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# **Bosnian Women Working for the Reconstruction of the Post-conflict Society**

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*“We can no longer afford to minimize or ignore the contributions to women and girls to all stages of conflict resolution, peacemaking, peace-building, peacekeeping and reconstruction processes. Sustainable peace will not be achieved without the full and equal participation of women and men”  
(Kofi Annan - Former United Nations Secretary General)<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> “Women, Peace and Human Security.” *Fem LINK Pacific*, accessed April 20, 2014

## **Abstract**

Bosnian women activism, as the result of victimization, instantly increased. The post-war society did not have space for women neither in public, nor in private sphere. Thus, they started constructing civil society, as a ground, for lobbying their interests and needs.

Numerous NGOs were established by women around the country. Through activities of the organizations, women contributed to the long-term tasks, and aims of peacebuilding.

This research focuses on the contribution of the women organizations to the reconstruction and reconciliation of the post-war society and provides comprehensive image on the role of Bosnian women.

## **Introduction**

This paper discusses women's role during and after the terrible war on the soil of Europe - Bosnian War (1992-1995). The main reason behind choosing the topic is to go beyond the image of the Bosnian women as victims of war; to show their activism in addressing the issues they faced in the aftermath of the war; and highlight contribution of Bosnian women to the peacebuilding process.

Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH, Bosnia) was annexed to the Federation of Yugoslavia after the Second World War. After the fall of the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics, countries in the territory of the federation started pushing for independence. Bosnia, where Bosnian Muslims, Croatian Catholics, and Serbian Orthodox Christians lived, became an independent country in the beginning of March 1992. Despite the disagreements of Serbs, it was recognized as a sovereign state by the international community. Serbian militia attacked Bosnia in April 1992. Starting from 1992 Bosnia and Herzegovina witnessed a terrible war. All segments of the country were highly affected by Serb's campaign on ethnic cleansing against the Bosnian Muslim population. After the war, 250,000 people died or were reported as missing, and more than 20,000 women were systematically raped by the Serbian population. The war profoundly influenced Bosnian women, and after the conflict ended women faced numerous severe issues.

Purpose of this research is to show the victimization of women as the outcome of the war, and to explore and analyze the role of Bosnian women in addressing the acute social, economic, and political challenges, which they faced during and after the war. The hypothesis of the present research is that post-war Bosnia challenged women in all spheres, but they established a functioning ground for overcoming the faced issues. Major

question this work will address is: how Bosnian women and their activism helped in reconstruction and reconciliation of the post-war society? The paper is divided into two chapters through which the question is answered.

This paper answers the question mentioned above by firstly looking at the existing theories of women activism. The two feminist theories: liberal feminism and post-structuralist feminism, are found as most relevant to the topic of the research.

Then it proceeds to the first chapter, which at the beginning discusses the role of women in the former socialist Yugoslav society. Afterwards, the research highlights women activism after the war and influence of the war on women. The last part discusses women victimization in the aftermath of the war.

The second chapter analyzes the rise of women civic activism, and touches upon activities of prominent women organizations in post war-society. Moreover, the chapter examines the contribution of women activism to the reconstruction and reconciliation of the Bosnian society.

As the result, the research will provide comprehensive analysis of the role of women in overcoming the faced issues.

### *Methodology*

This research uses qualitative data analysis for exploring the answer to the research question. Through content analysis the primary sources were studied. The primary sources are the websites of the big women organizations in Bosnia. The websites have information about the work and activities of the organizations. Through analyzing the content of the websites, the main activities of the women organizations were found out. The research as well uses secondary sources which are scholarly articles, books and

publications on the topic of study. Discourse analysis approach was as well helpful in studying the reports of international and local community on the role of women in the Bosnian society. These research approaches made possible answering the question and proving the hypothesis in a convenient way.

## **Literature Review**

This research explains the role of Bosnian women in the post-war society through the prism of the feminist theories.

The proceeding literature review is divided into two parts. The first part of the review is focused on two theories that are found most relevant to the subject of the study. The second part discusses concepts that are important to understand before reading the whole work.

### **1. Theoretical Framework**

Women subordination and subjugation goes back to the history of human being. For centuries women were denied from the right to vote, get education, and own property. Women movement as a demand for liberation and equality started in France and since then, women reached numerous aims. After gaining a right for owning property and suffrage, women started challenging the socially constructed role of woman as child-bearer and wife.

Feminism - a theory that is often associated with women and women movements - lays as the theoretical basis of this paper.

Feminism as a philosophical discourse has developed very fast, it is well researched, and consequently it is very broad. Thus, after researching the major feminist theories, it was found out that liberal and poststructuralist feminism are most relevant to the role of Bosnian women in the post-war society.

### **Liberal Feminism**

The liberal feminist approach dates back to 1779 when the book *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* by Mary Wollstonecraft was published. *A Vindication on the Rights of*

*Women* is the classic of liberal feminism idea. Wollstonecraft stresses the importance of reasoning and proposes an idea that through knowledge and reason women can end deprivation of their rights. The main argument of the book is that women are enslaved because of not socializing; low level of socialization retards women growth and leads them to enslavement.<sup>2</sup> Wollstonecraft believed that education is the key to women liberation.

Proper education and training in critical thinking skills is what will protect women rights and freedom. She proposes two benefits that women will gain from thinking critically. First, if women think “clearly and sensibly about their situation” it is more likely that they will become self interested and less naive<sup>3</sup>. Secondly, thinking critically would make women develop themselves. For Wollstonecraft “Reason and God are almost synonymous.”<sup>4</sup> She believed that reason is virtue, reason and knowledge can make our world perfect.<sup>5</sup> Thus, women must have an access to knowledge. The source of knowledge is - education. If they have access to education they will be emancipated from domestic sphere to which they are confined. Thousands of women have wasted their talent after being imprisoned in their homes and consequently became dependent. “The woman, who earns her own bread by fulfilling some duty, deserves much more respect than the most accomplished beauty!”<sup>6</sup>

The second prominent work worth to mention on liberal feminism is, an essay of one of the latest thinkers in 19<sup>th</sup> century liberal feminism discourse, John Stuart Mill

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<sup>2</sup> Donovan Josephine. *Feminist Theory: The Intellectual Tradition*. Third Edition. (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc., 2001), pg 25.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 25

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 23

<sup>5</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft. *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman with Structures on Political and Moral Subjects*. (2010). PDF e-book

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 9

*Subjection of Women* which he published in 1832. He pointed out an idea that men oppress women due to their [men] “improper moral education” and selfishness<sup>7</sup>, which was given to them through the culture. Thus, he believed that women subjection is immoral and customary. He as well advocated for women suffrage, equal right for children and property. Mill touched upon the economic equality. For, women as well. Women should be able to compete, for competition is very important part of the capitalist economy. He believed that equal opportunity, competition will lead to equality in society. At the end he sums up with an idea that women and men complement each other in work, and these complementary roles will lead to ideal relation.<sup>8</sup>

Accordingly, the main idea that liberal feminism holds is individualism and equality. The main cause of women inequality is lack of opportunity and education. The solution for women would be to open up opportunities through education and economy.

### **Poststructuralist feminism**

The most important work in the tradition of poststructuralist feminism is Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*. The author talks about how women difference made them inferior to men. Men have defined themselves as “the self” and women as “the other”. Since the beginning of women movement - feminism - women have reached big change in their status. They are able to vote, but voting does not make them free from subordination and repression. What gives freedom to women in all senses of the word is - work. Only through winning their bread, on their own women will reach liberty.<sup>9</sup> The “womanness” has confined women to the borders from which women are incapable to go

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<sup>7</sup> Ollenburger, Jane and Moore, Helen. *The Sociology of Women: The Intersection of Patriarchy, Capitalism, and Colonization*. Second Edition. (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1998), pg 18.

<sup>8</sup> Ollenburger, Jane and Moore, Helen. *The Sociology of Women: The Intersection of Patriarchy, Capitalism, and Colonization*. Second Edition. (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1998), pg 19

<sup>9</sup> Beauvoir, Simone de. *The Second Sex*. (New York: Vintage Books, 2011), pg 721

out. It is difficult to escape the stereotypical image that patriarchal society has posed on women. Thus, Simone de Beauvoir proposes ways for women liberation. First, in order to stop of being the “second sex” women need to work. Despite the fact that working in capitalist economy is often oppressive, women need to go to work in order to control their destiny. Second strategy for liberation is becoming intellectuals. They must be involved in thinking, defining, and looking.

Both of the mentioned above theories admit that women have been subordinated for centuries. But, women themselves can change their destiny. Primarily, through education women will start reasoning. Reasoning will lead to economic empowerment.

## 2. Conceptual Framework

Except the two theories the review of literature defines the following terms: ethnic cleansing, sexual violence, peacebuilding and civil society.

### *Ethnic cleansing*

Ethnic cleansing is not well defined under the international law. The Statute of the United Nations International Criminal Tribunal on Former Yugoslavia admits that ethnic cleansing was practiced in Bosnia, but it does not define the term. The most comprehensive definition on the term can be found in the documents of the International Committee for the Red Cross (ICRC). Thus, ethnic cleansing according to the definition of the ICRC - is “the policy or campaign designed by one ethnic or religious group to forcefully and violently remove the civilian religious or ethnic group from certain geographic area.”<sup>10</sup> This term is relevant to the campaign of the Serbian authority in several ways: a lot of villages, where the Bosnian Muslim population lived, were

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<sup>10</sup> “Ethnic cleansing”, *International Committee for the Red Cross*, accessed April 18, 2015. <https://www.icrc.org/casebook/doc/glossary/ethnic-cleansing-glossary.htm>

indiscriminately attacked by the Serbian militia, this way the ethnic group was forced to flee or displace; men were arrested and were confined to the prisons or were killed; women were forced to flee with children and elderly or often were sexually violated.<sup>11</sup>

### *Sexual violence*

For centuries sexual violence was ignored as a crime under the international law. A lot of important legal documents under the international law, such as Hague Conventions and Geneva Conventions did not prosecute war time rape. The Fourth Geneva Convention points out, that sexual violence during the war is a grave breach, but no trial was held under the international law for prosecuting sexual violence. Only after the establishment of the two international courts the silence around sexual violence vanished.

In June 2014 the “*International Protocol on the Documentation and Investigation of Sexual Violence in Conflict Basic Standards of Best Practice on the Documentation of Sexual Violence as a Crime under International Law*” defined as: “Sexual violence is a particularly heinous form of violence, and includes rape and any other attack of a sexual nature perpetrated against women and girls, men and boys. Its consequences can be brutal, may include acute physical and psychological repercussions for survivors and witnesses, and have a deep destabilizing effect on communities and populations as a whole.”<sup>12</sup>

### *Peacebuilding*

Peacebuilding in contrast to ethnic cleansing is well studied approach in the conflict resolution. Everyone seems to interpret the approach in a unique way, thus, there is no

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<sup>11</sup> Case Study, Armed Conflicts in the former Yugoslavia. *International Committee for the Red Cross*, accessed April 18, 2015

[https://www.icrc.org/casebook/doc/case-study/yugoslavia-armed-conflicts-case-study.htm#para\\_8](https://www.icrc.org/casebook/doc/case-study/yugoslavia-armed-conflicts-case-study.htm#para_8)

<sup>12</sup> United Kingdom. London. *International Protocol on the Documentation and Investigation of Sexual Violence in Conflict: Basic Standards of Best Practice on the Documentation of Sexual Violence as a Crime under International Law*, 2014.

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/319054/PSVI\\_protocol\\_web.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/319054/PSVI_protocol_web.pdf)

universal definition of the term. The outstanding book - “*Conflict Resolution in the Twenty-first Century: Principles, Methods, and Approach*” suggests the definition of peacebuilding as: “long-term political and development activities that are aimed at recovery from war, preventing and relapsing into violent conflict, strengthening local capacities for peaceful conflict resolution, and creating the conditions for genuine long-term human security.”<sup>13</sup>

In the same book the authors have a built framework for the aims and tasks of peacebuilding. They divide the process of peacebuilding to military, political, economic, and social, and show the short, medium, long term tasks of peacebuilding. This paper uses long term aims of political, economic and social dimensions of peacebuilding in the activities of women organizations.

Dimension	Aim
Political Peacebuilding	Establish tradition of good governance including respect for democracy, human rights, rule of law, development of civil society
Economic Peacebuilding	Stable long-term macro-economic policies and economic management, locally sustainable community development
Social Peacebuilding	Healing psychological wounds, long term reconciliation, peace education

Table 1: A Framework of Peacebuilding Aims and Tasks <sup>14</sup>

### *Civil society*

The concept - civil society - is also a very well defined and thus it has numerous definitions that highlight different aspects of the concept. According to the definition of the World Bank civil society is about “non-governmental and not-for-profit organizations that have a presence in public life, expressing the interests and values of their members or

<sup>13</sup> Berkovitch, Jacob and Jackson, Richard. *Conflict Resolution in the Twenty-first Century: Principles Methods and Approaches*. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009), 172.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 174

others, based on ethical, cultural, political, scientific, religious or philanthropic considerations”. Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) therefore refer to a wide of array of organizations: community groups, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), labor unions, indigenous groups, charitable organizations, faith-based organizations, professional associations, and foundations.”<sup>15</sup> The definition adopted by the Center on Conflict, Development, and Peace building is: “Civil society is understood as including a wide range of actors from professional associations, clubs, unions, faith-based organizations [such as churches or Islamic charities], nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), as well as traditional and clan groups.”<sup>16</sup> The key functions of civil society are: “advocating values of human rights, tolerance and understanding, offering civic training, promoting civic education and public issues through media, and promotion of conflict resolution and inter-faith dialogue, control of political power, monitoring of political participation and elections and promoting of anti-corruption awareness.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> “Defining Civil society” *The World Bank*, accessed April 8, 2015  
<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/CSO/0,,contentMDK:20101499~menuPK:244752~pagePK:220503~piPK:220476~theSitePK:228717,00.html>

<sup>16</sup> Pazzenhof Thania. “Civil Society and Peacebuilding.” *Centre on Conflict, Development and Peacebuilding*, no. 4 (Geneva:2009)

<sup>17</sup> Mulalic Muhidin. Women’s NGOs and Civil Society Building in Bosnia-Herzegovina. *Epiphany* 4, no.1 (2011)

## Chapter 1: War and Women

Women activism in BiH goes back to the history of the former Republic of Yugoslavia. The country had a very powerful feminist group. Before the war, these groups called for demilitarization and peace. During the war women groups were instrumental in delivering basic humanitarian aid.

### 1.1 Women activism in the Former Yugoslavia

The activism of feminist organizations in Yugoslavia is traced back to 1978 when an international feminist conference, “Women Comrade: The Women Question a new approach”, was held in Belgrade. Women in the conference discussed their role in the context of socialist society: women as mother, worker, and heroine of war<sup>18</sup>. Soon after the conference a feminist organization, “Women and Society”, was formed in Belgrade. This organization funded forums and published feminist articles in the mainstream magazines. They held workshops and seminars on women related issues.<sup>19</sup> By the mid of 1980’s women opened an air-market which was, as well, open for Roma women. By the end of the year several women groups launched the project on SOS telephone hot-lines, in the capitals of three biggest Yugoslav republics Croatia, Serbia, and Slovenia. Volunteers answered calls from women who were raped, abused and domestically violated. Later these groups opened shelters for women and their children, where they could find refuge. In 1987 women from the cities formed a Yugoslav Feminist Network; through the gatherings of the group women shared ideas about improving the feminist projects throughout the country. In 1990 the first multi-party election in the federation

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<sup>18</sup> Bonfiglioli, Chiara, “Belgrade 1978 Remembering the Conference “Drugarica Zena. Zenzko Pitanje - Novi Pristup?”/ “Comrade Woman. The Women Question: ANew Approach” thirty years after” (master thesis, Unrecht University, 2007-2008)

<sup>19</sup> Hughes, Donna, Mladjenovic, Lepa, and Mrsevic, Zorica. “Feminist Resistance in Serbia.” *European Journal of Women’s Studies* 2, no. 4 (1995)

was won by the nationalists and Christian democrats. Consequently, the level of women in the legislature and labor sector instantly decreased. In two years after the election a terrifying war broke out in the Federation, thus women rights violations became much more apparent.

BiH was annexed to the Federation of Yugoslavia after the Second World War and was part of Yugoslavia prior to the fall of the USSR. Starting from 1991 countries within the federation started pushing for independence. Croatia and Slovenia were recognized as sovereign states in 1992. Macedonia declared its independence in September 1991 and became part of the United Nations as Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Bosnia, that is the most ethnically diverse country within the union, follows Croatia, Slovenia and Macedonia. The population of BiH was deeply divided among the ethnic lines throughout the history to different communities of Bosnian Muslim, Serbian Orthodox Christian, and Croatian Catholics. Muslims made up almost 50% of the Bosnian population.<sup>20</sup> They wanted to create a multi-ethnic<sup>21</sup> independent, democratic Bosnia.<sup>22</sup> Serbs, who comprised large portion of the Bosnian population, were against the secession of Bosnia from Yugoslavia. They claimed: if Bosnia receives independence, the Serbian minority in the territory of BiH would be oppressed.<sup>23</sup> Despite the disagreements of the Serbs, the international community recognized Bosnia as an independent state in April 1992. Very soon Serbian forces evacuated the Serbian population from the Muslim Bosnian cities and seized control over Zvornik, Visegrad, and Foca. In April 7-8, 1992<sup>24</sup> full-scale war

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<sup>20</sup> Samary, Catherine. *Yugoslavia Dismembered*. (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1995), pg 89

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 98

<sup>22</sup> Nizich, Ivana. *War Crimes in Bosnia-Herzegovina: a Helsinki Watch Report*. (Helsinki: Human Rights Watch, 1992), pg 41

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 46

<sup>24</sup> Burg Steven and Shoup Paul. *The War in Bosnia-Herzegovina : Ethnic Conflict and International Intervention*. (London: Routledge, 1994), pg 129

started in BiH.

## 1.2 Women anti-war protests

When the war broke out the male population was sent to the national army, women launched anti-war protests and demonstrations. The first public resistance to war, called Mothers Protest, began in 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1991 by several hundred parents. Women called for returning their loved ones from the war. In July of the same year, Center for Anti-War action opened in the territory of BiH. The Center, along with the Mothers Protest, resisted the war and led peace protests around the parliament of Yugoslavia.<sup>25</sup>

By the end of 1991 women were inspired by a Jewish organization - Women in Black and established an organization with an identical name. Every woman from the organization protested in the square of Belgrade. They demanded demilitarization and end of the conflict.<sup>26</sup>

Starting from 1992 when the flow of women refugee increased and cases of rapes, forced impregnation, and other crimes against women were on the rise, the work of women organizations took new direction. Feminists, in biggest city and capital of Croatia Zagreb, opened a center for Women Victims of War: they gave psycho-social support for women.<sup>27</sup>

While the male population was in the national army, the space was free for women in the public life. The first women-only organizations, Medica Zenica and Zene Zenama, were established for supporting women who faced sexual violence in the war.

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<sup>25</sup> Hughes, Donna, Mladjenovic, Lepa, and Mrsevic, Zorica. "Feminist Resistance in Serbia." *European Journal of Women's Studies* 2, no. 4 (1995)

<sup>26</sup> Restoring Women to World Studies: A Document-Based Curriculum Unit for Grades 9–12. (Austin: Hemispheres, 2009), 97 PDF e-book

<sup>27</sup> Benderly, Jill. "BOSNIA: NO PLACE TO HIDE-NO PLACE TO RUN The Balkanization of Women's Bodies." *On the Issue Magazine* (1993), accessed April 18, 2015  
[http://www.ontheissuesmagazine.com/1993summer/Summer1993\\_3.php](http://www.ontheissuesmagazine.com/1993summer/Summer1993_3.php)

Medica Zenica, a women therapy center, was established in 1993 for offering psycho-social and health support to women who faced any form of violence during the war. It is important to note that women organizations offered help despite the ethnic background. Thus, women were the first to cross the ethnic lines and step towards reconciliation.<sup>28</sup> Serbs campaign on ethnic cleansing, which included extermination of the male population and rape of female population, affected women both during and after the war.

### 1.3 Bosnian war and its influence on Women

Bosnian women were influenced by the war in various ways: they faced indiscriminate attacks as the part of civilian population, they faced sexual violence, detention, and they became widows and refugees.<sup>29</sup>

Majority of women don't take direct part in warfare but they also face hostilities. Majority of the Bosnian women did not take part in the combat; consequently they faced indiscriminate attacks and bombing. Moreover, as right to movement is not always possible during the war, women together with children and elderly faced lack of food, water and medical assistance.

Rape and crimes of sexual violence accompany every war. No doubt that rape is the grave and horrendous violation of human rights, but for centuries rape as a crime was ignored under the international law. It was an "unfortunate byproduct"<sup>30</sup> of war. Prior to the 90s, rape had a different character; it was an act of individual soldiers. Crimes of

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<sup>28</sup> Simić, Olivera. "Activism for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina: A Gender Perspective." *Global Media Journal* 8 no.11 (2009)

<sup>29</sup> "Women and war - An overview" *International Committee of the Red Cross*, accessed April 18, 2015 <https://www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/misc/57jqg3.htm>

<sup>30</sup> Niarchos, Catherine. "Women, War, and Rape: Challenges Facing the International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia." in *Women's Rights: A Human Rights Quarterly Reader*, edited by Lockwood, Bert, 270-310. (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2006), pg 271

sexual violence that were present during the war in BiH had different scale. It was not a byproduct; on the contrary it was a strategy of leading the warfare. All the warring sides during the conflict were perpetrators of rape, but according to the UN Commission of Experts, that was established in 1992 for investigating the war crimes in BiH, the major cases of rapes were committed by the Serbian militia against the Muslim, Bosnian women.<sup>31</sup> The estimated number of Muslim women, raped during war by Serbs, is over 20,000.<sup>32</sup> The assertion that the rapes in BiH were systematic and deliberate was proved by dividing the cases of rape to five patterns.<sup>33</sup> Serbian army started committing acts of sexual violence in the regions before the war broke out; this is the first pattern of rape. The second is sexual violence during the war: women were raped in their homes, often in front of the family members. Third form of rape was perpetrated within the detention camps, where women were brought from the districts captured by Serbian soldiers. The fourth type is sexual violence that occurred in the rape camps, in the hotels, schools, hospitals, factories, cafes. The fifth pattern is rape that was in the bordello camps, where women were providing sex to the Serbian men that returned from the front line.<sup>34</sup>

Serbian men tried to destroy the Bosnian ethnicity, and tear apart the society by destroying the main component of society - family. They deliberately exterminated men: a crucial example for this can be the massacre in Srebrenica, when up to 5,000 men and

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 271

<sup>32</sup> Aydelotte, Danise. *Mass Rape During War: Prosecuting Bosnian Rapists Under International Law* <http://www.law-lib.utoronto.ca/Diana/fulltext/ayde.pdf>

<sup>33</sup> Salzman, Todd. "Rape Camps as Means of Ethnic Cleansing: Religious, Cultural, and Ethical Responses to Rape Victims in the Former Yugoslavia." in *Women's Rights: A Human Rights Quarterly Reader*, edited by Lockwood, Bert, 311-341. (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2006), pg 322

<sup>34</sup> Salzman, Todd. "Rape Camps as Means of Ethnic Cleansing: Religious, Cultural, and Ethical Responses to Rape Victims in the Former Yugoslavia." in *Women's Rights: A Human Rights Quarterly Reader*, edited by Lockwood, Bert, 311-341. (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2006), 321-322

boys were killed<sup>35</sup>, and forcefully impregnated women for changing the ethnic ground of the society. In most of the patriarchal societies the child receives ethnicity from the father, thus, Serb wanted the Bosnian women to have Chetnik children. Over 2000 women were held by the Serbs for impregnation in special camps. They were held in the camps till the moment when it was impossible to have safe abortion.<sup>36</sup>

The Bosnian men during the war were either part of the combat or were massively exterminated after confinement to detention camps. Majority of the population that died in the war were men. Moreover, according to the data of International Committee of the Red Cross 91, 2% among the missing people were men.<sup>37</sup> Thus, women became the only supporter of the children and elderly in the family.

Women and children make up the majority of the internally displaced people. Women leave their homes and become refugees in order to assure security and survival of their family members. Consequently, women have the burden of the whole family on their shoulders, so women were in acute need of seize-fire and demilitarization. Women headed organizations and groups were very effective during the war. They arranged aid for women that were influenced by the war. They took care of the children and widowed women, helped women in income generation, organized schools for children and took care of the elderly and disabled. Moreover, they were the first to initiate negotiation with the fighting side and tried to find a common ground for stopping the violence.

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<sup>35</sup> "For the Women of Bosnia, War Was Not the End." *Huff Post Impact*, accessed April 18, 2015 [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/andree-simon/rape-in-the-bosnian-war\\_b\\_1406318.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/andree-simon/rape-in-the-bosnian-war_b_1406318.html)

<sup>36</sup>Fisk, Robert. Bosnia War Crimes: 'The rapes went on day and night': Robert Fisk, in Mostar, gathers detailed evidence of the systematic sexual assaults on Muslim women by Serbian 'White Eagle' gunmen. *The Independent*, (1993) accessed April 18, 2015 <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/bosnia-war-crimes-the-rapes-went-on-day-and-night-rob-ert-fisk-in-mostar-gathers-detailed-evidence-of-the-systematic-sexual-assaults-on-muslim-women-by-serbia-n-white-eagle-gunmen-1471656.html>

<sup>37</sup> "Women and war - An overview" *International Committee of the Red Cross*, accessed April 18, 2015 <https://www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/misc/57jqg3.htm>

#### 1.4 Dayton Peace Agreements

The Bosnian war lasted for three years, 1992-1995 and it brought terrible consequences to the country. There were several peacebuilding initiatives but till 1995 all of them failed. Dayton Peace Accords were officially signed in Paris on 21<sup>st</sup> of November 1995. It was estimated that when Dayton Agreements were signed over 4,3 million people from the population of Bosnia was displaced as refugees or were hosted in other countries, almost 250,000 people died or were missing, and more than 200,000 were wounded, 50,000 among the wounded were children. The peace accords consisted of “umbrella document, 11 annexes and 102 maps.”<sup>38</sup> Each of the annex had to deal with certain aspect, the first annex talks about military aspects, ceasefire and regional stabilization, the second annex deals with the borders and draws a definite border between the states, the third annex sets out a new constitution for BiH, annex number five deals with the arbitration process “The Federation and the Bosnian Serb Republic agree to enter into reciprocal commitments to engage in binding arbitration to resolve disputes between them, and they agree to design and implement a system of arbitration.”<sup>39</sup> The sixth annex addresses the human rights issue and established a human rights commission for promotion and development of human rights, the next annex talks about refugee and displaces people and their right to return home, the eight annex sets a commission for prevention of national monuments, the three last annexes talk about BiH public corporation, civilian implementation, and the international police task force.<sup>40</sup> Despite

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<sup>38</sup> Paczull, Jutta. “The Long, Difficult Road to Dayton: Peace Efforts in Bosnia-Herzegovina.” *Sage Publication* 60 no.1 (2004-2005): 268

<sup>39</sup> “Summary of the Dayton Peace Agreement on Bosnia-Herzegovina” *University of Minnesota Human Rights Library*, accessed April 18, 2015 <http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/icty/dayton/daytonsum.html>

<sup>40</sup> “The General Framework Agreement.” *NATO Operation Joint Endeavor*, accessed April 18, 2015 <http://www.nato.int/ifor/gfa/gfa-home.htm>

the fact that women were among the most affected group their issues during drafting and signing the agreement were ignored. No single women took part in the official peace negotiation and none of the issues women faced during the war were mentioned in the agreement. Thus, the Dayton Peace Agreements were gender neutral.<sup>41</sup> Due to this and several other reasons, women were highly victimized segment of population after the war ended.

### 1.5 Women Victimization

Signing of peace accords did not end the war for women. The post-war society challenged women in all spheres and for many women the worst was yet to start.

Women faced post-traumatic stress disorder, the level of participation of women in politics decreased, the capitalist economy made the employment sector highly segregated, the level of domestic violence increased, and women became the only supporter of the vulnerable members of family, many women needed to bare the children that they had after being raped. Thousands of women, due to becoming refugees, instantly lost everything they had. Because of rape, lack of medicine, and hygiene during the war women faced severe mental and physical health issues.<sup>42</sup>

The impact of rape on women psyche is obvious; it is constructed for humiliation of and domination over women body and mind. After experiencing rape every women faces post-traumatic stress disorders. Most common among the disorders can be: flashbacks that “relieve the trauma over and over,”<sup>43</sup> anxiety, phobia of the society, and suicide

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<sup>41</sup> “Bosnia-Herzegovina.” *Equal Power - Lasting Peace For Women Full Participation in Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding*, accessed April 18, 2015

<http://www.equalpowerlastingpeace.org/five-conflicts/bosnia-hercegovina/>

<sup>42</sup> Yuval Davis, Nira. “NATIONALIST PROJECTS AND GENDER RELATIONS” (London: 2003)

<sup>43</sup> “Post-traumatic Stress Disorder.” *National Institute of Mental Health*, accessed April 18, 2015  
<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/post-traumatic-stress-disorder-ptsd/index.shtml>

attempts.<sup>44</sup> Thousands of women went through these symptoms every day.

Along with mental disorders women faced numerous physical health issues. Crimes of sexual violence, along with affecting psyche, as well influence physical health. Obviously, women experience sexually transmitted infections. The level of HIV/AIDS after the war dramatically increased in Bosnia.<sup>45</sup> Consequently, women reproductive health was damaged. The lack of hygiene brought further complications to the health of both women and children.

In economy the situation with women rights was no better. The capitalist economy made the economic sector male dominated. Fewer rights were granted to women. So 70% of women in the post-war society were unemployed.<sup>46</sup> For sexually abused women who lost their husband the situation was even worse. In addition to physical and mental health issues women they became the only supporter of the vulnerable members of the family. Along with these issues the number of women in the politics of was very low.

Under the Yugoslav law certain percent of seats war guaranteed to women in the government, but in 1996, during the first multi-party election, quota system was abnegated. In result the number of elected women was very low. Only 2, 4% of women were elected as the members in the House of Representatives and up 6, 3% elected members of the Federation cantons were women.<sup>47</sup>

The impoverishment of society directly influenced the family relations. The stress

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<sup>44</sup> "Rape Trauma Syndrome." *Rape Crisis: Cape Town Trust*, accessed April 18, 2015

<http://rapecrisis.org.za/information-for-survivors/rape-trauma-syndrome/>

<sup>45</sup> "Report of the Independent Evaluation of the HIV/AIDS Programme in Bosnia and Herzegovina" *AIDS Program Management Group* (2014), accessed April 18, 2015

[http://www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/country/documents//BIH\\_narrative\\_report\\_2014.pdf](http://www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/country/documents//BIH_narrative_report_2014.pdf)

<sup>46</sup> Haynes, Dina Francesca. "LESSONS FROM BOSNIA'S ARIZONA MARKET: HARM TO WOMEN IN A NEOLIBERALIZED POSTCONFLICT RECONSTRUCTION PROCESS" *University of Pennsylvania Law Review* 158, no. 6 (2010)

<sup>47</sup> Mulalic Muhidin. Women's NGOs and Civil Society Building in Bosnia-Herzegovina. *Epiphany* 4, no.1 (2011)

from war, poverty, loss of jobs and property increased domestic violence in the aftermath of war. Many women that faced rape and sexual assaults were continuously humiliated by their husbands.<sup>48</sup>

The Serbian nationalist war affected women both during and after the war. War made women targets as civilians, victims of sexual violence, widows and refugee. In spite the challenges women were active during the war, they created groups and initiatives for anti-war demonstrations and cease-fire; delivered basic humanitarian aid; and took care of those in need. Despite their activism women were left out from the table of official peace negotiations, moreover women issues were not mentioned in the Dayton Peace Accords. Thus, the post-war Bosnia did not have place for women in the public life. Certainly, women needed to uphold their rights. As the result of the victimization women activism instantly increased. Women started organizing for change and significantly contributed to the reconstruction and reconciliation of the post-war society.

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<sup>48</sup> “Domestic Violence Revives Bosnian Women’s War Nightmares.” *Balkan Transitional Justice* (2015), accessed April 18, 2015  
<http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/domestic-violence-revives-ex-prisoners-wartime-nightmares>

## Chapter 2: Feminism in Post-War Bosnia

As discussed above, women were highly victimized segment of Bosnian population after the war. While the capitalist economy made the employment sector male dominant, the Dayton Peace Accords with their gender neutral policy instantly decreased the number of women in politics. Women were oppressed in economic, political, and social spheres.

Thus, as poststructuralist feminism advises, women started working. Despite the fact, that, “working in capitalist economy is exploitative and oppressive”<sup>49</sup> women worked and indeed they started controlling their own destiny. The prevalence of “oppression was rooted in the lack of opportunity”<sup>50</sup> and women found a solution by creating opportunity for themselves.

Women did not have a space in the public life of the society because majority of the female population was unemployed and the number of women in the government was drastically low. Thus, they started building, civil society, as a ground for overcoming the faced issues and for lobbying their interests and needs. Women established numerous non-governmental organizations around the country. Women organizations\* made significant contribution to peacebuilding and reconciliation of the post-war BiH.

### 2.1 Women activism

The women organizations started functioning in BiH soon after the war began, at the war time their main role was providing humanitarian relief, such as delivering food and

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\* Women organizations are the organizations established and/or headed by women or the majority of the members of the organization are female.

<sup>49</sup> Ollenburger, Jane and Moore, Helen. *The Sociology of Women: The Intersection of Patriarchy, Capitalism, and Colonization*. Second Edition. (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1998), 25

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 17

water, giving shelter to refugees and providing medical counseling, both physiologic and psychological. After the war activities of women organizations took new direction

All societal sectors were ruined in the aftermath of war. About 40% of social housing and 60% of private housing was either damaged or destroyed.<sup>51</sup> Returnees found out that they actually did not have a place for coming back. The social sector that employed most of the women, was out of work. Schools were damaged; health system and all other kinds of social services were demolished. The employment sector became highly segregated, about 70% of women were unemployed, the neo-liberalism made the working sector male-dominated<sup>52</sup>, less rights were granted to women in the era of privatization.<sup>53</sup> Lack of education, traditional notion of Bosnian people about belonging women to her home, and lack of access to resource further fueled marginalization of women.<sup>54</sup>

Thus, women started organizing for addressing the acute problems that society faced. Over 500 NGOs were established in the country, more than half of these organizations were headed by women.

The activities of women organizations can be divided to various categories: income generation and training programs; increasing political participation; human rights advocacy; psycho-social support; and reconciliation of society<sup>55</sup>. Through these activities

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<sup>51</sup> Cockburn, Cynthia, Stakic-Domuz, Rada and Hubic Meliha. *WOMEN ORGANIZING FOR CHANGE A study of women's local integrative organizations and the pursuit of democracy in Bosnia-Herzegovina* (Zenica: Medica Women's Association, 2001), PDF e-book

<sup>52</sup> Haynes, Dina Francesca. "LESSONS FROM BOSNIA'S ARIZONA MARKET: HARM TO WOMEN IN A NEOLIBERALIZED POSTCONFLICT RECONSTRUCTION PROCESS" University of Pennsylvania Law Review 158, no. 6 (2010)

<sup>53</sup> Cockburn, Cynthia, Stakic-Domuz, Rada and Hubic Meliha. *WOMEN ORGANIZING FOR CHANGE A study of women's local integrative organizations and the pursuit of democracy in Bosnia-Herzegovina* (Zenica: Medica Women's Association, 2001), PDF e-book

<sup>54</sup> "Bosnia and Herzegovina." *Women for Women International*, accessed April 18, 2015

<http://www.womenforwomen.org/sites/default/files/WfWI-Bosnia-Country%20Profile-08202014.pdf>

<sup>55</sup> Walsh, Martha, "Aftermath: The Role Of Women's Organizations In Postconflict Bosnia And Herzegovina." *Center for Development Information and Evaluation United States Agency for International Development*, no. 308 (Washington: 2000)

women became apparent civic activists, they overcame the challenges and significantly contributed to the reconstruction and reconciliation of the post-war country.

### *Income Generation and Training Activities*

Bosnian economy was completely devastated after the war. In 1990 the GDP of the country was \$11 billion, \$2400 per capita, while in 1995 before signing the Dayton agreements the country's GDP collapsed to \$2 billion, per capita it comprised \$500<sup>56</sup>. Women comprised the major part of the unemployed population. They faced several limitations for active participation in the economy: exclusion from formal employment sector, lack of knowledge about market and its opportunities, lack of physical access to the market for women in the distant area. Hence, a lot of women joined small, non-governmental organizations. The organizations offered small loans and training programs for women.

Organizations, like Zene za Zene, offered training programs for women in manufacturing “agricultural, medicinal and aromatic products, handicraft and fashion accessories.”<sup>57</sup> The main objective of the organization was to increase economic opportunities for women and encourage their economic activities, through material support<sup>58</sup>, they organized weekly markets where women could sell the manufactured commodities.

Federalne Zena established in mountainous region of BiH as well offered income generation activities. With the grant of the international organizations the NGO bought

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<sup>56</sup> Haynes, Dina Francesca. “LESSONS FROM BOSNIA'S ARIZONA MARKET: HARM TO WOMEN IN A NEOLIBERALIZED POSTCONFLICT RECONSTRUCTION PROCESS” University of Pennsylvania Law Review 158, no. 6 (2010)

<sup>57</sup> “Statistics about Women in Bosnia and Herzegovina,” *Women for Women International*, accessed April 18, 2015

<http://www.womenforwomen.org/what-we-do/countries/bosnia-and-herzegovina>

<sup>58</sup> Ibid

sewing machines. Soon 70 members of the organization were actively sewing and knitting.<sup>59</sup> The main aim of these income generation activities was to provide women with long term economic strategies. Thus, the training programs were priority for many NGOs.

Medica Zenica - provided women with professional training and upon completion they received a certificate. Through the training programs of the organization women obtained practical skills that were in demand in the labor market.<sup>60</sup> Most of the programs trained women in handicraft, sewing and knitting.

Training programs of the Udruzene Zena, had a different direction. The organization trained women in advocacy of public issues, management, and leadership.<sup>61</sup>

The training program of another Bosnian organization, Zene Zenama, had the same direction. Women after 12 months of training obtained basic skills of management and business. Most of the beneficiaries of Zene Zenama in contrast to Udruzene Zena were women from rural setting. For the women living in the rural parts of BiH the organizations had a different training program. Women harvested herbs that were further used in making cosmetics and medicine, they were taught cultivation in the greenhouse and beekeeping. Moreover, women from rural BiH were trained in making both traditional and modern accessories.

Along with the training and income generation activities women organizations offered small loans for those who wanted start their business. Bospo is an example of the

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<sup>59</sup> Cockburn, Cynthia, Stakic-Domuz, Rada and Hubic Meliha. *WOMEN ORGANIZING FOR CHANGE A study of women's local integrative organizations and the pursuit of democracy in Bosnia-Herzegovina* (Zenica: Medica Women's Association, 2001), PDF e-book

<sup>60</sup> Mulalic Muhidin. Women's NGOs and Civil Society Building in Bosnia-Herzegovina. *Epiphany* 4, no.1 (2011)

<sup>61</sup> Ibid

successful micro-credit organization. It started functioning in Bosnia from 1996; the target groups of the organization were women.<sup>62</sup> At the moment of establishment the basic aim of the organization was to deliver humanitarian assistance, starting from 1995 the direction of the organization changed. The organization offered loans to women entrepreneurs.

### *Increasing Political Participation*

As indicated above the level of women in politics was drastically low after the war. Thus, the organizations networked women for participation in the political parties. The activities of women for increasing the level of women political participation had an educative direction. Zene Mostara organized round tables and talks with politically active guest speakers. The participators of these initiatives were women who wanted to be politically active.<sup>63</sup> The activities of Udruzene Zene were directed towards increasing public awareness about gender balance in politics, through media.<sup>64</sup> Moreover, Zene za Zena organized a “Civic Engagement Program.”<sup>65</sup> Through the program women were encouraged to run for local leadership positions. The initiative raised women awareness about Bosnian laws, particularly the laws on gender equality. As well in the framework of the project, women organized forums in media on level of women in political bodies.

### *Human rights advocacy*

Another important direction of women organizations was advocating and monitoring

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<sup>62</sup> “MI-Bospo.” *Mix Market*, accessed April 18, 2015 <http://www.mixmarket.org/mfi/mi-bospo>

<sup>63</sup> Cockburn, Cynthia, Stakic-Domuz, Rada and Hubic Meliha. *WOMEN ORGANIZING FOR CHANGE A study of women's local integrative organizations and the pursuit of democracy in Bosnia-Herzegovina* (Zenica: Medica Women's Association, 2001), PDF e-book

<sup>64</sup> Cockburn, Cynthia, Stakic-Domuz, Rada and Hubic Meliha. *WOMEN ORGANIZING FOR CHANGE A study of women's local integrative organizations and the pursuit of democracy in Bosnia-Herzegovina* (Zenica: Medica Women's Association, 2001), PDF e-book

<sup>65</sup> “Bosnia and Herzegovina.” *Women for Women International*, accessed April 18, 2015 <http://www.womenforwomen.org/sites/default/files/WfWI-Bosnia-Country%20Profile-08202014.pdf>

human rights. Thousands of women in BiH survived torture and violence, thus, women after the war were in a sharp need of human rights advocacy.

Several big organizations formed in the country for protecting women human rights. Among them the most prominent in advocating women rights are: Vive Zene, Zena BiH, Zena Zenama, Udruzene Zena.

Center for Legal Aid established in 1997, is an organization that offered legal support for women. In the first years of establishment the organization filed cases about property, housing, and labor rights, but soon it began protecting women rights as well.<sup>66</sup> Organizations like Lara, Zena BiH, La Srada were advocating human rights and were fighting human trafficking,<sup>67</sup> which dramatically increased after the war.

Moreover, several Muslim women organizations in BiH that was as well promoting women rights and emancipation. Among them the most important are: Nahla Education Center for Women and Kewser Zehra Association of Muslim Women.<sup>68</sup>

Almost each of the above mentioned organization worked with survivors of rape and sexual violence. Bringing justice to women who were sexually abused was one of the priorities on the agenda of women organizations. In order to successfully find and prosecute the perpetrators of rape the international community together with Bosnian authorities faced several difficulties. In spite the fact that over 20,000 women were raped during the war, the issue still had silence around. Fear or social stigmatization and traditional notion of shame and honor prevented women from openly talking about their

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<sup>66</sup> Bouta, Tzejard, Frerks, Georg and Bannon, Ian. "Gender, Conflict, and Development." (Washington: The World Bank, 2005)

<http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTCPR/Resources/30494GenderConflictandDevelopment.pdf>

<sup>67</sup> Mulalic Muhidin. Women's NGOs and Civil Society Building in Bosnia-Herzegovina. *Epiphany* 4, no.1 (2011)

<sup>68</sup> Mulalic Muhidin, "Fostering of Civil Society by Muslim Women's NGOs in Bosnia and Herzegovina." *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 34 no. 4 (2014)

wounds. Women who were sexually abused, needed professional physical and psychological help, but, they were suffering in silence. Thus, it was difficult for the international community and the Bosnian authority to prosecute sexual violence without the testimony of survived women. So, Medica Zenica together with UK Foreign Secretary William Hague and the Special Envoy for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Angelina Jolie launched a campaign “Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative” which deals with raising awareness about the crimes of sexual violence in BiH. Moreover, the women organizations in the framework of this initiative pushed the Bosnian government to launch “International Protocol on the Documentation and Investigation of Sexual Violence in Conflict.”<sup>69</sup> In the foreword the protocol admits the importance of prosecuting sexual violence and ending the impunity. “For decades – if not centuries – there has been a near-total absence of justice for survivors of rape and sexual violence in conflict. We hope this Protocol will be part of a new global effort to shatter this culture of impunity, helping survivors and deterring people from committing these crimes in the first place.”<sup>70</sup>

Together with raising awareness about the crime of sexual violence in the country, women organizations were important for the international court. The International Criminal Tribunal for Former Yugoslavia is the United Nations court established in 1993. Since then it is working on investigation and prosecution of war crimes and crimes

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<sup>69</sup> “Overcoming the Stigma of Sexual Violence in Bosnia and Herzegovina.” *Trans-conflict* (2014), accessed April 18, 2015  
<http://www.transconflict.com/2014/11/overcoming-the-stigma-of-sexual-violence-in-bosnia-herzegovina-261/>

<sup>70</sup> United Kingdom. London. *International Protocol on the Documentation and Investigation of Sexual Violence in Conflict: Basic Standards of Best Practice on the Documentation of Sexual Violence as a Crime under International Law*, 2014.  
[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/319054/PSVI\\_protocol\\_web.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/319054/PSVI_protocol_web.pdf)

against humanity that happened in the territory of former Yugoslavia.<sup>71</sup> At the moment of establishment women struggled for women inclusion to the body of the court. Women feel more comfortable giving testimony to the representative of the same sex.<sup>72</sup> Equally important was the role of Bosnian women NGOs in finding and preparing witnesses for testimony in the court. They were collecting testimony in the court and were instrumental in giving psychological counseling to women who were testifying.<sup>73</sup>

As well women organizations were contributory to demanding reparation and rehabilitation for women - survivors of the war. According to Amnesty International report on the state of providing reparation for women who suffered rape in the war, the Bosnian government failed to provide reparation for women. The report gives five forms of reparation that need to be provided: “restitution, compensation, rehabilitation, satisfaction and guarantees of non-repetition.”<sup>74</sup> Women organizations demanded justice for women through demonstrations and public protests in front of the building of ICTY and the Bosnian government. The organizations as well provided women with the third type of reparation which is rehabilitation. Rehabilitation includes medical and psychological care for the survivors of sexual abuse. Psycho-social support was another big dimension in women organizations.

### *Psycho-social support*

Almost every member of the Bosnian society was in need of psychological support.

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<sup>71</sup> “About the ICTY.” *United Nations International Criminal Tribunal for Former Yugoslavia*, <http://www.icty.org/sections/AbouttheICTY>. (accessed April 18, 2015)

<sup>72</sup> Mertus, Julie and Hocevar, Olga Van Wely. “Women’s Participation in the International Criminal Tribunal for Former Yugoslavia (ICTY): Transitional Justice for Bosnia and Herzegovina” (2004). pg 11

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> “*WHOSE JUSTICE? THE WOMEN OF BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA ARE STILL WAITING*”. (London: Amnesty International Publication, 2009).

Vive Zene is one of the biggest organizations on providing psycho-social support. Main aim of the organization is to “improve mental health of the victims of the war”<sup>75</sup>. Another organization, worth to mention, is Medica Zenica. Medica Zenica - established during the war, was offering gynecological services for women. After the war, together with providing women with health support the organization started giving psycho-social aid to victims of domestic violence and survivors of the war.<sup>76</sup> Zena BiH as well had a project on offering psychological support for women called “Women Help Women through Work Therapy.”<sup>77</sup> Except big organizations there were as well small grant projects in the outskirts of Bosnia that offered psychological support for women.<sup>78</sup> The psychological counseling of women organizations is about enabling women to cope with the mental trauma that they went through during war. Despite giving psychological support women organizations were as well giving support to women in reproductive health. The organizations gave women possibility to access the adequate health care.

Along with supporting women who faced sexual violence in war, women organizations were active in assisting women who face domestic violence. Even though the number of women domestically violated was very high, domestic violence was one of the most under reported crime in the country. The main reason beyond the low number of reports on domestic violence is the traditional notion of women belonging to her home. It is often not acceptable to take the domestic problems out to public. Loss of jobs and poverty further contributed to the wife abuse. Women organizations in this case rose

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<sup>75</sup> “About Us”, *Center for Therapy and Rehabilitation*, accessed April 18, 2015 <http://www.vivezene.ba/>

<sup>76</sup> [http://medicazenica.org/uk/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=46&Itemid=28](http://medicazenica.org/uk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=46&Itemid=28)

<sup>77</sup> Cockburn, Cynthia, Stakic-Domuz, Rada and Hubic Meliha. *WOMEN ORGANIZING FOR CHANGE A study of women's local integrative organizations and the pursuit of democracy in Bosnia-Herzegovina* (Zenica: Medica Women's Association, 2001), PDF e-book

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 68

awareness about the issue through media. Moreover, they established a SOS telephone line for women and children who suffered domestic violence. These lines offered psychological support for women and children and as well had a legal advice service. Except psychological and legal support women organizations offered shelter for those in urgent need.<sup>79</sup>

### *Reconciliation of the society*

Women organizations were as well instrumental in reconciliation of the war torn society. The main reconciliation initiatives were crossing the ethnic lines, helping the internally displaced and returnees, and reduction of the potential for future conflict.

Dayton Peace Agreement divided BiH to three entities: the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Bosniak and Bosnian Croats), Republika Sprska (Serbs) and Brcko District. The society was highly divided among ethnic lines. Women were the first to cross the ethnic lines. The organizations tried to reach proportional representation, in membership, from all ethnic groups. For instance, members of the Federalne Zena organization from the very beginning decided on fifty-fifty representation from Bosniak and Croats. Savjetovaliste SB also joined Croatian and Bosnian women; the aim of the organizations was to collectively help the displaced people, refugees and returnees.<sup>80</sup> Zene Zenama launched a project “Women in Peace Building – Reconciliation in the Local Community”<sup>81</sup> in the framework of this projects women tried to address the social conflict and conflict reduction, the organization created a space for inter-ethnic

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 57

<sup>80</sup> Cockburn, Cynthia, Stakic-Domuz, Rada and Hubic Meliha. *WOMEN ORGANIZING FOR CHANGE A study of women's local integrative organizations and the pursuit of democracy in Bosnia-Herzegovina* (Zenica: Medica Women's Association, 2001), PDF e-book.

<sup>81</sup> Mulalic Muhidin, “Fostering of Civil Society by Muslim Women's NGOs in Bosnia and Herzegovina.” *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 34 no. 4 (2014)

dialogue.<sup>82</sup>

Women through opening up opportunities for themselves actually started controlling their own destiny. They were the fighters and the heroes in their own lives. Zahida - a Bosnian woman, who survived war, domestic violence, and unemployment, is now the member of women organization - *Zene za Zene*. From her interview it is obvious that she had a very difficult life but after joining the organization she changed her own life to the positive side. "I live a very humble life. I spend as much as I earn and no more. And even though I sometimes don't have enough income, the most important things is that I have my peace now. I am at peace. I live in comfortable surroundings. I am used to much, much worse, so I can call this happiness. And I need you to know that I am so honored by the attention that you have given me, because I know that I am a fighter, but I can't believe that someone else recognizes me as a fighter."<sup>83</sup>

## 2.2 Obstacles for women organizations

Women organizations mission was important in addressing many acute social issues. But, they faced several obstacles for fulfilling their programs. The first and biggest challenge for women was the stereotypical and traditional attitude to the role of women that is rooted in the consciousness of the society. Women in the context of traditional Bosnian society are primarily mothers, wives, and protectors of the household. Moreover, they are categorized as vulnerable, weak members of society. The traditional domination of men over women is omnipresent in the country and it is passing from generation to generation. Thus, changing consciousness of the society and women themselves was indeed a big obstacle for women organizations. Next challenge is lack of women

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> "My Name is Zahida," *Women for Women International*, accessed April 18, 2015. <http://www.womenforwomen.org/what-we-do/stories/my-name-zahida>

education; women were more likely to be involved in the unpaid work. This attitude leads to low participation of women in the official employment sector. The low level of women in the employment sector is as well due to women lack of education. Involving women in the politics is as well difficult because politics is thought to be “men’s work”<sup>84</sup>. Feminism in general is perceived with many stereotypes. Feminist women are perceived as “men haters that rose against good old traditions.”<sup>85</sup> Obviously it was extremely difficult for women organizations yet they addressed the victimization and contributed to peacebuilding and reconciliation.

### 2.3 Women NGOs in peacebuilding

Civil society that is established in an authentic democratic community is the product of peacebuilding, according to the framework on the tasks and aims of peacebuilding by Berkovitch (p.13).<sup>86</sup> This chapter shows that women through the activities of the organizations contributed to the long term aims of peacebuilding. The table below shows similar aims of civil society and peacebuilding and applies this framework to the activities of women organizations that were mentioned in the part first part of current chapter.

	Aims of civil society and peacebuilding	Bosnian Women Organizations
Political	Establish respect for democracy through protecting and advocating human rights	Udruzene Zene, Zene Mostara, Zene za Zena, Vive Zene, Zena BiH, Zena Zenama, La Srada, Nahla Education Center for Women,

<sup>84</sup> “ALTERNATIVE REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF CEDAW AND WOMEN’S HUMAN RIGHTS IN BIH.” (2010)

<sup>85</sup> “Women’s Rights in Bosnia: An Interview with Aleksandra Petric.” *Politics Respun* (2012), accessed April 18, 2015 <http://politicsrespun.org/2012/05/womens-rights-in-bosnia-an-interview-with-aleksandra-petric/#sthash.qoitgDuQ.dpbs>

<sup>86</sup> Berkovitch, Jacob and Jackson, Richard. *Conflict Resolution in the Twenty-first Century: Principles Methods and Approaches*. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009), 174.

		Kewser Zehra Association of Muslim Women
Economic	Locally sustainable community development	Federalne Zena, Bospo, Zene za Zene, Medica Zenica, Udruzene Zena, Zena Zenama
Social	Healing psychological wounds; long term reconciliation	Federalne Zena, Savjetovaliste SB, Zene Zenama, Medica Zenica, Vive Zene, Zena BiH

**Table 2: Women NGOs in peacebuilding**

Women activities made a profound influence on political, economic, and social peacebuilding.

*Political Peacebuilding*

The NGOs struggled for establishment of genuine democracy. Particularly women organizations tried to promote “respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms”<sup>87</sup>

First of all, the women NGOs were striving for promoting the rights of those who were sexually violated in the war. The organizations provided women with psychological support and counseling. Moreover, women NGOs women organizations actively advocated the rights of rape survivors. First, Bosnian women organizations pushed the local authorities and international community to prosecute the perpetrators of rape and sexual violence. With this aim in the beginning they tried to overcome the stigmatization of sexual violence. In spite the fact that over 20,000 women were raped during the war, the victims of the sexual assault remain silent. The main reason beyond remaining silence is the fear of being stigmatized by the society. Thus, women who need professional psychological counseling for healing their wounds suffer in silence. So Medica Zenica together with UK Foreign Secretary William Hague and the Special Envoy for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Angelina Jolie launched a campaign “Preventing

<sup>87</sup> “Rule of Law- Democracy and Human Rights.” *United Nations Human Rights: Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights*, accessed April 20, 2015 <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/RuleOfLaw/Pages/Democracy.aspx>

Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative” which deals with raising awareness about the crimes of sexual violence in BiH. Thus, the women organizations in the framework of this initiative pushed the Bosnian government to launch “International Protocol on the Documentation and Investigation of Sexual Violence in Conflict”<sup>88</sup> Next, women groups were first to call for provision of reparation for the victims of rape, because the Bosnian government failed to pay reparation and rehabilitation for the survivors of sexual violence.

Secondly, women organizations tried to promote freedom from violence which is an important part in establishment of the democratic country. Thus, women organizations struggled against domestic violence, which in traditional Bosnian society is a “socially acceptable” behavior.<sup>89</sup> And despite long-standing tradition of domestic violence, the crime is under reported in the country. The traditional notion of women belonging to her home is an obstacle to talking about the issue in public. So before the activism of women organizations the problem had silence around. “Women organizations intense advocacy and activities improved the legal and real protection of women against violence in both private and public spheres.”<sup>90</sup>

Moreover, women organization endeavored to ensure equality, which is among the basic elements of democracy. They struggled for gender balance in the government. As

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<sup>88</sup> “Overcoming the Stigma of Sexual Violence in Bosnia and Herzegovina.” *Trans-conflict* (2014), accessed April 18, 2015  
<http://www.transconflict.com/2014/11/overcoming-the-stigma-of-sexual-violence-in-bosnia-herzegovina-261/>

<sup>89</sup> ALTERNATIVE REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF CEDAW AND WOMEN’S HUMAN RIGHTS IN BIH.” (2010) and Fransioli Esther Garcia, “Annual Report on the State of Women’s Rights in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2013” *Human Rights Papers*

<sup>90</sup> “BiH: Domestic violence in a complex institutional setting.” *Osservatorio Balcani e Caucaso* (2011), accessed April 20, 2015  
<http://www.balcanicaucaso.org/eng/Regions-and-countries/Bosnia-Herzegovina/BiH-Domestic-violence-in-a-complex-institutional-setting-89182>

noted before the level of women in Bosnian government was drastically low after the war. Women organizations worked with political parties and cooperated with the politicians. The organizations supported women who ran in the elections. Moreover, they tried to increase number of women voting in the elections, through organizing campaigns about the importance of voting.<sup>91</sup> The activities of women organizations led to ratification and implementation of important legal tools such as: Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women on the international level, “Law on Gender Equality and Gender Action Plan on the BiH level, gender quota in the Election Law, entity level legislation.”<sup>92</sup>

Consequently, women organizations impacted the political empowerment of women in the country. .

	1996	1998	2000	2002	2006	2014
House of Representatives of BiH Parliamentary Assembly	2.3%	30,2 %	7,1%	14,3%	11,9%	21%
Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina	5%	15%	17,1%	21,4%	25,5%	22,4%

**Table 3: Women in Legislature**<sup>93</sup>

### *Economic Peacebuilding*

Furthermore, women organizations made efforts on ensuring economic security.

<sup>91</sup> “Bosnia Herzegovina. The Women Movement.” *Kvinna till Kvinna* (2014), accessed April 18, 2015 <http://kvinnatillkvinna.se/en/country/bosnia-herzegovina/the-womens-movement/>

<sup>92</sup> “Women’s Rights in Bosnia: An Interview with Aleksandra Petric.” *Politics Respun* (2012), accessed April 18, 2015 <http://politicsrespun.org/2012/05/womens-rights-in-bosnia-an-interview-with-aleksandra-petric/#sthash.Vm26thMp.dpbs>

<sup>93</sup> “ALTERNATIVE REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF CEDAW AND WOMEN’S HUMAN RIGHTS IN BIH.” (2010) and Fransioli Esther Garcia; “Annual Report on the State of Women’s Rights in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2013” *Human Rights Papers*. <http://www.diskriminacija.ba/sites/default/files/Annual%20Report%20on%20Women%20Rights,%202013.pdf>

Franklin Roosevelt in his 1944 speech to congress said: "...true individual freedom cannot exist without economic security..."<sup>94</sup> Thus, the income generation programs and training activities of women organizations that were directed towards increasing level of employed women, made profound influence of women economic well-being. .

Thousands of women through the small loan projects and training started their small, own businesses. The level of women entrepreneurs went up. The mentioned organizations except giving loans to women through the training programs taught them strategies and provided them with tools for long term sustainable development.<sup>95</sup>

The positive impact of the organizations is apparent in the Bosnian society. To date 31% of women are unemployed in the country in contrast to 70% after the war. Women economic empowerment has positive influence on internally displaced and returnees, through working and training they rebuild their lives.

### *Social Peacebuilding*

Regarding social peacebuilding women organizations were involved in healing the psychological wounds of the members of society, reconciliation of the divided society, and peace education. Reconciliation of post-war society is a long and complex process, especially in divided societies like Bosnia. It involves mutual acceptance among the groups and "changing the psychological orientation towards one another."<sup>96</sup> Bosnian women organizations contributed to each of the above mentioned aims of social peacebuilding and reconciliation.

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<sup>94</sup> "State of Union Message to Congress." *American Presidency Project*, accessed April 19, 2015  
<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=16518>

<sup>95</sup> "Women's Economic Empowerment project." *Care*, accessed April 18, 2015  
<http://care-balkan.org/index.php?otvori=novosti&prikazi=460>

<sup>96</sup> Staub Irvin, "Reconciliation after Genocide, Mass Killing, or Intractable Conflict: Understanding the Roots of Violence, Psychological Recovery, and Steps toward a General Theory." *Political Psychology* 27, no. 6 (2006)

Obviously, the therapy centers established by women organizations helped to heal the psychological wounds of the populations. Everyone was able to receive aid in those centers, despite their ethnic or religious background. Thus, women organizations were the first to cross the ethnic lines and draw a path towards reckoning. First, women NGOs through “neighborhood coffee visits, a political community service and organized outings”<sup>97</sup> provided opportunity for reestablishment of good relationship between the ethnic groups. Another example of women initiative in crossing ethnic lines is a cafe that was organized by women in an ethnically divided town in BiH. The cafe is “situated in the unofficial border that separates the two communities,” this cafe is a place for members from all ethnic groups where they can meet and talk. The cafe was organized by the Croat, Serb, and Bosnian women, as a strategy to heal the psychological wounds of the population.<sup>98</sup> It is important to point out that the members of the organizations were women from all ethnic groups. Serbian, Bosnian, and Croatian were proportionally participating in the organizations. The organizations provided platform for women from all ethnic and religious groups to talk to each other.

Truth-telling and forgiveness is another important pillar for long-term reconciliation. In the aftermath of blatant and brutal wars like in Bosnia people from different ethnic groups have the feeling of hatred and distrust to each other. “The myths of “our” victimhood and “liberation struggle” versus “their” genocidal aggression”<sup>99</sup> is in the

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<sup>97</sup> Helms, Elissa, “The gender of coffee: Women and reconciliation initiatives in post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina,” *Focaal-Journal of Global and Historical Anthropology*, 57 (2010): 17–32  
doi:10.3167/fcl.2010.570102

<sup>98</sup> Anderson, Shelly, “Crossing the Lines,” *European Union External Action*, accessed April 28, 2015  
[http://eeas.europa.eu/efs/publications/articles/book2/book%20vol2\\_part1\\_chapter12\\_crossing%20the%20lines\\_shelley%20anderson.pdf](http://eeas.europa.eu/efs/publications/articles/book2/book%20vol2_part1_chapter12_crossing%20the%20lines_shelley%20anderson.pdf)

<sup>99</sup> “Why the ICTY has Contributed to Reconciliation in the former Yugoslavia.” *Osservatorio Balcani e Caucaso*, accessed April 21, 2015  
<http://www.balcanicaucaso.org/eng/Tell-Europe-to-Europe/Dibattito-online/Why-the-ICTY-has-Contributed>

mind of people. Telling the truth paves the path towards forgiveness. Women organizations actively advocated the formation of ICTY<sup>100</sup>, which is an approach to reckoning. The aim of the tribunal is to “deal decisively with the past, particularly the legacy of massive human rights abuse and lay a foundation for a peaceful and democratic future.”<sup>101</sup> Bosnian women organizations had profound influence on the work of the tribunal. Women collected testimony from thousands of women around Bosnia. It took them years to transcribe the interviews and to provide the international court with those interviews. They broke the silence and stigma around war-time rape which was not prosecuted in the international court before. And today partially because of Bosnian women testimony rape is categorized as a war-crime. According to UN the actions of Bosnian women was the turning point in acknowledging rape as a war crime under the international law.<sup>102</sup> Moreover, women organizations prepared the witnesses and survivors of rape for testifying in front of the international court. They provided women with the psychological counseling.<sup>103</sup> Thus, the international court indicted eight Serb men for perpetrating crime of sexual violence in the war.

Therefore, the post-war Bosnian society highly victimized women. And as the result of victimization women activism instantly increased. They started construction civil society. Despite facing several obstacles for completing their mission, women

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[-to-Reconciliation-in-the-former-Yugoslavia-130374](#)

<sup>100</sup> Mertus, Julie and Hocevar, Olga Van Wely. “Women’s Participation in the International Criminal Tribunal for Former Yugoslavia (ICTY): Transitional Justice for Bosnia and Herzegovina” (2004)

<sup>101</sup> Berkovitch, Jacob and Jackson, Richard. *Conflict Resolution in the Twenty-first Century: Principles Methods and Approaches*. (Ann Arbor: *University of Michigan Press*, 2009) 151

<sup>102</sup> Cerkez Aida. “Bosnian woman helped make rape a war crime” (*Associated Press*: 2013), accessed April 21, 2015

<http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Making-a-difference/Change-Agent/2013/0308/Bosnian-woman-helped-make-rape-a-war-crime>

<sup>103</sup> Mertus, Julie and Hocevar, Olga Van Wely. “Women’s Participation in the International Criminal Tribunal for Former Yugoslavia (ICTY): Transitional Justice for Bosnia and Herzegovina” (2004)

organizations contributed to social, economic and political peacebuilding.

## **Conclusion**

The post-war Bosnia imposed an image of victims of the war and rape on women. But, women were instrumental in addressing the acute challenges after the war. The underestimation of Bosnian women activism is rooted in the attitude towards women as vulnerable victims.

This paper attempted to provide a comprehensive image of Bosnian women as civic activists and peace-builders. Thus, this study, through using feminism theories, explored the impact of women activism on the process of peacebuilding. It was identified that the activities of women organizations contributed to the peacebuilding process in several ways. In order to explore the contribution of women organizations to the peacebuilding process, this paper applied women NGOs activities to the long term measures of peacebuilding and found out that women organizations activities worked in the framework of aims and tasks of peacebuilding.

Thus, through income generation and training activities women organizations contributed to economic growth and peacebuilding. These activities provided the community with strategies and skills for becoming locally sustainable. Regarding political peacebuilding, the organizations advocated human rights, promoted rule of law and propagated equality. Furthermore, women NGOs made a significant contribution to the reconciliation of the ethnically divided Bosnian society. In the context of the reconciliation initiatives women organizations gave psycho-social support to those who were sexually abused in the war. Moreover, the NGOs struggled for truth and justice for

the war survivors in the international court.

This paper proved that participation of women in the peacebuilding process needs to be ensured. For, only through including women to the process of peacebuilding long-term sustainable peace can be reached. Whether inclusion of women to the official peacebuilding process has connection to democratic state building is the question that needs further research.

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