbs, 17.4% Croats, and 5.6% Yugoslavs, thus the referendum for independence that happened in February 1992 was rejected by the second major ethnic group, Bosnian Serbs, who have consequently established their own republic within Bosnia, and soon mobilized their forces in order to secure Serbian territory within the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina. That led to the war and ethnic cleansing of the Muslim Bosniak and Croat population, especially in the eastern parts of Bosnia and throughout the Serb Republic. The war was also marked by systematic mass rape and Srebrenica genocide perpetrated by the Army of the Serb Republic. "300[.]000 people had then died or gone missing and around 2 million had been made refugees".[17]

There were four major attempts of settling the conflict in Bosnia by offering unsuccessful peace plans by the European Community (EC) and the United Nations (UN).[18] The conflict was finally settled by the General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina, also known as the Dayton Agreement in 1995.[19] The Dayton Peace Agreement set out the post-conflict structures for Bosnia and Herzegovina; the country was divided into political units according to the ethnic division. It now consists of two entities – Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serb Republic (*Republika Srpska*), and one district – District Brčko.

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[15] Institute for Statistics of Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH) (n.d.) *Population grouped according to ethnicity, by Censuses 1961 – 1991*, online edition: http://www.fzs.ba/Dem/Popis/NacPopE.htm [14th May 2014].

[16] In the 1961 Census Muslims grouped as "Muslims in the ethnic affiliation sense" and for 1971 Census as "Muslims in the sense of ethnicity". Source: Institute for Statistics of FBiH (n.d.), online edition: http://www.fzs.ba/Dem/Popis/NacPopE.htm [14th May 2014].

[17] Source: Equal Power Lasting Peace (n.d.) *Five conflicts; Bosnia-Herzegovina*, online edition: http://www.equalpowerlastingpeace.org/five-conflicts/bosnia-hercegovina/ [14th May 2014].

[18] Rejected peace plans were: The Carrington–Cutileiro peace plan by the EC, Vance–Owen plan by the UN and EC, Owen–Stoltenberg plan by the UN, Contact Group plan.

[19] For original full text of the Dayton Agreement, see: http://www.ucdp.uu.se/gpdatabase/peace/BoH%2019951121.pdf [28th April 2014].

During the War, women in all parts of former Yugoslavia started organizing against war, but organizations in Bosnia and Herzegovina were usually around service provision for women victims of war, especially victims of rape and other forms of sexual violence (Svedberg, 2014: 10). However, Bosnian women's political engagement with the peace process was rare and usually individual (Svedberg, 2014: 10); organizing for peace mostly occurred in neighbouring countries, particularly Serbia, where the main anti-war organization, *Women in Black,* was founded.

The Dayton Agreement "contained the seeds of its own failure" since it included participation of only warring factions, and no representative(s) of civil society (Rees, 2013). Additionally, not one woman, in any capacity, was part of the peace negotiations. Women did ask for peace, but there was no organized action (Svedberg, 2014: 11). In addition, "Dayton Peace Accords did [not] take neither CEDAW nor the Beijing Platform for Action into consideration, which led to a gender neutral peace agreement and a following gender neutral constitution"[20] as a part of the respective agreement, thus the women's voices remained ignored and excluded. Even until today, "[w]omen have consequently been excluded from the processes of negotiations, peace processes, post-war reconstruction and the European integration process in BiH".[21] More on Bosnian women's activism during the war and in the post-conflict period will be discussed further in this thesis.

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[20] Source: Equal Power Lasting Peace (n.d.) *Five conflicts; Bosnia-Herzegovina*, online edition: http://www.equalpowerlastingpeace.org/five-conflicts/bosnia-hercegovina/ [14th May 2014].
[21] Ibidem.

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3.5 Women's International League for Peace and Freedom

In this chapter, I will more thoroughly introduce *Women's International League for Peace and Freedom* (*WILPF*) and its role in the overall process of experience and knowledge exchange between women activists from Bosnia and Syria. In addition, I will present their initiative called *Women Organizing for Change in Bosnia and Syria* that has served as a platform for my research and analysis, and will explain the background context of the respective initiative, together with elaborating its major ideas and objectives.

The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom is a

> women's peace organization which gave a feminist voice to world affairs, but (…) at the same time a women's organization which placed women's equality and well-being in the forefront of its ideas and actions (Alonso, 2012).

WILPF developed from the International Women's Congress against World War I that took place in the Hague, Netherlands, in 1915, although the name WILPF was not used until 1919 (Bussey and Tims, 1980). In 1919, at the Zürich meeting, WILPF was formally constituted as a women's peace organization, with its main objective to raise their voices as women prevent further conflicts in Europe and elsewhere (Confortini, 2012). In the years that followed, women wondered whether the WILPF still had a purpose and whether their words for freedom, democracy, justice, equality and peace had been "abused and degraded to such extent that these words [had] [word altered by Confrontini] become hollow shams" (Bussey and Tims, 1980; in Confortini, 2012, introduction, para. 2). They started questioning their role in achieving peace, although they participated in the armed resistance alongside men, lived under

occupation, perished in concentration camps, went for nonviolence resistance, assisted in humanitarian and relief work, but also worked on their visions for the future (Confortini, 2012). Their personal experiences of wartime suffering created a new strength and will to address war, conflict and destruction from happening again, thus they decided to continue the WILPF and get onto postwar planning for a 'future of peace' (Confortini, 2012, introduction, para. 3).

Today, WILPF is the longest lived women's organization for peace in history, and as such has demonstrated women's key role in the global discourse on peace. The issues that women from WILPF raised in 1915 are still relevant and visible almost 100 years later in the text of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) which is a pioneering UN document that addresses women not only as victims, but also as peace makers, and outlines the ways to hold nations accountable for victimization of women in conflicts at all levels (Alonso, 2012). Regarding that, WILPF's presence at the United Nations gained important visibility in the last thirty years, both as a non-governmental organization with official observer status at the UN, and as an important influence on the UN policy (Alonso, 2012). Up until today, WILPF has continued to stress the issue of women's human rights, especially when it comes to women's participation in peace processes. In this regard, WILPF has established and sponsored a platform PeaceWomen[22] whose main idea is to emphasize the urgency of the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. Once the resolution was passed in 2000, WILPF has joined non-governmental and civil society organizations from around the world to pressure the

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[22] For more on PeaceWomen platform, see: http://www.peacewomen.org/ [26th May 2014].

UN and governments to implement the measures that safeguard the rights of women and include them in the peace process (Alonso, 2012).

In regard to the subject of this thesis, WILPF has played an important role in setting the agenda for inclusive peace process in Syria, mostly through the lens of experience of the Bosnian War and peace process in Bosnia and Herzegovina which, as stated earlier was led by the international community and its representatives from the governments of the United States, United Kingdom, France, Russia, Germany and the European Union on one side, and Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina as warring parties on the other side. WILPF did not play a mediator or observer role in this process, and was not involved in this way at the time. However, after the Dayton Peace Accord was signed in 1995, the transition and peace-building process has brought many international organizations to Bosnia, including but not limited to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), a United Nations agency that works to promote and protect human rights that are guaranteed under international law and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948. The current Secretary General of the WILPF, Madeleine Rees, began working for the OHCHR in 1998 as the gender expert and Head of Office in Bosnia and Herzegovina.[23]

As an already esteemed human rights advocate, Rees helped in exposing sex trade in Bosnia by testifying in support of "Kathryn Bolkovac, an American policewoman, [who] was hired by DynCorp Aerospace in Aldershot for a UN post aimed at cracking

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[23] Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (n.d.) *Madeleine Rees [biography]*, online edition: http://www.wilpfinternational.org/madeleine-rees/ [28th April 2014].

down on sexual abuse and forced prostitution in Bosnia",[24] who then revealed that members of the UN Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina were using prostitutes and have participated in sex trafficking.[25] From September 2006 to April 2010, Madeleine Rees served as the Head of the Women's Rights and Gender Unit for the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.[26]

Rees' strong personal and professional connections with Bosnia and Herzegovina became most highlighted in 2012 at the beginning of the Syrian peace negotiations when she started the initiative "Women Organizing for Change in Bosnia and Syria" from her position as the Secretary General of the WILPF that will be thoroughly discussed in the following chapter. In the context of intersections and interplays of gender and security, Rees' work involves support for women's inclusion into peace processes, and she advocates for more responsive and effective human rights instruments.[27]

3.5.1 'Women Organizing for Change in Bosnia and Syria' Initiative

In spring 2012 – one year after the uprisings in the Middle East North Africa (MENA) region – WILPF started the 'MENA Agenda 1325' project in order to "draw attention to discrimination against women and support efforts to reinforce peace and security

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[24] Guardian (29th July 2001) *British firm accused in UN 'sex scandal'; International police in Bosnia face prostitution claims*, online edition: http://www.theguardian.com/world/2001/jul/29/unitednations [28th April 2014].
[25] Ibidem. Also, in 2010, the *Bolkovac* case was put on the big screen through the thriller film *The Whistleblower* (directed by Larysa Kondracki), where Rees was portrayed by Vanessa Redgrave.
[26] Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (n.d.) *Madeleine Rees [biography]*, online edition: http://www.wilpfinternational.org/madeleine-rees/ [28th April 2014].
[27] Ibidem.

in the region".[28] One of the uprisings started in Syria in 2011, and soon escalated into an armed conflict, already known as the Syrian Civil War. Due to her previous connections with Bosnian peace building where she strongly advocated against the violation of human rights, especially women's human rights, Madeleine Rees together with the WILPF started a new initiative titled 'Women Organizing for Change in Bosnia and Syria' in order to connect women peace activists from these respective countries for a series of meetings where they could exchange their experiences and learn from each other. This initiative seeks to

> Strengthen support to Syrian women's rights and civil society activists in order to strengthen the full and equal participation in all processes leading to peaceful transition in Syria [and]
> Empower women's rights groups and civil society organizations of Bosnia and Herzegovina to, based on their experience and knowledge, share valuable lessons with Syrian counterparts, and engage with international experts in developing their own strategies for demanding and accessing their rights in the context of post-conflict Bosnia and Herzegovina.[29]

Nela Porobić-Isaković, feminist activist from Bosnia and project coordinator of the 'Women Organizing for Change in Bosnia and Syria' initiative elaborates on that:

> WILPF has this, so called, 'MENA Agenda 1325' for the MENA region, thus there was already a project through which WILPF has collaborated with Syrian women. Madeleine Rees, on the other hand, is very attached for Bosnia and Herzegovina, thus her experience and knowledge on Bosnia and her hands-on knowledge, together with being in contact with Gorana [Mlinarević] and me, has brought us to an idea that there could be a successful knowledge and experience exchange. We never started from an explicit contact point between these two countries, except that we could already perceive that the issue of access to justice will be neglected, especially when it comes to women's access. Regarding Bosnia, we knew that no women whatsoever that were included into formal negotiations, except as maybe translators. We approached this initiative from the aspect of transitional justice, and what has and has not been done in Bosnia, thus our approach was more through some of the segments for which we knew

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[28] Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (n.d.) *MENA Agenda 1325*, online edition: http://www.wilpfinternational.org/mena-agenda-1325/ [28th April 2014].
[29] Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (28th November 2013) *Call for Syrian Applicants: Women Organi[z]ing for Change in Bosnia and Syria*, online edition: http://www.wilpfinternational.org/call-for-syrian-applicants-women-organising-for-change-in-bosnia-and-syria/

that they are going to become a component of one transition from war to peace. This particularly refers to Bosnia, since there are so many negative lessons, but we should not run away from that since those can be corrected. All in all, that was our vision; we used our personal experiences and knowledge on the capacities and expertise of the respective countries in order to put together these two programs: WILPF's 'MENA Agenda 1325' and our work in Bosnia."

Although this initiative includes a series of meetings on both national and international levels, the most important event was a conference that was held in February 2014 in Sarajevo, gathering 20 representatives and individual activists from women groups and human rights organizations in Syria, and 42 individual activists and representatives of women's rights groups and civil society organizations from Bosnia and Herzegovina, thus the primary focus was on the experiences of Bosnian and Syrian women (Svedberg et al., 2014). According to the Conference Report, this conference emphasized the importance of acknowledging "experiences and empirical knowledge of women who went through the armed conflict and struggled for women rights, in light of conflict prevention and peace building initiatives in Syria" (2014: 3). The main reason for including Bosnian women into this process, is to emphasize what happens when women are not included into peace negotiations or other strategic decisions in the transition and post-conflict period and how "inefficient and discriminatory power embodied in patriarchal political elite continues to deepen conflicts in the society instead of solving them" (Svedberg et al., 2014: 3). Simultaneously, the ongoing Syrian War and Syrian women's struggle to be heard at the peace talks in Geneva, demonstrated the inability of international mechanisms such as UN Security Council Resolution 1325, whose main aim is to create a space for women "when geopolitical interests and the interests of the male political elites are prioritized over the needs of Syrian people" (Svedberg et al., 2014: 3).

4 THE EFFECTS OF CROSS-CONTEXT EXCHANGES ON WOMEN'S (FEMINIST) ACTIVISM

This chapter is dedicated to the interviews analysis through which I will use the conceptual and theoretical framework presented in the chapter three. I have divided this chapter into three sections. In the section 4.1, I will discuss the differences among women activists from Bosnia and Syria, both separately and as a group. This discussion will be based on the observations of my interviewees that have participated in the project of experience exchange between women peace activists of the two respective countries. In addition, I will present the means of overcoming those differences through utilization of the principles of transversal politics. In the section 4.2, I will engage in further discussion on transversal politics, and will try to introduce a distinction between two forms of the concept, i.e. in-context and cross-context approach. This will be a valuable contemplation in the light of the rest of the chapter, since I will further discuss the role of Syrian women activists in Bosnian women activists' reflections on their war and peace process experience, where I will present and analyze the major findings in this research.

4.1 Transversal politics and overcoming differences among women activists

Most of the women that took part in this research have agreed on one thing; that the process of collaboration and experience exchange between women peace activists from both Bosnia and Syria was of mutual benefit.[30] This acknowledgement can be attributed to their common interests and objectives. As Anderlini (2007) has pointed

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[30] This will be supported in the next section (4.2).

out, women peace activists do have much in common; their approach is non-violent, they seek transformations of power and politics in their communities, they advocate for inclusion, freedom, democracy and equality on all levels, they are engaged in activism, and they see peace as a holistic process that includes economic security and freedom from violence. The latter approach usually faces different impediments, as elaborated by Cockburn (2012b) who shows that women have worked together for peace since the early 19th century; in the case of Britain for example, they had no other choice since men of London Peace Society would not accept and "tolerate women raising their voices in public" (Cockburn, 2012b: 42). Even today, very few men acknowledge their oppression over women and make room for women's voices within their organizations, although the holistic approach of women's peace movements is evident in almost every society. Nela Porobić-Isaković reflects on these points from the perspective of common interests of both Syrians and Bosnian, by identifying the problems that Bosnia has faced 20 years ago, in relation with what is ahead of Syria at this point:

> Generally speaking, we can assume which are the issues that will have to be emphasized in the upcoming process of peace building; it is gender based violence, access to justice, war crimes, transitional justice, and social and economic rights. Regarding that, we [in Bosnia] have become aware of these problems only now, 20 years after the war.

Here, we can recognize a holistic approach in practice and although Syrian women activists do not claim to represent the civil society as a whole,[31] their aims and values are evidently on the path of common interests for both men and women. In addition, principles of feminist ethics are perceptible in this exchange, in accordance with what was noticed by many scholars, including Porter (2007) and Benhabib (1992; in Porter 2007) who write of feminist responses that are governed by

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[31] As claimed by Nawal Yazeji, activist at the Syrian Women's League.

norms of formal equality and reciprocity and the moral categories of rights, obligation and entitlement with corresponding feelings of respect, duty, worthiness and dignity (…) norms of equity and complimentary reciprocity with moral categories of responsibility, bonding and sharing with corresponding emotions of love, care, sympathy and solidarity" (Benhabib, 1992; in Porter 2007: 85)

In this regard, it can be said that these emotions are part of feminist ethics of mutual respect, which is also seen in the case of Syrian women in regard to Bosnian women, as Nela Porobić-Isaković has stated:

The last day of the Conference was really emotional and sad – it felt like I was listening to ourselves [Bosnians] in the 1990s – because Syrian women expressed their thoughts by saying: 'when war was happening somewhere else, when [Bosnia] was in war, we didn't even look back, and now when we [Syria] are at war, we constantly ask ourselves why no one is taking care about Syria'. They were thankful for our will to meet with them, primarily because, and these are their words: 'we are meeting many people who are showing empathy and wish to understand what we are going through, but they actually do not understand. And now, for the first time, we have met people who have indeed gone through everything, and we finally see the possibilities'. Because, it is hard to imagine that there is a life beyond war, and that life even continues, and suddenly you see a way forward. That was of incredible importance to Syrian women, and they have emphasized that many times."

On the other hand, there are also different views and interests when it comes to creating feminist and/or peace politics and in regard to conflict outcomes. I have found that in the cases of groups of Syrian and Bosnian women activists, these differences are problematic only within each group, and not between them. That largely refers to the "sameness-difference, the equality-differentiation, and the essentialism-deconstructionism arguments" (Porter, 1997: 84). In this regard, Nela Porobić-Isaković reflects on her impression about the differences within the group of Syrian women that have attended the 'Women Organizing for Change in Bosnia and Syria' Conference in Sarajevo:

There are divisions within the group of Syrian women, and that is primarily in terms of secularism; Syria is now facing an important question, i.e. the

third question, since it's not just Bashar and opposition anymore – the question is what will happen with Islamists who are holding parts of the Syrian territory? (…) Large part of [Syrian women] does not want to do anything with religion, especially the older 'squad' whose activism originates from communist days. On the other hand, there is a number of the younger activists who are veiled. Also, there is a delegation that wanted to be a partner in the peace negotiations, and on the other hand, there were women who said that they don't want peace negotiations at all; instead, they were saying: 'I only want to run over Bashar Al-Assad because my mother was killed and I only want…', not even vengeance, but military victory. Women as her do not want to share anything with the regime, since they are fully aware that peace accords imply that they have to cohabitate, i.e. share the power in the state."

Clearly, differences exist in the sense of identity of each participant, mostly concerning political orientations and ideological beliefs. When it comes to Bosnian women's activism, Popov-Momčilović (2014) shows how women activists were partially caught into traps of identity politics, as a partial consequence of donor politics that are high on the political agenda (Helms, 2003; in Popov-Momčilović, 2014: 115). However, the most evident differences lay in the terms of use of feminist agenda as a platform for a women's movement. Gorana Mlinarević elaborates on this:

> While Syrian women mostly use feminist principles (…) our [Bosnian] organizations insist on being organizations that deal with women's human rights, whatever that means (…) The fact is that most of [Bosnian women] accept the ethnical matrix. When they talk about active participation of women, most of they talk about biological women, not political subjects; there is a lot of misunderstanding. Even when they, at some point, start to talk about feminism, they do that only to stand out from each other, and that is very specific for us. They literally insist that, when we talk about our joint voice, we talk about women's human rights organizations.

Yuval-Davis discusses this phenomenon through elaboration of the concept of *transversal politics* which is "an alternative to the universalism [there is only one truth (Cockburn, 2012b: 12)]/relativism [there is no truth (Cockburn, 2012b: 12)] dichotomy which is at the heart of modernist/postmodernist feminist debate" (1997: 125).

> Transversal politics has been developed as an alternative to the assimilationist 'universalistic' politics of the Left on the one hand, and to identity politics on the other hand. While the first has proved to be ethnocentric and exclusionary, the second has proved to be essentialist, reifying boundaries between groups and, by homogenizing and collapsing individual into collective identities, undemocratic within groups (Yuval-Davis, 1999: 94).

Transversal politics is based on accepting differences in order to work together and it negates the feminist idea of sisterhood which is based on the "idea of common oppression [which is] a false and corrupt platform disguising and mystifying the true nature of women's varied and complex social reality", as claimed by bell hooks (hooks, 1991; in Yuval-Davis, 1997: 125). Hence, Yuval-Davis (1997: 125) suggests that assumptions about the structure of feminist agenda need to be problematized. Similarly as Gorana has noticed that Bosnian women activists "accept the ethnical matrix" and "talk about biological women, not political subjects", many feminist scholars have identified similar debates in all areas of feminist politics (Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1987; 1992; Hill-Collins, 1990; Kimble and Unterhalter, 1982; Spelman, 1988; in Yuval-Davis, 1997). Yuval-Davis emphasizes "dialogue across difference" as the key word and "the basis of empowered knowledge" (1997: 129):

> The idea is that each participant in the dialogue brings with her the *rooting* in her own membership and identity, but at the same time tries to *shift* in order to put herself in a situation of exchange with women who have different membership and identity (1997: 130) [italics mine].

Cockburn (1998: 9) elaborates this further by emphasizing that shifting should not result in abandoning one's identity, the same way as rooting should not prevent the participants to look for connection with those with whom they might have shared aims and values. Cockburn (2012b: 13) also mentions women activists from Bosnia and Herzegovina as an example of the transversal politics development, although her previous study (2001: 95) of Bosnian women's local integrative organizations showed

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that many women activists acknowledge the existence of the problem within the group of women's organizations; they recognize a lack of connection and cooperation, they are not interested and concerned enough for other women's organizations, they think that their own projects are the most important, and they are insincere with each other and do not act in solidarity. It would be easy to assume that the development of transversal politics has happened in the period from year 2000[32] when Cockburn has conducted her study, to 2012 when she claimed that Bosnian women are an example of its development. However, my findings and previous experience show that only a handful of women activists are aware of this issue, thus the joint agenda is very hard to achieve. As an activist and a member of Women's Network of Bosnia and Herzegovina, I have a first-hand experience with issues that were mentioned in the Cockburn's study from the year 2000; there is still a lack of cooperation, interest and solidarity, especially avoidance of identifying with feminism and everything that feminism represents. I find the most important problem to be the unconscious acceptance of traditional gender roles and stereotypical views on feminism and feminist women, thus it is very unpopular to be a feminist woman in Bosnia and Herzegovina, since a lot of prejudices, ignorance and wrong interpretations are linked to the concept of feminism. As a consequence, there is no perception of what is feminism about, except the stereotypical perception that feminist women are frustrated and brain washed.[33] In terms of this research, when I asked whether we can address Bosnian women's activism as feminist, both Gorana

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[32] The workshop that Cockburn is referring to took place in Neum in January 2000 (2001: 89).

[33] The latest public example of this perception came from an elected politician, Mayor of Novi Grad municipality in Sarajevo, who stated that women who are engaged in women's organizations show extremely high dose of frustration in public communication. More details are available online at the Bosnian Klix news website (08th February 2013) *Semir Efendić žene u ženskim organizacijama nazvao frustriranim [Semir Efendić labeled women in women's organizations as frustrated]*, online edition: http://www.klix.ba/vijesti/bih/semir-efendic-zene-u-zenskim-organizacijama-nazvao-frustriranim/130208052

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Mlinarević and Nela Porobić-Isaković disagreed. They elaborated their opinion by addressing the issues that women are facing in terms of developing a joint agenda:

> Unlike Syrian women, Bosnian women lack courage, understanding and solidarity, and they still talk in the concepts of coexistence, crossing of imaginary entity lines (…) I have a problem with them in terms of discussing women's feminist platform for the constitutional reform – to start that initiative, but not to deal with amendments since it is pointless to accept amendments on a militaristic constitution – but they will never agree with that proposal, they are running away from it by using excuses that the amendments are already proposed and that they will go with them. And the fact is that I have talked about that right in time, two years ago. I think they don't have courage for that, to say the least (Gorana Mlinarević).

Nela Porobić-Isaković had similar observations:

> "I think that we, Bosnian women, are very stubborn in some segments; there is a lack of feminist analysis on many issues, and accepting that approach would mean that they have to change their modus operandi, but they are not willing to do that (…) Just to be clear, we are not talking about feminism here; feminism as a term is used only by few activists that identify themselves as feminists, but in the implementation aspect we always talk about gender equality, gender mainstreaming, etc."

These observations are more in-depth and from a feminist activist point of view, but they still indicate a lack of courage to publicly speak up about issues that women's organizations should engage with, and a dose of skepticism when it comes to naming their initiatives as feminist ones. This phenomenon is consistent with Helms' (2003) findings about the use of the term 'feminism' by some Bosnian women's activists who rarely refer to feminism in their public presentations. In her study, Helms (2003) shows that 'feminism' was publicly used by more conservative women, and always in a negative context. On the other hand, objections to feminist approaches are justified with an idea that it singles out only women and their issues from general social and political problems (Helms, 2003). However, these opinions are not consistent with the approach of Syrian women for example, or at least not according to the impression they made on women from Bosnia. Many factors are playing important roles in this

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discrepancy, but the most important ones are the factor of time and resources which are causally connected.

The factor of *time* refers to the fact that two activist movements are taking place in the same time, but in different circumstances in terms of wartime and post-war period, i.e. Syria is currently going through the war period, while Bosnia is (still) in its post-war period. I believe that these two elements play a crucial role in developing of transversal politics; level of solidarity and tolerance among activists within one movement is different in the times of war and post-conflict period. This is noticeable from many studies on women's activism in Bosnia during the wartime in the 1990s, when they have overcome their identity differences due to their struggle for survival. Cynthia Cockburn addressed this solidarity in her chapter on *Medica*[34] *Women's Therapy Centre*, an organization that was initially "autonomous, feminist, politically independent, decentralized and in conjunction with women from all the republics of the former Yugoslavia" (1998: 189). Cockburn also describes the ethnical diversity within this organization, although the "[e]thnic mixity *[sic]*[35] was (…) drastically reduced [as an] effect achieved by ethnic cleansing" (1998: 192). The solidarity among Bosnian women of different ethnic background was sustainable for a while, at least until the late 1995; Cockburn testifies that in the period of her first visit,

> there was beginning to be a new consciousness, partly awoken by the interest of foreign visitors like me, that combined pride in the continued presence of non-Muslims in Medica with a self-questioning about how to celebrate difference without over-emphasizing it (1998: 199).

Selma elaborates on that:

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[34] *Medica Zenica* is one of the first non-governmental organizations in Bosnia and Herzegovina, founded in Zenica in early 1993 – in the midst of Bosnian war. Since then, they have been continually providing psychosocial and medical support to the women and children victims of violence, both in the war and in post-conflict Bosnia. See more: http://www.medicazenica.org/index.php [9th June 2014].
[35] Mixity is a word adopted from French (*mixité*) by Cockburn (1998).

A lot of time has passed [from the Bosnian War], and we should make a distinction between the will to fight for our rights in the period of war, and the post-war period; in war, everyone is so compact, supportive to each other, but when the time comes like it did in Bosnia, the whole idea starts to fade away.

However, the nature of Bosnian war should not be ignored here, since it was "a war waged against the principle of mixity [*sic*] itself [and it] involved the destruction of cultures" (Cockburn, 1998: 205), thus it is understandable that people were dragged into identifying their identities with their lives, where one's physical survival is thought to be causally connected with survival of culture, tradition and religion, i.e. their identities. Nevertheless, Cockburn's noticing of 'a new consciousness' development is interesting from another point of view other than the one she identifies. It is also a matter of different form of survival – financial survival. Jasminka elaborates on that:

It is great to be a foreigner! Because, when foreigners come to Bosnia, they will easily finish their work; I am just – 'oh, please' – because I don't bring money. But foreigners bring money. That is really painful (…) I am sick of the fact that everything has become a project.

Selma gives her point of view on the same issue:

I am saying this in terms of competition and financial maintenance and survival of organizations. We are directing ourselves towards donors' requests, and the desire to make a change transforms into something else, something material and of personal interest.

This is not to criticize professional activists who earn their wages in non-governmental organizations; this is to point out another reason why feminist agenda might be avoided or ignored. Nela gives her point of view on the impact of UN discourse on women's activism in Bosnia:

It is the UN effect – the UN does not talk about feminism. Feminism is even a notorious term (…) you could sound like some Stalinist, which is absolutely wrong. That has put us in a position that we are not even close to the level of global discussion on feminism, where feminism is not such a bad word anymore (…) International community is the one who creates

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discourses with their funds. That is particularly noticeable in terms of feminist activism or sustainable peace through the prism of feminism; they have imposed their discourses, and we can see that in a way we are talking about gender, because we are definitely not talking about feminism.

This discourse is noticeable only in the post-conflict period, because during the war, everyone is concerned with how to stop the conflict and achieve peace. However, after the war, when international funding for building peace is at its peak, civil society sector starts to grow, thus it is becoming more competitive. Helms speaks of the so-called "NGO Boom" (2013: 90) when she quotes one of her interlocutors from Bosnia who said that NGOs were "springing up like mushrooms after the rain" (2013: 90). Furthermore, similarly as Jasminka and Selma have pointed out in our interviews, Helms writes about professionalization in terms of being an employee of an NGO, and not always an activist by pointing out that "[i]t could not be taken for granted that Bosnians did NGO work out of dedication to a cause, for lower pay or even in their spare time (…)" (2013: 117). She explains this by stating the fact that "NGOs offered some of the best paid and most stable work available" (2013: 117). When asked what Syrian women should take from Bosnian women as the most important lesson, Jasminka stated her concerns on this very issue:

> I have said at some point that I wouldn't like to see Syrians going through what we are going through [and that is] to reduce their activism on budget. It would disgust me to reduce my activism only on a fee [*honorar*]. I wouldn't like that to happen to Syrian women – to build their activist careers just because someone is funding them.

Obviously, resources are causally connected to the circumstances in which activism is developing. This also refers to different instruments that were not available during the War in Bosnia, but are available today when the Syrian War is happening. 'Instruments' refers to international documents that support women's active role in

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conflict and post-conflict societies that originated as a result of previous conflicts, such as the one in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The most obvious international instrument is UN's agenda on women, peace and security, in the form of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and other resolutions that followed.[36] Other than that, 'instruments' also refer to international organizations that support the respective agenda, such as WILPF whose work has been discussed in this thesis. Finally, 'instruments' also refer to access to technology and internet, which are available to Syrian women, but were not available for Bosnian women 20 years ago. One of the Bosnian women's activists who I have interviewed remembers that the first time she has used a computer was after the War, in 1995. She added that "in order to talk to someone, we had to walk – no phones, no skype, no social networks were available at that time."

In conclusion, this section has showed some of the major discrepancies between activist movements across contexts of Bosnian wartime and post-conflict period, and Syrian current conflict. It has showed that different factors impact the solidarity and tolerance among women of the same movement, but also their activist engagement in the times of war and peace. These observations are not to be taken for granted and applied to other peace movements; every movement has its own background which is never the same. Thus the struggles women are facing are also different. However, the lack of feminist analysis in any movement can broaden the problems that women are facing, thus the transversal politics should be developed at the early stage. Syrian women are a good example of how it is done, as Nela reflects on her experience at the Conference in Sarajevo:

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[36] S/RES/1325, S/RES/1327, S/RES/1366, S/RES/1408, S/RES/1820, S/RES/1888, S/RES/1889, S/RES/1960, S/RES/2106, S/RES/2122. Full list available at: http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/ [12th May 2014].

> The dynamics among Syrian women is very interesting; there were a lot of tensions in the beginning, but they have eventually patched up their relations and brought their views closer in terms of understanding the reasons for the different aspects of action – they do not necessarily agree, but they have found a common point.

In the next section, I will discuss whether Syrian women's approach to their problems through finding a common point was useful for the women of Bosnia, and in what ways.

4.2   Dayton peace accord through the lens of Syrian peace negotiations: in-context and cross-context approaches

When discussing lessons that should be learned from Bosnia in the context of Syrian war from an international relations or political studies perspective, it is usually meant in terms of analysis of peace negotiations and post-conflict transition process or in terms of international intervention to stop the conflict as soon as possible, in order to avoid genocide and minimize the effects of war on the society as a whole. This is noticeable from many recent analyses of the war in Syria.[37] In addition, in activist and feminist circles, there is a concern regarding women's exclusion from the peace

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[37] Some of the analysis that cover this issue are listed below:
- Daalder, I.H. (22nd January 2014) *Are there lessons from Bosnia for the Syria peace talks?*, The Chicago Coucil on Global Affairs, online edition:
http://www.thechicagocouncil.org/files/About_Us/Articles_and_Commentary/FY14/lessons_from_bosnia.aspx [5th May 2014].
- Debeuf, K. (10th June 2013) *We Never Learn: Syrian Lessons from Bosnia*, German Marshall Fund Blog Expert Commentary, online edition: http://blog.gmfus.org/2013/06/10/we-never-learn-syrian-lessons-from-bosnia/ [5th May 2014].
- Ischinger, W. (4th September 2013) *Syrian Hell: Why We Must Not Forget the Lessons from Bosnia*, Spiegel Online International, online edition: http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/opponents-of-syria-intervention-must-review-lessons-from-bosnia-a-920126.html [5th May 2014].
- Jaafari, S. (22nd January 2014) Are there lessons from Bosnia for the Syria peace talks?, Public Radio International, online edition: http://www.pri.org/stories/2014-01-22/are-there-lessons-bosnia-syria-peace-talks [5th May 2014]
- Leroux-Martin, P. (21st January 2014) Bosnia's Lessons for Syria, The New York Times, online edition: http://www.nytimes.com/2014/01/22/opinion/bosnias-lessons-for-syria.html [5th May 2014]

negotiations that took place in the beginning of 2014. One of the results of those concerns is the WILPF's initiative that has served as a platform for this thesis research. However, there is little analysis of whether that experience exchange affects women activists from Bosnia and in what ways. Even the official Conference report (Svedberg et al, 2014) has not touched upon the process of learning from the perspective of Bosnian women activists. That is, however, reasonable since the focus is on Syrian women and on claiming their space in the Syrian peace negotiations and peace building.

Additionally, when feminist exchanges in the context of peace and conflict are discussed, that usually refers to exchanges across identities within the same context, e.g. within one conflict or a war, as seen in the section 4.1. This is due to the common organizing of women of different identities, backgrounds and ideological positions within the society and conflict as such, not to say women who belong or identify themselves as members of the opposite side from the perspective of conflict, in order to protest militarized occupations. Various approaches are noted in different contexts, but many of them tend to follow principles of transversal politics, through rooting and shifting that has been discussed in the previous section. In the context of Bosnia for example, women from the three conflicted ethnic groups were gathering in solidarity for peace and protection from violence, as seen in Cockburn's (1998) study that I have referred to earlier. Another example is continued activism of Serbian feminist group *Women in Black* who were occupying the streets of Belgrade to protest the War and Serbian aggression to Bosnia and Herzegovina (Zajović, 1995). By using transversal politics principles, women from the segregated areas of Northern Ireland, especially Belfast, worked hard to develop sustainable cross-

communal collaboration with other women in their segregated communities (Cockburn, 1998). A similar organizing occurred in Israel/Palestine in the form of Bat Shalom group that gathered Israeli Jewish, Arab, Christian, and Muslim women whose major focus was on friendship and coexistence (Cockburn, 1998). Obviously, these are the examples of the in-context transversal politics – they are applied by the separated, opposed and sometimes even ideologically different groups of women. Here, the question imposes itself: do transversal politics principles apply to exchanges across contexts, Bosnian and Syrian context in particular, and if it does, how is it done?

Before answering these questions, it is important to clarify what is meant here by *in-context* and *across-context* transversal politics. Transversal politics, as elaborated earlier, refers to what Yuval-Davis (1997) has taken up and developed into a theory, and what Cockburn has tested, i.e. "fill[ed] the container [of] 'transversal politics' with content" (1998: 9). In-context transversal politics then refers to a strategy of overcoming identity differences through diversity that is used within one specific context, i.e. one conflicted situation in this case. Earlier examples of transversal politics applied in Northern Ireland, Palestine/Israel, Sri Lanka, Serbia and Bosnia, appertain to in-context transversal politics. On the other hand, cross-context transversal politics would refer to conflicted situation of two or more different contexts such as contexts of current Syria and Bosnia. However, since Syria and Bosnia are not in conflict, principles of transversal politics do not directly apply to the respective exchange. Other than Bosnian and Syrian women activists' joint initiative implemented by WILPF, their joint goal to learn from previous experiences and to use that knowledge in their future activities towards social changes, no joint cause exists

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between the two groups. Nevertheless, there are still elements of transversal politics that are identifiable in this initiative.

Although this experience contains the major elements of transversal politics proposed by Yuval-Davis, i.e. it is "an alternative to the universalism/relativism dichotomy" and it provides answers on "how and with whom we should work" (1997: 125), all through a dialogue as "the basis of empowered knowledge" (1997: 129), guided by the principles of "rooting and shifting" (1997: 130), the exchange between Bosnian and Syrian women activists is somewhat specific, and at this point, these elements apply to Syrian women activists solely, I would dare to say. Although both groups of women in this process were assisted by the *WILPF*, Syrian women were the ones who organized by themselves, they have accepted their differences, and found a way to overcome them through dialogue and acknowledgement of common goals. Bosnian women activists on the other hand, were handpicked and invited to participate in this initiative, based on their expertise in different areas that are of interest for Syrian women, i.e. for them to acknowledge the consequences of the conflict that are to appear in the post-conflict period if they do not take action. In this process, besides giving an opportunity to Syrian women to identify themselves with another similar context's firsthand experience, WILPF serves as a mediator or an agent of encouragement and provocation transference from Syrian to Bosnian women peace activists; the exchange between these groups of women implies retrospective analysis of Bosnian peace process by Bosnian women activists through the lens of Syrian women's peace movement in order to bring closer some of the main issues of the peace process to Syrian women activists. As stated in the

beginning of the previous section (4.1), interviewed women agreed on the fact that the process of learning across contexts of Syria and Bosnia was of mutual benefit:

> Although I am not sure whether that was the aim of the Initiative[38]; this whole process has helped us, Bosnian women who work with those issues, *to recapitulate what we have done* in the war and post-war period, and to sort out what we have done and where are we standing now – so the process was twofold (…) it is really important to continue this initiative since it gathers women who wouldn't gather otherwise [emphasis mine] (Selma).

> From the very beginning, we use this initiative as a process of *mutual learning* in order to see an analysis of the whole women's activism in Bosnia in the last 20 years [emphasis mine] (Gorana).

> In my group, we talked about all aspects of life after the conflict, and that way we evaluated those activities, which was great, i.e. for the first time ever, *we had the opportunity to see ourselves back in time* when we were at the beginning [emphasis mine] (Jasminka).

> We were so glad to meet them, (…) they were so nice that each group tried to tell about their experience in their field, (…) all these experiences were really reached and were something to learn from (Nawal).

Interviewed Bosnian women activists talk about opportunities to communicate and to reflect on their previous experience. The issue that I would like to point out here is that the Bosnian War ended in 1995; since then, there are no restrictions of movement across different parts of the country, different communication technologies and internet are available to almost everyone, but still, Bosnian women activists did not have the opportunity to reflect on their war and immediately after-war experience. That is why I can claim that the efficacy of the respective retrospective analysis is debatable if taken into account all of the above, and the issues that were presented in the previous section (4.1) regarding Bosnian women activists' approaches to the dialogue that should serve as a basis for transversal politics within their group, i.e. the lack of it. One would say that this is not entirely true since there was, and still is

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[38] Refers to WILPF's "Women Organizing for Change in Bosnia and Syria" initiative.

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very strong cross-entity cooperation that has existed for some time, including on the subject of improving the status of war rape survivors, for example. If analyzed closely, it is noticeable that the two major principles of transversal politics are present in these initiatives. If we recall Cockburn's (1998: 9) elaboration of these principles that shifting should not result in abandoning one's identity, the same way as rooting should not prevent the participants to look for connection with those with whom they might have shared aims and values, one could claim that these elements are not missing from the initiative for improvement of status of war rape survivors. But here I would like to raise an issue of progress and overall efficacy of application of the respective principles. It could be asserted as a fact that women and women's organizations are not united in this specific cause, otherwise a significant progress would have happened in the previous two decades. In other words, even if their approach to the subject of improving the status of war rape survivors is based on, or could fit the concept of transversal politics, the question of efficacy or the lack of it remains.

This is particularly important since we have already concluded that Syrian women activists do use transversal approaches in their collaboration. Here, I specifically refer to the results they have achieved so far, in the midst of war – they have raised the issue of women's participation in the Syrian peace negotiations on the higher level and drawn the attention of the global public to their activities, and therefore the attention of one of the biggest and most influential international women's organizations, WILPF. Additionally, their advocacy towards the United Nations is also worth mentioning, since they have come a long way to have that opportunity in the first place. These are only some of the effects of transversal politics applied by the

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Syrian women activists, and they show concrete results, in contrast to Bosnian women activists who are lobbying for the legislation harmonization for more than 10 years now. Thus, the question is how do Bosnian women activists reflect on their war and peace process experience, and what is the role of Syrian women activists in this reflection? More specifically, what is the effect of the approach that is based on the principles of transversal politics?

Importance of the idea of transversal politics lays in potential transformation of feminist activism, or women's rights advocacy in case of Bosnia, directed beyond identity politics activism, while problematizing women's homogeneity and strengthening solidarity beyond limitations of one identity. In addition, feminist approaches would consequently get more pragmatic and situational, thus would prosper towards issue-based cooperation. However, feminist authors who discuss cross-borders[39] feminist exchanges, rarely discuss or theorize them out of one context.

This, however, does not mean that similar exchanges across different temporal, spatial and situational contexts did not happen in the past. On the contrary, they are very common, especially amongst women peace activists. Cockburn (1998), for example, based her study largely on her experience from an international workshop that took place in Mijas, Spain, in 1996. The respective event gathered sixteen women from Northern Ireland, Israel/Palestine and Bosnia for a five day workshop aiming to prompt the experience exchange between them and to "learn[ ] from each other's situations, struggles and analysis" (Cockburn, 1998: 5). Still, after careful

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[39] Any type of borders or limitations: geographical, ideological, identity, or imaginary.

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consideration of Cockburn's findings and analysis, I did not find any analysis of the cross-context experience exchange; the whole Cockburn's analysis is focused on relations within each of the three respective participating groups, and does not cover the influences they had on each other. Another Cockburn's study refers to similar experience with the international *Women in Conflict Zones Network*,[40] but her analysis of that experience is focused on proposing a "feminist analysis of gender" (2004: 24) and illustrating "the gender specificity and gender power relations of war" in order to show the links between different kinds of violence that she refers to as a "gendered continuum of violence" (2004: 43). Cockburn still does not analyze the cross-context experience exchange or the effects on women participants. Giles and Hyndman get somewhat closer to analyzing these links; they articulate the cross-context experience exchange that I am referring to as "transnational feminist practices" (2004: 312). However, from Giles' and Hyndman's point of view, transnational feminist practices focus on "articulation of gender in relation to the dominant discourses of globalization, nationalism, and the state" (2004: 313), but not on the effect of experience exchanges across different contexts.

4.3 The role of Syrian women activists in Bosnian women activists' reflections on their war and peace process experience

In order to further elaborate on the form of approach I am referring to in this chapter, I will turn over to analysis of how do Bosnian women activists reflect on their war and

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[40] *Women in Conflict Zones Network* (*WICZNET*) is a research network on gender and militarization based at the York University. It has been founded in 1996, and it focuses on Sri Lanka, the Post Yugoslav States, Sudan, Burma, Israel/Palestine, Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Guatemala. Source: Women in Conflict Zones Network (v.d.) *About [section]*, online edition: http://www.yorku.ca/wicz/about.html [10th June 2014].

peace process experience, and what is the role of Syrian women activists in this reflection? From the perspective of Bosnian women activists, an important factor for the mutual benefit of the Initiative was Syrian women's approach to the peace process that is based on the principles of transversal politics. Diversity and solidarity within the Syrian group of women activists was one of the major triggers for Bosnian women activists to recapitulate their past experience. This is not to claim that the Syrian group of women who participated in this Initiative *is* indeed diverse and tolerant within their group, but to serve as a starting point for examination of the *impression* they have made on Bosnian women activists. Selma's impression should illustrate this point:

> Syrians had very interesting energy, which was fascinating to me personally. They don't lose hope and that is reflected in the way they talk about their problems. Also, they are connected with the idea that women should be united in terms of ending the conflict as painless as possible, and to fight for their role in the whole process of peace building.

Here, Selma talks about certain energy among women who are experiencing the war, that is rather motivating to another group of women who went through a similar experience two decades ago. Hence, the joint point is the fact that both groups of women had a similar experience with conflict. Another joint point is the fact that both groups of women are diverse in their essence, i.e. in terms of political affiliations, ideological beliefs, age, and social and financial status. The Bosnian group of women who participate in this project consists of activists of all ages, both the ones who got engaged with activism prior to Bosnian war, and the ones who were born in the last 30 years. They come from three constitutive national groups, Bosniak, Croat and Serbs, and the group also includes a significant number of national minorities, or the Others (*Ostali*) as labeled in Bosnia. Some of the women included are Muslims, some of them are Christian, Orthodox or Atheist. In addition, the level of their

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education also varies. Similar diversity happens to exist in the group of Syrian women included in this initiative. However, Bosnian and Syrian groups of women are approaching this diversity differently, i.e. they are overcoming them in a different way depending of the achieved level of development of their transversal politics, as seen in the section 4.1. These perspectives are important if we want to identify the principles of transversal politics in this initiative. In order to do that, I will now focus on the specifics of Syrian women's influence on Bosnian women activists.

First, there is already mentioned emotional dimension of the whole exchange process. Selma articulates that dimension in terms of awakened energy and motivation:

> [Syrian women's] activism have awaken the same in us, since we have a lack of that energy; I mean, 20 years have passed, we do agree on some issues and there are also some joint initiatives, but it seems that new enthusiasm and something positive was awaken with that moment, at least that's how it affected me – I was additionally motivated to talk to other women about what is happening in the Bosnian society and politics.

What I also noticed from Selma's reflection here is that she speaks in partial terms when it comes to joint activities of women activists; agreeing on *some* issues and having *some* joint initiatives illustrate my earlier point that there are still differences or even conflicts that women activists from Bosnia and Herzegovina did not overcome. This does not imply that there should be a universal approach of women activists from any context, but in terms of efficacy on some of the issues such as peace and conflict, joint action has proved to be necessary. Nela speaks of this dimension not only in terms of past experience, but also by considering what is yet to come:

> Syrians are true activists, and they have awakened our desire and memories how it was some time ago, and how it could be.

Besides these abstract dimensions, important acknowledgments were made by Bosnian women activists in terms of positioning in the wider social context. During the Conference in Sarajevo, the biggest social protests ever were happening in Bosnia; as a consequence of the regime change and the war that followed, almost all of the state-owned[41] companies were privatized in the after-war years. This led to thousands of people losing their employment in the midst of the then worst economic crisis that Bosnia has faced. Almost twenty years after the Dayton Peace Agreement was signed, social revolution of massive proportions affected the entire territory of the bigger political entity, Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and some parts of Serb Republic. The protests that initially started February 2014 in the North-Eastern part of Bosnia, former industrial center of the region based in the city of Tuzla, soon spread to other parts of the entity, and have led to resignation of governments in many Bosnian administration units and cantons. Additionally, the level of violence has escalated across the country, in terms of burning down governmental buildings and other governmental assets, and the conflict that occurred between demonstrators and the police forces. As Nela has put it, in terms of comparison of Bosnia and Syria, "[Bosnia is] at the beginning of the Syrian revolution, twenty years after the Bosnian War".

These events are of great importance because they were happening at the time of Syrian women's visit to Bosnia to attend the WILPF's Conference in Sarajevo. In this regard, Nela reflects on what was happening at the site of the Conference:

> During the Conference, social protests in Bosnia were settling down in terms of violence, but Bosnian women didn't reflect to what is happening at all. Syrian women, on the other hand, were full of questions, since the war in Syria has started as a social revolution, a bunt, thus they call it a

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[41] Refers to Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY).

revolution. [Syrian women] were all like, 'let's go and protest', but our women didn't even think about joining the protests, and if they are honest, they will admit that. However, the reaction of Syrian women has prompted Bosnian women to think about it, thus questions were raised in terms of positioning towards what is happening. The third day, we have already wrote a press release, i.e. a statement on what would women who participated in this gathering want. That is, something did prompted and sent them back to reality, thus that abstract value was probably the most valuable.

This brings us back to what was previously stated regarding holistic approach of Syrian women towards the peace process as a whole and their connectedness to the revolution – the dimension of analysis that lacks in the approach of Bosnian women. Their unawareness or non-acceptance of their position in the society as a whole creates limitations in terms of engagement in social and public life on all levels. However, Syrian women's experience has prompted Bosnian women activists to analyze what is happening in the broader social context and to react accordingly. The question remains: what would happen if Syrian women brought different sort of experience, i.e. experience that resonates with Bosnian women activists' twenty year after the war in Bosnia? I find that Syrian women's utilization of principles of transversal politics, through which they have identified their joint objectives despite the differences between them, is of great importance in terms of affecting a less motivated group of women from another situational context. Nonetheless, this does not imply that the work is done. Similarly as peace is not a matter of one event such as signing of a peace agreement, but it is rather a long-term process, experiential learning that is the subject here should also be seen from the same aspect – as a process that leads to sustainable results. In this regard, Gorana reflects on the next event that happened in Sarajevo, only one month after the Conference:

Now we have this whole moment with the social bunt in Bosnia in which [member organizations of the Women's Network of Bosnia and Herzegovina] refuse to participate. They do not understand the principles

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of direct democracy; they have even organized the 8th of March march in Sarajevo, far away from where the protests took place – God forbid they get connected with the protests – they marched from the Cathedral to the BBI, while protests were taking place in front of the Presidency building.

According to Gorana, even after the insights from Syrian women activists that Bosnian women found valuable, their awareness stayed limited in a broader sense. This could also be analyzed from the aspect of the post-conflict professionalization of activism and the large increase of the amount of civil society organizations in Bosnia, which were addressed earlier. If the discourses that are imposed by the donor international organizations are taken into account, the connection between the avoidance to get related to a violent social revolution and financial competitiveness among civil society organizations can be easily derived. In this regard, Jasminka criticizes the civil society sector of Bosnia and Herzegovina:

> Now we have protests in Sarajevo, but you can't see the people who promote themselves as Center for Civil Initiatives for example. What is a civil initiative? Is that when you have protests of citizens, or a civil initiative refers only to seminars and trainings? There is a lot of politically directed humanitarian money that goes into nongovernmental sector.

Although a lot of substantial critique has been directed towards political/activist (un)consciousness of Bosnian women activists, there were also many moments of understanding and identifying with each other:

> It was an emotional event full of understanding, and everyone was learning, even Bosnian women – at least, there were many 'aha!' moments because Syrian women are full of energy, activism and they are very inspiring (Nela).
> Many things were unknown, even among themselves, plus it was an opportunity for a potential mapping and reflection on the main points – here we had those 'aha!' moments when we realized that we're all in the same position. That led us to think forward, but not by ignoring and neglecting our historical context (Gorana).
>
> That was a sort of way of putting ourselves into some past years and organizing in any way, on any level; what we have been doing, what

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difficulties we faced, what successes we achieved, and in what ways we were working with people in our communities (Jasminka).

But then we realized that we have to reconsider all those issues in order to see what is happening with Bosnia, since we are going to need that analysis. That reflection was also useful for us (Selma).

From these selections, the influence of Syrian women over Bosnian women activists is apparent. Furthermore, Bosnian women activists who have participated in this Initiative are willing to continue their work within the same framework. When it comes to acknowledging the mistakes that have been made in Bosnia during the war, and later during the peace negotiations, Bosnian women have realized their mistake of not asking for their space in the peace negotiations. However, the consequences of that mistake are yet to be effectively addressed. Some of the main issues were summarized in the "Women Organizing for Change in Bosnia and Syria" Conference report (Svedberg et al, 2014: 5). Among other issues, transitional justice process is stalled, the process of accessing justice for victims of war crimes is unsafe, thus the victims are still not satisfied with the pace of prosecutions of war crimes. Also, victims are still waiting for recognition, and the reparation instruments are not appropriate (Svedberg et al, 2014: 5).

6   CONCLUSION

In the previous chapters, I have presented my analysis of the experience exchange between Bosnian and Syrian women peace activists, and have discussed how do women activists from Bosnia use this process to reflect to their own war and post-war experience, i.e. how do women activists from Bosnia reflect on the Bosnian peace process through the lens of Syrian peace activism. In answering this question, the concept of transversal politics was used as a central concept of the analysis that has shown that some elements of transversal politics can be applied to the cross-context experience too, at least in the case of Syria and Bosnia. This primarily refers to the two major principles of transversal politics, rooting and shifting.

The analysis has further shown that Syrian women's transversal approach to their peace process has positively influenced Bosnian women activists as well, in terms of 'awakening' them in the midst of the biggest crisis that Bosnia has faced after the War. This refers to the social protests that women have been ignoring on the organized level. In this regard, I claimed that their unawareness is a consequence of their positioning in the overall social context of Bosnia and Herzegovina, in which they have accepted passive roles, instead of seeking for a space that would open up opportunities for transformation towards active participation in the decision-making processes. On the other hand, their positioning towards activism itself through rejection of a feminist foretoken affects the overall feminist analysis of the broader social context in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which is consequently missing.

Furthermore, I have argued that Syrian women's transversal approach to the peace process has inspired Bosnian women activists to gather, discuss and review their mistakes in the last twenty years, since their collaboration on this matter has been certainly weak so far. Finally, I have shown that this cross-context experience exchange between Bosnian and Syrian peace activists was valuable not only for Syrians, but also for Bosnians, because it demonstrated a potential to produce a movement within the 'movement' that looks back in order to look forward. This refers to acknowledging mistakes and oversights from the previous experience and recapitulating the past, in order to create and develop strategies for demanding and accessing their own rights in the context of post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina.

As I have shown in previous chapters, there is a lack of analysis of the cross-context experience exchange, i.e. on how do these processes affect women peace activists from different contexts that are not necessarily conflicted. As already seen, *transnational feminist politics* is a term that is often used in discussions that refer to and address different contexts, however, analysis of the influence of one context over another is almost always absent. This is important because further analyses of the respective experience exchange processes would serve as a potential foundation of more efficient cross-context exchanges. On the other hand, the importance of this analysis also lays in the fact that this process is currently being implemented within two groups of women that originate/come from sites of current war, as in the case of Syria, or from the post-conflict society where the consequences of war are evident even twenty years after the Dayton peace agreement was signed.

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Finally, the significance of progress on the transversal politics plan lays in potential transformation of feminist activism beyond identity politics activism, while problematizing women's homogeneity and strengthening solidarity beyond limitations of one identity. In addition, feminist approaches would consequently get more pragmatic and situational, thus would prosper towards issue-based cooperation.

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