

**GENDERED VISIONS OF THE BOSNIAN FUTURE:
WOMEN'S ACTIVISM AND REPRESENTATION IN POST-WAR
BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA**

by

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To the memory of my grandmothers

Julia Moore Helms
1906 - 1994

and

Ruth Zimmerman Schliebe
1912 - 1998

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This is an ethnographic study of women's activism in Bosniac (Muslim) areas of post-war Bosnia-Herzegovina. I examine the activities and representational strategies of activists in women's non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and political parties as they engage local nationalist and religious discourses, established notions of gender, and the discourses and policies of foreign donors and international bodies. The work is based on over two years (1999-2000) of ethnographic research among women activists, who take a range of approaches to gender and ethno-national/religious identity. I show how women's attempts to influence the direction of post-war reconstruction often rely on what I term, following Richard G. Fox, "affirmative essentialisms"—over-simplified but positive characterizations of women. These attempts are embedded in a moral universe in which gendered wartime experiences shape much of the possibilities and obstacles to public action. As women attempt to forge new identities, then, they do so within morally coded hierarchies of gender and ethnicity established during the war. I show that while affirmative essentialisms in a sense constrain women from becoming actors of consequence in political processes, in the context of Bosnia they are an effective strategy for overcoming resistance to women's political participation. I also examine the relationship between women's activism and foreign intervention, showing how donors both enable and limit women as significant political actors through a similar use of affirmative essentialisms of women. Donor policies influence the direction of feminist and women-centered discourses through their emphasis on multi-ethnic state building and on liberal feminism. Debates over difference with men and among women thus form the core of women activists' discourses on gender roles and relations.

I relate this analysis to theories of gender and ethno-national identities; strategies of women's activism in relation to essentialisms of gender and cultural systems (Orientalism, Occidentalism, and

“balkanism”). In contrast to social science literature on nationalism that sees women as symbols of nation, and in further contrast to images of Bosnian women as passive victims of war and nationalist politics, I argue for and provide a case study of women’s active gendered roles in post-war nation building.

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CHAPTER ONE IMAGES OF BOSNIAN WOMEN

Introduction

- ◆ A *New York Times* article (June 14, 1998) lists “a Balkan *farming village* under siege” along with other places and times in which the rape of women has been used as a weapon of war (emphasis added). The accompanying photo shows an 18-year-old Bosnian Muslim woman who has just undergone an abortion after having been gang raped by Serb soldiers. Her back is turned toward the camera as she hides her face. The image implies shame, victimhood, and silence.
- ◆ Eve Ensler’s *Vagina Monologues* include a sketch on wartime rape entitled, “My Vagina was my Village.” The piece makes clear that the protagonist is a Muslim woman from rural Bosnia.¹
- ◆ News articles about ethnic cleansing feature pictures of women in Muslim headscarves crying, mourning the dead, or desperately fleeing enemy troops (see e.g., *New York Times* July 25, 1998: A3).
- ◆ Dženana [an activist at the Bosnian women’s organization *Medica*] told us of her annoyance at two western “experts,” one of whom assumed she had never heard of Aretha Franklin or the Rolling Stones and tried to “educate” her. She angrily told him that her *mother* had listened to the Beatles and all those bands. On top of that, after drinking beer with her and her colleagues all night, the other western man had expressed a wish to “meet and talk with a real Muslim girl.” When a Serb activist gestured to Dženana in her western clothes, fashionable hair style, smoking and drinking “right in front of him all night,” as Dženana put it, the man was incredulous. “People have no idea what Bosnians are like. They have these stereotypes in their heads, especially of Muslims and women,” Dženana fumed. (edited fieldnote entry from my first day living in Zenica)

To most people in the world in the early 1990's, the image that immediately came to mind upon hearing “Bosnian women” was that of the rural Muslim woman as the victim of ethnic

¹ Ensler’s other play, *Necessary Targets* (2001), about Bosnian women recovering from war trauma explicitly counters this image and presents a diversity of Bosnian women that is quite representative of the population (including a rural woman in a head scarf), but what is significant is that when she needed just one woman to represent wartime rape in Bosnia, Ensler made her rural and Muslim.

cleansing and rape.² As portrayed in the world media, women in Bosnia-Herzegovina (hereafter Bosnia) were victims, silenced by the savage, macho violence of the Serb man and doubly shunned by the patriarchal, primitive Muslim communities of rural Bosnia. Many observers, including feminists, used these Orientalized images to claim that Muslim women suffered much more than other women from rape. This all happened in the not-quite-civilized Balkans where “ancient ethnic hatreds” erupted uncontrollably every generation or so, as depicted by journalists and politicians.³

These images persist, despite the fact that women of other ethnic backgrounds were also raped, as were men. Bosnian women experienced many other hardships that are not often talked about. Yet the focus has been on rape as the emblematic gender crime interpreted as an insult to nations and men. All evidence indicates that Muslim women indeed made up the largest number of wartime rape victims, but they have become the only victims, and *only victims* in the popular imagination.

The images that Bosnian women presented about themselves, however, are much different. Many of them have been *active* participants in social and political processes during and since the war, which ended in 1995. These activist women also invoke images of female victimhood to varying degrees, yet association with rape is strikingly absent. Instead, victimhood is based on loss, innocence, and womanhood. At the same time, there is an explicit effort to counter the stereotype of rural, Muslim culture as backward, traditional and passive, as represented even by other Muslims. The predominantly urban, educated women who are active in non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and through political parties aim to show, in the words of one woman politician, that “we’re not just old peasant women like the world media showed.” Bosnians watched wartime coverage on CNN, too. They also encountered such assumptions in their contact with foreign journalists, aid workers, and other visitors to Bosnia, as illustrated in the vignette about Dženana.

Still, since Bosnia broke away from socialist Yugoslavia and plunged into war, there has been a move by local nationalists to return to “traditional” forms of ethno-national culture, especially to

² “Bosnian” is a regional rather than ethnic designation, referring to Serbs, Croats, and Muslims (Bosniacs) from Bosnia. Since 1993, Bosnian Muslims have been officially known as “Bosniacs.” I discuss these terms in chapter 3.

³ Scholars of the former Yugoslavia have worked to debunk the “ancient ethnic hatreds” view from a variety of angles (e.g. Donia and Fine 1994; Gagnon 2002b; Hayden 1996a; Woodward 1995; Živković 2001).

religion and patriarchal family roles. For Muslims, called “Bosniacs” since the early years of the war, this has meant increasing emphasis on Islam and “Eastern values,” combined with campaigns to strengthen this group’s identity as a nation. As in the rest of what had been Yugoslavia, women were assigned active roles as reproducers of the nation and nurturers of culture, but passive roles as citizens, (potential) victims to be protected by the nation’s men.

As they stressed their “modern” and “European” orientations in response to these foreign and local discourses, many of these women were also wary of embracing neoliberal western models put forth by aid agencies and representatives of the “international community” that took over as pseudo-protectorate at the end of the war. Although most women activists were dependent on western aid for the survival of their organizations, and in many cases also their personal livelihoods, these models, with their emphases on “democracy,” “civil society,” even “feminism” and “gender,” seemed at times to clash with the women’s senses of self as Bosnians. While this contested emphasis on NGOs and “civil society” offered women new opportunities and spaces for a redefinition of female gender roles and women’s public/political activism, they are constrained and the constrain themselves by categories of gender, ethno-national identity, and morality that have emerged from the experience with war.

This study is an ethnographic examination of women’s activism in Bosniac areas of post-war Bosnia-Herzegovina. I focus on the activities and representational strategies of activists in women’s NGOs and political parties as they engage local (patriarchal) nationalist discourses, established notions of gender, and the discourses and policies of foreign donors and international bodies. The work is based on over two years of ethnographic research among women activists, who take a range of approaches to gender and ethno-national/religious identity. I show how women’s attempts to influence the direction of post-war reconstruction often rely on what Richard Fox (1996) has called “affirmative essentialisms”—over-simplified but positive characterizations of women—based on women’s wartime experiences and identities. Furthermore, these attempts are embedded in a moral universe in which gendered wartime experiences shape much of the possibilities and obstacles to public action. As women attempt to forge new identities, then, they do so within morally coded hierarchies of gender and ethnicity established through wartime experiences. As gendered actors in the male-associated sphere of the public and political, women are forced to confront circulating

discourses on gender and ethnicity/religion (especially Islam), which are produced by local nationalisms, and foreign interventions. I thus not only examine the dynamics of women's roles in a (post)conflict situation, but also the impact of their activism on post-war reconstruction.

I relate this analysis to theories of gender and ethno-national identities; strategies of women's activism in relation to essentialisms of gender and cultural systems (e.g., Orientalism, Occidentalism, and "balkanism"); and I emphasize women's *active* roles in contrast to academic, feminist, and local nationalist representations of Bosnian women, especially Muslims (Bosniacs), as passive victims of wartime rape and expulsion, and of post-war political processes.

Why Bosnia? Origins of a Project

In our graduate seminar in ethnographic field methods, we were taught that anthropological projects were supposed to appear as if formulated first around a theoretical problem with the field site chosen to best investigate the problem or test hypotheses. As is likely the case with most other researchers, I went about my project in exactly the opposite order. I entered graduate school in 1995 knowing little about anthropology but sure that I would work with Bosnians in some capacity. I had just spent two years working for a Croatian NGO with Bosnian refugees in Croatia. I had learned the language, albeit in a colloquial mishmash of regional dialects and with no formal grammar lessons. The war in Bosnia was still going on, so I set my sights on a possible project with refugees or other populations in Croatia. I had long had an interest in both gender and nationalism, and the theoretical literature I was reading in my courses sparked many questions about how categories of gender, ethnicity, and sexuality were being constructed and lived, and what mechanisms of state power, discursive "common sense," historical legacies, and transnational movements were being brought to bear in people's lives. My experiences volunteering at the Prague Gender Studies Center in the years just after the "Velvet Revolution" had also piqued my interest in transnational feminist exchanges and women's activism in the "transition" from socialism to, it seemed, liberal market democracy.

The Bosnian war ended in late 1995 with the Dayton Peace Agreement, brokered by American government officials and the nationalist leaders of the warring parties. Not one Bosnian woman was present (Lithander 2000). Though the issues which had sparked the war remained far

from settled, the cease-fire, secured by NATO troops and myriad “international” officials, meant the reconstruction effort could begin. Dayton had “saved” the Bosnian state from being torn apart, yet it established two internal “entities,” each ethnically defined and controlled: the *Republika Srpska* (RS) and the Bosniac-Croat Federation. The Federation, having been created (uneasily) in 1994 with the Washington Agreement that halted fighting between Bosniac and Croat forces, was further arranged into ten ethnically controlled (and populated) cantons, and within the two ethnically “mixed cantons,” ethnically controlled municipalities took on primary significance (see Burg and Shoup 1999).

While humanitarian aid organizations and some international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) had been operating in Bosnia during the war, Dayton established a quasi-protectorate role for the (western dominated) “international community” and also ushered in swarms of development and aid agencies, international administrators, advisors, consultants, trauma experts, mine clearing specialists, youth workers, feminists, teachers of non-violent conflict resolution, individual activists, and many others who added to the journalists, humanitarian workers, soldiers, and other foreigners already in the country. Bosnia was incorporated as another project site in the networks of humanitarian crisis response, democracy aid to post-socialist countries (mostly in Central and Eastern Europe), as well as development agencies whose traditional targets had been “Third World” or “less developed” countries. Though these agencies mainly came from western Europe and North America, a number of Islamic agencies from Arab and other predominantly Muslim countries also took up projects in the Bosniac areas of Bosnia.

Jumping onto this bandwagon, I joined a UNICEF “psycho-social” project run by the University of London in the town of Mostar in the summer of 1996, after my first year of graduate school. Working with youth and the various other NGOs and international administrators in the town, I experienced some of the issues, problems, and “disconnects” (Wedel 2001) involved in the post-war reconstruction process. I also established contacts with local women’s organizations and saw what kinds of discourses and activities they promoted in the name of “helping women.” When I returned in the summer of 1997 to do pre-dissertation research, I encountered even more intriguing expressions of gender, ethnic, and religious identity, as I expanded my contacts at a variety of women’s organizations including feminists, nationalists, religious Muslims, and secular

traditionalists. I decided to base my research in Zenica, home of *Medica Zenica*, one the few self-declared feminist women's NGOs in Bosnia.

Bosnia was in fact an ideal place to investigate women's activism and the intersection of gender, ethnicity, sexuality, and nationalism. It had just emerged from four years of war in which ethno-national identities had been mobilized in a bitter struggle to control territory and the character of the emerging Bosnian state. Gender had been an integral part of this process, both rhetorically and actually (Žarkov 1999). The use of wartime rape, first and most notoriously by Serb forces and later by Croats and Muslims, against ethnic others was the most dramatic expression of the ways in which categories of gender and sexuality were incorporated into nationalistic, militaristic aims. The publicity generated by the rapes formed the subtext to foreign interventions on behalf of women in Bosnia, producing specific kinds of initiatives. Rape and the other gendered ways in which women experienced the war and nationalist mobilizations also spurred Bosnian women themselves to action, both as members of their ethnic groups and as women. It was this renewed, and for many women new, cultural introspection into the role of gender, combined with the forging of new identities out of the rupture of the war which promised fertile ground for a study of women's activism.

Bosnia also invited parallels with other post-conflict, post-socialist, and post-revolutionary contexts in other historical and geographical places. Yet the combination of these effects and the specifics of Bosnian histories, identities, and experiences were producing a uniquely Bosnian context. Post-war moral status, in public life and everyday interactions, was still very much based on categories forged during the war: demobilized soldiers, former camp detainees, war profiteers, army deserters, raped women, refugees, displaced persons (DPs), widows and children of *šehids* (Muslim martyrs) and other "fallen soldiers," those who left, those who stayed, those who went to the "other side," those who helped their neighbors, and those who betrayed them, and so on.

As men were cast as political actors and soldiers, their relationship to both political and military struggles was frequently questioned. Women were seen as victims of the war and politics, romanticized for their sheer determination to keep their families fed, together, and alive. While male death and suffering as soldiers was thus "normal," women's suffering at the hands of enemy soldiers was evidence of the barbarity of the enemy. Although Bosniac political and religious leaders urged compassion toward women rape survivors, the stigma of rape was still strong for individual women

(and so terrible as to be unspeakable for men). This stigma figured in women activists strategies of self-representation, as I show in chapter 7. Women NGO activists and politicians endeavored to “remain feminine,” especially (sexually) respectable in their public images. This was important, as they sought in various ways to become actors in politics and the Habermasian public sphere. Feminized victim images *other than* rape played a significant role, however, for the moral weight they gave to women as public actors.

Fieldwork and Methods

The data for this study were collected mainly over two years of ethnographic research (1999-2000), but were also informed by a summer of research in 1997, a stint with an NGO project in Mostar in the summer of 1996, and continued relationships with former refugee families I had known during my refugee camp work in Croatia (1993-4). I started out in January 1999 in the capital, Sarajevo, collecting key documents from international agencies, attending women’s NGO events, and monitoring the media for portrayals of gender and women’s activism. My time there was extended longer than I had planned by a broken computer and some other mundane issues, but I finally moved to my primary field site in June of that year. From that point, I was based in the Bosniac dominated provincial city of Zenica, an hour’s drive up one of the best stretches of two-lane highway to the northwest of Sarajevo (see map). The town was less than picturesque with its concrete highrises and the sprawling, rusting mess of pipes, chimneys, and machinery of the steel mill that had employed nearly 23,000 workers in its heyday. It was more dilapidated with age than damaged by the war, in contrast to Sarajevo or Mostar. But it was also bisected by the impressive Bosna river and surrounded on all sides by green mountains dotted with orange-roofed houses and fruit trees.

I lived in the upstairs apartment of a house on the edges of a highrise development, at the base of one of the hills that delimited the town, near Medica and a ten minute walk from the center. I shared the flat with a Medica team member, a young American woman named Kristen whose role I discuss in chapter 6. Kristen kept me up on what was happening at Medica and acted as a sounding board for my thoughts on the interviews and activities I had each day, even as she was also one of

my “informants.”⁴ We saw our landlady, an elementary school teacher, and her family frequently over coffee⁵ or as they worked in their substantial garden behind the house. With a pre-war population of 145,000, Zenica was big enough that I could move through it anonymously, yet I also found that nearly everyone I met was connected to each other in some way and I frequently ran into familiar faces on the street.

Project Design (and what it became)

My original interest was in changing articulations of gender and national identities in Bosnia. Aside from what I could extract from the press, though, it was difficult to know where and with whom to find my data. I chose to study women’s organizations both because I was already familiar with and interested in the NGO sector, but also because they were a tangible locus of activity around questions of gender. It is important to acknowledge the ways in which this circumscribed “field site” limited the kinds of insights I could access (Gupta and Ferguson 1997; Passaro 1997). I quickly realized I was doing a study of women’s activism rather than of changing women’s identities in general, though the two were closely linked. The women NGO members and political activists I worked with represented a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds, yet many of them moved in circles that were quite different from those available to “ordinary” women.

There were two officially feminist women’s organizations in Bosnia at the time: Medica and *Žene Ženama* (Women to Women) in Sarajevo, which had just formed in 1997. Since I did not want to be in the expensive, foreigner-ridden capital, I set my sights on Zenica. I wanted to contrast a feminist and anti-nationalist organization, Medica, with a “nationalist” group, or one that concerned itself with national identity affirmation. As I describe in chapter 5, I had decided in 1997 that *Bosanka* in Zenica more or less fit the bill. There were other women’s organizations in the town as well, which turned out to be an advantage when *Bosanka* failed to “perform” for my ethnographic

⁴ Although I try to avoid it altogether, I sometimes use the often disparaged “informant” to refer to the people I met in the course of this study, though I share many anthropologists’ discomfort with it, especially because I count many of these people as my friends (see Berdahl 2000b). Given the meanings of “consultant” in the international aid business, I am even less comfortable with that term as an alternative.

⁵ Coffee, most often Turkish coffee drunk out of small handle-less cups (*fildžani*), is an important part of everyday social interaction in Bosnia (see Bringa 1995; Sorabji 1989).

eye. Zenica was also interesting because of its reputation as a hard-line Muslim town, both in terms of the presence of religious zealots and for being under the firm control of the Bosniac nationalist party, the Party of Democratic Action (SDA). In this atmosphere, I hoped to find a variety of gendered expressions of Bosniac and Islamic identity and perhaps opposition to its dominant forms. Of course, none of this played out in such stark terms—there were “ethnic” tensions and doubts about feminism at Medica, Bosanka leaders stopped talking about educating Bosniac village girls in what it meant to be a Muslim woman, and in the spring of my second year of fieldwork (2000) the SDA lost its hold on the municipal and cantonal assemblies to the secular communist successor SDP (Social Democratic Party).

Medica remained a key part of my research, especially the information and advocacy wing, *Infoteka*. I stopped by Infoteka nearly every day, especially at afternoon coffee time, and participated in as many discussions and activities there as I could. While Kristen already performed most of the tasks with which I could have engaged to “give something back,” I made myself available and in fact did take on sporadic translating, editing, and report writing for Infoteka. Infoteka assisted me in my media monitoring, as they kept an archive of articles from the local press dealing with women, which they made accessible to me. These women were also the ones with whom I most watched or discussed local television (Mankekar 1993). With their feminist training and experiences abroad and with westerners, these women were perceptive critics of the gendered images and other messages about local (ethnic) politics and international intervention being conveyed through the media.

As it became clear that Bosanka’s activities were fizzling, I began to visit other women’s organizations in the town (and in other places, as I explain below), including those profiled in chapter 5—*Naš Most*, *Merjem*, *Kewser*—and others with whom I had more infrequent contact, because of the busy schedules of their leaders, such as the Center for Legal Aid to Women. I visited the organizations’ offices to chat with whatever members could be found there, attended their activities, and conducted interviews with their leaders.

As I spent time with Šehida, Bosanka’s president, I became, with her, more involved with the League of Women Voters, of which she was a leading member. This activity led me to the wider network of women activists from around the country, especially when, in late summer 1999, we attended a League-sponsored series of round tables (*okrugli stolovi*) in each of the ten Federation

cantons on the theme “Towards Equality” (*Ka Jednakosti*).⁶ In this, the used 1974 Volkswagen Golf I had bought became a valuable research tool. Riding through the windy narrow highways of the mountainous terrain, Šehida and I and various women’s NGO leaders, politicians, journalists, and judges who were invited to speak at these events discussed all kinds of issues facing women in post-war Bosnia. They waxed nostalgic about the prosperous days of Yugoslavia, exchanged gossip about other public figures, shared their satisfaction and frustration about the round tables, and patiently explained to me why opening the car windows to create a draft (*propuh*) against the hot summer sun could be deadly.

Through these events and countless other gatherings I attended with Šehida and the members of Medica, I began to follow the activities and discourses of advocates for women’s increased participation in formal politics. Many of these women were politicians themselves and many others were NGO leaders, journalists, and Bosnians working for the international community. I began to interview women on candidate lists for the Zenica municipal, cantonal, and Federal assemblies. There were many of these, as the new quota rules had mandated that women, or the “minority gender,” make up a third of each list in 2000. (The Women’s Party thus had to field men in one-third of its spaces.) I followed two election campaigns—those leading up to local elections in April, 2000, and the national elections of November of the same year. The NGO women were also involved in these efforts and I paid careful attention to the way in which all of these activists discussed women’s roles in the sphere of the political (see chapter 7).

In chapters 5 and 7 I also discuss two groups of Bosniac DP women working for return. I became fascinated by these women’s articulations of traditionalist roles for women, moral hierarchies of ethnic difference, and quite effective strategies at accomplishing the seemingly impossible goal of return to areas of particularly strong Serb nationalist control and resistance to refugee return. As I further describe in chapter 5, in Sarajevo and in Zenica toward the end of my stay, I also got to know several religious Muslim women working on women’s issues.

⁶ The series was funded by the Westminster Democracy Foundation of London and took place in a different canton each weekend, culminating in a final meeting and day excursion in Kakanj, central Bosnia, of all the series’ speakers. I attended six of the ten sessions and spoke at one of them. As the existing laws did not allow NGOs to be registered in the whole country, the League was forced to form a Federation League and an RS League. Thus the round table series, organized by the Federation League, it did not include any stops in the RS, though a few RS women were invited to give presentations.

Multi-sited “Deep Hanging Out”

Participating in the activities of these women meant attending countless meetings, round tables, workshops, and conferences organized by international officials or other NGOs (usually with funding from a western donor) in all parts of Bosnia as well as Serbia, Montenegro, and Hungary. These were typically all-day affairs held in the conference rooms of once modern but now fading hotels accompanied by heavy lunches and frequent coffee breaks. Participants were typically divided into “working groups” where they went through an activity or held discussions before the whole group reconvened to decide on a tangible list of “conclusions,” whether consensus had been reached or not. Some of the gatherings seemed more useful to the women’s cause than others, yet they were all interesting to me for the opportunities they represented to tap into discourses on women’s roles vis-a-vis politics, advocacy, and public activism. Many of the activists complained about the constant travel just to “see the same women and say the same things over and over again.” Others praised the meetings for their “networking” (*networking* or *umreživanje*) utility. For my purposes, following these networks allowed me to compare the “western-looking” activists who operated in western donor-funded circles (Medica activists, leaders of the Center for Legal Aid to Women, and Šehida) with those who rarely left Zenica for their organizational activities (Nas Most, Merjem) or who had no contact with western donors (Merjem and Kewser). Their rhetoric and ideological stances were markedly different, differences reinforced by the circles in which they moved (see Phillips 2002).

Thus, as much as this study reflects my participation in the community of Zenica as a place, it is also a multi-sited (Marcus and Fischer 1986) examination of a mobile network of women activists. As I outline the various groups of women with whom I associated, I fear it will appear too scattered. To be sure, I did give up some depth in terms of understanding locally place-d dynamics in Zenica. However, this is not an “ethnography of Zenica” but one of women’s activism. Furthermore, I managed to do a good deal of “deep hanging out” (Clifford 1997: 188 quoting Renato Rosaldo) among Zenica and Sarajevo residents outside women’s organization circles, as well as with most of the groups of women I discuss here. I was drawn out of Zenica and into questions of political activism (as opposed to a focus on ethnic identity, which was nonetheless present) by the women themselves. This approach was the best way I saw toward understanding “the cultural unit” of women’s activist networks, accounting for “outside forces” impinging on the constitution of the

community(ies) under study (Marcus and Fischer 1986: 77).

This work is not a thorough example of “studying through,” however, as Shore and Wright have proposed for the “anthropology of policy” (1997), taking Laura Nader’s “studying up” (1974) a step further. Shore and Wright point out that “anthropologists are in a unique position to understand the workings of multiple, intersecting and conflicting power structures which are local but tied to non-local systems” (1997: 13), a condition that fits my project well. Janine Wedel has reflected that her approach to studying “the strange case of western aid to Eastern Europe” (2001) entailed “studying up, studying through, and then studying through again” (forthcoming: 25). She followed relationships and “flows” (Appadurai 1996) of ideas, capital, and people “across levels and processes” from government agencies and donors to local elite representatives, to local NGOs, to their beneficiaries and back up the line again (forthcoming, 2001). I did not have the resources to travel back and forth between Bosnia and Washington, New York, Geneva, Cologne, Stockholm, and the other centers of western donor financing and policy making. I did, however, talk with many Bosnia-based representatives of international agencies and donors involved with women’s issues. I collected their literature and observed the interaction between them and local women activists in a process that better resembles what Lisa Markovitz, also evoking Nader, has called “studying over” (2001). This dissertation therefore reveals more about the process of local policy implementation and self-representation (on the part of foreigners and locals) than it does about the conceptual bases of policy design. Most of all, however, it is about the women activists themselves and the cultural context in which they were embedded, regardless of whether those “forces” came from “inside” or “outside.”

The CIA in Wonderland: The Position of the Ethnographer

I was received in many different ways during my fieldwork. In the Bosnian language, my first name is rendered phonetically as “Alisa,” a common “modern” first name among Bosniacs and also the Bosnian (Serbo-Croatian) translation of Alice. So I was often called “*Alisa u zemlji čudesa*” or Alice in Wonderland. I was indeed in a land of wonders, I was told. Anything can happen here, this

is the Balkans.⁷ This was part of a common narrative of self-orientalism as well as one of several common “litanies and laments” (Ries 1997) on the “chaos” of life since the disintegration of socialist Yugoslavia (see Živković 2001). As Alice, I was hardly expected to be able to make sense of all of this when it wasn’t clear even to them, they told me. Bosnians of all sorts, even those living in remote villages, had become accustomed to foreigners,⁸ including Americans, busily attending meetings, inspecting projects, and asking them questions. Most of these aid workers, soldiers, and administrators, however, (with some very definite exceptions) did not speak “local language,”⁹ nor did they know much about the society in which they were working (see Coles 2003). As a result I was often discussed in the third person by curious strangers when I was introduced as “our American,” even when I had addressed them in their language. Likewise, I was often treated to excruciatingly basic, but often instructive, history lessons and sociological explanations of who lived here and what had happened to them, even by people who knew I was a researcher.

At other times, I was assumed to be a donor representative. Even when I told people up front that I was a researcher, many were convinced that as a foreigner, I had important connections in the international community and could affect their chances for funding or get their son/niece/cousin a job (see Kuehnast 2000). I therefore heard many statements that, to me, resembled what women thought donors might want to hear. Or I was toted around with pride as a token representative of the powerful west. At other times, especially in Sarajevo on first contact with a potential informant, as soon as she heard I was *not* a donor, she declined to make time to talk with me or changed her erstwhile upbeat manner. In still other situations, I was received with warm surprise as a foreigner “with whom we can talk,” in contrast to the parade of foreigners they spoke with only through interpreters, or in English. In general, I had a difficult time pinning down some of these busy women, especially in the high-powered atmosphere of donor and NGO circles in Sarajevo.

⁷ A few times I was also called Alice *from* Wonderland (*Alisa iz zemlje čuda*), which invariably provoked comments about the otherness of “Amerika” and “the west.”

⁸ Cornelia Sorabji has noted a marked difference in her reception in Sarajevo after the war, in contrast to the way she was treated as a novelty in the mid eighties (personal communication 2003).

⁹ As each ethno-national community had laid claim to its own separate language—Serbian, Croatian, and Bosnian—out of what was once Serbo-Croatian (Greenberg 1996), international officials referred to “local language” to avoid offending any of the “locals.”

In what Bosnians attributed to socialist era politics, the “peasant mentality,” or nationalist paranoia, I was also sometimes suspected of being a spy (see Silverman 2000; Zanca 2000). On one occasion, after I had attended a women’s Kuranic reading lesson with members of Merjem, I had asked if any of the women would be willing to meet me for coffee the next day. One of the women I eventually got to know, Zlata, told me what some of the other women had said: “Oh you go ahead and talk to the CIA, I sure won’t!” Zlata had retorted, “I’ll talk to her and I’ll even invite her to my home!” As she rolled her eyes and complained to me about how so many of these women were nationalists and close-minded villagers (*seljanke*), I wondered whether she had taken me under her wing out of spite (*iz inata*) to show me and herself that she belonged to the “open,” cosmopolitan world of the city, “even though” she was a devout Muslim (and a fairly radical one at that). This was another way in which the women I met resisted the standard orientalist constructions of “Muslim women.”

There was also the problem of my focus on women as a westerner working in a “Muslim” society. Many religious women and men seemed to be very defensive in talking to me. As one young woman told me, she had been reluctant but eventually agreed to meet me because I was not a journalist. She explained to me, “When you said it was for a dissertation, I figured you would try to keep to some standards and not twist my words like I’ve seen done so many times when foreigners come to interview people. Especially in the context of Islam this happens.” Other religious Muslims sought assurances that I would not misrepresent their words or slander Islam. They seemed to assume that I was interested in Muslims and women out of a desire to criticize Islam for its terrible treatment of women (see Abu-Lughod 2002). I discuss this reception further in chapter 5. Non-religious Bosniacs, who nevertheless identified with their Islamic heritage, likewise often took my focus on women to mean I was there to document how “primitive and patriarchal” their society was or to “change Bosnian women” into some western feminist prototypes. Nearly everyone was eager to convince me that there was no “problem.” One woman who worked for the Islamic administration (*Islamska Zajednica*) told me, incorrectly, that “No one here, from Bosnia, is writing about women and their status, probably because it’s not a problem.”¹⁰ Maybe this needs to be done by a local and

¹⁰ Several articles were in fact written about women’s subordination in Bosnia, though these appeared in local publications this woman was unlikely to be sympathetic with, or in low-circulation literature produced by

not a foreigner. But usually, when people write about some topic, it's because they see there's a problem there." Not surprisingly, my relationship with that woman did not blossom, though she did grant me two interviews that lasted nearly two hours each.

Fortunately, the women with whom I developed more sustained relationships grew accustomed to me as a researcher and fellow traveler in the circles of women's meetings rather than a member of the donor crowd. Several older women from more traditionalist organizations treated me with grandmotherly affection, preferring to talk about how I would "be married in Bosnia" over issues of women's activism. Long-term fieldwork made it possible for me to follow women's activities over time and to witness their interactions in a range of contexts. My status as an American was never completely forgotten, but this positionality was illuminating as it sometimes prompted the women to reflect on their activities to me and to compare their views of the situation for women in Bosnia with that of the U.S. and "the west." I was at times the audience for Herzfeldian self-representations towards "the outside world," but I also blended in and was often privy to much "between ourselves" talk.

Things were not completely smooth, however, least of all at Medica Infoteka. To be sure, the women there had welcomed me, though for some it was with reserve. Right away they had offered to be my "base" and informed me that I should not be offended that no one seemed to take notice of me when I came into their office. I wasn't a guest they had to worry about; "you're ours (*naša*)," Nataša told me, "part of the furniture." Yet several of the women I considered friends began to teasingly refer to me as the CIA, especially when I seemed eager for them to expand on a particular point. I knew this was a joke, a message underscored when they bought me "FBI" earrings (there was no "CIA") for my birthday, yet over time it began to bother me. It was especially difficult when one Infoteka member warned me several times after we had discussed issues which I had thought I had made clear were central to my research that her comments were "spontaneous" and for my "private" information, even though I had told her I would not use anyone's real name. Accordingly, I have not used that woman's comments. Her reaction startled me, however, as I had expected the women of Infoteka, having played the roles of researcher and researched on several occasions, would

western funded women's NGOs (e.g., Andrić-Ružičić 1999; Bećirević 1999; Šamić 2000; Selimbegović 2000; and articles by Rada Sesar in *Žena 21*).

understand my methods. I was already sensitive about how I would portray Medica and its activists and I often refrained from probing when the women seemed to be less than eager to talk. This was not only out of concern with the dilemmas raised by theorists of “feminist ethnography” (e.g., Abu-Lughod 1990b; Stacey 1988; Visweswaran 1994) and others (articles in de Soto and Dudwick 2000; Herzfeld 1997) of balancing (some degree of) research objectivity with the intimate relationships required of fieldwork, along with the added assumptions accompanying female solidarity. It was also because Medica had already experienced a major sense of betrayal when another foreign researcher, one who had not even understood their language, had written about personal details of the women’s lives. As Nataša told me soon after I moved to Zenica, I therefore had “more responsibilities” towards them.

I was keen to avoid sensitive personal details or anything that might compromise the women’s standing in the community or their ability to pursue their activism. Yet some of those details intersected with the issues of local activism, donor relations, and gender, ethnic and religious identities that I was exploring (see Stacey 1988). Out of trepidation over how my informants will receive what I write, I have likely skimmed on the details of my informants’ everyday lives in this study. Of all my informants, the Infoteka women are the most likely to read my work and take issue with some of my stances (see Brettell 1993). Indeed, they expressed the desire to publish a Bosnian language version of my “dissertation lite” when it is finished. I had always planned to give them the opportunity to review what I had written about each of them, but the timing of graduation requirements may not allow that. I can only hope they are not hurt by anything I write here and that I have the opportunity in the future to continue to engage in a dialogue with them about this project.

A Note on Terminology and Bias

In writing about these women and others, I have endeavored to use their own words as much as possible, while at the same time respecting their privacy and anonymity. Where I discuss specific activists, I use pseudonyms, but I identify their organizations and the places where they operate by name. Where the first and last name of an individual appears, it is the person’s real name. I do this with public figures and people speaking in public fora. I also include real names when I discuss

activists whose work I cite, though I may write about them under pseudonyms elsewhere in the text.¹¹ This compromise allows me to grant credit to the organizations for the work they do and to offer ethnographic details for other researchers while also protecting the identities of individual women. In a few cases, I have intentionally omitted names and places in order to afford anonymity to women and groups whose statements might be interpreted negatively in the sensitive political climate of Bosnia, despite their having been conveyed to me in good faith. Nevertheless, I realize that the measure of anonymity this conveys is not complete, as anyone familiar with the communities I discuss may readily recognize some of the individuals.

Throughout this dissertation, I sometimes specify the ethnic background of informants as it is relevant to the context. I do this as a regrettable shorthand for categories that are often imposed rigidly by others, but are experienced in much more subtlety and fluidity than such labels convey. Ethnicity is presumed through well-recognized cues such as religious affiliation (a reference to religious rituals, mosque/church attendance, or pendants with religious symbols often give this away); use of ethnically marked language (Greenberg 1996); ties to geographical location, especially in reference to wartime movements (e.g., whether a person was expelled from or had stayed in an area known to have been ethnically cleansed); political affiliations; and above all names. These cues are not always accurate, however, most obviously in the case of the many people of mixed ethnic parentage or whose spouses came from a different ethnic background. Some names are ethnically ambiguous (Dino, Damir, Dijana, Ena), often purposefully chosen by “mixed” or “communist” parents who believed in Yugoslav “brotherhood and unity.”¹² More significantly, dominant associations with ethnic labels do not necessarily reflect an individual’s sense of identity (see Žarkov 1999: preface). Many of my informants chafed at being judged by their names, and hence by their purported religion and political stance (see Cockburn 1998: 192-6). Yet, they recognized that such information was at times important, even to efforts to counteract nationalist divisions. The situation

¹¹ This convention becomes awkward with the women of Infoteka whose written work I cite under their real names. While these women all granted me permission to use their real names, I have retained their pseudonyms both for consistency and to provide a measure of anonymity where I quote casual statements.

¹² One friend with ethnically ambiguous first and last names often found himself privy to “cultural intimacies” (Herzfeld 1997) and expressions of hostility toward other ethnic groups among people who erroneously took him for “one of them.” He noticed a marked change in rhetoric when he revealed his “actual” identity in such situations.

made it obvious that ethnic distinctions mattered. I use them, therefore, but with caution. Readers familiar with names in Bosnia will also notice ethnicity (or ethnic ambiguity) conveyed in the pseudonyms I use, as they would with informants' real names.

A related issue is the ethnic labels applied to territories, especially the entities, cantons, and municipalities which have gained ethnic markings. When I write about an area dominated or politically controlled by Bosniacs, such as Zenica, it is important to realize that the population is not completely homogeneous. About 20% of Zenica's population, for example, is not Bosniac. Indeed, many of the women activists working in "Bosniac areas" were not Bosniacs. There were fewer non-Serbs in the RS or non-Croats in areas controlled by Croat politicians, a result of the more thorough ethnic cleansing operations there and of the official policy of tolerance among Bosniac officials (see chapter 4). However, as in Bosniac areas, those (newly defined) "minorities" tended to be well represented in the NGO sector for reasons made obvious by the structure of ethnic politics and donor policies discussed in subsequent chapters.

I also follow the practice of my activist informants and refer simply to "the war." This is partly out of a tactical desire to remain as neutral as possible, but also because I see it as the only acceptable term. Some, including most Serbs, have described this as a civil war. This was a civil war in the sense that it was a conflict among different groups of Bosnians over the future of their territory; the majority of fighters were Bosnians themselves. In some cases, members of the same family ended up on opposite sides of the battle lines. In Northwest Bosnia, a whole region was torn apart by Muslims fighting Muslims.¹³ However, calling this a "civil war" has become code for the acceptance of the "all sides are equally guilty" argument. The use of "civil war" is understood in Bosniac areas as an apology for war crimes committed by Serb and Croat forces. The term favored by many Bosniacs, however, is "aggression," meaning the aggression against Bosnia as a state and idea. Defenders of this view, including many of my informants, cite the fact that soldiers from other countries (Serbia and Croatia) entered Bosnia after it had been internationally recognized as an independent state. As Azra put it, "I have the argument that in 1992 Yugoslav National Army planes

¹³ This was the conflict between Bosnian government forces— the Bosnian Army and its backers in the main Bosniac political party, the SDA— and the "*autonomaši*" loyal to local businessman and politician Fikret Abdić who were in turn allied with Serbs. See Burg and Shoup 1999: 154-9.

from (rump) Yugoslavia were bombing me in Zenica.” While it is clear that Serbia and Croatia were both deeply involved—militarily, politically, financially— in trying to carve up Bosnia, and that their actions and those of their Bosnian allies were certainly “aggressive” (see Ron 2003), the implication of calling the war an “aggression” is to nullify the legitimate political concerns and real wartime suffering of non-Bosniac populations.

In explaining this position, I am pleading for a rejection of the simplistic moral narratives through which the crises of the former Yugoslavia have tended to be viewed, both inside and outside the region. As Živković points out, the various partisan views of these conflicts exist in their own moral universes which do not only interact in simple binaries— what is good in the Serb universe is bad in the Bosniac or pro-Bosnian one— but are often “convoluted” in more inter-related ways (2001: xxv; and see Spasić 2000). I am at the same time sympathetic to Bosniac points of view, having lived mostly among them and not in majority Serb or Croat areas, and am therefore more critical of the discourses and practices I encountered in such contexts. My open and defacto criticisms of dominant Bosniac positions should not be interpreted as an endorsement of anti-Bosniac and anti-Bosnian (i.e. “Serb” and “Croat”) positions. Rather, I have endeavored to analyze the cultural logics by which people in Bosniac areas negotiate their many shifting and overlapping identities.

Having said that, I acknowledge the dangers inherent in deconstructing national myths, especially when one comes from a place so secure in its national myths that no amount of deconstruction is likely to harm it (Brown 2000). When I discuss victim images I am not denying the real suffering or the ethnic identities of the many victims of the Bosnian war. Nor do I question the right of victims to identify with or reject the very ethno-national identities for which they were targeted with various forms of violence. Instead, I point to the moral power of those identities within their specific moral universe and attempt to understand their role in political representation and identity maintenance.

Similarly, there is a danger in deconstructing women’s activism at a time when such activities hold a precarious place in public life in Bosnia. I fear the criticisms I bring out, especially of NGOs and their internal contradictions, will add fuel to the already healthy skepticism of women’s activism, especially feminist activism or any activities that challenges dominant notions of gender and nation. I can only express the wish that any impact my work has will serve to spark debate and strengthen

women's activism in Bosnia (see de Soto 2000; Spasić 2000).

Outline of Chapters

In Chapter Two I outline the theoretical underpinnings of this study. These span anthropological and other scholarship on gender, ethnicity and nationalism; essentialist and Orientalist representations of gender and civilizational geographies; post-socialist “transition;” development aid, civil society, and non-governmental organizations as vehicles for women's activism. I also discuss the place of this project within the anthropology of what was Yugoslavia.

Chapter Three begins the “story” of women's activism by reviewing the history of gender relations and women's organizing in Bosnia and the wider political entities of which it has been a part over the past 150 years, with special emphasis on the most recent period under socialist Yugoslavia. In keeping with this study's focus on women in what became Muslim/Bosniac areas after the most recent war, chapters 3 and 4 focus on the position and representation of Muslim women in the historical record, and the discourses, policies, and agendas circulating in and affecting those areas. In the first part of chapter 3, I discuss various cultural and historical legacies that left an impression on gender relations through kinship systems, religion, and state policies, both before and during socialism. Despite the legal and cultural improvements for women established by the socialist regime, significant elements of the patriarchal basis of pre-socialist life remained and have been carried through and even renewed in the post-war period. The second part of the chapter traces the history of women's movements and feminism in the region in order to show how socialist era models of women's organizing have influenced the shape of wartime and post-war women's groups. In contrast to the common assumption that the explosion of women's organizations in the 1990's reflects a desire to advocate for women's equality, I argue that the bulk of these groups were formed on the basis of models developed during socialist times, and/or as extensions of women's social networks rather than on challenges to patriarchal norms. It is only with the arrival of foreign donors that the language of women's rights,¹⁴ civil society, and NGOs has emerged among women's group

¹⁴ As I outline in chapter 3, women enjoyed a broad range of rights and legal equality with men under socialism. What emerged in the post-war era was both new needs for rights that disappeared with the introduction of pluralist democracy, as well as a new conception and language of “women's rights” used by foreign agencies.

members.

In Chapter Four, I outline the circumstances around the dissolution of socialist Yugoslavia and the subsequent Bosnian war as they pertain to women and understandings of gender. Wartime events, the debates surrounding them, and the outside interventions they provoked established many of the categories of identity as well as concrete issues around which women's organizations began to organize themselves during and after the war. My aim is to show how those categories were formed in order to establish the underpinnings of women's subsequent expressions of identity and their organizational and representational strategies as activists. I first discuss the politicization of ethno-national and religious identities encouraged under socialism and expressed through the rise of nationalist politics and the outbreak of war. I then examine the gendered logic of ethnic violence, wartime rape, and sexual violence and their impact on women and gender constructions. I also discuss the debates sparked, mostly among feminists, about the rapes and how they were represented by nationalists, feminists, and others. The final section of this chapter examines how gendered experiences of war, especially ethnic cleansing campaigns, mass rapes, and the politicization of ethnic and religious identities, defined the issues for women's organizations of all orientations, propelling them to organize and providing them with a measure of moral legitimacy as public actors. The intersection of these wartime legacies with those of the socialist and pre-socialist periods, discussed in the previous chapter, profoundly affected the agendas, possibilities, and limitations of post-war women's organizing.

Chapter Five introduces the women's organizations in this study and the political context in which they operated, focusing on ethnic, religious, and gender identities. I begin by outlining the aims and practices of the "international community" of donors and administrative agencies towards local NGOs. I then give an overview of the political and social climate in Zenica. I introduce the main organizations I worked with there and in the wider network of Bosnian women's NGOs. In terms of approaches to gender, I show how the makeup of women's groups reflected socialist models of women's community involvement, normative assumptions about women's roles, and ideas pushed by foreign donors of civil society, the "third sector" of NGOs, social activism, and various other "hot" issues. In terms of ethnic and religious identities, I show how donors effectively force ethnic categories upon NGOs even as they attempt to dismantle them. Thus, I argue that international

intervention has forced a “nation-ing” of gender discourses that otherwise strive to concentrate on gender issues, and a suppression of dialogue about gender and religious identities.

Chapter Six examines the kinds of articulations of gender ideals which resulted from these interactions and explores the struggle to define womanhood and a particular “Bosnian feminism.” I explore conflicting approaches to improving the status of women between self-proclaimed feminists and a group of conservative women associated with the ruling Bosniac nationalist party. The tensions, which emerged through a discussion of parental leave and other labor laws, revolved around questions of women’s difference from men and the role of the state in “protecting” women. A similar difference in theoretical orientation was visible among those activists who called themselves feminists, though in different ways, as I show through an examination of struggles to define a Bosnian feminism among the activists at Medica. I highlight theoretical debates over the inclusion of other categories of difference in feminist analyses, Medica’s encounter with western feminists, and their stances toward the 1999 NATO bombing of neighboring Yugoslavia in light of their earlier support for anti-militarist feminist positions.

In Chapter Seven, I analyze the discursive strategies used by women activists and politicians to gain support and justify their involvement in the male-associated sphere of the political. To establish context, I begin by discussing portrayals of women in local political discourses and the gendering of international community approaches to women. I introduce the concept of “affirmative essentialisms” to describe the ways in which women activists were effectively portrayed in donor discourses. Affirmative essentialisms characterize the bulk of women activists’ self-representations as they positioned themselves outside politics and within traditionally female domestic and nurturing roles, especially motherhood. I argue that these representations must be seen in the context of locally produced gendered meanings and a political climate in which moral purity is based on war-associated victim identities. As female identity was commonly constructed on notions of victimhood and passive, non-involvement in the public or political sphere, women easily claimed moral purity when they stressed such qualities. International officials and donors contributed to this view. However, as I further argue, donor approaches presented a paradox for women: they were charged with achieving the very political goals of ethnic reconciliation and refugee return, yet the essentialist constructions used to encourage women’s peacemaking roles effectively marginalized them from

formal political power. For politically active women, affirmative essentialisms also emphasized qualities that at first glance seem to inhibit their being taken seriously as political actors. However, given the strong resistance to the idea of women politicians, including the idea that a woman in politics is morally (sexually) suspect, women strove to continue to be perceived *as women*, and morally respectable women at that. They thus based their self-presentation on affirmative essentialisms which stressed women's domestic roles and feminized victim identities forged during the war.

The Eighth and final chapter discusses reasons why women activists avoid association with rape and considers the wider implications for women of the importance of morality, victimhood, and wartime categories for the formation of public identities. I point to the wider significance of such images in the context of world events surrounding the September 11th attacks on the U.S. in 2001. I further explore the prospects for women's activism in Bosnia, pointing to some of the difficulties raised by international intervention and to the theoretical tools which might be used to evaluate women's activities.

Finally, appendices are provided as a reference to the acronyms(A) and organizations(B) used in this study. I also list major terms of NGO-speak that have entered the Bosnian language in the post-war period (C); record gender-related jokes heard in the field (D); and offer avenues of further research suggested by this study (E).

CHAPTER TWO

REPRESENTATIONS OF GENDERED IDENTITIES IN THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

Gendered Nationalism

Feminist theorists have pointed to the way nationalist projects are constructed around ideas of gender and gender role ideals (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1989; Peterson 1994; McClintock 1993; Verdery 1994), the recognition of which is absent from most (androcentric) studies of nationalism (e.g. Anderson 1983; Gellner 1983; Hobsbawm 1990; A. Smith 1971, 1986). Gendered representations wield enormous power. As the roles and behaviors of men and women are often perceived as natural givens, rather than variable cultural constructions, couching an argument in gendered terms serves, as Joan Scott has argued (1999), to “naturalize,” and therefore legitimate ideological positions, whether those positions deal directly with gender roles or not (see Gal 1994; Lukić 2000).

Nations are often feminized, cast as the woman whose honor must be protected by the nation’s men (Verdery 1994), while images of the nation’s grandeur are built upon masculine ideals and heterosexual “respectability” (Borneman 1998; Mosse 1985; Parker et. al. 1992). Scholars have further shown how sexuality is constitutive of nationalist imaginings, most often manifested in mechanisms of control over sexual contact with ethnic others (Abu-Lughod 1993; C. Smith 1996) and the interpretation of cross-ethnic marriage or rape as injury to the nation (Das 1995; Heng and Devon 1992; Mežnarić 1994). These “genderings” are also commonly based on naturalized gendered dichotomies derived from the common public/domestic dyad: women are assigned to domestic roles and men to public or political roles. I discuss this below.

Because nationalist images tend to portray women as passive objects of male-dominated nations (Verdery 1994; Williams 1997:10), much scholarship has focused on gendered discourses of nationalism from a top-down perspective (Bourke 1995; Chatterjee 1989, 1993; Mani 1987; Stoler 1989; Tohid 1996). Fewer writers have focused on the actions and lives of those who are made objects of such discourses. Those who have offered valuable insights into how women resist, negotiate and/or actively reaffirm nationalist ideologies that are based on strict gender role definitions (Moore 1988; Schein 1996; C. Smith 1996) or when nationalist revolutionary movements

ask women to put their gender interests on hold (Enloe 1990; Chinchilla 1997; Rofel 1994). In this dissertation, I focus on this lived experience, keeping in mind the possibilities, barriers, and pressures created for women as objects of nationalist (and other) discourses.

In the case of Yugoslavia and its successor states, feminist activists, writers, and academics have pointed to the strong gender component of nationalist discourses, especially in Croatia and Serbia. Nationalists have put forth especially traditionalist, essentialized constructions of women as reproducers and men as the actors of the nation. From the point of view of feminist observers, this has had decidedly negative consequences for women as evidenced by campaigns to return women to the home (Drakulić 1993a), calls for women to “make more babies for the nation” (Bracewell 1996; Mostov 1995), the scaling back of abortion rights and social services in general (Drakulić 1993a; Salecl 1994), increases in domestic violence (Mladenović 1993), and the wartime rapes of women (and men) of other ethnic groups (e.g., Korać 1997; Olujić 1998; Seifert 1996; Sofos 1996; Žarkov 1995, 1999). Another consequence was that women were portrayed as passive objects of male actions (Kašić 2000; Spasić 2000). I discuss this further in chapter 4 as it relates to the use of wartime sexual violence in the Bosnian war.

Feminist scholarship has, however, been slower to explore women’s agency in the region. Several have sought to redress this problem by highlighting women’s considerable peacemaking and anti-nationalist activities (e.g., Benderly 1997b; Cockburn 1998; Cockburn et.al. 2001; articles in Kašić 1997; Terselić 1995). While this has offered important insights into the logics and appeal of nationalist discourses, it effectively reaffirms the notion of women’s “natural” nurturing qualities, their removal from “significant” arenas of power controlled by men, such as politics, and their association with domestic roles (Blagojević 1994; Gal and Kligman 2000; Scott 1999; Spasić 2000). Indeed, much feminist writing, especially on the former Yugoslavia, has implied that feminism, or even women themselves, are incompatible with nationalism. This is a curious assumption, given the common linkage of the two in the context of post-colonial, revolutionary movements for national liberation (Jayawardena 1986) which share many of the same elements of identity formation with the former Yugoslavia. To be sure, feminist critiques of androcentrism in nationalist movements eventually put feminists at odds with “their own” nationalist men (Chinchilla 1997; Enloe 1990; Moghadam 1994; Molyneux 1990). Yet Lois West (1992; 1997) argues for the existence of “feminist

nationalism” which combines the two in diverse settings, including the former Yugoslavia (Benderly 1997b).

Explanations for what seems to be a greater tendency of women toward anti-nationalist and peace initiatives (Kašić 1997; Terselić 1995) range from the biological (Papandrea 1997) to claims that women’s position in society makes them more prone to peace (Walby 1992:92) and more accepting of ethnic and other Others (Iveković 1993). Many of these arguments are reproduced in the donor and activist representations I discuss in chapter 7. The danger in such assertions is that they romanticize and essentialize women as victims of patriarchal systems, a hazard inherent in feminist and subaltern studies which, Lila Abu-Lughod (1990a) warns, only distorts the way that power is wielded and perpetuated (and see Constable 1997). Instead, it must be recognized that women’s active roles in nationalist processes can also include enforcement of patriarchal gender norms. Women “actively participate in the process of reproducing and modifying their roles as well as being actively involved in controlling other women” (Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1989:11).

Recognizing this, a few scholars have therefore begun to explore other, “unexpected” forms of women’s activism in what was Yugoslavia, such as in nationalist and military organizations (Lilly and Irvine 2002; Žarkov 1999; and see Blee 1991; Koonz 1987). Overwhelmingly, however, it is Serbian and Croatian nationalisms which have come under feminist scrutiny. The gendered aspects of local Bosnian nationalisms, especially among Bosnian Muslims, or Bosniacs, have been conspicuously absent from this literature (with the exception of some mention in Hayden 2000; Korać 1997). The construction of women *in Bosnia*, especially Bosniac women, as Orientalized, exoticized, passive victims of nationalist violence has therefore remained largely intact (Helms 1998; Mertus 1994; Žarkov 1997). It is my intention in this dissertation to show not only the active roles of Bosnian women, but the multiplicity of approaches they actively take towards questions of gender, ethnicity, and nation.

Furthermore, feminist attention to the powerful “international community” of western governments and aid agencies has only recently begun to surface (on Bosnia: Chinkin and Paradine 2001; Cockburn et. al. 2001; Cockburn and Hubić 2002; Rees 2002; Walsh 2000). As I show, the discourses of international intervention are also gendered and “nation-ed,” and duly circumscribe women activists’ possibilities. The power of this set of actors over politics, concepts of gender and

nation, and the lives of women cannot be ignored, as this dissertation aims to show. I take up this issue below, through a discussion of local women activists' relationships to western donors and feminists.

Balkan Nesting Orientalisms

A key element of discursive representations in Bosnia, including those of women activists, is their invocation of familiar orientalist symbolic geographies, arranged in “nesting” hierarchies (Bakić-Hayden 1995). Like the Orientalism toward the Middle East described by Said (1978), these constructions can be traced to western representations of Eastern Europe (Wolff 1994) and the Balkans (Goldsworthy 1998; Todorova 1997) as inferior, backward, primitive, violent, and indisputably “other.” This otherness was, however, not grounded in the greatness of Eastern civilization, as was that of Orientalism, but constructed an inferior, failed other within the European self, where “great civilization” lay definitively in the west (Todorova 1997; Živković 2001). The resonance of these associations was especially evident during the 1990's wars in former Yugoslavia, most notoriously by the best-selling travel book of journalist Robert Kaplan, *Balkan Ghosts* (1993), which has become “a favorite whipping horse for scholars of the region” (Živković 2001: 5).¹⁵ Kaplan's popular thesis that ethnic hatreds are embedded in the people and the landscape of the Balkans is said to have influenced President Clinton and other policy makers in their initial (non)approach to dealing with the war in Bosnia and Croatia. Establishing that “those people” know nothing but hatred and violence was the first step towards distancing the western public from attempting to curtail the atrocities, and later towards justifying certain forms of intervention (see Herzfeld 2002).

Furthermore, just as the formulation which posits the Balkans as an internal other of Europe suggests, these oppositions are arranged in hierarchies of “nesting orientalisms” (Bakić-Hayden 1995; Bakić-Hayden and Hayden 1992) which recur “recursively” (Živković 2001) within each other. Such hierarchies of symbolic geography are thus just as apparent and resonant within the

¹⁵ Marko Živković proposes that Kaplan should be thanked for providing this “precious document” of “the logic of the stereotypes themselves and the symbolic geography of the Balkans,” for “truly, a more condensed compendium of negative stereotypes of the Balkans would be hard to find anywhere else.” (2001: 5-6).

Balkans themselves, as well as other parts of Eastern Europe¹⁶ (e.g., Gal 1991; Verdery 1996: 104-29).¹⁷ Since the mid 1990's, scholars of the former Yugoslavia, most notably those hailing from the region itself, have produced insightful analyses of the complexity, power, and material consequences of such constructions in political, media, and “everyday” discourses (Bakić-Hayden 1995; Bakić-Hayden and Hayden 1992; articles in Bjelić and Savić 2002; Čolović 2002; Žarkov 1995 ; Živković 2001). A scale of purportedly “eastern,” or “Balkan,” and “western” attributes and associations are presented as evidence of one’s own people as western, while those to the south and east are relegated to the lesser categories of “Balkan,” “oriental,” “Byzantine:” histories of incorporation into the (Christian) Hapsburg Empire signal westernness and Europeanness and are opposed to histories of Ottoman rule; Christianity is western while Islam is Asian, non-European; within Christianity, Orthodoxy is inferior to Catholicism; and so on. East/west distinctions can also recur nested within western contexts—Vienna or Paris—or within a place marked as western within the “easternness” of the Balkans, such as Zagreb (*ibid.*).

If the other mechanisms proposed by James Carrier (1992) for the way in which “westerners” and “non-westerners” alike essentialize both the west and the non-west, each group essentializing itself and its other,¹⁸ endless reconfigurations of Balkan discourses become apparent. Indeed, incarnations of all of these mechanisms can be found attempting to prop up various national and political claims, constructing the self on either side of the east/west divide. Thus, Serbs could represent themselves as both non-European and more European than (western) Europe because the latter had renounced its spiritual values and become the “Rotten West” (Čolović 2002: 39; and see Živković 2001).¹⁹ Similarly, various Bosniac discourses (again, as with the case of gendered

¹⁶ Intellectuals in Bohemia, Hungary, and Poland have also argued for a separate “Central Europe,” setting themselves off from Russia to the east and the Balkans to the south (see Schopflin 1991; Schopflin and Wood 1989; Živković 2001: 1-56).

¹⁷ These processes also demonstrate what Louisa Schein, writing about China, has termed “internal orientalism,” or “practices of othering internal to the ‘East’” (1997: 3).

¹⁸ These categories are Orientalism (essentialist representations of the other by the west), Occidentalism (essentialist renderings of the self/west by the west), ethno-Orientalism (essentialist representations of the non-west by the non-west), and ethno-Occidentalism (essentialist representations of the west by the non-west) (Carrier 1992).

¹⁹ This expression was used ironically during the socialist period to mock the way in which communist officials demonized the west. Current usage therefore recalls both this socialist usages as well as nationalist ones.

nationalism treated above, generally overlooked on this topic) have not only sought to re-position the borders of Europe to include themselves, but in other cases have reversed the negative valence of “the east” and Islam to contrast with a decadent Rotten West (Helms n.d.; and see Robertson 1995). Despite these variations, essentialist renderings of civilizational oppositions continue to be reproduced. Such positionings recur throughout the Bosnian narratives presented in these pages.

Importantly for the context of western intervention in the Balkans, local discourses also reproduce forms of Occidentalism. What Carrier called “ethno-Occidentalism,” or essentialized representations of the west by non-westerners (1992), occurs in the narratives of Bosnian social and political actors who constantly invoke comparisons, whether positive or negative, to an essentialized west as they consider which elements of western systems to adopt in their emerging post-war system. At times Bosnia or Bosniacs are located within Europe, while at others they are not. Occidentalism on the part of western officials and aid workers is also present, though not a phenomenon I develop fully in this dissertation (see Methodology section below). The simplified models of institutions, policies, and processes in their own societies that westerners put forth as examples for Bosnians to follow have profound effects on the impact of foreign interventions (see Wedel 2001).

Until recently, it has been less noticed that these nesting orientalisms also have a strong gender component, just as nationalist discourses do. As discourses which are often both nationalist and orientalist/occidentalists simultaneously, Balkan discourses are built on categories of gender and sexuality which are used to naturalize differences and legitimize the hierarchy between east and west (Ahmed 1982; Said 1978; Yegenoglu 1998).²⁰ In the case of the Balkans and the conflict over Bosnia, gender and sexuality have been constitutive elements of nationalisms which are at the same time infused with (gendered) Orientalist representations (Žarkov 1995, 1999; Živković 2001). These images are at the heart of the dominant image of the Bosnian Muslim woman as passive rape victim (Žarkov 1997). In keeping with the traditional focus on the masculine in balkanist discourses

²⁰ It is clear from Said’s account that images of gender and sexuality were a constitutive part of Orientalist representations of the Muslim East. While Said did not develop this element in *Orientalism*, other scholars have expanded on various aspects of the gendering of Orientalism (see Abu-Lughod 2001; Lewis 1996; Nader 1989; Robertson 1995; Schein 1997; Yegenoglu 1998).

(Todorova 1997)²¹, orientalist frameworks also inform the construction of masculine roles. Serb men are especially portrayed as violent, “patriarchal” and destructive (Bjelić and Cole 2002; Čolović 2002; Simic 1969; van de Port 1998; Živković 2001), as they denigrate (and physically attack) the men of their enemies as “mama’s boys,” homosexuals, or hyper-men with rabid sexual appetites (Borneman 1998; Čolović 2002; Žarkov 1999), much the way Muslim men of the Orient were portrayed (Said 1978).

Bosniac discourses wielded depictions of gender and sexuality, especially of women, to construct and legitimize nationalist and Orientalist discourses about the ideal character of society and the nation. Gender and sexuality function as a vehicle by which standard Orientalist models are inverted. Orientalist discourses portrayed the eastern threat through images of unrestrained female sexuality and deviant erotic behavior unacceptable to Western patriarchal values. Muslim religious leaders around the world have for some time recast this construction, describing instead the dangers of a decadent West. The threat to Muslim purity and values is posed by open displays of female sexuality and sex outside the sanctions of patriarchal marriage. Although few have remarked on it, western, Orientalist discourses have also undergone a shift since the colonial era. Whereas Said described the evocation of the eastern threat through images of deviant, uncontrolled female (and feminized homosexual male) sexuality, the political threat of the Muslim world is now depicted through images of strictly *controlled* female sexuality: “hyperveiled” women in all-encompassing coverings (Macmaster and Lewis 1998).²²

In a separate study analyzing Bosniac media and “everyday” discourses, I show that gendered balkanist representations have undergone a shift (Helms n.d.). While the image of the Balkan male remains primitive and violent, his violence is now often directed toward women, in the form of

²¹ In contrast to the feminized, erotic Orient described by Said, traditional western representations of the Balkans are decidedly male. Local women are virtually invisible, while Balkan men are described as rough, disheveled, violent peasant men who engage in blood feuds and revolts. Todorova cited this difference as one of the reasons that balkanism cannot be equated with Orientalism (1997: 13-15). For a rather uncritical reproduction of these masculine stereotypes embedded in balkanist hierarchies, see van der Port (1998).

²² Such representations have been particularly prevalent in US discourses in the wake of September 11th and the war in Afghanistan. Images of women in *burqas* and other all-encompassing veils have symbolized the brutality of the Taliban and the backwardness of Afghan, and indeed all Muslim, culture (Abu-Lughod 2002). Similarly, strict punishments by the Taliban for homosexuality, too, have been held up as evidence of the enemy’s inferiority, in contrast to colonial Orientalism which depicted rampant homosexuality as the marker of Eastern inferiority.

domestic violence and the rape of the “enemy’s” women. Women have thus become more visible as cultural symbols. Indeed, the association of Bosnian (Muslim) women with wartime rape has overshadowed the way in which gendered images are used to construct various *other* discourses within the Bosnian and Bosniac communities. In informal conversation with Bosnians during my fieldwork, the way in which women were treated by “their” men and the degree to which they were “emancipated” were used as markers of a society’s relative backwardness or modernity. Such a standard, reminiscent of Orientalist justifications for Western colonial rule, implies a inherent link between superior (Western) civilization and purported gender equality (see Chatterjee 1989; Mani 1987). However, as I have demonstrated (Helms n.d.), even when such “primitive, patriarchal” treatment of women said to be typical of “the Balkans” was rejected in favor of a modern west, images of women mirrored those common in the west itself: women remained in subordinate roles to men, becoming symbols of “modern” sexual freedom and objects of (heterosexual) male desire.

These familiar configurations of gender, nation, and civilizational hierarchy infused local political discourses against which the Bosnian activists depicted in this dissertation operated. Yet they were not only “political,” or macro-level, discourses but part of a shared idiom of both (outward) self-presentation and (inward) cultural intimacy (Herzfeld 1997) in which Bosnian women activists participated.

Women’s Activism and Gender Essentialisms in Times of Flux

Violent conflict and its aftermath has drawn women in many parts of the world into various forms of public activism, as it has in Bosnia. As the public, political sphere is most commonly constructed as the sphere of men (Lamphere 1993; Moore 1988: 12-41), women’s activism seems to pose an implicit challenge to established, patriarchal gender regimes. Still, many women activists, including many of the Bosnians discussed in this study, have organized around their roles as mothers and keepers of the domestic sphere, just as they are positioned in male-dominated gender regimes (e.g. de Alwis 1998a; Ishkanian 2003; Phillips 2002; Samuel 2003; Taylor 1994; Žarkov 2000).

The gendering of nationalist discourses in the successor states of Yugoslavia has been based precisely on these kinds of gender essentialisms, as is evident in the works cited above. My data also shows the often overlooked way in which similar gender essentialisms appear in non-nationalist,

“civic” discourses, as well as discourses of foreign donors that fund women’s NGO activities (Helms n.d.). These representations essentialize women as nurturing mothers tied to domestic roles and outside the male public, or political sphere. As feminist anthropologists have noted, these domestic/public divisions and the meanings ascribed to them are not fixed (Gal and Kligman 2000; Lamphere 1993) (nor are they universal²³). Like the dichotomies set up by orientalist representations, their borders can be shifted, meanings altered, and the dyads can be “nested” or “fractal” – recursively reproduced within each side of a larger dichotomous distinction (Gal and Kligman 2000: 41).²⁴ This can be seen clearly in Cornelia Sorabji’s account (1989) of women’s roles and religion in an urban Muslim neighborhood in Sarajevo: within the private sphere of the neighborhood, the public/private opposition reappears in the public (male) space of the mosque and contrasts with the private (female) home; the home is in turn divided into public areas reserved for entertaining guests and private family areas; there are public subjects suitable for neighborly socializing and private topics kept within the family (see also Bringa 1995). This phenomenon is visible in this study through women’s representational strategies vis-a-vis the “political,” which I present in chapter 7. Women positioned themselves within the political through their domestic, and therefore feminine, roles, which they hoped would “clean up” the corrupt (male) side of politics.

Many researchers have been critical of these kinds of essentialisms for reinforcing patriarchal values and hierarchies (e.g., Basu 1999; Blagojević 1994; Chatterjee 1989; Drakulić 1993a; Spasić 2000). Essentialisms, they point out, not only restrict females to subordinate roles, but also males, whose roles are thereby limited to those of aggressors, power-hungry careerists, uncaring parents, and in all things incapable of dialogue or compromise. Feminist writers have further charged that

²³ For discussion of longstanding debates in feminist anthropology over the significance of the gendered public/private divide, see Lamphere 1993; Moore 1988:12-41; Ortner 1974; Rosaldo 1974, 1980; Strathern 1980. While these scholars showed that such concepts are not universal, it remains true that gendered dichotomies of public/domestic and related variations like public/private, modern/traditional (Ishkanian 2000), culture/nature, technological/spiritual (Chatterjee 1989; Mani 1987), outside/inside (Rofel 1994; Yanagisako 1987), politics/family (Afshar 1989; Huseby-Darvas 1996) form the basis of discursive representations of gender roles in many societies.

²⁴ Ivan Čolović offers the fascinating example of this recursive reproduction of the male/female dichotomy in Serbian and Croatian discourses during the wars in Croatia and Bosnia. The male warrior is constructed as heroically masculine, brave in battle and attached to his weapons as to a female lover, yet he is said to have “the soul of a girl.” Čolović interprets this as a mechanism by which the soldier is purified, in preparation of a virginal sacrifice to the parental nation (2002: 48-56).

“mothers’ movements” women activists’ identification with domestic roles are too easily coopted by patriarchal, male-dominated and violence-producing nationalist movements (de Alwis 2003; Drakulić 1993a; Duhaček 1993; Samuel 2003). Because the protesters are women, they are easily dismissed or overtaken by larger national or ethnic movements, and the potential force of their movement is diffused. It would seem that feminist groups,²⁵ or any organization favoring the dismantling of established gender hierarchies to improve the status of women, would avoid such constructions. But, as I show especially in chapter 7, there are practical reasons for women’s groups to allow themselves to be portrayed as apolitical and as mothers, and even to embrace and put forth these images themselves.

Local women’s NGOs in Bosnia take many different forms according to the class and ethnic backgrounds of their membership, the political and gender ideologies which they represent, and the activities in which they engage. Their use of essentializing gender rhetoric varies according to the degree to which they challenge gender hierarchies and the relative importance what they define as “women’s interests” takes in relation to their other goals. Despite this diversity, however, all of the women’s NGOs with which I came into contact in Bosnia used some form of gender essentialisms in representing themselves to their local communities, to themselves, and to (potential and actual) foreign donors. In contrast to dominant political discourses, however, the gender essentialisms utilized by women activists stressed *positive* roles for women, portraying them as peace makers and nurturers, more non-nationalist and capable of dialogue and reconciliation than are men. Donor discourses also often constructed women’s roles in this way. Thus, women were essentialized and confined to domestic roles (the nurturing mother) but with a positive spin, or what Richard Fox calls “affirmative essentialisms” (1996).

Fox applied this term to late-colonial Indian nationalism, which Partha Chatterjee (1989) had earlier argued effectively confined women to less prestigious domestic roles as keepers of tradition and spirituality. While these essentialisms may have at first reinforced patriarchal hierarchies, Fox argued that, in the long run, they provided women with opportunities to be recognized and active in the public, male sphere. Indeed, the positive attributes associated with women mobilized women to

²⁵ As I describe below and in chapter 6, very few women’s organizations in Bosnia describe themselves as “feminist” or use the term publicly.

get involved in the first place. Once involved women's actions actually "superceded the original gender stereotypes" (*ibid.*: 48). Fox may overstate the case for women's "liberation," yet it is worth examining this source of potential empowerment for women. Chinchilla (1997), writing about revolutionary women in Central America, likewise argues that taking part in national processes is what put women in the position from which to become conscious of gender hierarchies and women's inferior status— in short, by some definitions, to develop a feminist critique of society. Similar processes have been noted in Argentina (Taylor 1994), Sri Lanka (de Alwis 1998a), Kenya (Tibbetts 1994), and post- World War II Yugoslavia (Jancar-Webster 1990),²⁶ to name just a few. These are the experiences which lead to organic feminist movements and ultimately, though not *necessarily*, to change from within a society. Indeed, as Amrita Basu, writing about contemporary Indian women's activism and Hindu nationalism, has cautioned, women's political activity does not in itself *necessarily* challenge patriarchy (1999). This study of the Bosnian case shows the ambiguities for women of gaining access to public and political spaces.

What is also very important for the Bosnian case is the moral power of gender essentialisms, especially of motherhood. Groups of mothers such as the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina (Taylor 1994) and the Mothers' Fronts in Sri Lanka (de Alwis 1998a; Samuel 2003) have succeeded in publicly shaming the state precisely because their engagement in the public, political sphere was as mothers and widows in performances (Taylor 1994) of grief and mourning. Their public, activist identities were based on their belonging outside the male realm of politics, on their relationships with male kin and domestic roles, and on their association, as mothers, with the innocence of children. The Bosnian group, Women of Srebrenica, discussed in chapter 7, has in many ways offered a similar image. In some contexts, this form of women's protest may be the only way possible for women to successfully achieve their goals (Samuel 2003), especially under conditions of extreme state repression (Taylor 1994). In a context very similar to post-war Bosnia, Armine Ishkanian has found that women NGO activists in Armenia stress an image of "moral motherhood" engaged on behalf of the nation, to legitimate their activism in the eyes of local elites, even as they utilize

²⁶ While women were welcomed by socialist revolutionary movements into the military as fighters, they were nonetheless expected to carry out traditionally prescribed roles during and after the revolution, such as caring for war orphans, cooking and cleaning for male soldiers, and providing sexual "comfort" to male soldiers (Chinchilla 1997; Jancar-Webster 1990).

“modern” discourses of women’s rights and gender equality with their western donors (2003, 2000). Similarly, given the current political climate in Bosnia, in which politics is perceived as immoral, and moral status is derived from categories of wartime victimhood, Bosnian women activists achieve more immediate respect and moral clout— indeed, they avoid outright dismissal— by positioning themselves outside the male realm of politics and within the roles of mothers and nurturers.

In this study I also follow researchers who argue for the importance of studying and understanding women activists who choose to embrace patriarchal gender essentialisms and association with motherhood. To dismiss all gender-essentializing women’s initiatives as “dupes” of male ideologies or examples of false consciousness is to dismiss the legitimacy of women’s agency (Basu 1999; de Alwis 1998a; Jeffrey 1998; Žarkov 1999, 2000).

Furthermore, as Dubravka Žarkov has argued, for feminists to dismiss any women’s agency which is based on motherhood, or traditional gender essentialisms, is to “surrender motherhood to nationalism” (Žarkov 1999: 171), a force which, in the Balkans, has notoriously claimed ownership of the power of motherhood (see Bracewell 1996). Many Croatian and Serbian feminists dismissed mothers’ movements of late 1980’s and early 1990’s Yugoslavia for having been coopted by nationalism (e.g., Drakulić 1993a; Duhaček 1993). Yet Dubravka Žarkov’s study of Croatian and Serbian discourses in that period reveals a variety of much more intricate meanings attached to motherhood, and to ethnicity, than either nationalist *or feminist* ideologies tend to allow (1999, and see 2000). To wrest motherhood and ethnic identity— elements commonly associated with patriarchal, essentialist roles for women— from the purvey of nationalist and patriarchal ideologies is thus a step towards reclaiming what is significant to women in their daily lives, towards understanding the different forms of women’s agency, including those which utilize essentialist discourses. As Patricia Jeffrey has written, “only then can we determine what is key to *feminist* agency and imagine how women’s agency might translate into feminist political action” (Jeffrey 1998: 223). As I show in this study, Bosnian women activists used gender essentialisms not only because they are practical, but because they fit into familiar notions of gender relations for the women themselves as well as for members of their communities. We would do well to understand why (Basu 1999).

“Actually Existing Turbulence” and the Anthropology of Western Aid

International intervention in Bosnia has not only been about post-war reconstruction, but also about “transition” from socialism. Few international officials seem to question the assumed goal—Bosnia is “going to Europe,” meaning the European Union and the adoption of a western-style democratic, free-market system. While many Bosnians long for the stability and prosperity enjoyed by “Europe,” there is little consensus on exactly the kind of system they would like to build. What is more, as the years since the war go by, it becomes increasingly difficult to accept that every problem in Bosnia is due to “transition.” Still, NGO activists and others who relied on western financing took up the language and often the logic of the western powers, including that of “transition.” It even became a joke among the women activists I worked with. Personal foibles or organizational flaws were often, tongue-in-cheek, attributed to the fact that they were “women in transition” (*žena u tranziciji* sounding like *zemlja u tranziciji*, or “country in transition”)

Following many anthropologists of post-socialism, this study takes a critical stance towards the term “transition” and the body of “transitology” literature which describes it (Berdahl 2000a; Gal and Kligman 2000; Hemment 2000; Kideckel 1995; Pine 1998; Verdery 1996; Wedel 2001). These scholars have objected to the capitalist “triumphalism” and western superiority implied by such studies, along with the evolutionary, teleological assumptions which back them up: it is posed as a given that post-socialist states are in one-way “transition” exclusively to liberal democracy and free-market economies. Anthropologists, positioned to reflect on the effects of these processes affect everyday lives, have instead talked about “transformations” in which the end result is not inevitable and many different approaches are pursued. They emphasize the perpetual state of *uncertainty* for people in these countries (Berdahl et. al. 2000; Bridger and Pine 1998; Kideckel 1995; Verdery 1996), a state that David Kideckel, paraphrasing Rudolf Bahro, referred to as “actually existing turbulence” (1995: 5).

As several scholars have also pointed out (Barsegian 2000; Berdahl 2000a), post-Cold War western aid to the region holds striking similarities to the western “development” enterprise cultivated in the “Third World.” The west is cast as all-knowing, benevolent parent (even “God”! [Verdery 1996: 205]) instructing the naive masses whose experiences with socialism (or colonialism) are either unwanted dead weight or insignificant for the new path (Berdahl 2000a; Verdery 1996).

It is thus not surprising that similar sorts of cultural “disconnects” (Wedel 2001) and “unintended consequences” (Ferguson 1994) are being produced in post-socialist Europe (e.g., Hemment 2000; Ishkanian 2003; Phillips 2002; Wedel 2001) as have been described in anthropological critiques of “Third World” development (e.g. Escobar 1995; Ferguson 1994; Grillo and Stirrat 1997; Hobart 1993).

In Bosnia, the war and its aftermath created a situation of humanitarian crisis and thus ushered in many of the same “development” agencies whose working models have been honed in the “Third World.” I see this experience with both “transition aid” and “development” as an opportunity to strengthen alternative axes of comparison of Bosnia other than with other post-socialist European societies. Indeed, there have already been some useful studies connecting women’s activism in “conflict zones” involving Bosnia with Northern Ireland and Israel/Palestine (Cockburn 1998) and former Yugoslavia with Sri Lanka (Giles et. al. 2003; Giles and Hyndman forthcoming). Many practitioners in the international community have also looked to compare Bosnia (both positively and negatively) with other “Third-World” post-conflict situations, to the chagrin of their Bosnian beneficiaries and colleagues. Academics, however, have tended to include Bosnia in conferences and collections on Eastern Europe, thus emphasizing socialist legacies and shared experiences with “democratization aid,” but obscuring links to issues of (recent) war, ethnic and sexual violence, international military and administrative interventions, Islamic fundamentalism, and other issues. It is not that these issues do not affect other parts of post-socialist Europe, or that phenomena brought to the fore through the study of post-socialist contexts are not relevant to areas outside Eastern Europe. I do not wish to isolate either post-socialism or post-conflict issues as sets unto themselves. In fact, as Gal and Kligman (2000) have argued studies of post-socialist or “development” processes should also be in dialogue with studies of state welfare policies and regional development in the “west.” My point is to reiterate calls for the further dismantling of area studies boundaries that have tended to dictate many of the issues anthropologists take up.²⁷

²⁷ This was the subject of the closing discussion at the 2003 *Soyuz* meeting of researchers in post-socialist cultural studies. It was concluded that anthropologists of Eastern Europe had finally begun to take up theoretical topics representative of anthropology as a whole, rather than the “standard” East European topics of peasants, politics, property, and nationalism.

Civil Society and NGOs

One of these cross-cutting issues is the relatively new phenomenon of NGOs and civil society initiatives, part of a global trend in development and democratization aid (Hann and Dunn 1996; Fisher 1997; Mendelson and Glenn 2002). Despite the many ways in which this term has been viewed in various contexts (Gal 1997), the approach of western donors in the post-socialist countries of Central and Eastern Europe, including Bosnia, has been to see civil society as the sphere of independent associations which operate in the space between the family and the state (Carothers 1996: 65; Wedel 2001: 85-122). Despite some scholars' (not to mention local actors) inclusion of arenas such as the independent press (Gallagher 2000), neighborhood community networks (Abramson 1999), or religious institutions (Mojzes 1997) into considerations of civil society as democratic institutions, in practice, the donor approach has been more narrow, focusing almost exclusively on local NGOs, and as in Bosnia, certain types of NGOs (see Bruno 1998; Carothers 1996; Hann and Dunn 1996; Quigley 1997; Sampson 1996; Wedel 2001). In Bosnia, donors have thus placed great importance on the number and distribution of these groups, virtually to the extent of equating the number of NGOs with the strength of civil society (Belloni 2001; Chandler 2000; Smillie 1996; Stubbs 1995).²⁸

The vision of civil society as an independent sector between citizens and the state is particularly appealing to the international community, given Bosnia's political realities. In the absence of a functioning state, talking about and relating to "the state" is meaningful to local Bosnian NGOs mostly in the sense of government at the level of the (ethnically defined) entities, and within the Federation, ethnically defined municipalities and cantons (see e.g., Burg and Shoup 1999; Miličević 1997; Stubbs 1999). Furthermore, state (government) power has been virtually synonymous with nationalist political parties, with the exception of the 2000-2002 term when nationalist parties were substantially weakened including at the local level in Zenica (see chapter 5). At the time of my fieldwork, therefore, Bosnians tended to equate "state" (*država*) with the ruling party and the government (*vlada*). This can be seen as a continuation of the semantic practice under

²⁸ This is not to say that donors and international officials have not targeted other areas. Indeed, projects (Sampson 1996) abound that focus on the "independent" media, religious groups, and community organizing. When the term "civil society" is mentioned, however, it is usually interpreted to mean NGOs.

the socialist one-party state: despite the newly established pluralist system of political parties, I often heard the ruling Bosniac party referred to without irony as “The Party” in areas it controlled. It was understood that a “party person” (*stranački čovjek*) was connected to the nationalist party in power in his/her region.

As Sarah Phillips has pointed out in her work on women’s NGOs in Ukraine (2002), NGOs are rarely truly independent of the state (see also Gal 1997; Ishkanian 2000). Instead, they exhibit “blended relationships” in the sense that they must engage the state in both practical administrative matters and as a “philosophical point of reference” (*ibid.*, citing Uvin 2000). Some “NGOs” are actually created or financed (partially or wholly) by state organs or ruling government officials, prompting the creation of such acronyms as GONGOs (government-organized non-governmental organizations), QUANGOs (quasi-autonomous non-governmental organizations), and the like (Abramson 1999: 7; Fisher 1997: 447-48). While Bosnian government officials rarely set aside money for NGOs,²⁹ it could be argued that international donors as quasi-protectorate, function “governmentally” (Foucault 1991; Gilbert 2002), or as a sort of state actor. In this sense, then, Bosnian NGOs had little autonomy at all. Further, many activists I met in Bosnia actually felt they should be entitled to funding from their local and regional governments, especially since many of them, especially in women’s organizations, were providing services previously taken care of by the state (Gal and Kligman 2000; and see Mežnarić and Ule 1994).

However, in the international view, a sector independent of the state or dominant political structures meant possible opposition to the nationalist parties in power that were obstructing the functioning of the state structure envisioned in Dayton. Such opposition could both promote the building of a unified state and offer alternatives to ethnic separatism and chauvinist nationalism. Civil society (i.e., NGOs) was therefore promoted by donors as a space where the idea of a unified, multi-ethnic Bosnian state could be nurtured.

Interestingly, western, especially US, strategies for building civil society are so focused in Bosnia on countering nationalist power that they do not concentrate on encouraging civic advocacy

²⁹ Exceptions are associations formed under socialist structures that have kept their ties to local administrative units and organizations formed by ruling political parties (such as *Fatma* women’s association, a branch of the SDA). These groups tend to call themselves “associations” (*udruženje*) rather than NGOs, however, and do not move in western donor circles (see World Bank 2002).

in NGOs to the extent that they have in the rest of post-socialist Central and Eastern Europe. Writing about the Romanian case, Thomas Carothers notes that the American vision of civil society is not focused on NGOs in general but even more narrowly on “civic advocacy organizations— small, non-profit NGOs seeking to affect government policy” (1996: 65) because donor concern there is to prevent a return to communism. In Bosnia, the effort to oppose nationalists has led to, at times blatant, support of the Social Democrats, the successors to the Yugoslav Communist Party (widely stereotyped as “old communists”), and NGOs that support its non-nationalist agenda. While an emphasis on political advocacy is apparent in some donor initiatives, international community support for NGOs, whether policy-oriented or humanitarian, rests more on an NGO’s approach toward multi-ethnicity rather than political engagement. Indeed, the present international aim is to support whomever seems mostly likely to contribute to the ability of the Bosnian state to function independently, regardless (for the time being?) of ideology. Given this policy, and conflicting donor-inspired or created descriptions of civil society as a force that does not oppose but shapes and guides the state, considerable confusion exists among NGO participants and donor representatives themselves about the role of NGOs and civil society. Kadrija, leader of a women’s NGO from the Federation town of Kakanj, who believed strongly in the democratic possibilities of NGOs, summed up this confusion:

People on the street don’t know what an NGO even is. They think it’s opposition to authorities or else humanitarian work. They don’t know the possibilities or understand the potential. All those people don’t know that they themselves can initiate their own activities on their own issues and problems. Citizens don’t see themselves as actors. And there is also the problem that government doesn’t understand it. They think (NGOs are) a threat to their authority.

I explore these perceptions further in chapter 5.

NGOs and Women: Is There a Movement?

The standard claim of early feminist scholarship of post-socialist Central and Eastern Europe was that women were the “big losers” of “transition,” losing jobs, abortion rights, social safety net provisions, and public respect (e.g., Corrin 1992; Einhorn 1993; Funk and Mueller 1993; Moghadam

1993; Rueschemeyer 1994; Watson 1993). The women I met in Bosnia often made the same assertion about the effects of the war, saying that “women suffered the most,” and “women have lost the most in this war.” While women have certainly been disadvantaged under the “new universality” (Iveković 1997) of post-Yugoslav nationalist and masculinist publics (see Ler-Sofronić 1998 for data on women in Bosnia), such blanket statements paint too simplistic a picture, ignoring class, ethnic, and age differences (Gal and Kligman 2000: 114; Ghodsee 2001). In Bosnia, it can certainly be said that both men and women have suffered from both war³⁰ and economic restructuring, especially the poor and poorly connected to new elites, though in decidedly gendered ways. Further, as Kristen Ghodsee’s work (2001) on women’s experiences with “transition” in Bulgaria shows, certain skills cultivated by women such as knowledge of foreign languages and training for work in the tourist industry have given women a distinct advantage in the new economy. In Bosnia, with employment scarce and salaries low, young, educated women have been employed in large numbers by well-paying international organizations for their foreign language and computer skills (while highly educated men were often hired as drivers).

Still, as I discuss in chapter 5, women have been marginalized from (or were never well represented in) most avenues of power such as politics, business, and crime. This has partially been the reason for their gravitation to the NGO sector, albeit mostly in “humanitarian,” nurturing social service roles previously covered by the socialist state. While Susan Gal (1997) argues that civil society has been shaped as a male domain since the fall of communism in Central and Eastern Europe (and see Watson 1993), researchers have shown the NGO sector in Armenia (Ishkanian 2003), Russia (Hemment 2000), Ukraine (Phillips 2002), and other countries to be heavily populated with women, even to the point of becoming “feminized” and therefore less prestigious (Ishkanian *ibid.*). NGOs have therefore been singled out as a new form of women’s activism (Alvarez 1998; Costa 2001; Gal and Kligman 2000; Hemment 2000), a phenomenon that became highly visible at

³⁰ Dr. Charles Tauber, an NGO activist for the Center for Work with Psychotrauma and Peace in the war-ravaged town of Vukovar, Croatia runs a rare program to help *men* overcome war trauma (Peter Lippman, personal communication 2000; see <http://www.cwwpp.org> for more on the organization). Countless programs offer trauma recovery to women, due, as I argue in chapter 4, to the publicity around wartime rape of women and the construction of women as vulnerable victims. Anecdotal evidence from the experiences of several women’s organizations including Naš Most in Zenica suggests that women in rural and working class sections of the population are coping much better than men are with the effects of war and economic hardship; women are more willing to take on undesirable jobs while many men drown their sorrows in alcohol.

the NGO Forum held parallel to the UN Fourth World Conference on Women near Beijing in 1995. In Bosnia, there was no stigma attached to women's participation in NGOs per se, since most of these were understood as separate women's social outlets and/or humanitarian work— in continuity with patterns of women's organizing under socialism as I explain in chapters 3 and 5. The stigma fell, however, on NGO activity perceived as *political*, a realm avoided by many women for its association with immorality and males. (I explore this in chapter 7.) Indeed, many women activists felt there had been a masculinization of the top ranks of the NGO sector, especially after the end of the war and men's coinciding military duties.

One of the most negative ways in which women activists in Bosnia, as in other parts of Central and Eastern Europe (e.g. Drakulić 1993a; Goven 1993; Huseby-Darvas 1996), are seen as “political” is when they are labeled “feminists.” At the same time, as Sonia Alvarez (1998) and Sabine Lang (1997) have separately noted, feminism has undergone a process of “NGOization,” bring the movement(s) to a broader political stage but also effectively closing the door to wider participation of women outside the “increas[ingly] specializ[ed] and professionaliz[ed]” (Alvarez 1998: 306) interconnected NGO circles. Women in post-socialist Europe have been notoriously loathe to adopt feminism, which most of them see as a negative, western product (e.g., articles in Funk and Mueller 1993; Gal and Kligman 2000: 103-5; Hemment 2000; Holmgren 1995; Huseby-Darvas 1996). With or without the use of the term “feminism,” these developments make it less likely that women will be mobilized in sufficient numbers to see themselves as a “politically relevant” category and thus affect social change (Gal and Kligman 2000: 106). Indeed, the main feminist NGO in this study, Medica Zenica, was resented by many women in the town for what was perceived as Medica's closed nature and hoarding of donor resources.

We might more plausibly speak of the development of a women's “subaltern counterpublic,” in the terminology of Nancy Fraser (1997: 81). Building on and critiquing Habermas' theory of the discursive public sphere as counterweight to state and market (1989 [1962]), Fraser shows the male and class bias inherent in the idea of *a* public and points to the formation of separate publics by disenfranchised groups such as women and African-Americans in the U.S. Such arenas participate in the dominant public but because their specific modes of communication and cultures are not validated in that public, their counterpublic arenas enable them to “articulate and defend their

interests in the comprehensive public sphere” (*ibid.*). For Fraser, the cultivation of such counterpublics is the basis for true democratic practices, even in stratified societies. Bosnian women’s NGOs have been building this kind of counterpublic, although it is heavily supported by foreign officials and donors.

The relationships across international boundaries, which tend to accompany NGO activism (Keck and Sikkink 1998), raise concerns about new forms of dominance and local interpretations of western-associated, though no less indigenous, concepts such as “feminism,” “gender equality,” “nationalism,” and others (Alvarez 1998; Spivak 1996). Clashes between “western” and “eastern” women over feminism(s) were rife in the years following the collapse of socialism as western feminists expected a flowering of feminist activism now that women were free to organize (Gal and Kligman 2000). Many women from east and west have explored the assumptions and hurt feelings that went along with these exchanges (Busheikin 1993; de Soto 2000; Drakulić 1998, 1991; Funk 1993; Holmgren 1995; Šiklová 1998, 1993; and see Rofel 1994 on China). This dissertation follows in the path of recent studies that examine the forms of feminisms and approaches to gender issues in the context of donor-NGO beneficiary relationships (Hemment 2000; Ishkanian 2003; Phillips 2002).

The Bosnian context also makes visible the effects of foreign donor policies on feminist approaches to ethno-national and religious identities, a theme which has been taken up mostly by women of color and “Third World women” in response to the universalizing rhetoric of white, middle class western feminism (e.g., Collins 1991; Mohanty 1991; Moraga and Anzaldúa 1981). Similar negotiations over the meanings of ethnic identity to gender concerns/feminism, and vice-versa, became contentious issues which split feminists in both the west and the successor states of Yugoslavia over how to characterize and react to wartime rape in Bosnia and Croatia, as I detail in chapter 4. As I illuminate in chapter 5, however, local nationalists have not been the only actors that have forced ethnic categories into the lives and work of women activists. The international community, with its emphasis on creating a multi-ethnic state, has also effectively forced a “nation-ing” of gender discourses.

Studies of What Was Yugoslavia

Finally, a brief word about the place of this study in scholarship on the Balkans and what was Yugoslavia. As I have noted, studies of the region on women and gender have focused almost exclusively on Serbian and Croatian nationalisms. Bosnian women have been included largely as objects of those militaristic, nationalist projects, as victims of wartime rape. Even in this guise, only Muslim women tend to appear as the quintessential victims, ignoring the other women who live in Bosnia, many of whom *actively* engage in political and social processes. Although this study focuses on a Bosniac majority area, it includes the voices of many Serb, Croat, and “mixed” women who live there, along with those of Bosniac women. Nevertheless, the area is dominated by Muslims of various stripes. This research therefore seeks to bring consideration of Islam and its implications for women and gender relations to scholarship on the Balkans, and the Balkans to scholarship on women in Muslim societies.

This research also builds on pre-war studies of Bosnian Muslims (Burg 1983; Lockwood 1975; Rusinow 1982), especially those which revealed women’s roles in preserving ethnic and religious identity (Bringa 1995; Sorabji 1989). However, I go beyond macro level structural analysis of Bosnia (and former Yugoslavia) which have been common in the post-1990 period (e.g., Bougarel 1996; Bose 2002; Burg and Shoup 1999; Hayden 1999; Woodward 1995) to analyze the less well understood dynamics of local level activities and cultural understandings. I therefore seek to recognize continuity with past cultural forms while contributing to the small but growing body of local level studies of the greatly changed and changing cultural landscape of post-war Bosnia (Bax 2000, 1999, 1995; Laušević 1996; Maček 2000; Pickering 2001; Stefansson 2001; and other forthcoming projects from anthropology graduate students such as Kimberly Coles, Andrew Gilbert, Jennifer Erickson, and others).

CHAPTER THREE

HISTORIES OF WOMEN AND WOMEN'S ACTIVISM IN BOSNIA

Introduction

In order to situate women's wartime and post-war struggles, it is necessary to consider assumptions and habits related to gender roles, women's organizing and public activities, politics, social services, and the role of the state, which have carried over from before the 1992-5 war. This chapter therefore reviews the history of gender relations and women's organizing in Bosnia and the wider political entities of which it has been a part over the past 150 years. I place special emphasis on the most recent period under socialist Yugoslavia and on the experiences and representations of Muslim women. In the first part of the chapter, I discuss various cultural and historical legacies that left an impression on gender relations through kinship systems, religion, and state policies, both before and during socialism. Despite the legal and cultural improvements for women established by the socialist regime, significant elements of the patriarchal basis of pre-socialist life remained and have been carried through and even renewed in the post-war period. The second part of the chapter traces the history of women's movements and feminism in the region in order to show how the models developed during socialism of women's organizing have influenced the shape of women's groups formed during the recent war and after. In contrast to the common assumption that the explosion of women's organizations in the 1990's reflects a desire to advocate for women's status and human rights, I argue that the bulk of these groups were formed on the basis of models developed during socialist times, and/or on an extension of women's social networks rather than on a desire to challenge patriarchal norms in an organized, public way. It is only with the arrival of foreign donors that the language of women's rights, civil society, and NGOs has emerged among women's group members.

Women's Status: Cultural and Historical Legacies

Many accounts of women's position in the area of socialist Yugoslavia begin with reference to "traditional" kinship and subsistence patterns, notably the *zadruga* extended family household and its variations by zones of pastoralist or agricultural economies (Cockburn 1998: 156; Denich 1974;

Olujić 1998; Ramet 1992; Woodward 1985). While the “zadruga” term itself has been shown to be more national myth than a fixed and uniform family structure (Hammel 1972; Todorova 1990; Vittorelli 2002), elements of the various patriarchal kinship arrangements it described are nonetheless apparent in the present-day Balkans. In describing some of these elements, I aim to extend historical and cultural continuity beyond the socialist period to account for part of the complex web of norms and values surrounding gender relations in the post-war period.

In pointing this out, however, I do not wish to draw a firm line between “traditional,” pre-socialist kinship and gender regimes and those which developed after World War II. Such traditions have varied widely over space and time and have been transformed by and incorporated into the changing social, economic, political, and demographic realities of the past century (and more). Nevertheless, many Bosnians and foreign observers tend to chalk up patriarchal practices and norms to essentialized notions of “backward” traditions surviving unchanged from the past. Areas with pastoralist traditions such as Montenegro, Macedonia, Albania, and parts of Serbia have especially been singled out by scholars as especially patriarchal, in part because of the longer survival of the zadruga (Borneman 1998; Denich 1974; Erlich 1966; Ramet 1992; Woodward 1985). Gender regimes of agriculturalist based areas of Slovenia, Croatia and Vojvodina have been characterized in contrast as milder, though they remained distinctly patriarchal (Denich 1974; Gilliland Olsen 1990, Ramet 1992; Reed 1985).

However this is more difficult to characterize for Bosnia, as elements of “agriculturalist” tradition have also been identified there (Bresloff 1967), along with urban Muslim family structures traced to the Ottoman era. Though these distinctions risk simplistic orientalist categorization common to Balkan rhetoric (Bakić-Hayden and Hayden 1992, Bakic-Hayden 1995), aspects of each tradition can be identified to varying degrees in current family and economic structures. The terminology of the zadruga, therefore, combined with accounts of especially patriarchal gender regimes that characterize(d) “tribal” (read: primitive, backward, other) Balkan groups (Denich 1974; Erlich 1966), lend an “othering” quality to descriptions of the Balkans (Helms n.d.; Vittorelli 2002).

The “zadruga” described both an economic cooperative and a kinship structure in which patriarchal values undergirded patrilineal and patrilocal practices (Byrnes 1976; Halpern 1970; Hammel 1972). Women, in the familiar role of brides in patrilocal, patrilineal, and virifocal kinship

systems (e.g., Das 1995; Kligman 1988; Fernea 1965; Friedl 1991; Stone and James 1995; Watson 1986), were considered outsiders and were subordinated to the authority of the male hierarchy and her mother-in-law (Denich 1974; Erlich 1966; Simic 1983). This subordination was reinforced through symbolic acts of subservience such as women kissing the hands of males, remaining quiet and standing in the company of elder males (Denich 1974; Erlich 1966; Gilliland Olsen 1990; Olujic 1998; and see Kligman 1988, Whitaker 1981). A woman could improve her standing and security as the mother of sons, eventually becoming a mother-in-law herself (Simic 1983). Women's sexuality was also monitored and controlled in this system, though to varying degrees in different regions; women were confined to the homestead and related domestic, agricultural, and child rearing tasks and adultery was severely punished (Boehm 1984; Denich 1974, Erlich 1966, Halpern 1958, 1967, Hammel 1967, Gilliland Olsen 1990).³¹ Men were also confined to sex roles in the public sphere and as the authority figure of the household who did not engage in domestic "women's work" (Denich 1974, Hammel 1967, Simic 1969). Further, ethnographers described the duty of women to save their comments and disagreements for private words with their husbands so as not to compromise the outside appearance of male authority (Erlich 1966, Hammel 1982).

Though urbanization and socialism, and later war, economic collapse and forced migrations, significantly altered these patterns, many of the values and customs associated with *zadruga*-like family arrangements persisted into the socialist period (Denich 1976; Woodward 1985) and beyond.³² Tone Bringa describes a Bosnian man's hanging up laundry in the middle of the night so as to avoid showing publicly that he was doing "women's work" (1995). I encountered similar

³¹ Denich (1974) makes clear that social sanctions for adultery and out-of-wedlock births varied by region. She links this variation to differences in the importance of collective honor, or "face," of patrilineal family groups. Where collective honor is most prized— among pastoralist clans that live(d) by codes of the blood feud— women's sexuality is most closely policed. Erlich more simplistically links survival of the *zadruga* to more severe forms of women's subjugation (1966).

³² Patrilocality, while not practiced in every case, remains the ideal, especially in villages and smaller towns. However, this usually means a newly married couple will set up residence near the husband's parents rather than in the same household. In smaller towns and rural areas, one hears talk about women who "married in X town/village" (*udala se u X*), meaning that she had married a man from another place and naturally moved to where he was. This pattern was less common in urban areas where couples were happy to get housing where they could. Some still had to live with parents, in which case it was more common for the couple to live with the groom's parents, all things being equal. Post-war economic difficulties and housing shortages have complicated these patterns, preventing many couples from setting up households of their own upon marriage.

behavior on several occasions, both in smaller towns and in cities. One man playfully but resolutely ordered his wife and me out of the room while he fixed salad for the midday meal. He made it clear he was only fixing the salad because his wife was having back problems. He wanted no witnesses, however, to a job he said was not “masculine” (*nije muško*) (unlike grilling meat outdoors, which he happily did, even while posing for pictures). For the same reason, another man, who had become accustomed to helping with many domestic chores while a refugee in Germany, found the need, upon his return to a town in central Bosnia, to hide from passing neighbors as he beat dust out of the household rugs on his balcony.³³ Coffee made by a male was considered inferior and called “coffee with eggs (balls)” (*kafa s jajama*). Not surprisingly, although I encountered plenty of exceptions, most men, whether in urban or rural areas, did minimal, if any, housework (on gender and housework in the socialist period, see Woodward 1985). Those who did, especially younger men who considered themselves to be more cosmopolitan, were eager to point this out as a sign of their “modernity.”

The “traditional” male prerogative also included the right of men to beat their wives. Halpern (1958, 1972), Erlich (1966), Filipović (Hammel et. al. 1982) and others all describe wife beating (but not “too much” [Halpern and Kerewsky-Halpern 1972]) in Yugoslavia during the pre-socialist and socialist periods. According to Vera Erlich, though folk sayings and testimony from her village respondents in the 1930's indicate a quite open acceptance of men’s right, even need, to beat their wives to keep them in order, wives were being beaten less at the time of her study than had been the case before World War I (1966: 258-71). This did not necessarily indicate improvements in women’s status, however, as the younger men who condemned wife beating indicated that “they ‘know other ways and means’” to keep their wives in line (*ibid.*: 262). Domestic violence continued quietly in homes throughout socialism and was one of the first targets of neo-feminist activism beginning in the 1980s (Benderly 1997a; Jancar 1988). The economic hardships, consequences of wartime trauma, alcohol abuse, and other problems of the post-war period have exacerbated problems of domestic violence based on persevering ideologies of male authority (Medica 1999; and see Mladjenović

³³ Here, it was the place rather than the chore he considered less than manly; husbands often helped out with rug beating, as it required physical strength, yet they most often did this in the courtyard outside. The balcony was too much of a female space.

1999).

Dominant patriarchal ideologies have also been reflected in language. Ethnographers of the pre-socialist period recorded folk sayings about women which indicate a basic misogyny, e.g. “Long hair, short wit” (Erlich 1966: 262), “Trust neither dog, horse, or woman!” (*ibid.*: 260), and “Consult your horse or ox rather than your wife.” (Trouton 1952; and see Woodward 1985). Yugoslav neo-feminists wrote about curses and expressions using derogatory names for women’s genitalia which were in common use by both women and men during my fieldwork (Ugrešić 1994). Something devoid of significance is referred to as *pičkin dim*, “pussy smoke,” and a very common invective used to imply someone is being stupid or irrational is *ženska glava*, or “woman’s head.” Croatian writer Dubravka Ugrešić also pointed to the inherent homophobia, and therefore misogyny, in expressions used to denigrate less than manly men: they are called *pizde*, or “pussies” (*ibid.*). To be sure, many expressions contain references to male genitalia. However, these are generally from a male point of view or constructed upon notions of aggressive, dominating male sexuality.

It is important to note that women have also participated in and even enforced such gender ideologies and practices. Erlich’s respondents reported in many cases that women believed in their own inferiority to men, although some were beginning to challenge this in a few areas. Bosnia was one of them: women expressed bitterness at their inferior status considering their disproportionate contribution to household labor (Erlich 1966: 250). When it came to wife beating, however, many women shared the opinion of a woman from the Bijeljina district who said, “If I am in the wrong, I hold my tongue and bear it. He has the right for it’s his house I am in, his bread I eat, while my work is not admitted (sic)³⁴” (*ibid.* 262). Despite the decline of patrilocal residence, however, such attitudes persist. In 1998, Medica Zenica found that 20% of women surveyed in the Zenica municipality agreed with the statement that “It is understandable that a husband (boyfriend) beats his wife (girlfriend) if she does something wrong.” (Medica 1999).

Andrei Simić described the incentives women have for upholding the patriarchal order. Women themselves can build considerable power within the household through their sons, a phenomenon Simić termed “cryptomatriarchy” (1983). Many of my own informants argued that

³⁴ The original “*moj rad se ne prizna*” is better translated as “my work is not recognized.”

women were not at all disadvantaged in Bosnian society because of this great power they wield in the home— as one Zenica man put it, “Bosnia is at the same time a patriarchy and a matriarchy.” On countless occasions I was quoted the folk aphorism that “a house is held up by four pillars. Three are the woman, one is the man.” Not only were women’s nurturing roles a path to power in the family, but women also gained moral authority as respectable, diligent/valuable (*vrijedne*) women by demonstrating their self-sacrifice and dedication to their families. Some, both men and women, told me it was women’s own fault that they were not more visible in public and did not hold more positions of power, whether during or after socialism (see chapter 7). This was, some observed, because they refused to give up the time it took to maintain their leading role in the family. Indeed, I often witnessed or heard about women who would not let their husbands or boyfriends wash dishes or do other female-associated tasks. The women invariably said the man in question should not do these things because “he’s male” (*on je muško*). The damage these feminine tasks did to a husband or boyfriend’s masculinity was apparently out of the question for many women (see Drezgić 2002). In general, women did not want to relinquish the power they did have in their gendered roles as women, even as they strove to achieve positions of status in male-associated realms. (I explore this dynamic further in chapter 7.)

Socialism and Women

The socialist state of Yugoslavia established after the Second World War made gender equality part of their agenda. Women were to be emancipated through the uplifting of the working class. From the outset, women were granted equal legal status, the right to own and inherit property, equal rights in marriage and divorce, generous maternity and child-care benefits, and equal access to education and employment (Morokvasić 1986; Ramet 1999; Woodward 1985).³⁵ The various historically and religiously based family law codes (such as *šari’a* law governing Muslims) were abolished so that marriage and divorce were placed under civic authorities and applied equally to all citizens regardless of sex, region, or religion (Jancar-Webster 1990; Ramet 1999). In Bosnia and other areas with Muslim populations, the wearing of the face veil (*zar* and *feredža*) was outlawed

³⁵ Because of regional historical differences in legal codes, the new laws represented more drastic changes for women in some areas than in others (Woodward 1985).

in 1950, “to remove the age-old mark of subordination and cultural backwardness of Muslim women,” and to allow her to equally participate, along with other women and men, in the building of the country (Radić 1995: 216; and see Penava 1981; Milišić 1999). Abortion was legalized in 1952 and liberalized in a series of subsequent laws which eventually guaranteed all citizens the right to decide on family size (Morokvasić 1986; Ramet 1999).

As women gained education and began to be employed in wage labor outside the home, their dependence on husbands and families decreased. Marriage patterns were duly altered, as women began to be evaluated for their potential as wage-earners as well as for their household and reproductive labor. Urbanization and industrialization also affected women’s possibilities (Denich 1976), though, as Susan Woodward pointed out (1985), these varied widely according to economic status. Young women whose parents lived in university towns and cities had more support for completing higher education and thus got better jobs. These women tended to marry men of similar educational backgrounds, to initiate divorce in the case of problems, and to hyphenate their maiden names with their husbands’ surnames as a display of independence. In this way, Woodward argued, “class differences among women [were] rapidly replacing the cultural divisions that [had] formerly separated women of one region from another.” (1985: 255). This observation becomes significant when considering the 1992-5 Bosnian war and its aftermath which were accompanied by intense ethnic divisions and renewed generalizations about differences in gender relations for each ethnic group, especially when it came to the consequences of rape (see Žarkov 1999; 1995).

Among rural families, however, the changes brought by socialism meant that women were more likely to be isolated in their villages as men commuted to factories and towns to work (Bringa 1995; Woodward 1985). It was also common in the first decades of socialism for villagers, especially Muslims, to flout the law by holding girls back from schooling (Haskić 2000).³⁶ While this problem decreased over time, it points to another aspect of the uneven “emancipation” of women in

³⁶ Eight grades of education was mandated by law for both girls and boys with noncompliance punishable by a fine. However, many families opted to pay rather than send girls to school, especially beyond the fourth grade when girls would have to travel outside their villages for school (village schools only go up to the fourth grade). Many saw such education as unnecessary for leading lives as housewives and mothers. A strong fear of compromising a girl’s sexual reputation or risking her dating and marrying a non-Muslim also underlay such decisions (Haskić 2000). As an elderly Bosniac man I know explained of the early socialist period in his small town, “A female going to school? Must be a whore! That’s how it was.” (*Žensko ići u školu? To je kurva! Tako je bilo.*)

Yugoslavia (Žarkov 1991) and especially in Bosnia with its large rural and Muslim populations. This problem has resurfaced since the end of the Bosnian war among the rural poor of all religious backgrounds, indicating a persistence of patriarchal gender ideologies.

Ultimately, despite many gains for women—including rates of employment and education that far outstripped those in the “west”—Yugoslav socialism failed to achieve gender equality. In fact, Žarkov argues that the (deceptive) prosperity of the 1970s contributed more to women’s emancipation than did socialist policies of legal equality (1999). Patriarchal norms prevailed on many levels. Although women had moved into paid employment in large numbers, they remained concentrated in sex-stereotyped jobs of low status and pay (Denich 1977). Despite legal safeguards and generous maternity leaves, pregnant workers were sometimes laid off and many employers were up-front about preferring to hire men (Sklevicky 1989b; Woodward 1985). The biggest indicator of socialism’s failure, in the eyes of Yugoslav and western feminist critics, was women’s continued responsibility for housework and childcare (Benderly 1997a; Jancar 1988, 1990; Morokvasić 1986; Woodward 1985). Susan Woodward (1985) pointed to the contradictions in socialist state policy which simultaneously preached women’s equality in the workplace and politics, i.e. in traditionally male spheres, and also sought to strengthen the family as the provider of early childhood education and care of the elderly. These tasks continued to fall to women. As a result, women had less time or incentive to work for advancement into high-status and higher paying jobs or for active roles in politics³⁷ (Jancar-Webster 1988, 1990; Ramet 1984; Stakić-Domuz 1998; Woodward 1985; Žarkov 1999). Indeed, gender ideologies in which women considered care for their homes and families their primary purpose persisted (Jancar 1988: 8-9; Milić 1994), even to the extent that motherhood continued to be equated with womanhood (Žarkov 1999: chapter 1).

Sexual norms also underwent change as a result of socialism and urbanization, but again, unevenly (*ibid.*). During my fieldwork, the most liberal attitudes were found in cities and larger towns and among the educated. Except among the religious and some villagers, virginity was no

³⁷ There were token exceptions to the lack of women in politics. Milka Planinc, who served as Prime Minister in the 1980s, is well remembered as one of the few women to hold significant political office in the history of Yugoslavia. According to Ramet, she was placed in this position partly in response to feminist criticism about the lack of women in decision-making positions (1999:102). Other important “exceptions” were Savka Dabčević-Kučar and Latinka Perović, both prominent party leaders and eventual renegades in Croatia and Serbia, respectively (thanks to Dennison Rusinow for pointing out the latter two).

longer demanded of brides, though it was often assumed. The sexual double standard was alive and well, as were enduring suspicions about female sexual activities. Unmarried women were careful not to develop a reputation as “easy” (*rospija*); married women were seen as respectable when they restricted their outings to work, performing domestic duties (shopping, accompanying children), or going to respectable places in the company of their husbands or other women. In the following chapters we will see how women of all ages faced various social restrictions in their freedom of mobility and association.

Histories of Women’s Organizing and Feminism(s) in Bosnia

Many of my informants told me that women’s organizing and especially feminism were completely new to Bosnia since the recent war and its aftermath. Of course, they told me, there had been the *AFŽ* (Anti-fascist Front of Women), but they dismissed this as a quaint, comical detail from the socialist past, a state initiative (originating outside Bosnia) lacking any relevance in the present. While women’s activism and the degree to which the concept of feminism has been accepted and considered have truly mushroomed in the 1990’s, there is much women’s history in Bosnia which seems to have been erased in the public consciousness. Indeed, the history of women’s political organizing has been largely forgotten with each successive change in social and political systems throughout the recent history of Bosnia and Yugoslavia (see Sklevicky 1989b).

Women’s history in Bosnia has been overshadowed by movements in the larger cities of Belgrade and Zagreb. Similarly, the participation of Muslim (Bosniac) women is all but absent in the literature. This could partly be because Muslim women were not quite as active in public campaigns as their Serb and Croat counterparts, especially before World War II. However, it is more likely that studies of women’s activities written before the most recent war did not pay significant attention to ethnic differentiation among women as the primary issue was gender. In any case, participants in socialist women’s initiatives were unlikely to have been involved as “Muslim women,” but simply as “women.”

According to Serbian woman’s historian Neda Božinović, women in Bosnia-Herzegovina first began organizing themselves into societies and associations in the middle of the second half of the 19th century, about the same time that women in other parts of what was to become Yugoslavia

began organizing similar groups (Božinović n.d.: 2). These societies mostly engaged in educational and humanitarian work and many of them were organized on the basis of religion or ethnic membership (*ibid.*). During the period between the two World Wars, societies of intellectuals began to concern themselves with the “emancipation” and education of Muslim women, offering, as did the Sarajevo and Belgrade branches of *Gajret*, scholarships and female dormitories to enable female students to attend university (Milišić 1999: 228). In this period, women’s organizations continued their humanitarian work but also branched out into political and feminist campaigns through which they joined international feminist movements of the 1920's and 30's (Božinović n.d.; Slapšak 2000). Among several initiatives of socialist and bourgeois feminists formed on the level of Yugoslavia (and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes), many included branches in Sarajevo. These groups were the first to agitate for civic and political rights for women, including voting rights (Benderly 1997a; Božinović n.d.; Emmert 1999).

Muslim women are seldom mentioned in these accounts, despite the fact that there did seem to exist a few urban, educated Muslim women in Sarajevo and other towns who did not veil or confine themselves within the high walls of their houses (see Đilas and Gaće 1995) as many Muslim women did at the time (Božinović 1996: 92; Erlich 1966). The absence of Muslim women in these initiatives was so striking that a lone Muslim woman, Rasema Bisić, who came from Sarajevo to attend a Yugoslavia-wide women’s congress in Zagreb in 1920, caused delighted surprise and prompted praise from the other women activists in one bourgeois feminist organization for her bravery in defiance of threats of harm upon her return to Sarajevo (Emmert 1999: 42).

Socialist feminists gained strength as part of Tito’s Partizan movement during the Second World War. The Partizans held as a matter of socialist principle that women were equal with men (Jancar-Webster 1990). Indeed, many female Partizans (*Partizanke*) fought, were killed and captured, and became National Heroes during the war. It was then that the Anti-fascist Front of Women (*AFŽ*) was formed at a congress in the Bosnian town of Bosanski Petrovac (Božinović 1996; Jancar-Webster 1999, 1990; Kecman 1978). However, the AFŽ could only draw support in areas under Partizan control during the war. As many Muslim communities were suspicious of the Partizans, the AFŽ remained weak in these areas (Jancar-Webster 1990: 157). Still, Bosnian Muslim women did participate in the AFŽ, though not in top leadership positions. They were especially

active after the war in campaigns to abolish the wearing of face veils and the confinement of Muslim women (Achkoska 2002: 187; Milišić 1999).

The AFŽ as a whole was a strong movement of committed women's activists whose goals were decidedly political. Yugoslav women's historian Lydia Sklevicky argued that before it was disbanded, the AFŽ had been developing into a significant autonomous women's organization with political goals which were separate from the broader socialist movement (Sklevicky 1984, 1989b). Official socialist doctrine, however, held that the "woman question" could not be separated from class issues (Benderly 1997a; Jancar 1988; Ramet 1999).³⁸ The AFŽ activists struggled, often contradictorily, with maintaining their separate women's agenda within the larger socialist cause. There is no denying that AFŽ activists were committed to the socialist cause, nor that the AFŽ was an arm of the Party, which used the organization for its own purposes. Indeed, the AFŽ was used to achieve many of the Party's goals including civilian and military support to the Partizan fighters (Jancar-Webster 1990), educating women to support the building of a post-war socialist society (Sklevicky 1989a), and the campaign for de-veiling of Muslim women (Achkoska 2002; Penava 1981; Radić 1995: 214-218; Milišić 1999). As this benefit began to be outweighed by the dangers the AFŽ posed as an autonomous organization dealing separately with a specific issue, Party officials gradually broke up the AFŽ's organizational structure into smaller, more ineffective units, and the political (feminist) elements of their program were sharply curtailed. Ultimately, the AFŽ was disbanded in 1953, its name ceasing to officially exist (for more details see Benderly 1997a; Jancar-Webster 1990; Sklevicky 1984; 1989a). The name has remained, however, in colloquial speech as a pejorative label for any independent women's political initiative or often even merely gatherings of women, unaccompanied by males, in public places.

Since political activity could only be tied to the Party, the end of the AFŽ left little opportunity for any mass movement or activities of women on gender/women's issues. Indeed, when it dismantled the AFŽ, the state declared the "woman question" to have been solved (Jancar-Webster 1990: 166). Men and women were now equal and any challenge to the contrary would be an intrusion

³⁸ Ironically, Sklevicky pointed out, the demands and goals of the AFŽ differed little from those of the "bourgeois feminist" groups of the pre-war period, which were soundly denounced by the socialists. The main difference between these two camps, she argued, lay in their tactics and strategies (Sklevicky 1984; 1989a).

by bourgeois feminist ideas, an ideology unnecessary for the emancipated women of Yugoslavia (Benderly 1997a; Drakulić-Ilić 1984; Slapšak 2000: 36). Furthermore, the process of integration of women's activities into the rest of the party/state apparatus meant, according to Sklevicky, that "emancipation became something 'practiced' on women, as inarticulate objects of the social-political process, instead of making them its legitimate subject." (Sklevicky 1989a: 105). This "top-down" model was to leave a lasting impression on women in Yugoslavia, including many of my Bosnian informants in 1999-2000.

After it was disbanded, some of the work of the AFŽ continued, though in much diluted form, through the Union of Women's Associations and later (from 1961) the Yugoslav Conference for the Social Activity of Women (Jancar-Webster 1990: 166). The latter was a highly decentralized, loose grouping of regional organizations, including the localized, unconnected "women's actives," or *aktivni žena*, organized through Party units at various levels (Sklevicky 1989a: 103). These groups, as well as some charity and cultural societies, continued throughout the rest of the socialist period as the main form of women's community action in Bosnia until just before the recent war. It is these groups which, I argue in the following section, established a model for much of the way women's organizing developed during and after the 1990's war.

An *aktivni žena* acted as a sort of women's auxiliary section to local Party cells. They were a structure through which women, like youth, undertook collective action in their communities—cleaning up parks and streams, collecting clothing for orphan children, cooking for community events—and also went on sightseeing and leisure excursions together. These groups supported party policies but they did not engage in political debates, reflection, or activities on any issue, including those of women or gender. Since the party had declared women sufficiently emancipated, there was no need for any special attention to women's lives or problems. Several of my women's NGO informants recalled the activities of *Aktivni Žena* groups with disdain, as social and charity groups at best and tools of the party-state at the worst. One NGO leader explained this lack of political awareness saying, "They never talked about what other women in the world did, what things were like for them." In short, these groups had lost the gender-critical edge and autonomous activism of the early AFŽ and had turned into a social outlet for women in an essentially patriarchal socialist society (see Jancar-Webster 1990; Sklevicky 1989a).

In the larger cities of Belgrade, Zagreb, and Ljubljana, in the meantime, there seem to have been many women still interested in AFŽ-like activism. Slapšak reports that in Belgrade in the 1970's,³⁹ veterans of the AFŽ era appeared at meetings of the burgeoning new Yugoslav feminism, “eager to explain how their movement had been repressed after the war, and how they [had] waited for something similar to happen again” (2000: 37). These meetings in Belgrade, Zagreb, and Ljubljana were the beginning of a “neo-feminist” (Jancar-Webster 1988, 1990) or “second wave” feminist movement⁴⁰ which was to develop a gender-based critique of socialism (Benderly 1997a; Drakulić 1993a; Ramet 1999). The women involved mostly belonged to an educated, urban elite; many of them were social science academics and journalists. While this movement grew modestly in Belgrade, Zagreb and Ljubljana, it did not take hold in Bosnia, although women from Sarajevo, notably Nada Ler-Sofronić, participated in feminist conferences and published feminist articles in the local press (Slapšak 2000: 58). Furthermore, many women and girls in Bosnia read the writings of Zagreb and Belgrade feminists in the Yugoslav press, a fact that must not be forgotten when considering the antecedents of feminist or woman-centered consciousness in wartime and post-war Bosnia.

While it is beyond the scope of this project, it would be interesting to explore the reasons for the non-development of feminist groups in Bosnia, beyond stereotypical assumptions implied by many outside observers that Bosnian society, especially Muslim society, was (and is?) too conservative and patriarchal for women to attempt such a critique. The answer is more likely to be found in the prevailing political climate in Sarajevo in the 1970's, which was much more closed than in the other cities at the time due to attempts to suppress Bosnia's political cleavages and the republican government's strict loyalty to the party-state (Friedman 1997; Rusinow 1985; Slapšak

³⁹ Ramet (1995) dates the beginnings of the neo-feminist activities to the mid 1960s in Zagreb, though most accounts begin with the 1970's.

⁴⁰ The term “movement” may be misleading, as some observers have questioned whether feminist activities of this period were strong enough and organized enough to earn this characterization. The late Belgrade feminist and anthropologist, Žarana Papić, wrote that “before 1989 and before the war in Yugoslavia, we could say that although we *didn't have a feminist movement* in ex-Yugoslavia, we had feminists.” (Papić 1995: 19, emphasis added). However, as Žarkov points out, the fact that feminists enjoyed visibility in the press and other spaces of public discourse, and that first socialist and later nationalist governments “considered them important enough to fight against,” (1999: chapter 1, p. 20) was an indication that feminism had achieved some level of influence.

2000). This atmosphere also encompassed the universities. In fact, many people left Sarajevo for Zagreb and Belgrade at that time seeking wider intellectual and professional opportunities (Slapšak 2000).

This second-wave feminist movement did, however, contribute to the specific development of women's organizing and feminism in Bosnia after the collapse of socialism and especially after the war. The academic feminist movement of the 1980's spawned a generation of feminist activists who initiated domestic violence hotlines and political pressure groups in the late 1980's and early 1990's in Belgrade, Zagreb, and Ljubljana (Benderly 1997a; Slapšak 2000; Žarkov 1999). These groups were in place when Yugoslavia began its violent break-up. They led the efforts to aid women victims of war and to publicize the news of mass rapes of women happening in Bosnia (see Benderly 1997b; Dević 2000; Kesić 1994; Mladjenović and Litricin 1993). Some feminist organizations, mostly in Zagreb, took the side of local nationalists on this issue, declaring Croatian and Muslim women victims of a uniquely Serbian campaign against the Croat and Muslim peoples (Benderly 1997b; Kesić 1994; Žarkov 1999). These groups forged links with Bosnian women refugees, who were in turn inspired to form their own women's organizations (such as *Žena BiH* and *Biser*) and later to carry these initiatives to Bosnia. *Srcem do mira*, discussed in chapters 5 and 7, was one of the groups these women formed when they returned to Bosnia.

Most of the veterans of second-wave Yugoslav feminism remained staunchly anti-nationalist. Feminist groups in Belgrade and anti-nationalist feminists in Zagreb included many such veterans as well as members of the newer generation of feminists. These groups coalesced around their opposition to nationalism, militarism, and sexism. They endured harassment from local nationalist governments and media for their positions, especially on the wartime rapes in Bosnia and Croatia (Kesić 1994). They refused to see the rapes only as ethnic attacks and instead insisted on the gender aspect—these were first and foremost crimes against women, though they did not deny the ethnic component. (I discuss these stances further in chapter 4.) As a reflection of their anti-nationalist convictions, these women determinedly maintained contact with each other despite many obstacles and hostile borders between Serbia and Croatia (Benderly 1997b; Teršelić 1997; Žarkov 1999). It was this motive and their concern for what was happening to women in the war zones which led these anti-nationalist feminists to organize aid for Bosnian refugee women in their local communities

and to contact women in Bosnia even during the war. These contacts— through the *Zamir* (“for peace”) email network, sending packages and letters, and even some visits— formed a bond that would be nurtured after the war as the number of Bosnian women’s groups, including those that accepted feminism, grew.

Historical Legacies

During and after the most recent war, foreign and local observers alike frequently assumed that the accompanying explosion of women’s organizations, including some that embrace feminism, was the sole product of international intervention, especially from the west. However, as I show below, much of the way in which current women’s groups are organized and the philosophies by which they operate can be traced to women’s initiatives of the past and attitudes about them. I refer mostly to the AFŽ and the system of *aktivni žena* under socialism, but there are also elements which can be traced to the “bourgeois” women’s movements of the 1920's and 1930's and simply to general social patterns.

During my fieldwork, I often heard disparaging references to the AFŽ. Women and men alike seemed to dismiss it as a long-past element of socialist kitsch and utopian campaigns. For some it represented a more threatening image of “aggressive” women making demands. On one occasion during my fieldwork, during a League of Women Voters round table in the west Herzegovinan town of Široki Brijeg, the mere appearance of a large group of women in a hotel restaurant normally dominated by men was enough for some men gathered there for a long lunch (complete with wine and brandy) to condescendingly intone, “Ugh, here’s the AFŽ” (*Uf, evo AFŽa*) for everyone to hear. One man who had apparently seen a poster advertising the round table theme “Towards Equality,” approached one of the women organizers and said, “So you’re the group for equality, huh? What do you need that for? You’re already more than equal!” (*E, vi ste ona grupa za ravnopravnost, je’l? Šta će vam to? Vi ste već nadravnopravne!*). The women participants, who came from various towns nearby as well as other areas of Bosnia, were amused but irritated and began exchanging stories among themselves about similar attitudes toward their organizing they had endured from men in their communities. As we finished our coffee break and began to file back into the hotel, there were several loud, purposeful belches from the men’s table. Clearly they were threatened by the women’s

“invasion” of “their” space, both in the restaurant and as political actors. The women were equally dismissive of the men’s behavior, chalking it up to men’s consistent efforts to exclude women from the political arena.

Despite these associations, the impact of the AFŽ, and that of all socialist policies of sex equality, was substantial. Svetlana Slapšak, in arguing for a gendered history of conflict in the former Yugoslavia, writes of the immediate post-war period and the activities of the AFŽ:

I cannot underline enough the positive effects this politics [sic] had for Yugoslav women: gaining rights, equality, liberty and self-confidence, assured basic health and family protection, the will and possibility to work, a high level of feminine consciousness and a sense of initiative. Although this privileged epoch for women was relatively short, the results in the collective women’s attitude remained much longer. (2000: 34)

While I found much evidence of women’s *reluctance* to engage themselves in the public sphere, especially politics, I nonetheless agree that some degree of confidence and sense of entitlement existed for women, at least in the realms of employment, education, and social benefits (see Gal and Kligman 2000: 111). Even among women and men who embraced very patriarchal notions about women’s roles (as mothers, homemakers, care-givers and wives) or who emphatically rejected communist/socialist ideas, the presence of women in the workplace and the many rights they enjoyed under socialism were often taken for granted. In one sense, then, the legacy of socialism on gender relations is that women have gained the freedom and social validation to pursue high levels of education, to work outside the home, and to be active in the public sphere. However, as we have seen, socialism did little to dislodge traditional patriarchal values and practices. These attitudes among women and men have persisted in the recent post-war period.

Furthermore, in terms of women’s activism and political initiatives, after the dilution of the AFŽ’s agenda and its ultimate demise, women were left with virtually no channels through which to engage society on the “woman question” or any questions of gender. The rich history of women’s organizing and feminist social critiques was obscured and labeled bourgeois by the socialist authorities, while the sharp political edge of Party-related women’s activities has also been largely

forgotten in the collective memory (Skevicky 1989b).⁴¹ To be sure, the memory of the AFŽ and women Partizan fighters (*Partizanke*) are still very much alive. However most people I encountered, including many women and women activists, viewed those activities as no longer necessary since, with the AFŽ and the Party, women achieved formal equality, the right to vote, access to education and jobs, social benefits, etc. (though some felt socialism had gone too far). The impression was widespread that there was thus no need for women's activism or feminism in Bosnia. I repeatedly heard that "women have all their rights" and that "there is no discrimination against women." Indeed, I met many members and leaders of women's organizations who maintained that women only needed support in carrying out their familial duties, recovering from wartime trauma, and in making ends meet financially. In other words, women need help to overcome the consequences of the war— as victims— and in fulfilling their domestic roles, but not in fighting for improved social status or political rights. This impression made it more difficult for feminists or any activists who publicly challenge the patriarchal underpinnings of the present system, just as it had for the second wave feminists of Yugoslavia. What were they agitating for when women had complete equal rights?⁴²

It is precisely this model of state-directed "emancipation" that was carried over to the generations born under socialism who would become members of women's organizations in post-war Bosnia. Azra, a Medica activist in her mid 20's, conveyed both the widespread sense of entitlement for women (to certain rights, social benefits, and legal recognition) and also the impression she and the other women of Medica had had about their possibilities for engaging in women's activism:

With us it was a spontaneous reaction. We didn't think about it. We had our rights

⁴¹ Skevicky notes that the image of the socialist woman, for which the AFŽ and the Party professed to be fighting, underwent a drastic change between the 1940's and 1950 onward. Though never made explicit, the emphasis moved to "traditionally 'feminine' issues...: family, housekeeping, fashion, popular medicine, entertainment, cultural life, etc. The 'serious' subjects, i.e. general political themes, gradually faded away. The image of the ascetic combatant-cum-worker-cum-political activist was gradually and silently being abandoned." (Skevicky 1989a: 104).

⁴² On the other hand, the fact that most socialist policies towards women gained such wide acceptance, at least among the secular, urban middle-class and elites, meant that there was little support in Bosnia for nationalist and religious calls to roll back rights and provisions benefitting women as happened in so many other post-socialist states (see e.g., Gal and Kligman 2000; Funk and Mueller 1993).

and holidays⁴³ under socialism. When we met the German women we realized that in the west, they had had to fight for this kind of thing! ... I never realized before that something could be organized on these issues, some kind of struggle. I knew about the AFŽ but I thought that was for the state to organize because under socialism women did have some sort of valued status. But now, many women don't know about feminism, their rights, or even the fact that they took over a powerful role during the war without the men.

Feminism and activism for Azra were thus spontaneous, a response to the conditions of women's suffering during the war. I return in chapter 6 to the specific articulations of Bosnian feminism.

Still, when the war began in 1992 and again after Dayton, there were models for women's community engagement: the *aktivni žena*, and the women's cells of the AFŽ organized in villages and towns to support the military. Indeed, in some places the same women from the socialist era *aktivs* were the ones who organized themselves during and after the recent war. In wartime, the women performed many of the same tasks as their WWII predecessors (see Jancar-Webster 1990; Sklevicky 1989a). They cooked hot meals and knitted sweaters for the soldiers at the front, cared for the wounded, and gathered donations to help the elderly and the most needy in their communities. Some of these organizations even called themselves "Aktiv Žena." Many post-war women's organizations proudly displayed the certificates they had received from the army for supporting the war effort and aiding soldiers. When the war ended, many of the wartime groups stayed together, and some new groups formed, on the model of the socialist era *aktivs*, functioning mainly as a social outlet and source of mutual aid but also undertaking various charity initiatives. The activities of these organizations were, however, altered to accommodate the post-war situation of women and the donor-driven NGO economy. I take this up again in chapter 5. First, however, we must turn to the events of the war.

⁴³ Here she refers to March 8th, International Women's Day, which was promoted by the socialist government. It remains a popularly observed holiday even in the post-war period, despite clamorings from Islamists (in Bosniac-majority areas) that it be ignored for being "communist" and "un-Islamic."

CHAPTER FOUR

WARTIME: GENDER, NATIONALISM, AND MASS RAPE

Introduction

This chapter outlines the circumstances around the dissolution of socialist Yugoslavia and the subsequent Bosnian war as they pertain to women and understandings of gender. Wartime events, the debates surrounding them, and the outside interventions they provoked, provided the basis for many of the categories of identity and concrete issues around which women's organizations organized themselves during and after the war. My aim is to show how those categories were formed in order to establish the underpinnings of women's subsequent expressions of identity and their organizational and representational strategies as activists. Because this study is based on women activists in Muslim/Bosniac dominated areas, I concentrate on discourses, policies, and agendas circulating in and affecting those areas. I leave a similar examination of Serb and Croat dominated areas of Bosnia for another study.

In this chapter, I first discuss the politicization of ethno-national and religious identities encouraged under socialism and expressed through the rise of nationalist politics and the outbreak of war. I then examine the gendered logic of ethnic violence, wartime rape, and sexual violence and their impact on women and gender constructions. I also discuss the debates sparked, mostly among feminists, about the rapes and how they were represented by nationalists, feminists, and others. The final section of this chapter examines how gendered experiences of war, especially ethnic cleansing campaigns, mass rapes, and the politicization of ethnic and religious identities, defined the issues for women's organizations of all orientations, propelling them to organize and providing them with a measure of moral legitimacy as public actors. The intersection of these wartime legacies with those of the socialist and pre-socialist periods, discussed in the previous chapter, profoundly affected the possibilities, limitations and agendas of post-war women's organizing.

Ethnic, National, and Religious Identities

Ethno-national identity and its primary marker, religious identity, quickly became the dominant categories of identity in Bosnia as part of the process of the dissolution of socialist

Yugoslavia. For many urban Bosnians, who had not taken much notice of others' ethnic or religious affiliations under socialism, it seemed that such awareness was suddenly thrust upon them with the election of nationalist parties, disputes over the future of Bosnia, and the outbreak of ethnic war. Parents told of their shock when children came home from school during the build-up to the war, wanting to know "what am I?" I was told over and over that ethnicity had not mattered "before," that members of all groups had "lived side by side without problems." For some, this was entirely accurate. In general, however, it was an over-simplification, told to foreigners, to other Bosnians, and to the speakers themselves (see Živković 2001), as a way of countering images of Bosnia (and the Balkans) as a nationalist hotbed where ethnic hatred ran deep (e.g., Kaplan 1993). It was also a claim to moral superiority, refusing to succumb to what, in Bosniac areas, was seen as the evils encouraged by Serb and Croat nationalisms, i.e., separatism, ethnic exclusion, and genocide.

Muslims, Croats, and Serbs *had* lived peacefully in the same communities, sharing their lives with each other, even intermarrying.⁴⁴ Bosnia-Herzegovina had the highest rate of "mixed marriages" of any Yugoslav republic.⁴⁵ Yet this applied more to the secularized, urban population. Villages remained ethnically homogeneous, or were divided into ethnic neighborhoods. As Tone Bringa's work (1995) shows, village relations of exchange and mutual help crossed ethnic and religious boundaries, yet intermarriage was rare.⁴⁶ The many stories I was told about pre-war life in smaller towns and villages confirmed this. Milica, an educated woman of Serb background living in Bosniac-

⁴⁴ Nikolai Botev (Botev and Wagner 1993; Botev 2000) argues that rates of mixed marriage in Yugoslavia were actually quite low and therefore did not signal social cohesion (see also Simic 1994). This persuasively underscores the observation that an all-encompassing "Yugoslav" identity never took hold in significant numbers in Yugoslavia. However, as V.P. Gagnon (1993, 1994) pointed out in response to Botev and Simic, looking at Yugoslavia as a whole, with its many regions of ethnic homogeneity, is misleading. He argues that levels of mixed marriage *in mixed ethnic regions* such as much of Bosnia-Herzegovina were quite high in relative terms, even though overall Yugoslav levels remained lower.

⁴⁵ Differing percentages have been calculated for mixed marriages in Bosnia: Burg and Shoup give the number 15.3% for 1981 (1999: 42), Bogosavljević calculated 16.8% for the same year (1992:32-3); John A. Fine asserts that 30-40% of *urban* marriages were mixed as of 1990 (1993: 2). Nikolai Botev (2000) offers the following percentages:

	1962-64	1970-72	1980-82	1987-89
percentages:	11.4	9.5	12.2	11.9

⁴⁶ In fact, several scholars point out that most Bosnian mixed marriages involved Serbs and Croats rather than Muslims. Bogosavljević calculated that 95.3% of Muslim women and 92.9% of Muslim men married other Muslims (Bogosavljević 1992: 32-3).

dominated Zenica, grew up in a central Bosnian market town. In attempting to explain to me a different quality “in the mentality of Bosnia” (in contrast to Serbia and Croatia), she characterized this as “a kind of tolerance which means putting up with others.” She continued:

I’m thinking about this in the context of the pre-war, multi-ethnic Bosnia that I grew up in. You knew what you could say to whom and what you couldn’t, what subjects not to pursue with neighbors of other ethno-religious groups (*nacije*). You tolerated lots of things because you knew it was better not to push. This was especially true in terms of putting your neck out in public and exposing your position, especially in any criticism of the government. And women were especially not used to having deep conversations.... Most of all national and religious things were off limits to really probing conversations, which is a good thing I think.

Others told of a profound respect for members of other *nacije*, of attending each others’ religious and cultural celebrations, and of enduring cross-ethnic kinship and exchange networks. There was a clear sense of differences marked and maintained among groups (Bringa 1995; Lockwood 1975), simultaneous coexistence and competition (Bringa 1995: 17-18; Hayden 2002). As Xavier Bougarel writes, “the words ‘tolerance,’ ‘hate,’ ‘coexistence,’ and ‘fear’ are all equally applicable. In essence, they are complementary or consecutive rather than contradictory.” (1996: 87).

Under socialism, with urbanization and secularization, such differences had significantly diminished in importance, yet they were still present. Cornelia Sorabji’s ethnography set in a Muslim *mahala* (quarter) in Sarajevo (1989) makes clear that ethnically homogeneous neighborhoods and moral communities existed, even in the capital. Like the differences Bringa describes between the village and the wider world (towns), the inscription of space in the city also delineated the “ethnic,” private space of the *mahala* from the non-ethnic (and multi-ethnic), public space of the city center. Still, until the breakdown of state authority, the institution of *komšiluk*, or good neighborliness, promoted smooth relations despite ethno-religious differences, especially in the mixed urban apartment high-rises in the newer parts of the cities and towns (see Bougarel 1996).

On the political scene, however, ethno-national differences were actually fostered, despite official state doctrine of “brotherhood and unity” among nations (*narodi*) and nationalities (*narodnosti*), and in contrast to the assertions of many scholars and journalists that socialism had

“frozen” nationalist consciousness (Bougarel 1996). National (ethnic) differences were maintained and even reinforced through census categories and carefully balanced power-sharing mechanisms that reserved positions in governing bodies for members of each nation, or nationality (the *ključ*, or “key,” system of ethnic quotas) (Bringa 1995: 12-36; Bougarel 1996; Burg 1983; Rusinow 1982, 1985). Žarkov thus points out that, under socialism, “ethnicity became the most significant channel through which power was distributed,” and concludes that, “nationalism in former Yugoslavia did not replace socialism, but actually grew out of it” (1999: chapter 1, p. 9).

For Bosnia, one of the most significant measures undertaken by the Yugoslav state was the official creation, in time for the 1971 census, of a Muslim *narod*, or nation/people, designated *Muslimani* with a capital “M” (distinct from the religious *muslimani* with a small “m”). This placed Bosnian Muslims on par with the other five *narodi* of Yugoslavia, which included Serbs and Croats. Before this designation, Muslims went through several different census categories through which they declared themselves— as Serbs or Croats, “undeclared,” or “Muslims, ethnic adherence” (Bringa 1995; Bougarel 1996; Burg 1983; Irwin 1984; Ramet 1985; Rusinow 1982, 1985). For some, this change indicated a long overdue validation of the collective cultural identity of the Bosnian Muslims and a hope that the designation would silence longstanding claims by Serbs and Croats that the Muslims were “really” Islamicized Serbs or Croats, respectively. The move was mostly made for political reasons, to satisfy Bosnian Muslim demands, impress Muslim allies in the Non-Aligned Movement, and because the socialist state hoped to introduce a balance to competing claims to power in Bosnia-Herzegovina (Bringa 1995; Burg 1983; Rusinow 1982; Sorabji 1989). Žarkov argues that the name “Muslim” as an ethnonym confirmed the impossibility of imagining religiously diverse ethnic categories in Yugoslavia. In other words, from that point forward, all Croats were necessarily Catholic and all Serbs were necessarily Orthodox (1999: chap. 1, p. 9). I would argue that this categorization merely confirmed a social reality (Bringa 1995; Sorabji 1989) which at the time would have been difficult to reverse in the way Žarkov suggests. Nevertheless, this religious-ethnic categorization was to have political and social consequences during the break-up of socialist Yugoslavia and contributed to the politicization of religion as the primary marker of ethnic difference in Bosnia.

Nationalism and ethnic consciousness were thus alive and well when Yugoslavia began its

final slide into disintegration in the 1980's. After the death in 1980 of President for life Josip Broz Tito, power devolved more and more to the republics, most of which were defined in ethnic terms as the homeland of one of Yugoslavia's six peoples. Bosnia-Herzegovina was the only republic not associated with one dominant ethnic group; "Bosnian," a common term of identification, was strictly a regional distinction. Because Muslims held a plurality of the population in Bosnia, some Muslim leaders began arguing as early as the early 1980's that Bosnia-Herzegovina should be redefined as the national republic of the Muslims (Rusinow 1985: 151). The dwindling of a strong central authority and a "nationalist transfer of economic and political frustrations" to the republics and regions led to a reevaluation of national identities, religious revivals, and an increasing reliance on "communitarian," or ethno-national, political thinking (Bougarel 1996).

Thus, when the first multi-party elections were held in 1990, the majority voted along ethnic lines (*ibid.*). The national(ist), or ethnically based parties in Bosnia were thus in a position to contest dominance in the republic, against each other and among themselves. Serb leaders called for Bosnia to remain in Yugoslavia (with their fellow Serbs in Serbia) or have it partitioned along ethnic lines; Muslims concluded they could not remain in a Serb-dominated Yugoslavia if Croatia seceded (which it did) and insisted on an integral Bosnia-Herzegovina; and Croats went along with plans for independence until they could launch a military campaign to wrest predominantly Croat lands from Bosnia and join them to Croatia (Bougarel 1996; Burg & Shoup 1999). The war broke out when political negotiations failed and Bosnia declared independence (after Serb representatives had walked out of the parliament).⁴⁷ The logic of ethnic control of territory, enshrined in European ideologies of the nation-state, led to brutal campaigns of "ethnic cleansing" waged by Serb and then Croat forces, but to a lesser extent by the Muslim-led Bosnian Army. Ethnic cleansing was aimed at clearing ethnic others and all symbols of their ethnic otherness, especially mosques and churches, from the land (Borneman 1998; Denich 1994; Hayden 1996a). These campaigns had a specifically gendered component, which I explore below.

Independence and war also brought an attempt on the part of the Muslim leadership to strengthen the ethnic identity of the nation over the religious while simultaneously strengthening the

⁴⁷ A full outline of the events leading up to the outbreak of war in Bosnia is beyond the scope of this study. Among many accounts, see e.g. Bougarel 1996; Burg & Shoup 1999; Woodward 1995.

group's ties to the territory of Bosnia. This was accomplished through the (re)introduction of "Bosniac" (*Bošnjak*) as a replacement for "Muslim."⁴⁸ Since 1993, the term Bosniac has gradually gained acceptance, especially in official parlance. The international community, for example, enshrined the term into the Dayton Peace Agreement and its subsequent documents.⁴⁹ However, Serb and Croat politicians tend to retain the term "Muslim," as do many "ordinary" people of all ethnic backgrounds, whether for political reasons or because they simply find it difficult to shake the habit. "Muslim," therefore, was still understood in cultural/ethnic terms, as before the war. Additionally, while official usage has made clear that Bosniac refers only to the Muslims, some confusion remains about this term, as some Bosnians I met defined "Bosniac" as referring to all Bosnians regardless of religious or ethnic background. When not specifically asked for their definition, however, nearly everyone used the geographical term "Bosnian," or *Bosanac*, when speaking of Bosnians in general. This usage was also politically charged, as it usually signaled support for Bosnia as a unified state and was therefore avoided by Serbs and Croats who opposed the state. This was likely part of the reason for the inaccurate use, especially in the English-language press, of "Bosnian" to refer to Bosnian Muslims only.

This move away from the religious term "Muslim" did not, however, signal a distancing from religion. In fact, Islam has remained central to official and dominant definitions of Bosniac identity (Bougarel 1995; Maček 1997). There has been a marked resurgence in devotion to Islam (Laušević 1996; Sorabji 1994), actively encouraged by the SDA government, and the Islamic establishment close to it (Bougarel 1995), even though they are actively promoting the secular term Bosniac. Nevertheless, substantial numbers of people who readily identify themselves as Bosniacs, or Muslims (in the ethnic sense), have not embraced Islam (Maček 1997), retaining the secularism

⁴⁸ This term had been promoted during the Austrian occupation and annexation of Bosnia (1878-1917) by the Hapsburg governor of the province, Benjamin Kallay. Originally intended as an overarching national category that would encompass all Bosnians, it only took hold among Muslims (Banac 1984: 360-1). The term resurfaced in the early 1980's in the rhetoric of "secular" nationalists who advocated a leading role for Muslims in the concept of "*bošnjaštvo*," or "Bosnianhood" (Rusinow 1985). In the early 1990's, soon after the founding of the SDA, secular nationalists, who had promoted the term as a communal rather than strictly religious term, were forced out of the party by the pan-Islamist wing (Bougarel 1997a, 1996). The pan-Islamists nevertheless began promoting the *Bošnjak* term, though with a strong Islamic emphasis.

⁴⁹ See the Dayton Agreement and other governing documents compiled by the international community at <http://www.ohr.int>.

which was widespread among Bosnian Muslims in the pre-war years (Bringa 1995). I return at the end of this chapter to the ways in which changes in ethnic and religious identities during the war affected women's activists in the Bosniac areas of Bosnia. I first turn to one of the most contentious and highly gendered aspects of the war: rape.

Gender, Nationalism, and Wartime Rape⁵⁰

The Bosnian war brought the subject of wartime rape to world attention with reports of mass rapes by Serb forces of Muslim and Croat women. One of the most striking elements was the existence of "rape camps" where victims were held and repeatedly raped over long periods, often until pregnant. The targeting of ethnic others was shown to be part of a wider campaign of "ethnic cleansing" in which gendered bodies of the enemy were targeted for conquest through rape and other sexual tortures as a key element in driving out undesirables, redefining the ethnicity of territory (Žarkov 1999; and see Hayden 2000). Although facts and numbers surrounding the rapes have been highly politicized, contested, and difficult to substantiate (Carr 1993; Kesić 1994; Laber 1993; Neier 1993), evidence does point to Serbs, especially early in the war, as the most frequent perpetrators of ethnic rape, with mostly Muslim, but also Croat, women as their victims (Amnesty International 1993; Bassiouni 1996; Kesić 1995; Korać 1996; Stiglmyer 1994). However, males were also raped and sexually tortured, as were Serb females; and Muslim and Croat forces also used rape and sexual torture as weapons of war and ethnic cleansing (Bassiouni 1996; Borneman 1998; Jones 1994; Nizich 1994; Žarkov 1999).

During and just after the war, many academic and feminist activist analyses outlined the broader gendering of Serbian and Croatian nationalist discourses upon which the use and understanding of ethnic rape was built (e.g. Denich 1995; Drakulić 1993a; Kesić 1994, 1995; Korać 1996; Milić 1993; Mostov 1995; Olujić 1998; Salecl 1994; Seifert 1996; Sofos 1996; and articles in Williams 1995). In perhaps the most extensive study, Dubravka Žarkov showed how ethnicity and nationalism in the Croatian and Serbian media were produced *through* notions of gender and

⁵⁰ In a longer study on wartime rape (Helms 1998), I examine in detail the ways in which rape in Bosnia was represented by nationalists, feminists, and international legal codes. I summarize some of those points in this chapter.

sexuality in the years prior to and during the wars in Croatia and Bosnia (1999). She argued that notions of femininity and masculinity and norms of heterosexuality... are the basic ingredients without which ethnicity could never have been produced, without which the process of production itself would have remained unintelligible. We would make little out of national myths, practices of ‘ethnic cleansing,’ or stories about [the] motherland, were they not conveyed through images of chaste maidens, refugee women, or brave soldiers. (1999: prologue, p. 8-9).

Nationalist projects in what was Yugoslavia have not only targeted the ethnic self and the ethnic other differently, but also men and women within these two groups, in patterns familiar from many other contexts of gendered nationalism (e.g. Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1989; Enloe 1989, 1995; McClintock 1993; Moghadam 1994; Parker et. al. 1992; West 1997; Williams 1996; Yuval-Davis 1997). While the nation’s men are cast as soldiers, politicians, and active defenders of the nation’s territory and honor, women come to symbolize and embody the passive (feminized) nation, whose body/land and honor must be defended by men.⁵¹

Women also become symbols of ethno-national difference through their dress, demeanor, life choices, and behaviors, just as women and girls reflect the honor of their families (McClintock 1993; Mostov 1995; Schein 1996; C. Smith 1996; Tohidi 1996). Carol Smith (1996) argues that groups such as nations which define themselves along ethnic lines rely on specific controls of female sexuality as a way of ensuring ethnic and cultural purity. One reflection of this imperative are pronatalist campaigns targeting women of the nation– emphasizing motherhood, providing incentives for women to bear many children, and restricting abortion and contraception, all of which happened in the Yugoslav successor states, especially Serbia and Croatia (Bracewell 1996; Drakulić 1993a; Mostov 1995; Salecl 1994; Sofos 1996). Women’s active roles were thus reduced to their reproductive activities, as bearers and also nurturers of new (loyal) members of the nation, future male soldiers and female “reproducers of the nation” (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1989; Bracewell 1996).

Following from this logic, restrictions on women are also justified to defend them “from the

⁵¹ This logic was reflected in such expressions as the “Rape of Nanking” (Brownmiller 1975) and the “Rape of Kuwait” (Jeffords 1993).

allegedly insatiable sexuality of other nations' men" (Verdery 1994: 228). The rape of women is then seen as loss of control over women's sexuality by men, a blow to men's and thereby the family's honor. As an ethnic nation is constructed as a "family writ large" (Anderson 1983), violation of "the nation's women" is understood as humiliation and pollution of the nation (Das 1995; Lie 1997; Mostov 1995; Peterson 1994; Seifert 1996; Verdery 1994). Rape is thus meaningful when "the honor of the group (in which males are the normative actors) is determined by the honor of its women and by the masculinity of its men" (Hayden 2000:32).

Indeed, as Veena Das noted in the case of inter-communal rapes during the partition of India (1995), the bodies of women are merely the means through which a message is sent from one group of men to the other. It is a message of defeat, of bolstered manliness of the self while the masculinity of the other is wounded, even questioned for failing to protect "his" women. It thus follows that such messages were also sent via the bodies of other men in acts of ultimate de-masculinization. In the former Yugoslavia, this took the form of both media representations and physical acts. Ethnically other men were placed in the feminine inferior, penetrated, and passive role through rape (see Gatens 1996; Lancaster 1995), made to perform homosexual acts on other men, or were genitally mutilated, all acts, like the rape of women, which demasculinize men and render them unfit for nationhood or dominance over any other group (Borneman 1998; Žarkov 1999). These images, especially of Serb rapists in Croatian media and of Muslim rapists in Serbian media, also conformed to patterns of "nested" Orientalist positioning common to the former Yugoslavia (Bakić-Hayden 1996; Bakić-Hayden and Hayden 1992) and the feminization of the male other as described by Said (1978; and see Borneman 1998; Žarkov 1995, 1999).

Mass rape has also been understood and portrayed in the post-Yugoslav states in a "sociobiological" sense (Borneman 1998): committed with the aim of impregnating victims to spread the seed of the aggressor and/or contaminate the gene pool of the victims' ethnic/national group.⁵² Women's role as reproducer of nations was in this way taken to its logical conclusion. Non-Serb

⁵² This explanation was also applied to other conflicts, as when the rape of (shorter, darker) Bengali women by (taller, lighter) Pakistani troops in 1971 was said to be an army policy to "create a new race" (Brownmiller 1975:86). In Rwanda, Hutu soldiers raped and mutilated Tutsi women, often cutting away long noses and long fingers associated with being Tutsi, as well as mutilating women's genitals, an attack on their femaleness and capacity to give birth (Nowrojee 1996:62-5). One Tutsi woman reported Hutu soldiers exhorting each other to, "Kill them, you have to kill them. They will make Tutsi babies" (Nowrojee 1996:54).

survivors reported being told by Serb rapists during the rapes that they were being impregnated with the enemy's seed and that "you will give birth to a Četnik (Serb warrior)!" (Mežnarić 1994a:77; and see Ajanović et. al. 1999; Stiglmayer 1994). One woman reported being warned that her child would one day kill her, with the implication that the nationality of a child comes from the father while the mother is merely a carrying vessel (Mostov 1995). Even though a mother raising such a "mixed" child was likely to bring it up with her own ethnic identity, or, as many are reported to have done, refuse to keep the children they bore (Stiglmayer 1994:131-7), the idea that "little Chetniks" were being introduced into the gene pools of non-Serbs was largely accepted according to the patrilineal rule which assigns children the identity of their fathers (Mostov 1995; Mežnarić 1994a, 1994b). Indeed, women's rejection of children born of rape may have indicated the women's acceptance of this logic, in addition to their rejection of a reminder of their ordeal.

Likewise, in the Serbian nationalist imagination, Serb manhood, and thereby also Serb nationhood, was most injured by the impregnation of Serb women— not "just" their rape— by Muslim men and thus their giving birth to the children of the other (Žarkov 1999: Chap. 4: 7-12). The insult was therefore inflicted on Serb manhood/nationhood through the pollution of the Serb nation/ Serb men's capacity to reproduce itself, i.e., the capacity of Serb women to bear Serb children. As Žarkov concludes from her analysis of Serbian media:

the raped Serb women gained relevance in the representation only in as much as they were impregnated by Muslim men. Thus, the story about forced pregnancies again pointed back to the Serb men as the victim. ...hated by the world and deprived of his [pure Serb] offspring. (*ibid.*: Chap. 4: 15)⁵³

A final point about the logic of the rapes in Bosnia involves its use as a weapon of ethnic cleansing. Central to this strategy was the re-imagining of territory, much of which had been inhabited by ethnic mixtures and the ethnically mixed (mixed marriages, etc.). This meant redefining

⁵³ Žarkov found that representations in the Croatian media differed from those of the Serbian media, due to their differently constructed nationalisms. While Serbian media emphasized injury to the nation/Serb men, Croatian media emphasized the state. Thus, in the Croatian media, Muslim women appeared as the only victims of rape, thus preserving the purity of Croatian women (see also Kesić 1995; Lie 1997); Serb men were depicted as the only perpetrators of rape, solidifying the evil of the enemy; and Muslim men were portrayed as the only *male* victims of rape, allowing the (heterosexual) masculinity of Croatian men, and therefore of the nation, to remain unquestioned and unviolated (1999: Chap. 5).

new states discursively and legally through ethnic exclusion (Hayden 1992), as well as through the physical violence of ethnic cleansing— expelling ethnic others from territory in a manner that inflicted as much trauma on the targeted community as possible, ensuring their disappearance and the re-inscription of the territory as belonging to the ethnic self (Hayden 1996a; Ron 2003; Žarkov 1999). The goal was “making existing heterogeneous [communities] unimaginable” by removing their existence (Hayden 1996a: 783).

Hayden later connected the use of rape to this enterprise as a method of severing cross-ethnic social ties, making continued sharing of the same territory unthinkable (2000). Other scholars pointed to the symbolic link in nationalist discourses between women, their honor, and the land (Iveković 1993:123-4; Mostov 1995; Peterson 1994; Seifert 1996:39; Verdery 1994). While this link was certainly present, Žarkov showed that women’s bodies *themselves* became the actual territory which nationalist forces aimed to conquer (1999). The raped female body is always ethnic as well as female, so that meanings of national victimization are embedded into this body. Rape simultaneously defines the body of women as (conquered) territory while excluding it from territory that will henceforth be populated only by the rapists’ ethnic group. Thus, rape:

defines the female body as the land on which it resides, and it separates the two, simultaneously. As such, rape marks the female body as ethnic territory. It is a founder of the new ethnic geography, remapped, renamed and reclaimed through the female body. (*ibid.*: Chap. 4: 48)

The “new ethnic geography” was, however, rooted firmly in the classic, European ideal of the nation-state, in which the state is made up by and for the nation, ethnically defined, and the borders of the state match the territory on which the nation lives (Anderson 1983; Borneman 1998; Gellner 1983; Hayden 1992, 1996b).⁵⁴

⁵⁴ John Borneman (1998) locates the connection between rape and ethnic cleansing at the intersection of the territorially based nation-state ideal and normative, institutionalized heterosexuality. This, he argues, is based on male anxieties towards women’s sexuality and fears of homosexual desire. Violent assertion of the heterosexual masculinity of the group through rape and sexual mutilation of ethnically other women *and men* was used to assert control for one’s ethnic group over a given territory.

Representing Wartime Rape in Bosnia

The gendered logic of nationalism thus laid the groundwork both for the use of rape as a tool of ethnic cleansing and for the appropriation of images of rape by nationalists seeking to vilify ethnic others and prove the moral purity of the ethnic self (Benderly 1997b; Borneman 1998; Helms 1998; Kesić 1994; Korać 1996; Žarkov 1997). Although each national project was constructed upon different elements according to differing historical and geographical realities (Žarkov 1999), each sought to portray itself as victim and thus morally pure, innocent, and incapable of committing acts of aggression against others. Each declared it was fighting a purely defensive war for the survival of the nation. Association with the “Rape Victim Identity” bolstered this overall victim image (Žarkov 1997; Kašić 2000). I have already discussed the portrayal of the Serb nation as a victim because of the rape and subsequent impregnation of Serb women by non-Serbs. Biljana Plavšić, at the time Vice-President of the *Republika Srpska* in Bosnia, complained that most of the women raped in the war were actually Serbs but that Muslims and Croats were unfairly counting them as “their victims” (Knežević 1993:13). Croatian nationalists declared during the war that “A raped Croatian woman [*Hrvatica*] is a raped Croatia!” (Kesić 1995), despite the near invisibility in Croatian media of Croat women as victims of rape—Muslim women appeared instead (Žarkov 1999). And the Bosnian (Muslim) ambassador to the U.N. during the war appealed to the world for help for the nation saying, “Bosnia and Herzegovina is being gang-raped” (MacKinnon 1994). The concern was not with the victims themselves but with their symbolic value for the nation.

Feminists from the Yugoslav successor states and from abroad claimed to approach the issue differently, out of concern for women victims. International women’s activism together with the feminist network in place in Zagreb, Belgrade, and Ljubljana since the 1970s made possible the documentation and publicizing of the rapes as they were still happening (Enloe 1994; Korać 1994).⁵⁵ Yet the most wrenching debates over how to characterize the rapes ensued among feminists and women’s groups; the issue managed to split long-time feminist networks in the former Yugoslavia and their supporters abroad (Benderly 1997b).

⁵⁵ Another reason the rapes in Bosnia gained so much attention may also be that they occurred in Europe to white women who could be shown on western television, who look just like ‘Us.’ These rapes have therefore been noticed in a way that similar patterns of rape in Bangladesh, Ecuador and Kuwait, among many others, were not (Copelon 1994; and see Brownmiller 1975; Jeffords 1993).

One popular position taken by western feminists with little or no knowledge of the Balkans was what I have termed the “global feminist” approach (Helms 1998). This saw wartime rape as a weapon used by men against women in all wars throughout history, yet it left little room for the specific political, ideological or ethnic contexts in which wartime rape occurs. Objections were raised, therefore, mostly by feminists in the Yugoslav successor states, who pointed to local specifics, including the undeniable ethnic character of the war. These “ex-Yugoslav” feminists, however, were split among themselves over whether the rapes were primarily crimes of gender or crimes of ethnicity.

One camp insisted that these were not just “ordinary” wartime rapes but a new, uniquely Serbian project of “genocidal rape” against Croats and Muslims. This group was made up of Croatian feminists and Bosnian Muslim refugee women based in Zagreb. Some of their women’s organizations, especially the *Kareta* Feminist Group from Zagreb,⁵⁶ had retained US feminist lawyer Catherine A. MacKinnon in efforts to prosecute those responsible for the rape of Bosnian and Croatian women (Hamilton 1993). *Kareta* and their allies focused their work on aid to *Muslim* and *Croat* women victims of the war and regarded wartime rape primarily as a crime against nation. They conceded that women had been targeted for rape in all wars, but, they maintained, this Serbian practice was an organized, deliberate tactic directed at non-Serbs to destroy them or drive them out of desired territory (Allen 1996; Kareta et al, 1993; MacKinnon 1993a, 1993b, 1994; Trešnjevka 1993). In the view of Kareta and their supporters, the global feminist approach equalized all factions in the war, thus minimizing the crimes of the Serbs (Kareta, et al 1993; Wielchowski et al 1993). This camp further held all Serbs, even Serbian anti-nationalist feminists, responsible for the war, and thus severed all ties with women from Belgrade (Benderly 1997b).⁵⁷

⁵⁶ The women’s groups siding with *Kareta* included the feminist organizations *Trešnjevka*, and Nona Women’s Center, as well as women’s organizations *Bedem Ljubavi* (Rampart of Love), *Žena BiH* (Woman BiH [Bosnia & Herzegovina]), and the International Initiative of Women of Bosnia-Herzegovina *Biser* (Pearl), all based in Zagreb at the time (Benderly 1997b). Elsewhere (Helms 1998), I analyze the letter of protest written by some of these groups that was directed at an American publicity initiative called “Mother Courage II” which took a global feminist and anti-nationalist stance (Kareta et al, 1993; and see Wielchowski et al 1993).

⁵⁷ This attitude, reflected in Kareta and other groups’ refusal to include Serbian (anti-nationalist) women’s groups in conferences about rape and their denunciation of Serbian *and* Croatian anti-nationalist feminists as opportunists who had gained advantages under socialism and were therefore unfit to represent victims of rape (Benderly 1997b; Carr 1993; Helms 1998). Catherine MacKinnon, who firmly allied herself to the nationalist

The other camp was made up of anti-nationalist feminists, many of them veterans of the second-wave feminist initiatives begun in the 1970's in Yugoslavia (discussed in the previous chapter). These women refused to let closed borders, cut phone lines, and mutually hostile nationalist propaganda break their feminist ties across newly formed state borders. They kept in touch despite formidable obstacles, meeting in Hungary or elsewhere abroad and communicating through foreign friends or by the *Zamir* (For peace) email network. What bound them together was their feminist critique of women's oppression their opposition to nationalism and militarism which followed from their gender critique.⁵⁸

The anti-nationalist approach to the rapes, too, focused on the gender aspect of crimes against women as women. They did distance themselves from the global feminists by pointing to the dangers of the "all sides did it" argument as one that supported the common view put forth in the western press during the war that the Bosnian conflict involved equal combatants acting on "ancient ethnic hatreds" among "Balkan tribes."⁵⁹ The danger in this was to provide an excuse to western powers for not intervening to prevent atrocities, despite pledges to uphold human rights (Douglas and Hamilton 1993:12-15; Kesić 1994, 1995; Knežević 1993; Renne 1993; Ženski Lobby 1992).

However, their most vehement opposition was to MacKinnon, Kareta, and the other women's groups insisting on the term "genocidal rape" and on the victim status of Croatian and Muslim women and thus of Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. The anti-nationalists saw this position as supporting the very nationalist projects which so oppressed women and set up the logic by which wartime ethnic rape was being perpetrated in the first place (e.g., Douglas and Hamilton 1993; Kesić 1994, 1995; Knežević 1993, 1995; Renne 1993; Ženski Lobby 1992). Anti-nationalist women's groups in Zagreb (the Center for Women War Victims, Anti-war Campaign Croatia, and others)

groups, took on a similar attitude, attacking Serbian anti-nationalist women in public with comments such as her response to a Serbian feminist at a UN human rights conference in Vienna in 1993: "If you are in opposition to the regime in Serbia, why aren't you already dead?" (see Benderly 1997b: 67).

⁵⁸ Yet, as Žarkov shows, they were so nervous about breaking these bonds that they tip-toed around issues of their own ethnic and national identities, concentrating instead on their "sisterhood," or solidarity as women (1999).

⁵⁹ An example from *Time* of the kind of statements commonly made: "The Balkans have become a sort of Bermuda Triangle into which human decencies vanish without a trace. In the post-cold war era, it is unsettling to think that conscienceless *tribal ferocity* may catch on around the world" (Morrow 1993) (emphasis added).

noted with alarm that the nationalist media and authorities in Croatia began to embrace Kareta and the other “nationalist” or “patriotic” women’s groups (Benderly 1997b; Kesić 1994). This was especially striking given the usual hostility toward women’s issues and feminists that were normally expressed in the media and by a regime that had vigorously promoted a return to “traditional” gender roles, especially for women (Drakulić 1993a; Kesić 1995, 2001; Knežević 1995; Salecl 1994; Žarkov 1999). Despite Kareta’s radical feminist approach, which blamed men for oppressing women when it came to domestic issues, the group was suddenly given prominent placement in the media for its message condemning “the Serbs” for rape (Žarkov 1999).

This was further vexing to the anti-nationalists because of the way the Croatian nationalist media had treated *them* for advancing the opposite argument. The best known example of this was the attack in the Croatian weekly *Globus* on five prominent women writers, Slavenka Drakulić, Vesna Kesić, Rada Iveković, Jelena Lovrić, and Dubravka Ugrešić, calling them “witches” for criticizing the nationalist government (*Globus*, December 11, 1992: 33-4). Drakulić, Kesić, and Iveković had written specifically about the rapes in Croatia and Bosnia as crimes of men against women instead of (only) Serbs against Croats and Muslims. Even more revealing was the headline of the *Globus* article, which read “Croatian Feminists Rape Croatia!” The women were accused of “concealing the Serbian rape of Muslim and Croatian women” (Korać 1994:505) and the article went on to attack the five women’s physical appearance, choice of (non-Croatian) marriage partners and ties to the west (Korać 1994; Mostov 1995:521; Tax 1993).⁶⁰ The women’s home addresses and phone numbers were also published and the five were “‘witch hunted’ throughout the national media for almost a year and a half” afterwards (Kesić 1994).⁶¹

Thus, the anti-nationalists condemned the nationalist women’s stance because it upheld the claims of nationalists. This disagreement was not only a disagreement with nationalism, however, but because of what was seen as the sexist, traditionalist, and ultimately anti-feminist nature of

⁶⁰ Significantly, the women were accused of raping “Croatia” rather than also Bosnia. As Žarkov (and others less extensively: Kesić 1994; Mertus 1994:19-20; Mostov 1995:525) has shown, the Croatian media put forth images of Bosnian Muslim women as victims of rape in order to show the barbarity of the Serbs, while “saving” the pure image of Croatian women (see Lie 1997). Yet, when it came to using the rapes to show the victimization of the nation, “Croatia” was the victim (Žarkov 1999: 177-287).

⁶¹ Articles in the Serbian media in 1995 also denounced feminists who spoke out against the government and its nationalist policies as “witches” (Kajosević 1995:44).

nationalism in disintegrating Yugoslavia. Anti-nationalist feminists therefore criticized the nationalist women for undermining feminist causes, even though some of the most vocal proponents of the nationalist/patriotic position, such as *Kareta* and Catherine MacKinnon, were staunch feminists (Kesić 1994, 1995; Knežević 1993; Ženski Lobby 1992; Lepa Mladenović quoted in Douglas and Hamilton 1993). As Vesna Kesić argued in a strong rebuttal to MacKinnon (1993a, 1993b, 1994), the aim of calling attention to and stopping “genocidal rape” can hardly be realized since this approach reinforces the logic by which the rapes were committed and understood in the first place (Kesić 1994; and see Borneman 1998; Copelon 1994; Korać 1996; Žarkov 1999). In other words, focusing on whether rapes were “genocidal,” or perpetrated on the basis of ethnic differences, assumes precisely the relation of women to the nation which is assumed by the very perpetrators of rape– the equation of women’s honor with the honor of the nation. The ready embrace of the genocidal rape thesis by the nationalist media (discussed above) was a case in point. The national identification of the victims was the most important criterion in these reports: women were more members of the nation than women (see Helms 1998; Žarkov 1999).

Insisting on “genocidal rape” therefore implied that “only certain [ethnic] victims count” (Kesić 1994: 276). In other words, the crime is to be condemned, or more harshly condemned, when it is committed as part of a genocide, or campaign of destruction of another ethnic group. War rapes by members of the same ethnic group as the perpetrator are thus dismissed, and a “hierarchy of rapes” is created, followed by a “hierarchy of victims” (Carr 1993:29) which “places the violation of nations ahead of that of women” (Mladjenović 1999: 87; and see Helms 1998; Žarkov 1999).⁶² This was the same logic used by Serbian/Yugoslav nationalist leader Slobodan Milošević in the 1980's when the category of “ethnic rape” was introduced in response to accusations that Albanian men were raping Serbian women in Kosovo (Mežnarić 1994a, 1994b; Žarkov 1999). The new category of crime carried harsher punishments than “non-ethnic” rape and was thus understood as a threat to the nation rather than an injury to women (Mežnarić 1994a). This case shows the link between the understanding of ethnic rape as insult to the self nation and as weapon against the other,

⁶² Furthermore, as Hayden has argued (2000), consensual sexual relationships between men and women belonging to different warring ethnic/religious groups become suspect under the fuzzy boundary between rape and marriage which was especially apparent in the conflicts in India during partition (Butalia 1993; Das 1995, 1996; Menon and Bhasin 1993) and Rwanda in 1994 (Nowrojee 1996).

an easy conceptual shift that made the accusations of ethnic rape against Serbs in Kosovo “a prelude to rape as a strategy of ethnic cleansing in Bosnia” (*ibid.*:77; and see Milić 1993; Sorabji 1993). Feminist anti-nationalists from Zagreb and Belgrade therefore stressed the gendered logic of the rapes and that they were perpetrated by men against women (rather than e.g. Serbs against Muslims). However, as Žarkov shows, this contributed to the identification of the The Rape Victim with females, and females as therefore vulnerable and “rapable” (1999).

Representation and Bosnia

Throughout this discussion, I have said very little about Bosnia or Bosnians themselves. This is because the overwhelming majority of texts about wartime rape in Bosnia (and Croatia) were written and debated by those in Croatia and Serbia (and Slovenia) and from outside the former Yugoslavia. The exception was with Bosnian Croat and Muslim refugee women in Zagreb who sided with *Kareta* and the other “nationalist” women’s organizations. Many of those women returned to Bosnia after the war ended to live as close as they could to their former homes which were now in Serb or Croat held areas. These women took their Zagreb experiences with women’s organizing with them and started new women’s NGOs focused on helping other refugee women recover from trauma, make a living, and return to their homes. They also carried with them their ideas about rape as an ethnic crime against Muslims, and a few of them continued campaigning publicly for the acceptance of this view. I will discuss some of these women and their organizations in later chapters.

Despite the presence of the “nationalist” Bosnian women in Zagreb, Croatian feminists were quite vocal in speaking for the Bosnians (even though many of the Bosnian women rejected the Croatian women’s feminist ideas).⁶³ Those from outside the region, too, tended to look to Serbian and Croatian women to speak about, and often *for*, victims of wartime rape in Bosnia, not only silencing the voices of Bosnian Muslim women (as members of the group most affected by war

⁶³ Almasa, a Bosniac refugee and member of *Žena BiH* in Zagreb was wary of feminist groups but worked with *Kareta* because of their stance emphasizing the ethnic character of the rapes. In Almasa’s words, “organizations like *Kareta*, *Bedem Ljubavi*, etc., were more like feminists who would fight, even using force, for human rights. They were against men. They thought that only the men were guilty, even though many of them were married. So some of them left the groups at the end, some of the more reasonable ones, mostly the ones with husbands. While our organization was there precisely because of what was happening in the war, not just to women but all human rights that were violated.”

rapes) but also obscuring Serb and Croat women from Bosnia (Helms 1998).

Of course, it stands to reason that, during the war, Bosnian women in Bosnia had little access to world media and scholarly journals, not to mention that they were too consumed with survival and helping other war victims to have the luxury of reflection and writing. However, there were many Bosnian women refugees in Zagreb and Belgrade working with both nationalist and anti-nationalist women's groups. Even after the war, however, only a few Bosnian women activists who had been working with women war survivors got their work to wider audiences (e.g. Andrić-Ružičić 1997; Ostojić 1999; Senjak 1997; Giles et. al. 2003). Such texts tended to focus more on therapy, overcoming trauma, and the problems of service provision, however, than on analysis of the rapes themselves. Moreover, they appeared after the major debates about rape, which had occurred during the war. On top of this, the lack in Bosnia of feminists or academics specializing in gender, and who spoke English or had the right contacts outside Bosnia contributed to this effect. As we will see in the chapters to follow, too, Bosnian activists were anxious to move on and deal with current problems after the war, rather than dwell on rape and ethnic cleansing.

To be sure, Croatian and Serbian women had much to offer, especially to audiences unfamiliar with the former Yugoslavia. They were (and are) insightful analysts of the historical and current circumstances of what was Yugoslavia, which they shared with Bosnia. And they had worked with Bosnian war survivors and experienced many of the same effects of living under dominant nationalisms that the women in the war zones had (e.g. Borić 1997; Mladjenović 1999; Terselić 1997; articles in I. Williams (ed.) 1995). I am not arguing, therefore, that Croatian and Serbian feminists were out of line in speaking out—on the contrary, their voices were crucial at a time when many ill-informed observers made all kinds of well-circulated pronouncements on the rapes.

Still, many feminist texts and initiatives expressed the goal of making the voices of women war victims heard. When women from Zagreb and Belgrade were chosen, for example, to represent Women from Ex-Yugoslavia on a speaking tour of the U.S. designed to draw attention to the issue of wartime rape, none of them had experienced war directly and the only Bosnian woman selected was a Muslim who had not lived in Bosnia for ten years (Helms 1998). At the same time, there were (are) many professional women and activists from Bosnia, of all ethnic backgrounds and living in Serb, Croat, and Muslim dominated areas, who would have been eloquent speakers and analysts

about their own experiences in the context of the war. On this point the initiative's organizers and other western observers showed a similar "homogenizing" tendency towards the diversity in the former Yugoslavia for which "Third World" women have criticized western feminists in general (e.g., Mohanty 1991). Because there was no representation from Bosnia on a subject that predominantly dealt with Bosnian Muslim women, The Muslim Raped Woman could remain the "archetypal victim," forever the Orientalized, secluded and silent Muslim woman whose only role is as passive victim of male power (Mohanty 1991:58; Žarkov 1995, 1999).

Texts about the rapes furthermore left Bosnian Muslim/Bosniac nationalism almost completely unexplored. Accounts that recognized the wider patterns of gendered nationalism in the region generally focused on Serbian and Croatian nationalisms as a way of explaining the appearance of ethnic rape, although Korać (1994, 1996) and Hayden (2000) did include some details of this in their wider analyses. Wider cultural explanations also centered around Serbian and Croatian histories and ideologies (Denich 1995; Olujić 1998). There was good reason for this focus, as the Serbian and Croatian nationalist regimes had made dramatic pronouncements and enacted corresponding policies infused with "traditional" (patriarchal) gender models, as discussed above. Furthermore, these nationalisms were deemed worthy of (feminist) criticism in a way that Bosniac nationalism, as representative of The Victims, was not: Serbian nationalism was held to blame for starting and perpetrating most of the rapes, and Croatian nationalism was seen, at least by the feminists living in Croatia, as oppressive to women "at home" and manipulating the rapes of Muslims for nationalist purposes.

Again, there are reasons for the absence of local feminist criticism of Muslim/Bosniac nationalism. In contrast to Serbia and Croatia, neither Bosnia as a whole nor the Muslim dominated areas of Bosnia had the kind of feminist community or critical women activists who might have publicly commented on the gendered aspects of Bosniac nationalism. Certainly during the war women had few possibilities for disseminating the writing they did produce. After the war, a few texts by local journalists in Muslim dominated Bosnia did emerge about the effects of (nationalist) government policies and rhetoric on women (Bećirević 1999; Šamić 2000; Selimbegović 2000). And a few Bosnian women activists have written about their concern over the manipulation of women war victims' suffering for the benefit of state authorities (i.e., nationalist politicians), though this was

mostly published abroad and in English (e.g. Andrić-Ružičić 2003). Such critiques, however, remain unnoticed in most characterizations of gender relations in the Balkans or Bosnia.⁶⁴ Furthermore, anti-nationalist women activists in Muslim dominated areas have refrained from publicly subjecting local nationalist projects to the kind of feminist scrutiny that Croatian and Serbian feminists leveled at Croatian and Serbian nationalisms. In other words, they have not connected the gendering of Bosniac nationalism with understandings of wartime rape.

This absence is not surprising, given the construction, both locally and internationally, of Bosniac collective identity as *the* victims and *only* victims of the war. Local constructions of Bosniac identity revolved around these and other victim images— victims of socialism, of Serbian and Croatian designs on Bosnia, of genocide, and of an international community suspicious of and prejudiced against Muslims. As Nataša of Medica (and, incidently, of Serb background) remarked, those on the Muslim dominated, pro-Bosnia side are rightly seen as the “good guys, the victims.” Another anti-nationalist Bosnian feminist in Sarajevo, also of Serb background, expressed her reluctance to publicly single out anything Bosniac or Islamic for (feminist) criticism because, while she was a strong promoter of a multi-ethnic Bosnia and had a history of opposing Serbian nationalism in Serbia, she was nevertheless not a Bosniac and thus feared she would be seen as anti-Muslim. Turning a critical eye to the construction of Bosniac identity was seen as unseemly, both locally and abroad, due to the real suffering of so many Bosniacs. It is probably also because Bosniac nationalist policies have not targeted women as dramatically as have those in Serbia and Croatia. However, I suggest that this is also because any critical discussion of gender inevitably entails a discussion of wartime rape, which, in turn, has been a powerful symbol of the Bosniac nation as collective victim. In this light, I must stress that the scrutiny I bring to Bosniac discourses here is not meant to take away from the real experiences of war victims, but just the opposite, to strip nationalist representations of the moral power they gain by appropriating that suffering as belonging to (the males of) the ethnic nation.

⁶⁴ To be sure, some scholars have included examples from Bosniac discourses in wider analyses of the logic by which rape was perpetrated and understood in the Balkans (Hayden 2000; Korać 1998), and Žarkov (1997) has pointed to the gendered and Orientalist elements of the Muslim rape victim identity as conveyed through academic texts. Still, there has been no thorough gender analysis of Bosniac national discourses.

Gendering Bosniac Nationalism

Patterns of gender constructions in Bosniac nationalist discourses are strikingly similar to those of Serb and Croat nationalist discourses discussed above. The differences lie in the peculiarities of Bosniac nationalist constructions, just as differences in Serbian and Croatian discourses were reflected in the different kinds of gendered images used in the Serbian and Croatian media, as Žarkov shows (1999). To be sure, media in the Bosniac dominated areas of Bosnia are not all “nationalist” (see ICG 1997). Even within nationalist circles, many different approaches to questions of ethnic relations, national identity, and the role of Islam, have competed for dominance (Bougarel 1995, 1996; Rusinow 1985). These different streams also carry with them different approaches to gender ideals. In public discourses, many different images are therefore projected of Bosnian and Bosniac women, of gender categories and sexuality (see Helms n.d.). My aim here is not to thoroughly analyze Bosnian and Bosniac political or nationalist discourses but to indicate the presence of the same constructions of gender and sexuality in relation to the nation as have been found in Serbian and Croatian nationalist discourses.⁶⁵ As I have argued elsewhere (1998), the wide acceptance, among people of *all* ethnic backgrounds in Bosnia, of the link of female sexuality and honor to the honor of the nation is what made rape an effective tool of ethnic warfare in the first place.

Conservative gender ideals were most commonly put forth by pan-Islamists within the Bosniac nationalist party, the SDA, and their close allies among the Muslim clergy. Women were consigned to the home sphere, that of tradition and spirituality, under the same concerns about the nation’s birth rates that informed discourses in Serbia and Croatia. Alija Izetbegović, at the time leader of the SDA, President of the Presidency of Bosnia-Herzegovina and the grandfatherly figurehead of Bosniac nationalism, summed up his view of the role of women in a public speech in June 1997, after the male organizers of a Muslim pilgrimage (*Ajvatovica*) had forbidden women to take part in the walk to the pilgrimage site:

Women make up half of our nation [*narod*]. In the midst of the war, together they shared with us the burden of wartime misfortune: dying, starving and suffering. From

⁶⁵ A more extensive analysis of the gendering of Bosniac nationalism appears in Helms 1997. For examples related to Orientalist Bosniac discourses, see Helms n.d.

them we expect that they bear and bring up a generation of Bosniacs who will preserve what we have elected and fight to rid themselves of what we are not. Such a proud and aware generation cannot be brought up by humiliated and excluded women. (Krehić 1997)

“Us” and “we” were clearly the male actors of the nation. Women’s dignity and right to participate was upheld, but on the basis of their function as bearers and socializers of new generations of Bosniacs, first and foremost mothers with primary duties toward the home and family. As Nataša from Medica pointed out at the time, Izetbegović’s comment contained both positive and negative implications for women. On one hand, he relegated women to the role of motherhood and child rearing. But he also chastised the male organizers of that day’s event for excluding women from the pilgrimage walk.⁶⁶ In Nataša’s view, it was better to support the President on this small positive point rather than attack him for the more fundamental problem of portraying women as worthy only for the fulfillment of domestic sphere duties, and only in service to the nation.⁶⁷ Indeed, many Bosniac women viewed Izetbegović as a staunch supporter of women and their valuable contribution to the nation, in opposition to those men who would bar women from full participation in religious and cultural life. However, several of Izetbegović’s longtime friends and colleagues—religiously trained men closely associated with the President and members of the influential pan-Islamist wing of the SDA (see Bougarel 1997a)—drew no public objections from Izetbegović when they expressed more extreme and conservative views about gender as a national/ethnic concern.

A typical example of this pan-Islamist nationalist rhetoric was offered by the deputy *Reis-ul-ulema* of the Islamic Community (*Islamska Zajednica*), Ismet Efendija Spahić, at an SDA-sponsored mosque dedication ceremony I happened to attend in a small Bosnian town in July 1997. In his speech, Spahić warned that, “if mini skirts are worn, the shells will fall again. If the Četniks [Serb forces] don’t send them, Allah will find someone who will.” He equated women’s dress, demeanor and religiosity with maintaining actual differences and awareness of those differences, thereby suggesting that failure to remain a separate group and mixing with other groups (Serbs and Croats)

⁶⁶ Since that year, women have been allowed to take part in the *Ajvatovica* pilgrimage.

⁶⁷ I address Medica’s stances toward public reactions in chapter 6.

as they had done before the war, would result in renewed hostilities. This draws on a commonly held view among Bosniacs of their Serb and Croat neighbors that betrayed them in the war— that Muslims were too trusting of the other groups, they bought into socialist atheism and Yugoslav “brotherhood and unity,” forgot they were different and therefore did not realize they could be targeted and attacked as different in war. The common sentiment was that they should have seen it coming.

Spahić did not mention men’s dress, but he did admonish men to attend mosque regularly and to refrain from drinking alcohol (a very popular, male-associated activity). He also advised the audience that a man’s honor and worth (as a Muslim) could be judged by looking at his wife and daughters to see whether they covered themselves and how they conducted themselves. Spahić thus brought the responsibility for the maintenance and marking of national essence back to women and their dress and demeanor (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1989; McClintock 1993; Schein 1996; C. Smith 1996). He also expressed a common nationalist concern with women’s sexuality for maintaining the purity of the nation (C. Smith 1996). It should be noted that most townspeople present for Spahić’s speech, Bosniacs who generally supported the SDA, shrugged off the cleric’s statements as extreme, even ridiculous. They felt he was asking too much from this more secular population, especially that men give up drinking alcohol and women (especially teenaged girls) cover themselves and forgo the latest fashions. Indeed, on that summer day, very few women were covered and many teenaged girls wore mini-skirts and halter tops, oblivious to the deputy *Reis*’s words.

Other pan-Islamists close to Izetbegović expressed a similar concern with ethnic demographics as those in Serbia and Croatia who called for women to bear more children for the nation and pointed to the damage done to the nation by rapes of “our” women by “their” men (see e.g. Bracewell 1996; Salecl 1994; Žarkov 1999). The most notorious such statements condemning “mixed” marriages between Muslims and non-Muslims appeared during the war (summer, 1994) in the Bosniac press, especially the pro-SDA weekly *Ljiljan*. The debate was sparked in response to the statement by *Circle 99*, an independent club of Sarajevo intellectuals of all ethnic affiliations, that families of mixed marriages represent a “third nation appearing” within Bosnia. Circle 99 presented this as a positive sign that all ethnic groups could rebuild a multi-ethnic Bosnia, or “life together” (*zajednički život*) like the co-existence that had existed under Yugoslav socialism (Latić 1994:40; Šantić 1994). Prominent pan-Islamists reacted with appeals to a sort of separate but tolerant policy,

publishing repeated denunciations of mixed marriages and the “frustrated” children they produce (Hadžić 1996; Kasumagić 1997; Latić 1994; Spahić 1994). In the words of Džemaludin Latić:

Mixed marriages, a kind of banner to a misunderstood life together, are mostly failed marriages, serious conflicts arise from them, the children of such a marriage are frustrated from the beginning, and it would be worth putting a halt to that kind of destructive message. The differences between Muslims and non-Muslims are so great that if we suggest to our young people an alternative way, namely that they marry only those that think like they do, we will more easily build a society without trauma. (Latić 1994:40)

Example after example of terrible scenarios of mixed Bosnian families torn apart by the war were raised as proof that Muslims would do better to stick to their own kind. In these examples, children of mixed marriages were taken to non-Muslim relatives in Serb or Croat held areas and “turned into” Serbs or Croats, even baptized into Christianity; others were betrayed by a non-Muslim in-law and ended up in prison camps or dead; and many stories were told of terrible dilemmas faced by mixed families when Serbs, Croats and Muslims came into conflict (Šestić 1994).

In an article entitled, “Worse Than Rape: The Evil of Mixed Marriages,” another longtime pan-Islamist went so far as to conclude that:

Even though these rapes [of Muslim women in the war] are difficult, unbearable and unforgivable for us all, from the standpoint of Islam they are easier and less painful than mixed marriages and the *children and friendships* that result from them. (Spahić 1994:22) (emphasis added)

Thus, not only were “mixed” people considered damaging to the nation, but social connections and networks of mutual aid and hospitality between Muslims and members of other ethnic/religious groups were also frowned upon. Women were especially targeted; as Spahić further wrote, “Every [male] Muslim [*musliman*] in a mixed marriage as a rule was a loss for Islam and Muslims. With girl Muslims [*djevojke, muslimanke*] who have entered mixed marriages, the situation is even more drastic” (Spahić 1994:22). Women who marry non-Muslims threatened greater harm to the nation

than men marrying non-Muslims because, under local patriarchal/patrilocal and Muslim customs,⁶⁸ women move to non-Muslim surroundings, take on non-Muslim names and bear non-Muslim children (*ibid.*). The threat to the nation was clear: if Muslims, and especially women, did not marry within the fold, the nation would lose them and the children they produced. Moreover, the threat posed to the nation by mixed marriages took precedence over the actual bodily suffering and desires of individual men and women.

“I Begged Them to Kill Me”

A similar message was sent through the publication in 1999 of a book of testimonies by women survivors of wartime rape entitled *I Begged Them to Kill Me: The Crime Against the Women of Bosnia-Herzegovina (Molila sam ih da me ubiju: Zločin nad ženom Bosne i Hercegovine)* (Ajanović et. al. 1999).⁶⁹ The book was compiled by the Union of Former Concentration Camp Detainees, or *logoraši*,⁷⁰ of the Bosniac dominated areas of Bosnia. Although *logoraši* are most readily associated with male war victims, the organization, prompted by its women’s section (the *Aktiv žena bivših logorašica*), decided that its first book of testimonies in a planned series would be on “the crime against the women of Bosnia and Herzegovina” (*ibid.*: 14). There was no need to explain that this meant rape; indeed, other kinds of suffering of women are present in the testimonies but are not given the prominence of rape. It must be acknowledged that the organizers and authors of the introduction reject the image of women as passive victims; they write that raped women should not be ashamed, that they should not be seen as passive objects, but “subjects who speak and

⁶⁸ These patrilineal and patrilocal practices common in South Slavic kinship are reflected in language. The verb “to marry” is, for a man, *ženiti se* (literally “to take a woman”), and for a woman, *udati se* (“to give oneself”). In the less common case that a man marries and goes to live in his wife’s town or with her family, it is also sometimes said jokingly that he has “given himself” – *udao se*.

⁶⁹ One could undertake a much more extensive analysis of the 23 essays, nearly 50 testimonies, and numerous poems, drawings, letters of support and witness accounts contained in this 484 page book than I have done here. For the purposes of this chapter, I have excerpted here only a sample of the contents of this book.

⁷⁰ The word *logoraš*, a form of *logor*, from the German *Lager*, or “camp,” and is often translated into English, as it is in this book, as “concentration camp,” as it is meant to evoke Nazi concentration camps of World War II. Such connections were encouraged by the dissemination of pictures of starving Muslim and Croat men civilians behind barbed wire in Serb detention camps in the Prijedor area at the beginning of the war (see Gutman 1993).

accuse,” and that this book is a step toward the recovery of women’s dignity (*ibid.*: 14). Indeed, the testimonies in the book are quite powerful and, as Medica activists pointed out, it was very important for the women survivors and for all women that these crimes be documented and validated. It is not this aspect of the project, nor the real suffering of the war’s victims with which I take issue, but the constructions of gender and nation embedded in the book’s overall message.

The primary stress of the book is on the meanings of these rapes for the nation, as part of a wider pattern of *Bosniac* suffering under persecution and genocide, despite the subtitle’s claim that the book deals with “the crime against the women of *Bosnia-Herzegovina*” (my emphasis). Explicit comparison is made to the Holocaust; the texts and drawings accompanying the testimonies highlight wider campaigns of ethnic cleansing against Bosniacs (and Croats) by Serbs (and Croats) through pictures of starving men behind barbed wire in detention camps, of mass graves of Bosniacs, of men, women, and children lining up for water and bread in besieged Sarajevo, and of women and children fleeing ethnic cleansing attacks. In all of these drawings, it is made clear that the victims are Bosniacs. This is done through imagery of (destroyed) mosques, people praying, and women in head scarves and traditional Muslim (rural) dress, the *dimije*. The book’s editors claim that Bosniac women made up 99.9% of the victims of rape (men are not mentioned) (*ibid.*: 471), and that their testimony “further contributes to the defense of the women of Bosnia, especially Bosniacs” (*ibid.*: 14). Rapes of non-Bosniacs and non-“ethnic” rapes are thus demoted in significance; the real victim is the nation rather than women.⁷¹

Upon closer inspection, the Bosniac contributors to the book seem more concerned with

⁷¹ An essay in the book by Swanee Hunt distorts and dismisses my conclusions, and those of the other feminist critics I discussed earlier in this chapter, on this very point (1999: 77). Summarizing in a curious way (a critique of which I will forgo here) the points raised in my MA thesis, which in turn summarized feminist debates and literature, the author lists several “problematic issues” brought up by “those people outside Bosnia who were determined to mount a campaign against rape.” First among these points is the question, “Does the description of genocidal rape minimize other cases of rape *perpetrated by Serbs*, or rapes perpetrated by members of the same ethnic groups, as ‘ordinary’?” (emphasis added). I do not know whether the author (or her assistants, with whom I had shared my work) inserted the phrase “perpetrated by Serbs” or whether this was added during translation. However, the author goes on to imply that this question and the others raised by feminist critics are inauthentic because they come from “those people outside Bosnia.” She then effectively dismisses all critical questions by describing the distress of Bosnian rape victims she met in her capacity as American ambassador to Austria and the poignancy of the help she offered as a shoulder for them to cry on.

documenting the guilt of Serbs, and Croats to a lesser extent.⁷² One article by the well-known Bosniac “secular” nationalist (Bougarel 1996; Rusinow 1985) and academic Muhamed Filipović, is devoted to a “Socio-psychological and anthropological analysis of criminal character, especially of crimes committed against Bosniacs and Bosniac women during the Serb Aggression against Bosnia and Herzegovina” (Filipović 1999). Serbs are cast as a psychopathic *people*, as a collective “prone ... to drastic actions such as slitting people’s throats, killings with axes or violence against the elderly and women, frequent incestual relations and sexual abuse of little girls and children” (*ibid.*: 68). Filipović asserts there is “ethnographic and ethnological” evidence for violent traditions among Serbs, especially because of their pastoralist background, which explains the use by Serbs of types of violence “otherwise inconceivable for normal people.” (*ibid.*). Rape and sexual violence is also explained as a strategy solely used by the Serbs as “a people [*narod*] that has different sexual and family traditions/habits [*običaje*]” (*ibid.*: 69). It is worth noting that strong pastoralist traditions and histories among Serbs and other Balkan populations have long been used to essentialize entire peoples, even in the present, as primitive, uncivilized, warlike (Bougarel 1999a; Todorova 1997; Živković 2001), and violently patriarchal (Denich 1974; Ramet 1996: 119-22; and see Helms n.d.). Filipović takes a similar approach, telling us, in case there is any doubt, that these traditions among Serbs give us a “picture of the sources of those phenomena which were played out during the [recent] war, and those are sources *built into the social psychology of the Serbs as a people* [*narod*].” (*ibid.*: 68, emphasis added). This is despite evidence the author himself mentions in the same text, that of the diary of a Yugoslav National Army (read Serb) officer who complains that some of his soldiers resisted orders to “behave brutally toward their Muslim neighbors” in the area of Prnjavor (*ibid.*). If abnormal brutality was “built into” the Serbs, why would there have been a need to force Serb soldiers to commit such acts?

Similarly, the introduction to the book attempts to place equal emphasis on the perpetrators of rape, *and their communities*, as it does on women victims. To the women’s statement rejecting the notion that they as victims should feel fear and shame, that it is the perpetrators who should feel

⁷² Although this author focuses on the Serbs, some “similar characteristics,” we are told, “are found among some (Herzegovinian) Croats, who have an element of Vlah [pastoralist] ethno-genesis in their origins. All of that is what has produced the characteristic variant of Serb-dom in the 19th and 20th centuries.” (*ibid.*: 68).

shame and fear justice, the authors add,

we also want for the communities, the societies that allowed the crime of rape because the women victims were not “theirs,” not from their own communities, to awaken their collective conscience and accept what the civilized world accepted long ago, to condemn the crime of rape and to cleanse itself of it... (*ibid.*: 12)

As it has been made clear that the perpetrators are Serbs and their communities “the Serb people,” this passage suggests that Serbs lack honor, morality, and are as a group beneath civilization. Indeed, other sections of this text imply just that by asking whether the perpetrators feel shame. The Bosniac people, on the other hand, as the victim, is portrayed as a people whose morals and feelings “nurtured in us” by “our daughters, sisters, mothers, wives, women of honor” do not allow anyone, “no real ‘male’” to do such a thing: “a true man [čovjek] cannot do that to a woman, cannot order others to do that to a woman...” (*ibid.*: 11). Bosniacs are thus elevated to a morally pure state in which men are honorable and strong and women nurturing and chaste.

A public promotion for this book in Zenica further confirmed the significance to the book’s promoters of the nation, rather than of women as women. Prominent Bosniac intellectuals and politicians, including Filipović, gave a series of speeches about the long suffering throughout history of the Bosniac nation, and they emphasized the honor, purity, and piety of Bosniac women. All of the presenters were men, aside from a well-known Bosniac actress who did a dramatic reading of two harrowing testimonies from the book. In condemning the rapes, Filipović warned that there is evil in humans, that there will always be violence, “But we can know that such things await us and we can be prepared rather than go along like lambs and leave our mothers, our sisters, and our children, our daughters, our granddaughters, to the bandits [*hajducima*] and wolves.” It was clear that “we” were men of the nation, charged with the protection of “the nation’s” women. This formulation was no different from those embedded in Serb and Croat nationalist discourses, discussed above.

A male Bosniac friend who generally made a conscious effort to resist nationalist thinking, “not to hate,” despite his personal experiences as a victim of Serb ethnic cleansing, also attended the promotion. He remarked that the presentations had seemed to him like a “call to mobilization,” directed to him as a male and therefore potential fighter, rather than an acknowledgment of the suffering of the women victims. “This book doesn’t do anything for the women victims,” he said

afterwards, “it offers them no concrete or material help. It’s pure politics.” Indeed, though the hall was full of men and women members of the local elite (especially those around the ruling nationalist party), none of the women activists like those at Medica, who had been working to help women war victims (including survivors of rape) for years, and who were cited in the book itself, had been invited to the promotion. Nor had any rape survivors (though they may have wanted to remain anonymous). The suffering of the women themselves was clearly a secondary issue.

What is more, though there was a consistent insistence on preserving the honor and dignity of the women victims, the book simultaneously upheld conservative, traditionalist ideals of womanhood. The speeches at the book promotion and the book’s poetry, drawings, and essays surrounding the women’s actual testimonies, were saturated with images of female purity, shame, innocence, and motherhood. The title of the book itself—*I Begged Them to Kill Me*—made clear that rape was to be perceived as a crime of honor after which any decent woman would only want to be killed. This is not to deny that many women experienced rape this way. Indeed, the title is a quotation from one of the women’s testimonies. However, the choice of this statement as the title underscores the idea that these rapes were above all crimes against women’s honor, rather than their physical and psychological well-being.

Although the authors were careful to recognize women’s agency in speaking out, they nevertheless channeled those active roles into motherhood and accusations towards the enemy in the name of the nation. Women’s suffering and sacrifice was equated with the sacrifices of soldiers fighting at the front lines and of (male) *logoraši* detained as civilians, all actions deemed as part of the struggle for Bosnia and Bosniacs—women who had been detained and raped had resisted the enemy’s attempt “to kill Bosnia within [them]” (*ibid.*: 14). The women victims are praised for their courage, yet they are expected to want to remain silent because of the shame of what has happened to them:

We know that it is very difficult for the tortured women, that they do not happily speak about the crime that has happened to them, about the trauma they feel. We do not insist that the abused women give public statements, that they expose themselves...We just want them to record the truth. (*ibid.*: 12).

This could be interpreted as a similar stance to that taken by feminist advocates for women rape

survivors such as the activists at Medica who refused to discuss individual women's cases or offer them up to journalists for interviews. Medica's concern was with protecting women from re-traumatization and from manipulation by the press, especially nationalist media (Andrić-Ružičić 2003). However, the context in which this message is embedded in the book of testimonies points to different motives.

Post-war Women Activists and the Legacies of War

The war thus created a number of issues for women in the post-war period. Most obviously, the consequences of war— refugees, rape survivors, humanitarian need, trauma, ethnic divisions— became areas of activity for women's groups. In many cases, these needs provided the impetus for women to organize, for the presence of foreign donors and the availability of funds.

The war also brought forth and even established many of the categories of identity with which and against which women activists positioned themselves after the war. As with the population as a whole, women were characterized by newly important categories of ethnicity, religion, and political orientation vis-a-vis ethnic relations— was she a nationalist, a patriot, a communist holdover, to which ethnic group did she belong, was she “truly” religious, etc. They were equally positioned according to what they had done and experienced during the war— did they flee the country or stay, were they expelled from their homes by ethnic cleansing, did they leave their towns “voluntarily,” etc. All of these categories were tempered by age, family status, position in society, and of course, gender. Men were also judged according to whether they had fought and for which army. Women were not expected to have fought, which offered them both advantages and disadvantages after the war, as we will see. Women were instead placed in the category of civilians and, in the eyes of their own ethnic communities, victims, both symbolic (of the nation) and real. As we have seen, rape and sexual violence gave a specifically gendered tone to women's victimhood. However, it was not the only kind of victimhood through which women were portrayed and understood themselves.

Images of Rural Victimhood

Several women's organizations with which I came into contact in the post-war period were specifically concerned about their image, that is the image of "Bosnian women," and "Bosniac women," in the rest of the world. Bosnians had been watching CNN and the BBC during the war, as these programs were often the only coverage available. They were therefore quite aware of what Julie Mertus called the "CNN image" (1994) of distraught and disheveled rural Muslim women dressed in traditional *dimije* and head scarves, carrying their children and a few belongings as they were packed into trucks or marched over mountain trails in the process of being expelled from their homes. The women shown were inevitably crying, whether in distress or in mourning over a lost loved one. They thus epitomized the passive, feminized victim.

While such images played into Bosniac nationalist discourses of the victimhood of the nation, many educated, urban women told me they were hurt and insulted by them. However, their objections indicate that they were more insulted by the association with village culture and orientalized images of Bosnia as exotic, distant from Europe, than they were with images of women as victims. In fact, as I describe in chapter 7, women consciously utilized certain forms of feminized victim identities as strategies with which to achieve their goals. Hajrija, an Islamic teacher (*mu'alima*) who had helped distribute humanitarian aid through a women's organization during the war, grew irritated as she told me,

It's absurd and wrong that the international community portrayed Bosnian women as backward, uncivilized, illiterate. This is not reality. They filmed many of our sisters in the worst times when they were defeated, confused, scared. The communist system was difficult. Illiteracy grew, especially among our girls. So there were illiterate women. But these were the only women they showed on CNN—our women fleeing, always in the worst possible state, completely lost. We're not Kurds or something, we have civilization here. And we're fighting to keep it.

Rural women war victims were thus symbols of primitive backwardness, the exotic/non-European Muslim, and the blood- and hatred-filled Balkans. Hajrija here reproduces an orientalizing representation common to Bosniac discourses, which emphasizes the modernity and sophistication of Bosnian Muslims as opposed to (backward) rural Bosniacs, Balkaners further to the south and

east, and most of all Muslims outside of Europe (the Kurds) (Bakić-Hayden 1996; Helms n.d.). Elvira, a Zenica lawyer who was active with the women's group *Bosanka*, echoed these sentiments when she told me, "I wish those foreign journalists had, just once, come into the town and interviewed one of us. To see that Bosnian women are also educated, sophisticated. This is Europe!" Countering these images was in fact a major motivating factor for many women to get involved in women's organizations and public activities. Mensura, a teacher and parliament representative for the Bosnian Women's Party (*Stranka Žena BiH*), listed this as the first reason for the establishment of the Women's Party. In her words, they wanted to show that "we're not just old peasant women like the world media showed."

These women were emphatic about showing women's capabilities and actions, their belonging to "the civilized world" (i.e., Europe and the west), and countering the notion of Bosnian women as passive, helpless victims. However, there were actually other common images of Bosnian women projected in the foreign press. One appeared in western media (e.g., Cohen 1994) as well as in the local imagination: that of the Sarajevan beauty, stubbornly refusing to go out of the house without doing her hair, applying make-up, and donning the latest fashions despite shortages, the siege and the bombardment of Sarajevo. No Bosnian woman ever complained to me about this urban image, although it, too, failed to portray women as educated, active or political in any way. However, it portrayed women as urban and *western*.⁷³ As a French journalist wrote, "Judging by its streets, Sarajevo is clearly a European city, not a Muslim capital. Women are more likely to wear miniskirts than head scarves; men drink alcohol." (Ourdan 1995). It seems that these women thus objected more to the association with what was seen as primitive and backward rural culture, than the portrayal of *women* as passive and victimized.

The other image was that of the Muslim woman as rape victim, to which I now turn.

The Image of the Muslim Woman Rape Victim

Although Bosnian women activists associated themselves with certain victim identities, they generally avoided association with wartime rape for reasons I outline in chapter 8. The image of

⁷³ This image coincided with portrayals of Bosnian Muslims, especially in Sarajevo, as "just like us," i.e. white, urban, educated, worldly, which accompanied arguments *for* western intervention.

Bosnian women as passive victims, emblematically Muslim and rural, nevertheless endured, especially in connection to rape (Spasić 2000). Images of the Muslim Woman Rape Victim were almost as prevalent in the western media as those of distraught, fleeing, rural women. These usually showed younger women and girls, their faces stained with tears or turned away in shame, communicating silence (see Gutman 1993). Texts emphasized women's shame and unwillingness to talk, despite the obvious fact that the women interviewed *had* spoken out about their ordeals (Žarkov 1999). Instead of on their voices, the focus was on the women's bodies and what had been done to them (Kašić 2000). Headlines and titles reinforced the association with shame and silence: "Unspeakable" (in *Time Magazine*, Morrow 1993), *Breaking the Wall of Silence* (Vranić 1996), and "Women Hide Behind a Wall of Silence" (Drakulić 1993b). Many accounts combined rural and Muslim associations with images of rape. As listed at the beginning of this study, Eve Ensler's *Vagina Monologues* include a sketch on wartime rape entitled, "My Vagina was my Village," neatly reinforcing the idea of women's bodies as territory to be conquered. As the piece and the program notes make clear, the protagonist is a Muslim woman from rural Bosnia.

Significantly, the Rape Victim was always and necessarily female, despite the striking number of sexual attacks on men, discussed above. Indeed, rapes of men were not discussed publicly in any nationalist discourses, as men did not belong to the category of the "rapable" (Žarkov 1999). Žarkov shows how both nationalist *and feminist* discourses in Croatia and Serbia perpetuated this association by focusing on women solely as victims— for nationalists, victims of other nations; for feminists, victims of men (*ibid.*; Spasić 2000). The category of "woman" therefore remained the category of passive objects, outside the (male) realm of political action and military aggression, vulnerable to rape and therefore in need of male protection (Žarkov 1997). This was to have consequences for women's post-war organizing, which we will see in later chapters.

Žarkov also shows how the Rape Victim was constructed as (only) the Muslim woman in western media and academic discourses (1997, 1999). The few analyses of wartime rape which mentioned "Bosnian culture" at all usually referred only to the Muslim community and focused on Muslim women as silenced and shamed rape victims. Many texts commented on what was portrayed as a predictable, lamentable fact: that rape for Muslim women was especially hard because of the deeply patriarchal culture from which they came (e.g., Allen 1996; Gutman 1994; Zalihić-Kaurin

1994). It hardly needed to be explained that this culture placed high value on female chastity as a symbol of family and male honor, and that a raped woman would therefore be ostracized and punished by her own people. Associations with rural and Muslim traditions were emphasized as explanations in themselves of why Muslim women suffered more (Žarkov 1997). Such representations drew on familiar, Orientalized images of backward, passive, silent and silenced Muslim women, victims of their own oppressively patriarchal cultures and irredeemably other (Abu-Lughod 2002; Ahmed 1982; Mohanty 1991; Žarkov 1995; and see Narayan 1997).

In contrast to those images, therapists at Medica, who worked with thousands of women rape survivors, mostly Bosniac women, asserted that none of their patients had been rejected by her family. While rape was difficult for all women, they reported, it was the very religious women, whether Muslim, Catholic, or Orthodox, who sometimes had an especially difficult time. For the urban therapists, the idea that such differences among women would be detectable according to ethnicity made little sense. As discussed in the previous chapter, urban areas had become largely secularized and homogenized under socialism, such that differences in class and rural/urban origins were more pronounced than ethnic differences (Woodward 1985). Rural communities of all religions in Bosnia tend to be more religious than their counterparts in towns and (thus?) to take an equally patriarchal view of women's sexuality and rape. This includes the many people with recent roots in rural areas (see Simic 1973). Religious communities in the towns likewise tend to be more conservative in terms of their approach to gender roles (c.f. Sorabji 1989). As Serbs, Croats, and Bosniacs are all present in both rural and urban settings, nothing about one's ethnic background says anything about whether the social milieu one comes from will be rural or urban, religious or secular. During and after the war, therefore, differences on such issues corresponded more to a person's ties to villages and religiosity than to *which* religion s/he belonged (Žarkov 1999).

Nevertheless, the orientalized image of Muslim women has persisted. Although it is clear that many Muslim women *were* raped, and raped because they were Muslims, Muslim women have come to stand for rape in Bosnia as the *only* victims and *only victims*, made more vulnerable and victim-like through orientalized images of strictly patriarchal Muslim (rural) culture (Žarkov 1997). The effect of these images was to erase other victims of wartime rape— Serb and Croat women, women of mixed ethnicity, urban women of all ethnic backgrounds, males, those who were raped by

members of their own ethnic group— as well as victims of “ordinary” (non-ethnic and “peacetime”) rape. More immediate for post-war women activists, however, as we will see, was the association of women with passive victims, outside the realm of action, including public, political, and military engagement.

Another consequence of these images manifested itself in the approach of foreign donors and activists. A large number of women’s organizations active after the war had been started by, or together with, foreigners and foreign donor agencies. While many foreign donors were large international NGOs with experience in other post-conflict and post-colonial relief and development contexts, Bosnia also attracted a good many western women, many of them feminists, who, specifically mobilized by a concern about war rapes, raised money to help Bosnian women, especially Muslims (e.g. Foeken 1999; Krämer 1999). Zenica, for example, was firmly in the hands of Muslim dominated political and military forces and was slated to remain that way by all proposed peace plans (see Burg and Shoup 1999; Woodward 1995). It therefore became a collection point for thousands of Muslim refugees fleeing Serb, and later Croat, ethnic cleansing campaigns. Because the bulk of rape survivors were Muslims, but also because the archetypal rape survivor was a Muslim woman, Zenica and other places with large numbers of Muslim refugees (such as Tuzla and Zagreb) were chosen by foreign activists for their projects to help women rape survivors.⁷⁴

Upon reaching Bosnia, several of these groups of foreign women found that the need for women extended beyond coping with rape (feminists in Serbia reached the same conclusions in their work with women war survivors, Mladjenović 1999). This was the case for Monika Hauser, the German feminist who founded Medica in Zenica, and the other German women of Medica (see Cockburn 1998; Fischer 1997; Medica 1996). Initially concerned about war rapes, she traveled to Zagreb where many of the victims of rapes by Serbs had fled. There she learned about Zenica as a collection point for Muslim refugees within Bosnia. When she arrived in Zenica and gathered local women who were concerned about helping women war victims, they concluded that the center would have to tackle more than just the consequences of rape. This was due both to the multiplicity of

⁷⁴ Some foreigners, in solidarity with anti-nationalist feminists in Serbia, did direct funds and efforts toward projects to help women war victims in Serbia (Mladjenović 1999). Some, however, were conflicted about offering “sympathy for the devil” (Meulenbelt 1999).

kinds of trauma inflicted on women refugees and their children, combined with the need to offer rape survivors and others a refuge that was not marked specifically as a clinic for “raped women” (see Cockburn 1998; Medica 1996). Thus, the rapes drew in many concerned activists and facilitated the raising of more money than may have otherwise been the case.

Ultimately, because rape was an ethnic and national issue, women activists working to promote understanding for women rape survivors found support, sympathy, and concern for the victims from the (nationalist party) authorities and from the public at large. It helped that the vast majority of the rape survivors being treated in a given area belonged to the ethnic group controlling the town. In Zenica, local authorities supported public initiatives condemning rape as a war crime, calling for understanding towards the women survivors, and stressing that these women retained their purity and innocence despite what had happened to them. Muslim religious officials went so far as to issue a *fatwa*, or religious decree, calling for understanding towards women victims of rape by Serbs (Andrić-Ružičić 2003; Haskić 2000). They stressed that the women themselves were not to blame and urged Muslim men to marry rape victims, especially those pregnant with the children of rape (i.e., part Serb or Croat) so that the children could be brought up properly as Muslims/Bosniacs. This eased the minds of many religious Muslim women and helped Medica’s work somewhat. At the same time, publicizing the rapes also served nationalist causes eager to “prove” the barbarity of the enemy. Calling for men to marry pregnant rape victims meant re-claiming both the women and the children for the nation. As was true in Serb and Croat discourses, the nationalist interest in rapes ended with concern about its implications for the nation. Concrete and sustained support for women rape survivors (and survivors of other kinds of wartime atrocities) were offered only by local and foreign women’s organizations like Medica (Hauser 1996: 18).

War rapes affected Medica’s post-war work to combat domestic violence against women. On the positive side, the fact that rape had become a public issue that was, at least for a time, taken seriously, made it somewhat easier for Medica to continue discussing rape and violence against women after the war ended. Some level of understanding for what victims of rape go through and the gender aspects of the crime had been successfully absorbed by the public. Other aspects of people’s war experiences provided Medica’s therapists with additional tools for eliciting understanding for victims’ perspectives. Ivana, a Medica therapist, explained this connection in the

context of sensitivity training sessions she helped run for (male) local law enforcement and judicial officials:

We've found the sensibility towards domestic violence can be different when we put it in the context of things that happened during the war, like prison camps. We show people the same consequences for domestic violence but apply them to the camp situation— isolation from the outside, identification with the captor, specific senses of fear, etc. People in the audience had sympathy for and felt solidarity with the camp survivors. Then we said, this is the same as with domestic violence. In one group where there were some camp survivors, the whole room was silent after we made this comparison, even though before that they had had a much different position on it [prior to the session]. In this way the war did “help” by giving people examples from their own experiences or experiences they know more about. We then pose the question, are we against violence, or only when it's violence at the hands of certain people?

Ivana's last question alludes to some of the problems Medica nevertheless encountered in the post-war period as they attempted to shift the focus of their work from wartime rape to domestic violence. As Ivana further pointed out, many people saw wartime rape as something different from rape in “peacetime.” As her colleague, Esmā, put it, “in war, it was also easier to talk about rape because it was something the enemy was doing to us, they could say, look what they're doing! And there was support from the community.” It had therefore been easier in some ways for women to talk about what they had gone through. “But,” Ivana continued, “when someone feels like a victim in the collective sense, as part of a group, then it's seen as a betrayal of loyalty to accuse ‘our’ men of the same thing.” Thus, although the subject of rape had become more publicly acceptable, it was still seen in national terms rather than through a gender lens, despite the efforts of women activists. The support from the community had more been support for “our” victims rather than for *women* as victims. To be sure, prejudice against rape survivors was mostly due to standard patriarchal assumptions about women's guilt for “allowing” themselves to be raped— as much as their rapes were deplored as evidence of the barbarity of the rapists (whether because they were ethnic enemies or the stereotyped primitive peasant man), these women were nonetheless seen as dishonored and

polluted. I address some consequences of these attitudes in later chapters. Women's organizations still had much work to do to convey their gender critique of sexual violence to the Bosnian public. Indeed, as Esma pointed out, most women were still silent about rape, though Bosnian society was not unique in this regard since, "women are silent about this all over the world."

The Politicization of Ethnic and Religious Identities

Women activists, like all other Bosnians, had to contend with the public obsession with ethnic and religious identities which had been fueled by nationalist politics and deepened by real experiences of ethnic violence and hostility. Religious practice and identities were given primacy by nationalists who emphasized outwardly visible devotion to "their" religion as an integral part of ethno-national membership (Bougarel 1996; Laušević 1996). Public identities hinged to a large degree on ethnic belonging, levels of support for ruling nationalist parties and rejection of socialist (atheist, multi-ethnic, secular) ideals, and outward markers of ethnic orientation, including religious observance, language usage (especially greetings), dress, and choice of social circles. In Bosniac areas, markers of Islamic, Bosniac, and anti-communist identities became politically correct among supporters of the governing SDA, and correspondingly disdained among anti-nationalists. Political organization, administrative units, government policies, majority/minority relations, the distribution of state benefits and humanitarian aid, schooling, religious practice, and many other aspects of the post-war public sphere in Bosnia necessarily required participants in community life to orient themselves in terms of ethno-national relations. Often such choices became routine, went unquestioned, or appeared only implicitly in public discourses, but some situations demanded explicit recognition of a stance on ethno-national issues.

Ethnic labels, too, did not necessarily reflect the feelings, background, or political stance of individuals, though their use had gone a long way toward solidifying those identities. People of mixed background were in an especially difficult position. Some chose the identity of one parent or the other, others adamantly insisted they were neither or both. There were also many people whose parentage was "pure" (i.e., both parents came from the same ethno-religious background), but who were married to members of another community, had "mixed" children, or whose extended family included members of other communities. Again, some of these people willingly chose an affiliation

while others lived uncomfortably with the contradictions now imposed on their lives through ethnic categories. Finally, as names acted as markers of ethnic identities, those with the “wrong” names suddenly found themselves being mistaken for the “wrong” ethnicity, or being seen as suspect. In other words, although names and ethnic labels were taken to be absolute categories, many people did not fall into them neatly (see Cockburn 1998: 192-6).

Women’s organizations, along with other types of groups, were generally seen by the public in ethno-national terms as well. They either had to choose or were assigned (fairly or not) some ideological position on national identity and ethnic relations in Bosnia, even though most of them claimed to be completely apolitical. Those who condemned nationalism generally dismissed organizations engaged in religious activities as “nationalists.” For those suspicious of the international community’s multi-ethnic state-building policies, NGOs that received foreign funding to conduct cross-ethnic projects were seen as artificial creations and tools of foreign actors. An NGO which claimed to be non-nationalist and inclusive could be undermined in the eyes of its community by a mono-ethnic membership or the personal histories of its leaders if they had ever been a member of a nationalist political party or had ties to the religious establishment.

In fact, it was especially difficult in Bosniac majority areas, for foreigners or for fellow Bosnians, to gauge people’s commitment to multi-ethnic ideals. This is not to speak about “true” inner feelings, but to point out that outward statements held many possible meanings. Firstly, geopolitical factors had compelled most Bosniac nationalists to embrace the idea of a unified, and by necessity, multi-ethnic Bosnian state. This was also the official position of the SDA, though it often pursued policies which discouraged non-Bosniacs from feeling at home in the territories it controlled. This included their insistence on a prominent, public role for Islam and other markers of Bosniac identity. In this support for a multi-ethnic Bosnia, the SDA differed from its counterpart nationalists among Serbs and Croats who rejected the state, discouraged members of other ethnic groups from living on territory they controlled (and had ethnically cleansed), and harbored separatist dreams. Those Bosniacs who saw a multi-ethnic Bosnia as a practical necessity for the survival of the Bosniac nation therefore shared many of the same goals with anti-nationalists who advocated a multi-ethnic Bosnia based on secular democratic principles rather than ethno-national ones (c.f. Bougarel 1996; Rusinow 1985).

Secondly, blatant pressure by foreign donors and international officials for NGOs and political activists to engage in cross-ethnic cooperation and multi-ethnic activities meant that it was difficult to determine whether activists publicly espoused multi-ethnic ideals out of personal conviction or out of a desire to please international officials and garner funding. Support for a multi-ethnic Bosnia had therefore become “politically correct” both among Bosniac nationalists, the international community, and in NGO circles, though the reasons differed significantly.

Finally, I heard over and over in Bosniac areas Serbs, Croats, and Bosniacs can and must live together in Bosnia. This sentiment, too, was sometimes a reflection of genuine anti-nationalist sentiment. At other times it opposed not nationalism in general but *specific* nationalisms, namely Serb and Croat nationalist discourses which insisted that the nations could not live together and that Bosnia must therefore remain divided into ethnic parts. The latter sentiment, in other words, placed the onus on Serbs and Croats in everyone getting along, with the accompanying reasoning that Serbs and Croats had been the ones to attack Bosnia and its areas of mixed populations where people were living peacefully together. Such a stance, however, also frequently carried with it a refusal to look critically at aspects of Bosniac policies which might make members of other ethnic groups, not to mention anti-nationalists of all backgrounds, uneasy.⁷⁵

I outline these discourses and positions to illustrate the many layers of meaning attached to expressions of support for a multi-ethnic Bosnia and other stances on ethnic relations. My point is not to essentialize one nation or the other as “nationalist.” Instead, I want to point to the overlapping set of meanings and discourses on which people draw when they express ideas on how ethnic relations should be structured. As participants in and objects of these discourses and experiences, women’s organizations and their individual members held a wide range of opinions about ethnic identities and related issues. As was true in the wider population, each individual negotiated these discourses and meanings in different ways in different situations and the same statements by different people could reflect very different approaches. In this way, suspicions about others’ motives, and therefore conflict, were perpetuated but also often smoothed over. Likewise,

⁷⁵ Bougarel gives a careful account of these ambiguities as expressed by the SDA just before and during the war. The SDA tacked between a “civic discourse” of a multi-ethnic Bosnia and “participating fully in the communitarian dismantling of the state.” (1996: 101).

international community schemes were complicated by a failure to understand the depth of meaning contained in outward statements of support or opposition to international goals. I will have more to say about these issues below.

Women Crossing Ethnic Boundaries

Women's post-war activism was also affected by the intensified separation of women's and men's roles during the war (see de Alwis 1998b). As one Sarajevan man explained it (in English), thinking, when I told him that I study anthropology, of physical anthropology's focus on primate studies, "We really went back to [being like] the monkey in this war. Man was always fighting and woman just looked to make some food, carry water, look after [the] kids." (see Lazarevska 1995). As males are assigned the role of soldiers and political actors, women as a group fall outside the category of potential (armed and aggressive) adversaries. Indeed, they were, with very few exceptions, *not* among those who have waged war and made political decisions since the dissolution of Yugoslavia.⁷⁶ After the war, this allowed women to claim moral purity as new political actors untainted by the dirtiness of war and nationalist politics. I elaborate on this point in chapter 7. Women also had an easier time crossing ethnic borders and communicating with those on "the other side," especially with other women. This is not to say that such border crossing has been easy or without problems, especially for women who experienced traumatic personal tragedies during the war at the hands of ethnic others, but that women as a group were afforded more room to engage in such activities.

Women could therefore move across borders more safely and sooner after the war ended than could men, especially younger men. In many cases, older (married) women acted as scouts, testing the waters for the rest of their families in areas of different ethnic control soon after hostilities had ended. When I lived in the divided (Croat-Bosniac) city of Mostar in the summer of 1996, just a few months after the end of the war, it was common knowledge that women could and did routinely cross the ethnic boundary to the other side of the city where they no longer "belonged." When there was some errand that could not be accomplished on one's "own" side of the city, a woman would

⁷⁶ This is true despite the rise in women's political participation since 1998 with the introduction of gender quotas. I discuss women's involvement in post-war Bosnian politics in chapter 7.

typically be the one to cross to the other side to get it done. Men, and especially younger men (of fighting age), crossing the ethnic boundary risked violent assault if they were recognized— either by their former neighbors and acquaintances, or after being challenged by police or local thugs— as belonging to the “wrong” ethnic group.

I knew of only one incident in which a woman was made to feel threatened for being on the ethnically “wrong” side of town. This was when a young, observant Muslim woman wearing Islamic dress (*hidžab*) went to the Croat part of town to catch a bus to Croatia (which was only available from the Croat section of town) and was verbally harassed. Her head covering and Islamic dress offered an outward marker of her difference which otherwise cannot usually be determined from dress or appearance among urban Bosnians. Other women displaying no visible markers of difference could cross undetected, but the consequence of their being “discovered” was not as severe and violent as for men. Without outward ethnic markers, in other words, one of the only distinctions that could be made among people one did not know personally was by sex. Women were not perceived as significant threats unless they displayed markers of ethnic difference (see Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1989; McClintock 1993; Schein 1996; C. Smith 1996). Males, though, were seen as the actors of consequence and were therefore more often noticed and challenged to identify themselves.

These categories remained important after the war, facilitating the activities of those women who chose to cross ethnic boundaries. Women such as those at anti-nationalist organizations like Medica Zenica participated in cross-ethnic feminist networks between Zagreb and Belgrade during the war. As soon as the fighting halted, despite real fears, these women were among the first to cross ethnic boundaries within Bosnia to meet women “on the other side,” with whom they had had no contact during the war. They met with Serb and Croat women who were equally anxious to (re)establish contacts with the rest of Bosnia. Women continued to lead post-war efforts at reconciling ethno-national groups driven apart by the fighting. As we will see in the following chapters, these efforts were encouraged, amplified, and often initiated by donors eager to take advantage of women’s identities as apolitical actors. Yet it should be remembered that many women sought out these contacts on their own and were much more successful in establishing cross-ethnic relationships than were groups of men. As Nataša of Medica put it, “you have to recognize that the

first initiatives, especially the first exchanges across entity lines, [after the end of the war] were just women. Like the 1996 NGO Fair in Tuzla. *Duga* [A Serb women's NGO] came and that was before our [later] meeting with them... Maybe this was the donors making it happen but they still came.”

Conclusion

The war, therefore, created many issues which women's organizations felt compelled to tackle during and after the war. War-related issues were not the only issues, however. The dismantling and curtailing of socialist-era social programs, such as maternity leave, state-funded daycare, health insurance, pensions, and other benefits, also mobilized women to political activism. Some embraced western free-market models propagated by foreign donors, others encouraged a return to religion after years of state atheism, while others lobbied to retain socialist-era social benefits and the rights of women to full time employment *and* motherhood. These debates turned on fundamental definitions of gender roles and political ideology. Perhaps the strongest overt force affecting women's activism was the international community and the foreign donors, on which most women's organizations depended. Nevertheless, as this chapter has outlined, the experience of the war created firmly entrenched social and moral categories with which post-war women activists were forced to contend. The following chapters show how such wartime identities and experiences, together with the legacies of socialism and the effects of international intervention, fundamentally shaped the discursive arena in which post-war women's activists operated.

CHAPTER FIVE
WOMEN'S POST-WAR ORGANIZING AND DONOR AGENDAS

War's End: The NGO Explosion

Many post-war women's organizations got their start during the war providing humanitarian and social services, supporting the armed forces, and aiding refugees and other needy populations. As we have seen, women were the ones in the position to undertake such initiatives, as men served in armies or fled. Some of these groups were local extensions of projects begun by foreigners who wanted to limit their involvement in the region and "leave something behind," particularly after the war had ended. Women's wartime involvement established a foundation for their participation in the new NGO sector when it emerged in earnest following the end of the war. Women's NGOs have been a major category of new organizations formed (Cockburn et. al. 2001: 38-40). This NGO explosion coincided with the massive international post-war reconstruction effort which actively promoted the establishment of NGOs (see Belloni 2001; Gagnon 2002a; Stubbs 1999).

Because foreign donors were virtually the only source of funding available to local NGOs, their demands and policies exerted a profound influence over NGO activities and self-presentations. While many women's NGOs, as I discuss below, largely followed socialist era patterns and understandings of women's activism, they shaped these activities to conform to donor priorities and to incorporate attention to social problems produced by the war. Thus, community activities and social outlets for women became variously "psycho-social aid to traumatized women war victims," "legal assistance," "inter-ethnic dialogue," and "work with minority women and returnees." Some women's NGOs also reflected newer concerns, not only out of attention to donor demands but also in response to global and regional changes such as the shift to free market liberalism, political pluralism, relations with newly created "minorities," and renewed attention to religious and national identities (for an overview of activities engaged in by Bosnian women's NGOs, see Cockburn et. al. 2001; Walsh 1998; and see Gal and Kligman 2000 on post-socialist Central/Eastern Europe). Finally, a relatively small but vocal group of NGOs were developing feminist practices and ideologies suitable for the Bosnian context.

This chapter introduces the women's organizations in this study and the political context in

which they operated, focusing on ethnic, religious, and gender identities. I begin by outlining the aims and practices of the “international community” of donors and administrative agencies towards local NGOs. I then give an overview of the local political and social climate in Zenica. I introduce the main NGOs I worked with there and in the wider network of Bosnian women’s NGOs. In terms of approaches to gender, I show how the makeup of women’s groups reflected socialist models of women’s community involvement, normative assumptions about women’s roles, and ideas pushed by foreign donors of civil society, the “third sector” of NGOs, social activism, and various other “hot” issues. In terms of ethnic and religious identities, I show how donors effectively force ethnic categories upon NGOs even as both donors and NGOs attempt to dismantle them. Thus, I argue that international intervention has forced a “nation-ing” of gender discourses that otherwise strive to concentrate on gender issues, and a suppression of dialogue over gender and religious identities.

The “International Community” and “Multi-Multi” Civil Society

To understand how women in NGOs have been targeted by foreign donors and institutions, it is necessary to outline some of the goals of post-war foreign intervention. During my fieldwork, it was common to hear both locals and foreigners refer to “the international community.” This term was sometimes used generally to mean all foreign governments and agencies involved in relief aid and development,⁷⁷ but most often referred more narrowly to the group of supra-national bodies and major aid agencies charged with implementing the Dayton Peace Agreement which ended the war in late 1995. The latter group in effect represents “western” governments—the United States, Canada, and European Union (EU) states— either directly, through embassies and country aid agencies (USAID, DFID, SIDA, etc.[see Appendix C]), or indirectly, in the form of private development NGOs which implement governmental projects or UN agencies heavily influenced by western governments (see Gagnon 2002a). Two specific bodies, the Office of the High Representative (OHR) and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), act in a quasi-protectorate

⁷⁷ The major non-western donors to Bosnia were Japan and those from Muslim countries such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Iran. The latter worked almost exclusively with Muslims and in the Muslim/Bosniac majority areas of Bosnia and did not promote multi-ethnicity. The same can be said for some religiously based groups working in Serb or Croat areas. Also present were UN officials and soldiers from various western and non-western countries.

fashion, to monitor and implement Dayton. These are at the center of what is most often meant by “the international community,” so that this term, especially when used by Bosnians, can very often be read to mean “the west,” or “western governments.” Despite the heterogeneity of this group and the vague boundaries of what the term encompasses, there remains a singularity of purpose, if not method, when it comes to the broader goal of post-war reconstruction and its attendant aims: ethnic reconciliation, the return of refugees,⁷⁸ the creation of a workable, multi-ethnic state with a pluralistic, democratic and market system (Bose 2002). I therefore refer to international agencies and donors collectively where appropriate, keeping in mind the complex web of interests, goals, and power they represent.

International goals in Bosnia include the development of “civil society.” As discussed in the second chapter, in practice this has meant a focus on “NGO development” as the key feature of civil society. During my fieldwork, the OSCE’s Democratization Department had an initiative targeting “Neglected Areas” of Bosnia for the establishment of new local NGOs. In this way, the “internationals” aimed to “spread civil society” and thereby, presumably, democratize areas of Bosnia lacking in NGOs/civil society (and democracy?) (see Belloni 2001; Chandler 2000:135-53). It was no coincidence that the Neglected Areas were those under firm nationalist control, where refugee return was resisted and ethnic composition was effectively homogeneous. NGOs, especially those that would be beholden to western donors, were seen as a wedge through which “democratic” and “civic” (i.e., non-nationalist) values could be injected into these “problematic” areas. Perhaps coincidentally, but also because of the newness of NGOs, local government officials at all levels viewed NGOs with suspicion. “Non” governmental was often interpreted as “anti” governmental. In many cases, where civic minded NGOs opposed nationalist governments, this was in fact the case. It will be remembered that the international community aimed to nurture non-nationalist forces in the interest of promoting a multi-ethnic state. However, NGOs were not in themselves necessarily “democratic” or representative of “the grassroots” (see Abramson 1999; Ishkanian 2003). Indeed, their membership was often closed, or perceived as closed by outsiders, though this varied from group to group, as we will see.

⁷⁸ I follow local usage by referring to “refugee” return, even though many would-be returnees are in fact internally displaced persons under international law.

As I outlined in chapter 2, mixed messages from international officials, donors, and local authorities, combined with varying interpretations among local activists of concepts such as “civil society” produced much confusion about the role of NGOs. Indeed, I came across many definitions of civil society among NGO activists themselves, including those who had gone through numerous “trainings” (*trejninzi*) by international donors which stressed the need to build civil society through NGOs. For many, “civil society” was another buzzword of “NGO-speak” (Wedel 2001; and see Sampson 1996)⁷⁹ which activists learned in order to garner funding (Ishkanian 2000). Further, there was an intermediary effect, with concepts being conveyed down the line from donors to various local actors and back, their meanings shifting in the process (Wedel 2001). Often civil society was assumed to mean “civilized” or “civilian” society. Translation of the word “civil,” was at times rendered as “*civilno*,” as in civil behavior, and other times as “*građansko*,” from the word for “citizen,” or “civic” (see Phillips 2002). Several of my informants objected to what they saw as donor efforts to get them to behave “civilly” or to “civilize” them, as if they knew nothing but hatred and violence.⁸⁰

Whether they defined civil society the same way donors did, Bosnian activists placed their definitions squarely into the current Bosnian political context of ethno-national division. Most local NGO activists defined civil, or citizens’ society as one that rested on the equal treatment of citizens as individuals, rather than members of ethnic, religious, or other groups. “Civil society is practical, oriented to the needs of citizens regardless of their membership in certain groups,” explained one women’s NGO member. The leader of another women’s organization told me that civil society had existed in Bosnia (Yugoslavia) before the war because ethno-national categories had not determined one’s treatment by state institutions (but see chapter 4). “It means that there are no differences between people,” she explained, “each person is respected, valued. People are not differentiated by religion or nationality, but by their actions.” Both of these women were ethnic minorities in the municipalities where they lived and felt the onus of being ethnically different in their everyday lives.

⁷⁹ Similarly, Ferguson (1994) discusses “devspeak” in the context of “development.”

⁸⁰ One Bosniac NGO leader felt Bosniacs were being unfairly targeted to “behave civilly” when for her it was the Serbs that had instigated the violence and killing. Ironically, the lag in donor attention to NGO development in the RS had been the result of sanctions meant to punish the Serb entity for resisting the building of a Bosnian state.

Two Serb women active in a women's NGO in Banja Luka, capital of the Serb entity, however, stressed the *maintenance* of national categories in their definition. But civil society to them was still multi-ethnic in that the category of citizens superseded that of national divisions. "It is possible to work around national categories, nationalism. That's the only way to build a civil (*građansko*) society," one of the women told me. The other added, "Civil society has to make room for national identity, but *nationalism* negates all other things so it's a threat to civil society."

Other NGO activists focused on the role of NGOs. When I asked Nataša, a leader at Medica Zenica, what civil society meant to her, she responded,

It can mean all kinds of things. I would talk more about the NGO sector, the "third sector." This is some sort of link between civil society and the state. It's kind of a spokesperson for civil society (to the state). I mean, even neighbors who stick their heads out of their windows and complain about another neighbor throwing their garbage in the wrong place is civil society. But the state doesn't hear that voice.

For Nataša, the NGO sector operated within a larger, undifferentiated space called civil society. But as she continued her explanation, the specificity of the Bosnian case of a state divided into areas of different ethnic control was clearly visible:

The third sector is good because it's not parallel to the structure of the state. You can have a state that's divided and which often disregards the general interest. Then the economy is another sector and that's also divided (by national group, in Bosnia), especially when it comes to state firms. ... And then the third sector is concerned with the needs of the community and not just of one nation. ... Basically in the third sector it's easier to cross national borders.

Still other women's NGO activists focus on the fact that the current system in Bosnia is rife with corruption and violations of human rights on the basis of ethno-national membership. "How can we talk about civil society when people don't have jobs and can't live in their own homes?" demanded a woman NGO leader from the Federation town of Tuzla, referring to political obstruction to the return of refugees to areas of different ethnic control. Another, recalling ethnically motivated attacks on returned refugees, said, "as long as my neighbor can come and attack me, there's no civil society."

Not surprisingly, therefore, another key to international efforts was the return of displaced persons and refugees to their former homes. This effectively meant reversing the “un-mixing” achieved by the war’s ethnic cleansing—no small task given the great distrust and animosity towards members of other ethnic groups which was intentionally produced by ethnic cleansing and was therefore especially strong among the displaced (see Hayden 1996). Reconciliation and communication across ethnic lines were therefore a priority for foreign organizations working on refugee return. This, combined with the focus on multi-ethnic civil society, has produced an overwhelming international emphasis on a western multicultural model (Gagnon 2002b), or what many Bosnians, having been bombarded with calls for the need for multi-ethnic, multi-confessional, and multi-cultural everything, have come to refer to as “multi-kulti,” or simply, “multi-multi.”

To be sure, the local NGO sector *has* been the space where those favoring multi-ethnicity find room for expression. However, for several reasons it is problematic to assume in every case that professed support for multi-ethnicity by NGOs was sincere or carried the same meanings as the liberal multiculturalism promoted by foreign actors (see Belloni 2001; Bose 2002; Smillie 1996; Stubbs 1999). Some of these were the same problems that kept NGOs from being inclusive, democratic, and truly representative of “grassroots” opinion.

First, because of the severe lack of employment in the post-war economy, the NGO sector attracted people with all kinds of political convictions rather than just what promoters of Western civil society models would characterize as committed social activists (Stubbs 1999). Secondly, political climate and the acceptability of public support for multi-ethnicity, even cross-entity communication, varied from area to area. This meant that a subtle gesture towards multi-ethnic cooperation by an NGO in an area dominated by separatist nationalists (Serb or Croat areas) may have reflected a more sincere commitment to multi-ethnicity than more overt advocacy of a unified, multi-ethnic Bosnia by an organization in an area where such support is officially sanctioned (i.e., Bosniac areas).

Thirdly, because donors have openly demanded multi-ethnic membership and/or cross-ethnic activities from the NGOs they fund, NGOs were just as blatant in their outward declarations of

support for multi-ethnicity, or indeed whatever goals current donor policies demanded.⁸¹ NGOs that were, or hoped to be, dependent on western donors— virtually the only available source of funds—infused presentations of their work with the language of multi-ethnicity, tolerance, reconciliation, refugee return, and building civil society. NGOs looking for foreign support eagerly pointed out any members of ethnic minorities in their groups, especially to foreigners. It is therefore not surprising that some in the NGO sector were more committed to multi-ethnicity and cross-ethnic cooperation than others.

Finally, donors often required members of different ethnic groups to work together on projects in the hope that close cooperation would foster the reestablishment of cross-ethnic trust. Many NGO women complained that donors were putting this requirement above considerations about what was best for completing a project, even when the project was not specifically about building multi-ethnicity. In some cases, this strategy even backfired. People unprepared to work with members of other ethnic groups ended up increasing their distrust through such contact, as any conflicts related to the project at hand were chalked up to others' ethnicity rather than individual characteristics.

Thus, by placing so much emphasis on ethnicity in NGO activities, donor strategies in many ways reinforced the “communitarian” logic of ethnic categorization (Bougarel 1996) even as they sought to dismantle it (see Bieber 1999; Gagnon 2002b; Hayden 1999). As V.P. Gagnon has argued, international (western) insistence on a liberal multicultural model has reinforced the very European notion of “the ethnicization of territory and the territorialization of ethnicity” (*ibid.*: 13; and see Borneman 1998; Todorova 1997). Rather than being opposites, as donors present them to be, this “good” kind of liberal nationalism (multiculturalism) and the “bad” exclusive nationalism of the ethnic cleansers more accurately differ only by degree. Gagnon further points out that the ethnically based political structure enshrined in the Dayton Agreement has further produced the category of ethnic minorities within ethnically defined entities, cantons, and municipalities. Donors thus stress “tolerance” of minorities, people who used to be just regular citizens in a multi-ethnic territory not

⁸¹ David Kideckel reports an apt reworking of the old socialist phrase (“We pretend to work, and they pretend to pay us”) related to East European attitudes towards western aid: “They pretend to help us, so we pretend to be helped” (1995: 6).

defined by ethnicity. At the end of this chapter, I return to this issue to consider how it affected the work of women's organizations.

Zenica as “*Mudžahedin* Town”

Zenica served as a collection center for thousands of Muslim refugees during the war. Government at the local and cantonal levels (Zenica is the largest city in the Zenica-Doboj Canton) was controlled by the SDA throughout the war and up until the anti-nationalist Social Democratic Party (SDP) won municipal elections in April, 2000. Its reputation as a hardline Islamic town has been hard for it to shake. During the war, many foreign “*mudžahedin*” fighters operated in the town and its surroundings, along with local Bosnian converts to their brand of fundamentalist Islam. These fighters made the town notorious by patrolling the streets in armed groups (when regular Bosnian Army fighters were required to leave their weapons at home) harassing couples kissing on park benches or holding hands in public, and threatening women in clothing they felt was too revealing. Residents of the town had a mixed reaction to these fighters. Some were grateful for their help on the battlefield, especially when the Bosnian Army began the war with few weapons and were (legally) prevented from acquiring more through a UN arms embargo.⁸² Many others resented the foreigners' attempts to impose an “alien” standard of morality and propriety onto secular Bosnian society. Most of all, Zenica residents resented being labeled as a “*mudžahedin* town” (*mudžahedinski grad*). Nataša, a Medica activist, told the story of her husband's annoyance while working in the Bosnian Army's press office at foreign journalists who would consistently ask to be taken somewhere where they could film *mudžahedin*. Her husband, an ethnic Serb, shot back in exasperation, “Film me— we're all *mudžahedin*!”

Zenica's reputation has stuck even with the departure of most *mudžahedin* fighters. When Miss Bosnia-Herzegovina was stripped of her title after the local press revealed some nude photos she had had taken some years before, the Sarajevo-based press made knowing remarks about the irony that she came from Zenica, of all places. Similar inferences were made when the first Bosniac

⁸² Later in the war, the Bosnian Army was to amass considerable weaponry despite the embargo, most notoriously from Iran in shipments tacitly sanctioned by the US, as well as from other Muslim countries (see Burg & Shoup 1999; Woodward 1995: 338).

woman to appear in Croatian *Playboy* was a woman from Zenica (see Helms n.d.). Some radical Islamic groups were still headquartered in Zenica during my fieldwork, and the reclusive community of foreign ex-mudžahedin fighters who had married Bosnian women had settled in a village within the Zenica Canton,⁸³ but these groups had little influence on everyday life in post-war Zenica. There were easily just as many, if not more fundamentalist Muslims and their organizations in Sarajevo as in Zenica.

Nevertheless, Zenica did remain under the firm control of Bosniac nationalists who encouraged a prominent role for (their own brand of) Islam in public life and in notions of Bosniac identity. Many aspects of local governance and everyday life were controlled or influenced by the local SDA, from the appointment of people for prominent positions in state institutions and private firms, to housing allocations, private business licenses, and university scholarships. While there was considerable diversity of public expression, there was a general air of what was “politically correct” in the eyes of The Party, so much so that many public officials, journalists, artists, and others censored themselves in public so as not to attract unwanted attention. A small but vocal Croat nationalist community was also active, albeit largely separately except in its political representation through the minority party, the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) of Bosnia. The Serbs who had stayed in the town during the war were mostly supporters of a united Bosnia or elderly people with few choices; there was no Serb political presence on the local level.

The most prominent anti-nationalist political movement was centered around the SDP, a party with its own image problems as successors of the Yugoslav Communist Party, but which was genuinely multi-ethnic and had signed on to the principles of the European Social Democratic movement. These included working to increase the participation of women and youth in politics and society. The independent art and literary scene, along with informal social networks, also offered spaces for non-nationalist ideologies. Many, but by no means all, of those who worked in the NGO sector and with foreign agencies also favored a non-nationalist stance. For all of these groups of people, however, attitudes and practices vis-a-vis ethnic relations and politics were difficult to pin

⁸³ The village, Donja Bočinja, was actually about an hour’s drive from Zenica, closer to the towns of Maglaj and Zavidovići. The presence of the “*mudžahedin*” in this formerly Serb village and the effort to disperse them stirred considerable controversy during the time of my fieldwork.

down and even ambiguous or contradictory for individuals, for reasons outlined above. This was the complex environment in which women's organizations in Zenica formed themselves during and after the war.

Women's Post-war Organizing

In this section, I describe the activities and outlooks of several groupings of women's organizations in Zenica and elsewhere as a way of introducing some of the forms which women's activism has taken all over post-war Bosnia. I am most concerned with the groups' approaches to gender, ethnic issues, the idea of activism, and politics or political and social engagement.

Many outside observers have attempted to classify women's (and other kinds of) voluntary organizations by their activities and their ideological orientations. One common classification, which reflects the international community's concern with ethnic reconciliation, refugee return, and the building of a multi-ethnic state, has been by the organizations' stance on ethnic relations, or how "nationalist" they were. In addition to obvious ideological statements, foreign agencies look for an organization's ties with nationalist political parties or other groups, for the degree of ethnic diversity among the group's membership, for whether the group engages in activities with members of other ethnic groups or in territories of different ethnic control.

A second type of classification comes from foreign feminist donors and activists concerned with these organizations' desire or ability to challenge established patriarchal gender norms. These observers often asked how "feminist," an organization was, whether defined by the group itself or as evaluated by outside observers (but see Walsh 2000). As feminism was a controversial label, this criterion is often phrased as "having a gender perspective" (Cockburn et. al. 2001: 17), or being "women-friendly" (see Walsh 1998). Underlying these feminist classifications, too, was the assumption that feminism and nationalism do not mix— that feminist groups cannot be simultaneously nationalist, nor nationalist ones feminist. As we have seen from the previous chapter, this is not necessarily always so (see West 1997).

Despite the neatness of such classification schemes, these two social change aims— work towards ethnic reconciliation and towards equality of the sexes— indeed, the very definitions of "nationalism" and "feminism" have been, not surprisingly, subject to substantial variation,

contradiction, and differences in interpretation. So, too, are the complexities of identities encompassed within each individual organization, as they are made up of individuals and embedded in local communities. While questions of nationalism and feminism did arise in organizations' self-presentations, often due to perceived donor expectations, organizations also used other standards by which to judge themselves and other groups. The degree to which an organization was humanitarian, political, self-interested, or honest were important categories of classification, as was the ability of an organization to secure (foreign) funding and to demonstrate results in its work. These concerns reflect the moral categories relevant to local social and political processes in post-war Bosnia.

It must be stressed, however, that the self-presentations of formal organizations, whether influenced by donor pressures, interaction with outsiders, or foreign sponsored training sessions, were more than just representations for the benefit of observers outside each group. Women members, to varying degrees depending on their position within their organization, often felt the need to uphold certain ideals for which their group stood. In this way, self-presentations by groups also shaped relations and actions by individuals in their organizations, with other organizations, and in local communities, families, and social circles. What an organization said about itself was therefore more than just a statement for donors or others outside the group; it also represented ideals that could be interpreted and acted out in many different ways by the individuals participating in these groups.

In the following discussion, I describe four "types" of women's organizations in Zenica and a fifth "type" I encountered in other towns. I show how the very categories by which women's organizations in Bosnia were judged, by outsiders and locals, are in many ways problematic. By grouping the organizations in this way, I acknowledge some basis for categorization. However, these labels should be understood only as loose groupings of the kinds of orientations and activities of local women's groups. I do not suggest that the same dynamics among women's organizations occurred in all regions of Bosnia. Organizations were highly dependent on the personalities of their leaders, their histories within their communities, their skill and luck in securing funding, and many other factors (Cockburn et. al. 2001; Smillie 1996; Stubbs 1999; World Bank 2002). As I have explained, local politics, geography, and history also played a role in the possibilities and realities for each group. Nevertheless, in my experience with a wide variety of women activists from all parts

of Bosnia, I did see many patterns which are reflected in the Zenica groups.

The fifth grouping describes two women's organizations not based in Zenica, though I got to know them through Zenica activists at various women's NGO meetings. Organizations of this type, refugee/returnee women's NGOs, were not present in Zenica but many of the women refugees had passed through Zenica during the war. I discuss below the ways in which these groups fit and do not fit into the NGO "types" as I have grouped them here.

Medica: Feminist, Multi-ethnic, Anti-nationalist

Medica is one of the oldest, largest, best established, and best-known women's NGOs in Bosnia. It is also one of the few to declare itself a feminist project.⁸⁴ The organization was founded in April 1993 when feminists from Germany led by gynecologist Monika Hauser came to Zenica with the goal of helping women war survivors, especially those who had survived wartime rape (see Chapter 4). The German women sought out Bosnian women psychologists, medical professionals, and others with necessary skills to work in a women's therapy center which would combine medical and psychological treatment for women who had suffered various kinds of trauma during the war. Medica's approach has been to offer holistic treatment of trauma through medical, psychological, spiritual, and material help. With these goals in mind, the project grew to provide vocational training, spiritual counseling, material aid, child care, and shelter to women trauma survivors. After the war, with the immediate issue of wartime suffering receding in urgency, Medica's focus broadened and shifted to combating domestic violence against women and children. The residence maintained on the premises for women war survivors became a shelter for women fleeing abusive home situations. An *SOS Telefon* help hotline was set up, as was *Infoteka*, an office whose job it was to document Medica's work, network with other women's organizations, and represent Medica to the public. Eventually, *Infoteka* began conducting research and issuing publications on violence against women,

⁸⁴ The other self-described feminist NGO, *Žene Ženama* (Women to Women) in Sarajevo, was founded by two women who had worked for Medica and a third who had been an active member of the feminist, anti-nationalist and anti-militarist *Žene u crnom* (Women in Black) in Belgrade where she had spent the war years. Other Bosnian women's NGOs such as the *Centar za pravnu pomoć ženama* (Center for Legal Aid to Women) in Zenica, started by another Medica activist, *Udružene Žene* (United Women) in Banja Luka, *Lara* in Bijeljina, *Forum F* in Posušje, and *Žena BiH* (Woman of Bosnia-Herzegovina) in Mostar, sometimes used the term "feminism" or did not always reject it outright, but did not usually describe themselves as feminist groups. I take up the issue of "Bosnian feminism" in chapter 6.

as well as leading an initiative to train local police, medical, legal, and social work officials in better understanding and fighting gender based violence.

To facilitate fundraising efforts, the German women created *Medica Mondiale* as an organization based in Germany. Most of the direct involvement by the German women in Medica Zenica's activities was during the war and immediately afterwards. Since 1996 there have been no German women from Medica Mondiale in Zenica; the project became a truly locally run NGO. Medica Mondiale, however, continued to provide funding for Medica Zenica, even as they later began work in other conflict zones such as Kosovo and Afghanistan. During my fieldwork, the specter of an end to the German funding loomed over the project; they had been shielded somewhat from the volatility and pressures of the regular donor market in Bosnia. Infoteka was the first to begin learning how to write project proposals and garnering outside funds for various individual projects.⁸⁵ In fact, Nataša of Infoteka complained that they had outpaced Medica Mondiale in their development as an NGO. While the German Medica was still relying on crises and horrifying images of war to raise money, the Zenica women, Nataša felt, were getting on with life rather than dwelling on the war.

Contact with foreigners extended beyond Medica's relationship with Medica Mondiale. Zenica maintained close contacts with feminists from Croatia, Slovenia, and Serbia, though these, as fellow "ex-Yugoslavs," were not considered "true" foreigners. Many western feminist activists, researchers, donors, and volunteers also passed through the project. Infoteka had had several American volunteers, including two who stayed for two years each and contributed greatly to the direction of Medica's work. The second of these, Kristen, was part of the Infoteka team and my flat-mate while I lived in Zenica. I discuss her role further in chapter 6.

Infoteka was the branch of Medica with which I had the most contact, though I also interacted with several of the therapists and other leaders most active in public outreach projects. These were the women who kept in touch with feminists in other countries and women's NGOs within Bosnia. They had been through various training courses— in non-violent conflict resolution, feminist theory, database management, and subjects dealing with NGO development— and had conducted seminars

⁸⁵ A feminist donor with offices in Bosnia, Delfi/STAR, coached them through their first attempts at proposal writing, sending it back until it was right rather than rejecting the first drafts.

for other Bosnian groups in these subjects. I also spoke with and attended meetings with members of the Center for Legal Aid to Women (*Centar za pravnu pomoć ženama*), which had been founded by a Medica member and still worked closely with Medica and its clients. The Center's leaders were also quite well connected to western donor circles (and thus rarely had time to grant intensive interviews to a visiting non-donor anthropologist).

The women in Infoteka were more likely than women in the rest of Medica to call themselves feminists and to incorporate gender analysis into their work and everyday activities. They were also younger— all but one were in their twenties and thirties— a few having come of age in Medica from the time they were in their late teens or early twenties. In fact, as women in NGOs in Bosnia tended to be in their forties and fifties, the Infoteka “girls” (*cure*), as they were called in Medica, along with some younger women working in the day care center and SOS Telefon, were among only a few younger and unmarried women's NGO activists in Bosnia.

Although Medica was officially a women's “association” (*udruženje*), few women belonged who were not employees or SOS Telefon volunteers. The women had typically come to Medica because they were recruited for their skills (as psychologists, doctors, nurses, religious counselors, German speakers, cooks), because a mother, daughter, or other family member brought them in, or after having been a patient/client. There were also a few men employed by Medica as night guards and drivers; otherwise it was an all-women organization.

The community viewed Medica with a mixture of gratitude, approval, disapproval and envy. Many only associated it with “help for raped women” or with the gynecological clinic. This was seen as a welcome service to the victims of the war and to women. However, some who were more familiar with Medica's public activities were put off by their avowal of feminism and their association with foreign feminists. They assumed that this meant that Medica was teaching women to “hate men.”

Medica's feminist orientation had been built into the project from the beginning by the German women. Contacts with feminists in Zagreb, Belgrade, and further afield were initiated and nurtured. As they took over the project completely, the leading Bosnian women continued to embrace these ideals, as did Medica Zenica as an organization, though the rest of Medica's members came to different personal conclusions about both gender and national identities (see Cockburn

1998). Above all, they expressed the desire to get on with their work to help women, regardless of ethnic or religious background, which was in itself a political stance. I discuss the articulation of feminisms within Medica further in chapter 6.

Medica also billed itself as anti-nationalist and multi-ethnic, or without an ethnic identity. Their membership did include women of Serb, Croat, and Bosniac backgrounds, as well as those in or of mixed marriages. A large majority, however, were Bosniac, as were most of their clients. In this they closely mirrored the ethnic composition of the town, which was about 80% Bosniac. I encountered very little discussion among Medica members about ethnic differences within the group. Ethnicity, religion, and ethnic politics were all subjects of lively debate around the table in Infoteka, but this was in terms of what was happening in the community and in Bosnia as a whole. Conflicts, resentment, friendships, and alliances within Medica were based more often on personal attributes and actions than on ethnic categories.⁸⁶ Medica activists, regardless of ethnic background, professed a sense of appreciation for the atmosphere at Medica, calling it, as one activist did, “some kind of oasis,” from the pressures of everyday life where people were compelled to identify themselves ethnically and to think in ethno-religious terms.

Still, ethnicity did become an issue in subtle ways, whether imposed from the outside or as a subtle subtext to daily activities and debates. In some cases, perceptions influenced by individuals’ own ethnicized subject positions contributed to personal clashes. Within the organization, activists recognized the need to “count” those who could be classified as ethnic minorities and to encourage cross-ethnic work in a society that has been so divided by ethnic nationalisms. This was a crucial part of the effort towards ethnic reconciliation. “[Ethno-]national categories can’t be avoided,” explained Nataša of Infoteka, “I can’t think like that. But you have to take them into consideration, even if you want to fight them.” I return to the effects of donor policies on ethnic relations at the end of this chapter.

⁸⁶ Interestingly, foreigners— the current and former American volunteers who worked closely with Medica— were the ones to suggest that ethnic differences might be behind some of the tensions in Medica. When such hypotheses were voiced, however, the Medica women rejected them, offering explanations which had to do with individual characteristics and actions rather than ethnicity. In fact, it often seemed that foreigners, including me, were much more aware of ethnically based differences among the women than the local women themselves. It could have been that the women at Medica refused to consider such explanations in order to be consistent with their anti-nationalist views. Yet I also suspect this was a product of foreigners having been conditioned to expect ethnic tensions everywhere by the ubiquitous image of the Balkans as a hotbed of “ancient ethnic hatreds.”

Despite the working relationships that had formed, all the women at Medica had to work through feelings of animosity toward members of other ethnic groups in whose name armies were perpetrating terrible acts of violence. They had to work hard to reconcile those feelings with the presence within Medica of women belonging to those ethnic groups. However, for many of the Bosniacs who had had their faith in other ethnic groups destroyed by personal experiences during the war, just the presence of Serb and Croat women, as well as women from mixed marriages and other backgrounds, allowed them to overcome hatred and mistrust and to begin to view others as individuals first rather than as ethnic others. This atmosphere also helped the Serb and Croat women cope with the situation of suddenly being an ethnic minority which was associated with wartime atrocities perpetrated against Bosniacs, even while they themselves had had unpleasant experiences because they were not Bosniacs (see Cockburn 1998).

At the end of the day, it was Medica's common focus on combating violence against women which held them together, despite their differences on questions of ethnic relations. In Nataša's words, "We in Medica have different political orientations. We didn't unite because of political conviction but because we were all trying to work on the same problem. That's the advantage of Medica." Because Bosnian politics turned on differing conceptions of ethnic relations, here "political orientations" encompasses attitudes toward ethnicity and nationalism. Medica thus acknowledged the differences which might divide its members, yet because its focus was elsewhere, and not in small part also because many of the women could not afford to lose their jobs in Medica, it managed to hold itself together. A similar dynamic was even more crucial in cross-ethnic relations among women's NGOs, as I discuss in chapter 7.

Gender-conservative "Nationalists"?: The Association of Women Intellectuals "Bosanka"

As its name implies, *Bosanka* (the female form of "Bosnian") saw itself as a group of educated women whose main task was to help other women and their community as a whole through educative and cultural activities. The organization grew out of the wartime humanitarian activities of a group of urban, professional Bosniac women in Zenica. From the beginning of the war, these women had mobilized themselves through another women's group called *Sumejja* to distribute humanitarian aid to refugees and people in outlying villages. Šefika, a judge and former teacher, and

others also began organizing language courses and medical aid teams. Edina, a dentist, volunteered her professional services, often pulling hundreds of rotten teeth each week in exchange for apples from village orchards, which the women then distributed to wounded soldiers in the hospital.

After two years of this, in 1994, the educational courses were stopped to make more room for humanitarian distribution, at which point Šefika and Edina decided to split off and form their own organization. Šefika explained,

I was impatient. ... We were a little angry because of that and we made comments on why that kind of work couldn't be done, since Sumejja after all did have a sort of heterogeneous membership in terms of professions... so let those women—housewives— who don't have any specific knowledge do the most simple tasks. I don't know how to do all that weighing, packing, and all that. Let us women [professionals] do this [educational activities]. ... Then I was the one who suggested, why don't we... let's form an association of intellectual women where our goal will be just that, but that we don't just work in the town— there were those seminars and things in the town then— but let's go to the villages where women first of all don't have any opportunities or transportation. ... Let's go out to the villages and hold courses, or lectures, I don't know, on the subject of law or whatever our specialties are. So, then— even though the humanitarian and the educative are always linked, but when you just do the humanitarian, I don't know, you distribute flour, that's not educative.

Educative was the key concept for these women. They felt the burdens of their own privilege as educated, professional women— among them were a judge, several teachers, a school principal, a lawyer, and a few doctors— in a kind of *noblesse oblige* toward their less fortunate sisters in the villages. These were the women who most vehemently objected to the CNN images of disheveled, rural Bosnian women “with five scarves on their heads,” as one Bosanka member put it, and wanted to show their education and sophistication. *Bosanka* was thus formed with Šefika as its leader. After the war ended and the Zenica branch of Sumejja disbanded, Bosanka continued to operate on a purely voluntary basis and with no permanent donors.

When I first conceived this research, I had chosen Bosanka as a same-town counterpoint to

Medica's explicit feminism and anti-nationalism. Their name suggested, if not a specifically nationalist stance, then one which celebrated both Islam and Bosniac traditions as integral to Bosnian society and statehood, and in a way which might put off many Serbs and Croats. Bosanka's membership was all Bosniac; they spoke in terms associated with Bosniac nationalism, though mostly in the sense of national identity affirmation rather than outright hostility toward ethnic others. They were also closely linked to a network of women's organizations based in Sarajevo which had a reputation for being Bosniac nationalists and included other similarly named women's associations such as *Bošnjakinja* (the female form of "Bosniac"), several branches of *Sumejja* (named after the first female martyr to Islam), and of *Fatma* (a branch of the SDA which works with families of martyrs [*šehids*] and fallen soldiers from the Bosnian Army) (Selimbegović 1995).

During my preliminary research in 1997, the women of Bosanka had given off all the signals associated with a Bosniac nationalist position in the post-war period. They expressed great enthusiasm for promoting and celebrating all things Bosniac and Muslim, and their activities included workshops with (Muslim) village girls on various topics including "Women in Islam," "History of the Bosnian State," and "Handicrafts in the Function of Preserving Tradition." Šefika, was especially keen to take me to the (Bosniac) rural areas,

to see a real woman in a village, because in cities everyone lives in the same way—it's international. ... You have to go to a village to see a real Bosnian woman (*Bosanka*). We'll surprise her so she doesn't have time to prepare. You'll see her just as she lives. There's nothing like seeing someone in their home to really understand them.

In referring to a real "Bosnian" woman—*Bosanka*—in what she had made clear was a Bosniac village, she elevated Bosniacs to the status of emblematic examples of what it meant to be *Bosnian*. Furthermore, her veneration of village culture as authentically Bosniac seemed more a fascination with the Bosniac past and traditions than a real desire to improve life for rural women. Edina had talked excitedly about her recent trip to Iran, about solidarity between Bosnian Muslims and the wider Muslim world, and how she was thinking about starting to wear Islamic dress, "covering." Furthermore, when I asked them how their group got started, I got a history lesson which revolved around the theme of persecution of Muslims by Serbs. Clearly, the "we" in their perceptions were

Bosniacs.

Bosanka members explicitly eschewed the term “feminism,” said nothing about women’s rights or equality, and seemed to advocate and affirm conservative, patriarchal roles for women such as motherhood, traditional handicrafts, cooking, keeping a warm and nurturing home atmosphere for husband and children, etc. At the same time, however, these women were eager to portray themselves as intellectuals, professional urban women with careers, social standing, education, and sophisticated, “European” ways. I concluded that this group fit roughly into the category of a nationalist– or at least not explicitly anti-nationalist or multi-ethnic– and non-feminist women’s organization, even if I expected to find significant variation and perhaps contradictions in the activities of the group and stances of individual members.

When I returned to Zenica in 1999, I visited Šefika to begin following Bosanka’s activities. Though Šefika was to mention it to me countless times, I never was able to observe one of their “educational seminars for village girls and young women” because they were never held again (even though I gave them a standing offer to provide transportation). In fact, Bosanka had all but ceased to function as an organization by this time, despite Šefika’s attempts to motivate and organize its members.⁸⁷ The group’s, or at least Šefika’s, outlook on questions of gender and ethnicity had also changed substantially. Edina, who had *not* donned Islamic dress, was no longer very active in the organization, as her time was now taken up in her new role as a grandmother, and Šefika had begun to interact with a wider network of women’s organizations, including NGOs from Serb and Croat areas, that advocated inter-ethnic communication and challenged many aspects of commonly accepted gender roles for women. I do not know whether I had come away with the wrong impression of Bosanka in my initial visit with them, whether their initial self-presentation was something of an exaggerated performance for me, or whether the group, and specifically Šefika, had undergone an ideological shift in my absence. I am inclined to think it was a combination of all of these things, but especially the latter, and that Šefika was merely adding a new layer to her previously held beliefs. This was not at all incongruous, as it was easy and logical to merge aspects

⁸⁷ These fizzled attempts also included a plan to offer English and computer classes in their center, taught by me (as another of my attempts to “give something back” but also to create another arena for interaction with the organization and its women members).

of national identity affirmation with those of advocacy for a united, multi-ethnic Bosnia, especially for Bosniacs as I discussed above. Šefika had never been an official supporter of the SDA, though she felt strongly about affirming Bosniac national identity. At the same time that more and more people had grown disenchanted with SDA rule, however, she had directed her sympathies toward the SDP and anti-nationalist ideologies. Likewise, the group's stances on individual gender issues and advocacy for "women's rights" could easily encompass "traditional" patriarchal values and "feminist" demands for equality in public life. After all, this had been the familiar mode of women's lives under socialism, the system under which these middle aged women had all come of age and built their careers and families. Still, Šefika was beginning to embrace feminism as a term as she attended more and more Bosnia-wide meetings at which it was used in a positive way. My hunch is also that she wanted to show me, as an educated foreigner, how open minded and worldly she was. Feminism, women's rights, and anti-nationalism were embraced by western donors, representatives of "the civilized world," and many other educated Bosnians who moved in the circles of intellectual elites to which Šefika felt she belonged.

As Šefika became more and more involved in the Bosnian League of Women Voters and professional activities unrelated to women's organizing, she gave up most of her efforts to mobilize Bosanka's members to action, complaining that the women were not willing to participate anymore or to initiate anything without her. While I followed her activities with the League, I was left without an unambiguously "nationalist" and non-feminist women's NGO for my study, although I was aware that these labels meant little in this context. I began to seek out members of other women's organizations in the town in my quest to explore as many facets as I could of the intersection between gender and ethno-national ideologies and identities among women activists.

A "Catch-all" Working Class Ideological Mix: Naš Most

Naš Most (Our Bridge) organized social and income generating activities for a large membership of women from all kinds of educational and ethnic backgrounds. *Most's* leader, Razija, emphasized that it was this networking of "ordinary women" which distinguished *Most* from other women's organizations. At the time of my fieldwork, *Most* had over 500 members and was rapidly growing, owing to a requirement that women joining a foreign-funded micro-credit loan scheme also

join the association. The micro-credit scheme, financed and designed by the American aid agency Catholic Relief Services (CRS), was wildly popular, as unemployment rates, especially for those without higher degrees or elite connections, were very high and families, many of them headed by women, were struggling to make ends meet.

Most's activities ranged from all-women social gatherings, to income-generating projects with rug weaving, sewing, and traditionally female handicrafts, to micro-credit loan schemes. Members expressed a firm conviction that women could help each other out, learn from each others' experiences, and generally become stronger when they band together. As an organization, they were still struggling to successfully negotiate the world of foreign donors, although they had managed to win several projects (see Sampson 1996) from foreign donor agencies which helped them pay basic operating expenses and stipends for a handful of the women. Still, they were frustrated with the sometimes opaque process of garnering funds. They were learning "NGO speak" and how to tailor their proposals to donor priorities. As a result, they took on a wide variety of projects and as such may be classified as a "catch-all NGO" (Belloni 1999; Smillie 1996; Stubbs 1995; World Bank 2002). As one of the administrators told a prospective member who stopped by the office on day, "Any activity which helps women earn some money (*da zaradi koji dinar*)⁸⁸ is good. That's why we exist."

It is difficult to pin down Naš Most's stance, even an official one, on gender and ethnic relations. Most of their focus was on helping women survive the post-war economy. According to its leader, Razija, who joined the group in 1997, the organization had initially been purely Bosniac-oriented. However, Sadeta, a religious Muslim woman who founded Most during the war, made no mention of national identity when she told me about its initial activities. Sadeta formed the organization in 1994 with some other Muslim women when she had had to leave her position at Medica because of differences with the Medica women about its approach. In 1997, two years after the end of the war, Sadeta and many of the organization's original members left Most for various personal reasons and Razija took over its leadership. Under Razija, the organization underwent significant changes in membership and activities, as those unhappy with this shift left and new

⁸⁸ This expression, using the name of the old Yugoslav currency, the *dinar*, is still in use despite the introduction of a new Bosnian currency, the "convertible mark" (*konvertibilna marka*) in June, 1998.

women joined.

As Razija tells it, before she arrived the membership of Naš Most was all Bosniac women and one of their main goals was to affirm and nurture Bosniac identity. “Not that this is bad,” she said, “but I don’t know that an association like this is the right place for that.” Razija also volunteered with the local Bosniac cultural association, *Preporod* (Renaissance), which was tied to the SDA, because she was “interested in the tradition of the Bosniacs, especially after Milošević worked so hard to destroy Bosniac identity.” But she told me that “Identity belongs at Preporod, but Naš Most should be struggling for the rights of women.”

She also said she wanted to expand the membership to include more non-Bosniacs. In 1999, she proudly told me, “25% of our members are not Bosniacs. There’s a certain amount of Catholic and Orthodox women. But this is not a criteria for this organization. That’s a private thing. There are even Jehovah’s Witnesses.” There was a general desire among the active members of Most to cultivate a multi-ethnic or non-nationalist atmosphere. Džehida, the office manager during my tenure in Zenica, with a recognizably Muslim name, told a woman who had come to inquire about membership:

All members here are equal, the same (*iste*), regardless of their nationality, profession, status, whatever. Here, I’m Džehida and this is Milka [a recognizably non-Bosniac name] and it doesn’t matter. We’re both sitting here. And it doesn’t matter that she’s a cook and you’re a seamstress, or whatever. If you want to do something, if you’re interested in some activity, bring it forth and we’ll all try to make it happen.

Most’s membership was indeed made up of all kinds of women with many different outlooks on questions of ethnicity, religion, and nationalism. One Bosniac woman member complained every time I saw her of the corruption of the SDA, the hypocrisy of those who mix Islam with politics, and her disappointment with her “own people” in the post-war period. Non-Bosniac members proclaimed their enthusiasm over being involved and accepted into such a large and diverse group of women. But Besima, a young, devout Muslim who wore Islamic dress, was clear that she had joined the organization in order to help other women, especially Bosniacs and war victims, “to tell people what it’s like in Islam.” She was both moved by the way in which her people (*narod*) had been attacked

and concerned with Bosniacs' generally low levels of religious observance (a common complaint among religious Bosniacs).

For anyone who was looking for it, the signs of Bosniac domination were readily visible at Most. Besima was visible in the office in her head scarf and Islamic dress. This by itself should bear no significance, yet in the post-war climate in Bosnia, covered women signaled what some saw as a threatening form of Bosniac nationalism, and others saw as a friendly space where Bosniacs could be openly proud of their identity and faith. It was easy to learn that Razija was also active at Preporod, a space equated with the SDA, and the well-known large social gatherings for women (*sijela*) Most organized were always attended by SDA members and sympathizers. Razija herself proudly told me she had the approval of the authorities because, "they know how much I'm for Bosnia." In other words, they knew she and her organization supported the building of a multi-ethnic state in a way favored by the SDA.

However there were several enthusiastic and prominent non-Bosniac participants in the group. Furthermore, the group was actively recruiting non-Bosniac women for its membership and engaged in several projects to help minority returnees. Granted, much of this effort was in response to donor demands— one project Most had taken on required them to "find" Croat women to work in an industrial sewing workshop. Members of ethnic minorities in Zenica also had fewer options for income generation and employment and little choice but to get along with the majority Bosniacs. Still, Most could have opted not to pursue such projects, and more non-Bosniacs might have stayed away had they felt truly unwelcome. Most's position on ethnic relations, therefore, roughly coincided with that of the majority of people in the Bosniac dominated areas of Bosnia: open affirmation of Bosniac identity and cultural heritage along with an insistence that Bosniacs, Serbs, and Croats can live together in a multi-ethnic state. Non-Bosniacs were tolerated, welcomed, and recruited but they were not expected to espouse non-Bosniac nationalist views (such as challenging the legitimacy of the Bosnian state) or vigorously affirm their own identities. The ethnic mix was important not only to satisfy donors but also to conform to the ideological position which supported the idea of Bosnia as a multi-ethnic state with Bosniacs as its tolerant champions.

Naš Most had always been focused on helping women both materially and in becoming economically independent, and both Sadeta and Razija held strong opinions about the need to

establish more equality for women. However, feminism remained a dirty word at Most, as it was with most of the rest of the population, although Razija and others did talk quite a bit about “women’s rights.” Razija explained the motivation for her work in Most:

I wanted to do this because of lots of things that came together. There’s a lot of uneducated people, the mentality here... I had ideas on health, mental health, especially of women. Maybe I wanted a movement, but that’s too strong a word— an association. And *not the feminist kind but the kind of struggle for women’s rights*, for a complete woman— woman as a mother, worker, etc. (emphasis added)

Like the women professionals at Bosanka, Razija was concerned with reaching “ordinary women,” because “they have absolutely no clue about their own rights.” Razija’s approach was different from Bosanka’s, however, in that she did not plan to “educate” them but to gather them into the organization so they could support each other (c.f. Phillips 2002). As a result, a majority of Most’s members came from working class and rural backgrounds, and only a few had completed any higher education. It was important to many Most participants that women stand up for their dignity, for their rights not to be abused or cheated on by husbands, to collect alimony after a divorce, to be able to bring up their children in a stable, nurturing environment. Sadeta explained, “for young women economic independence is really important, regardless of whether they have a family, children, husband. This was one of the foci of our work.” They all found strength in women’s banding together. As Razija stated, “women are stronger together, as a group. Together they can educate and inform themselves, get to know each other and what’s being done for women.”

However, I never heard any of Most’s members challenge established gender norms for women. In other words, they never articulated what I would have labeled a feminist stance. They wanted women to be able to realize their rights *within* their roles as wives, mothers, and nurturers. They agreed that women should work outside the home, especially under current conditions of economic hardship, to avoid being isolated, dependent, and vulnerable to abuse from husbands or others. On many occasions, members of the organization expressed judgments of other women or otherwise made it clear that they agreed with, or at least did not consider challenging, patriarchal concern with women’s sexual honor and assumptions that women’s most important duties were to motherhood and marriage. Razija described an idea she had for improving literacy and education

rates for women, especially Bosniacs:

The way to have literate women is through girls' schools or girls' dorms. Then more village girls would be sent to school. This [would be] a complete school with a broad education— languages, music, and supervision of behavior and morality for ladies. This is a way for our families to get equality, because mothers that are educated in this way will bring up children in this way, children who will be the pride of this country and true carriers of society and not murderers. This is also a way to protect women *and make sure they have the support of the male public*. There's very little talk in schools about the importance of family, motherhood. Girls' schools would work to prepare a girl for life, to be a future mother, wife, worker. She will need to think about what kind of future husband she will have, her family, kids, house. Girls have no idea what awaits them. Diapers alone are a huge job, and then what to let kids do and what to forbid them. (emphasis added)

Razija thus saw marriage and motherhood as women's primary roles, but also included that of (female) worker (*radnica*), precisely the construction of women's roles that was dominant in the socialist period. Care of the home was a woman's responsibility, as was the upbringing and moral education of children. Razija stressed the importance of acceptance from "the male public," suggesting that girls should not be taught anything that might be seen as a challenge to the position of men, or in a way which clashed with established gender norms. Razija further explained that girls needed sex-segregated schools so as not to call girls' (sexual) morality into question, as it was part of the "mentality and faith" among Bosniacs that girls should be separated from boys from age nine.

Other members of the organization expressed similar acceptance of women's patriarchal roles, even as they worked for more female solidarity and justice for women within those roles. The women of Naš Most thus approached gender issues much the same way they were approached under socialism. Women were to be "mothers, wives, workers," and active in their communities, while taking primary responsibility for the home and the family (Mežnarić 1985; Sklevicky 1989). I discuss the continuity from socialist times further below.

Religious Muslim Women's Associations: Merjem, Kewser, and Individual Activists

In my search for the most exclusive and “nationalist” women, I sought out several organizations which specifically catered only to Bosniac women. Many of these were groups of religious Muslim women who focused more on religion and, in their words, social, cultural, and “humanitarian” issues rather than anything “political.” Over the course of my research, I was also directed to religious women who were or had been active in various other types of associations and public initiatives which stressed Bosniac and/or Muslim identity.

In seeking out these women, I wanted to understand more about the link between nationalism, religion, and constructions of womanhood. Though it was not all I was looking for, I wondered whether there were any challenges from within the religious establishment to male-defined conventions and expressions of Islam similar to Islamic feminist movements in other Muslim societies (see Abu-Lughod 1998; Fernea 1998; Mernissi 1991; Ahmed 1992). As with other women’s groups, my questions for these women were open-ended, centering on the women’s visions of the ideal society as far as gender, ethnic relations and religion were concerned. This took a specific tone with religious women, because outward markers of religious practice have become synonymous in many people’s eyes with support for nationalist political agendas.

I did not get as close to these women as I had hoped. Most of them were perfectly willing to be interviewed and they conveyed some very interesting things to me. But I sensed a level of caution in many of them, probably because I was a westerner, not religious (even in “my own” religion), and a woman asking about the position of women. Several of these women expressed outright frustration over the way Islam, Muslims, and especially the position of women in Muslim societies, are portrayed in the west. Some seemed to assume that I had come to Bosnia to judge them, to prove how nationalist and patriarchal religious Muslims really are. While I explicitly tried to assure them that this was not the case, there was nevertheless a sense among many of my interviewees that they felt the need to disprove western, Orientalist stereotypes about Muslims and assumptions about the link between religiosity and chauvinistic nationalisms in Bosnia. There was a barrier between me and many of these women that was absent with the other women’s organizations. As a result, though I had many conversations with individual women, I did not attend their activities to the extent I did with other groups; in some cases, I only got to know an organization’s leader. In introducing these

groups and individuals, therefore, I outline the range of their activities and approaches but do not present each group in detail.

Merjem, the Arabic name for Mary, mother of Jesus, was one women's group in Zenica that was made up strictly of Bosniacs. Their leader, Ramiza, and several of the core women of the organization were both devout Muslims (Ramiza and several of them wore Islamic dress) and members of the SDA. Of course, Ramiza was clear that their activities were not "political," despite their open support for the SDA, because their activities revolved mostly around religious education and "socializing" (*druženje*). They had formed the group as older women interested in learning more about Islam and their national identity. They organized women's excursions, often to religious events or sites, and frequently joined *Naš Most* in organizing women's *sijela*, especially for March 8th. Like the women of *Naš Most*, they stressed that *Merjem* members were "ordinary" women— "housewives and villagers" in Ramiza's words— not "intellectuals" like the women in *Bosanka* and other groups. Indeed, Ramiza did not appear to have thought particularly deeply about the role of women, religion, or ethnicity in society, though other members of the group had very specific ideas.

Merjem had never been funded by a western donor, nor had they tried to be. During the war they had received funding for various projects from Muslim donors operating in Zenica at the time. Throughout my tenure in Zenica their regular Islamic study classes were financed by local Islamic activists. The rest of their activities were self-financed and they remained a locally focused organization.

Although the women of *Merjem* seemed proud of their successes despite a lack of regular funding, Ramiza seemed jealous of another Zenica women's organization, *Kewser*, who had been financed by "the Iranians." In fact, *Kewser*'s leader and most of its religious members had moved back to Sarajevo when the war ended, and the women who remained in Zenica were running a day-care center which included Islamic instruction. As this had now become a small business that charged for its services, the women running it were less concerned with spiritual and social issues for women than was *Aiša*, *Kewser*'s founder who had moved back to her home in Sarajevo.

In Sarajevo, *Kewser* organized a variety of religious, educational, and social programs for women and their children. Although the organization, whose name is Arabic for "source" or "spring" (*izvor*), was solely made up of Bosniac Muslims concerned mostly with the spiritual growth and

social well-being of their members and their families, some of the group's members had participated in cross-ethnic dialogues with another Sarajevo women's association. Aiša, who wears *hidžab* (Islamic dress) in dark, plain colors, was open to dialogue with Serb women, though she was less enthusiastic than many Bosniacs about the return of refugees, especially of Bosniacs to Serb areas. "I always advise people they shouldn't return anywhere if it means being humiliated, degraded," Aiša told me. She was very clear that there were limits to the future of *multi-multi* in her eyes:

Many women work on this [cross-ethnic dialogue] to break down barriers because if we're not going to live with each other then we can live *next* to each other and to do this we still need to value and respect each other. It's like in a house with family. If the son marries and his mother and wife don't get along and the couple moves out, this doesn't mean they're not still family, that they don't continue to see each other. There's a way to get along without arguing.

Aiša's words also reflected her stance on gender. Women, because they "see things more emotionally," were "more prepared for this [ethnic reconciliation and dialogue], by their nature and also the situation they're in. All women, especially mothers, are prepared. Why should a mother want to send her children to fight?" She stressed women's biological differences, in line with her Islamic beliefs, which "naturally" tied them to the home, children, and education. Though she advocated the participation of more women in positions of decision-making power, Aiša was firm that "from an Islamic point of view, it's a bit different. A woman can't be the head of state. Woman as a biological creature is of a different nature. Being at the top entails lots of stress and this is difficult for women. Very few women could handle this well, being something like Margaret Thatcher." Still, she did not shy away from "politics" as most women activists did. Her definition was a broad one:

Everything is faith and religion, ethics. You can't separate this out. And women are the ones to deal with these issues. No one can say they are really outside of politics because it is everywhere, everything is political in some sense. The upbringing of children, voting, the economy— all of this is politics, and it's also all connected with ethics and faith.

Aiša was wary of the SDA and other politicians she considered corrupt and not true Muslim believers. Thus, she and the other members of Kewser were engaged in political questions, but from

the standpoint of women leading somewhat separate lives from men, involved more with “upbringing, children, relations with others.” Their approach to gender was therefore one of biologically based separate spheres and division of labor, with a strong basis in Islamic teachings.

I met two religious Muslim women in Zenica whose approaches to gender were much more critical of established norms. Sadeta, the founder of Naš Most and a former Medica member, was also involved in inter-religious dialogue and various religious education and humanitarian projects. Halima, who had replaced Sadeta as Medica’s spiritual counselor, was also involved in religious education for women and mixed groups through the official Islamic administration (*Islamska Zajednica*). Both women were young, trained *mu’alimas* (women Islamic teachers), and graduates of the Islamic Sciences faculty in Sarajevo. They both wore hidžab. Although neither Halima or Sadeta was engaged in high-profile, public campaigns, they were nevertheless enthusiastic participants in community activities and thoughtful analysts of social and political trends. Both women were critical of male interpretations of Islamic practice in Bosnia and aimed to educate women and men in a more gender-equal understanding of Islam. Sadeta even described herself as a “feminist, but an Islamic one” in a local newspaper during the war (Saraljić 1993:9). As she explained to me, the practice of Islam had been tainted by men and Arab customs:

The problem is that for centuries only men have interpreted Islam and of course they’ve interpreted it the way they want to, to suit them. What we have in the world now is actually Arab Islam, not Islam in its true form. Women in the Arab world have no rights as living things, to participate with equal rights (*ravnopravno*). Their place is just to stay at home, cover their faces and obey men. But Islam determines rights for women, it says women and men are equal (*ravnopravni*).

Halima held similar views: “My goal is to educate women in various problems and aspects, issues in Islam, so they know their real status, so they can defend themselves from being humiliated, put on an inferior level, made to listen to men and not use their own brains.”

While Halima and Sadeta had experience working through NGOs and supported the participation of women in politics, they were more hopeful of influencing social change through education and community work. Halima was engaged in individual work at Medica but she did more work on the community level through the *Islamska Zajednica*. Sadeta hoped to pursue graduate study

in comparative religion in order to work with university students to affect change. For Sadeta, this gravitation away from NGOs and politics reflected her criticism of the effectiveness of NGOs and corruption in politics. However, as I will show later in this chapter, the NGO sector was not overly welcoming of “covered” women or those wanting to engage in dialogue about women and religion.

Refugee Women’s NGOs: Srcem do mira and Žene s Podrinja

This study also considers the activities and discourses of several women’s organizations outside of Zenica. I encountered these groups while attending conferences, round table discussions, and workshops in other parts of Bosnia with the Zenica women activists I was following. Many of the groups I came across were similar to the Zenica groups I have presented here. One set of organizations, however, had different reasons and goals for their work. These were groups of women refugees and displaced persons (DPs) working toward return to their pre-war homes. While such groups existed to represent women of all ethnic backgrounds (see Cockburn et. al. 2001), the two such groups I got to know best were made up of Bosniac women who had been displaced by Serbs.

One of these groups, *Srcem do mira* (Through Heart to Peace), was started by women who had been refugees in Zagreb working with Žena BiH and allied with Kareta, Bedem Ljubavi, and other “nationalist” women’s groups that insisted on defining rape primarily as an ethnic crime of genocide by Serbs. Their home region, around Prijedor in Northwest Bosnia, had been one of the first to be ethnically cleansed by Serb forces; many of its people had been detained in area camps where some women were also raped, including some of the members of *Srcem do mira*. The women had returned to Bosniac controlled areas of the Federation at the war’s end and were pushing for return to their hometowns when I first met them. By the end of my fieldwork, the organization and most of its members had returned to the town of Kozarac, where Almasa, their leader, and many of the other women were from, and were engaged in a variety of NGO activities in the now Bosniac-dominated community.

Srcem do mira had always existed as a women’s group and offered psychological and material aid to women war victims, though they were clear that they had organized themselves to oppose all kinds of human rights abuses, not just those against women. They had formed as a women’s NGO because they were mostly women in their refugee circles, the men having been killed

or gone to fight in the war. They were wary of feminist groups, even those nationalist groups like Kareta with whom they agreed on many issues but who, Almasa said disapprovingly, “were against men.” In contrast, Srcem do mira stressed their relationships to men— husbands, sons, and other relatives, both alive and those killed during the war— and non-gender specific issues. As Almasa told me, they existed “precisely because of what was happening in the war, not just to women but all human rights that were violated.” They therefore concentrated much of their efforts on facilitating lasting return. Nevertheless, because they were a women’s group, they had been drawn into donor-linked circles of women’s NGOs and thus into engagement with a variety of “women’s issues,” including the campaign to increase women’s participation in formal politics. In fact, Almasa was a leading member of the League of Women Voters along with Šehida from Bosanka.

Another group, *Žene s Podrinja* (Women of Podrinje) was based in Ilidža, near Sarajevo, and made up of Bosniac women displaced from towns such as Srebrenica and Bratunac in the Podrinje region of Eastern Bosnia. While many of the group’s members refused to return after their ordeals, Zahida, the group’s leader, and some others were determined to push for return and were working towards this goal. Like Srcem do mira, *Žene s Podrinja* had been drawn into a variety of women’s initiatives, mostly through donor networks but also through the League of Women Voters. Through this exposure, Zahida had become used to the term “feminism” as a term. She did not outright reject it, though she preferred the term “women’s rights” when describing the group’s beliefs and goals. Her take on feminism and women’s rights campaigns, however, focused on allowing women autonomy and freedom to fulfill their roles as mothers and nurturers of their families.

Out of principle, in rejecting the idea that Bosniacs, Serbs, and Croats cannot live together and as a way of denying the ethnic cleansers their “ethnically pure” territory, these NGOs adamantly supported return and a multi-ethnic Bosnia. However, as refugees and DPs, the women in these groups had ample reason to be angry and were generally wary of members of the ethnic group in whose name they had been displaced and lost property, husbands, sons, livelihoods, etc. (the production of such enmity was, after all, the aim of ethnic cleansing to begin with [see Hayden 1996]). For many DP women, this suspicion extended even to those ethnic others active in NGOs and cross-ethnic initiatives. Indeed, some of the leaders of DP NGOs attempting to forge cross-ethnic ties to facilitate return had to struggle with the objections from members of their own organizations

because this entailed meeting and talking with “the enemy.” Zahida struggled with the members of *Žene s Podrinja* over these issues, as she explained:

I have problems with *our* women. They call Serbs “*Četnici*.” That’s not fair. We have to make a distinction [between ordinary Serbs and violent, chauvinist *Četnik* forces]. In April we went to Bratunac to vote in 5 buses. In the bus I said if we’re whores then I’m a whore, too. I’m going! [to talk to the Serb women in the town]. I visited four or five houses to show women in the bus how normal it was. The Muslim women said, “screw them- you’re kissing them and they slaughtered our children!” (*jeblate one- ti se s njima ljubiš a one nam djeca pokoljuše*). But I don’t want to live alone. I want to know who my neighbors are. For this you have to kiss and kiss and kiss.

Zahida and the other women who intended to return were therefore walking a fine line between airing their feelings about how they were treated by Serbs in 1992 and 1995, and knowing that reestablishing trusting relationships with neighbors required suppressing those feelings at key times. They felt that since they had been victimized, it was the Serbs, members of the victimizing group, who carried the obligation to repent and make amends. DP NGO leaders had to constantly balance their support for return and “life together” in a multi-ethnic society with their personal feelings of betrayal and humiliation, the sense that they could not concede legitimacy to claims made by women on “the other side” because this would risk indirect justification for the political programs which supported ethnic cleansing. Thus, the approach of many DP NGOs toward the ethnic others now dominating their hometowns was less than conciliatory, though they strategically refrained from expressing hostility in public forums. The process of return and cross-ethnic cooperation led by women’s NGOs was therefore fraught with tension, although some progress toward mutual understanding was being made. Indeed, women’s NGOs had achieved more concrete results in this area than male-dominated NGOs had. I discuss the representational strategies of these groups and the reasons for their successes further in chapter 7.

Why a Women’s Organization?: Continuity with the *Aktiv Žena* Model

The explosion in NGOs is most obviously attributed to the post-war incentives offered by the international community, to the lack of economic alternatives, and to momentum from

humanitarian aid activities undertaken during the war. But what explains the formation of so many *women's* NGOs? What reasons do women give for their having organized themselves as women rather than on the basis of other identities or goals? What assessment of gender relations and women's roles do they put forth to explain their existence as women's groups?

For those women who joined already established groups, the principle factors were the involvement of other women in their social and kin networks, and personal needs, whether material, psychological, or social. At Medica and other similar organizations, women joined as professionals, because a doctor, psychologist, or administrator was needed and because the women themselves needed an income (whether in cash or, during the war, in access to scarce goods and facilities). These women got their friends, neighbors, working colleagues, daughters, and even a husband or two involved as the organization's needs grew. At Medica, several had stayed on after having been therapy patients. Only subsequently, through their training and work with other women, did they develop better informed stances on gender issues and feminism, though many talked about having thought critically about such issues before. For the women involved in founding women's organizations, it is clear that constructions of womanhood in relation to war, to men, and to the nation played a large role in their motivation. The dominant narrative casts women and the (feminized) nation as victims. During the war, women were perceived as (potential) victims in their own right and as symbols of the victimization of the (in this case Bosniac) nation. Depending on their outlooks, then, some women responded to refugee women's needs primarily out of loyalty to the nation, some more out of concern for women, and many out of a combination of these concerns and other, mostly practical matters.

Many women whose organizations began their activities during the war explained to me that they had organized as women because women were the only ones left. The men had been mobilized into armies, some had been killed or captured, and others had fled the country. Aside from elderly men, young boys, and a few middle-aged men serving logistical duties in the towns, the population was all female. Indeed, for some organizations like Women of Podrinje, the women truly were virtually the only ones left from their communities after mass killings of men from Srebrenica and the surrounding area.

Women were also isolated from men by the stark division between men's and women's roles

created in wartime. There were, of course, exceptions, but for the most part men were soldiers while women were left to look after families and homes. Women were clearly placed into the category of (potential) victims, especially of rape by enemy forces, while men's masculinity was defined by whether and how they performed as soldiers. As the mood in Zenica was one of being under attack (by Serb, and later Croat, forces), women felt the need to help out where they could, even if most of them did not participate directly in the fighting. Though some younger, unmarried women did take up arms, most women did not consider this an option— it was not something expected of women, despite the well-known precedent of Partizanke fighters in World War II (see Žarkov 1999).

Women's wartime roles were to a large degree an extension of their care-giving roles in the family. To participate in the war effort, women knitted sweaters and socks, cooked hot meals for fighters on the front lines, and cared for wounded soldiers in the hospitals. For civilians, they organized aid for the elderly, for households without men, and for others in need. Women were also concerned with the challenges of keeping their own families safe, fed, and warm under harsh wartime conditions of scarcity and danger (Lazarevska 1995).

The massive influx of mostly women and children refugees, presented an overwhelming need. Women, among whom were many rape survivors, stood out as a category particularly deserving of help at the time. As Sadeta said of her founding of Naš Most during the war, "We decided on this category of people to work with, we considered them the most vulnerable, threatened group, the group with the most need. Zenica was a collective center for refugees at the time— there was a lot of need and a lot of women." It was therefore logical that women began doing what they could to help the refugees. In this way, groups of women began helping other women, not (necessarily) out of feminist consciousness but because women were both the ones in a position to help and in a position of need. This situation further underscored women's wartime roles as nurturers (of their own families, of the needy) and victims of male violence (whether real or potential).

Still, this did not fully answer the question of why they had named their groups *women's* organizations. Nearly all the groups I encountered conveyed in their names that they were women (see Appendix A). Women of Podrinja, for example, could have called themselves "People of Podrinje" or "Refugees of Podrinje." Many organizations use the prefix "women's association." Why were they not associations of "citizens" or some other term? Many other women to whom I posed

this question were at a loss as to how to answer. I inferred that it had been automatic for women to gather as women because women's and men's roles and patterns of social interaction were conceptually separate, even outside of wartime (see Simić 1983; Erlich 1966). Women had their activities and duties and men had theirs, so it "went without saying" (Bourdieu 1977) that they should form groups made up only of women or that worked solely with women.

Bosnian society is not strictly sex-segregated, nor was this the case under socialism, as we saw in chapter 3. Women and men mix and communicate freely in public spaces, in employment, in schools and universities, at family gatherings, etc. But especially in the working class and rural segments of the population there is a tendency for married women and men to socialize separately. Aiša of Kewser explained that:

We are more free among ourselves than if men were around... This is from our tradition. Even when a family comes to visit, a couple, we sit separately, in a group of women and a group of men, because each group has their own subjects and concerns. It's not only because of the war, that only women were around. It's like that now, too.

Men meet each other in cafes and pubs and have more latitude to go out in the evenings; women frequent cake shops and markets in towns and visit each other in their homes during the day for coffee (Bringa 1995). There is less of this kind of separation among younger, more urban, and better educated Bosnians, especially before marriage. However, most of the women in organizations, such as Naš Most, Merjem, Srcem do mira, and Women of Podrinje, that took for granted their organizing as women were married women in their 40's and older and many were from working class backgrounds, small towns, or villages.

This logic became visible after the war ended and manifested itself in the puzzled looks I got at several women's organizations in response to my questions about why they had formed as women's groups. Many replied as Zahida, leader of Women of Podrinje, did, looking at me as if the answer was obvious: "because *we* are women." If women were going to be involved in any sort of group, it seemed to be beyond question that women would organize all-women's groups and concern themselves with the specific problems of women and the activities associated with women's roles. Men could (and did) form their own groups to address their own concerns and spheres of life.

Forming separate women's groups also made sense because it is how it had been throughout the socialist period with the AFŽ and later *aktivni žene*. Đula, an older woman from a large village in northwest Bosnia had been involved with her local *aktivni žene* for twenty years and had been active in several women's organizations during and after the war. In answer to the question of why community activities had been separated by sex, she said, the *aktivni žene*:

never had men in it. It was just like that everywhere in Yugoslavia. We traveled all over to other chapters and it was like this. We never thought about it.... Men had their own organizations— chess clubs, hunting clubs, etc., but none of this had anything to do with social issues or politics.

Here, “social issues or politics” was partly an allusion to campaigns for women's political participation and equal rights which have become major buzzwords for women's organizations in the post-war period.

This apolitical *aktivni žene* model was replicated by many of the more gender-conservative women's organizations of the post-war period that also took for granted women's and men's separate spheres of interest and socializing. Both the nature of their activities and the way the women spoke about them conveyed the sense that women's activities should naturally be separate from men's and that gender conventions were being left unchallenged.⁸⁹ Specifically, the idea that women, especially married women, must guard their sexual reputation by not “walking around” (*hodati*) and mixing unnecessarily with men was very strong in these organizations. Some of Naš Most's most popular activities, for example, were weekly coffee gatherings for its members and the elaborate, large women's gatherings they called *sijela*⁹⁰ held two or three times per year and always on March 8th, International Women's Day. Women paid a small ticket price to attend a *sijelo* which included dinner, coffee, and folk music (*narodna muzika*) played by a hired band. These events typically involved a lot of high-spirited socializing, dancing and singing well past midnight. Women really

⁸⁹ This is in contrast with the kind of “women-only” approach cultivated by some of the feminist groups. I address this below.

⁹⁰ From the verb *sijediti*, to sit. This term is normally used to describe evening gatherings of women (and sometimes also men) in people's homes (see Bringa 1995; Sorabji 1989). Coffee and/or alcoholic drinks (except in religious Muslims homes) are served along with sweet and savory snacks (*meza*) on a low table in front of long couches.

let loose, Razija, Naš Most's leader, said, because for many this was the only social gathering they were allowed to attend. Therefore, Razija explained, she had three reasons for organizing such all-women events:

It's just women because, 1. women are far more relaxed in that kind of social setting; 2. all the married women have an easier time getting permission [from their husbands] to go out if it's just women; and 3. the authorities look kinder on this kind of gathering. Bosniacs are the majority in the government and they're more inclined to think that women are better in groups of only women because in mixed groups there's more chance for women to do something they shouldn't do. Also, there's no alcohol at our gatherings.

Razija went on to describe how many men said they loved the *sijela* because their wives spent the week before the event being extra nice and "obedient" to their husbands so as to ensure they could attend.

Đula offered a similar explanation about excursions and other events organized by her group, adding that the fact that they were a women's group legitimized many women's regular participation in activities outside the home. There was no danger at these meetings that women would come into contact with strange men, unaccompanied by their husbands or relatives. Thus there was also no fear of danger to women's reputation such as was felt by Ferida, another Naš Most member, who told me the organization had enabled her to be active in the community without being seen as "becoming a whore" (*otiči u kurvaluk*). Before she joined Naš Most, she told me, she had only gone out to go to work and then came straight home. Her husband got jealous and angry if she went anywhere else or spoke with anyone else. Again, such gender norms are mostly present in working class families of rural and semi-rural background and are not adhered to as stringently in more urban, higher educated segments of the population. Nevertheless, these attitudes about women and their sexual reputations were present to different degrees among people of all socio-economic and regional backgrounds. Women's organizations, therefore, risked disapproval in many circles if they appeared to challenge norms of gender and sexuality too forcefully. We will see in chapter 6 how some of the more political and feminist groups have been criticized along just these lines.

This separation of women's activities did not mean, however, that these women did not at

times also aim to affirm women's identities and protect those areas of autonomy that women did enjoy. Maida, a Bosniac former factory worker in her forties, had just returned to her village, now in the RS, with her family after having been expelled during the war. I knew her outside of my role as a researcher and had never known her to place special importance on her identity as a woman or gender relations in general. So I was surprised when she told me she was involved with the nascent women's association of other Bosniac returnee women in her village. So many men had been killed or had emigrated during the war that it seemed obvious that women were going to have to be involved in rebuilding the community. Yet Maida's explanation for why they had formed a women's group also showed a keen awareness of gender power relations:

What else could we do? It's mostly women there [in the village] anyway. And you know if men were in it they'd immediately want to be at the top, to boss everyone else around. That's what they've done with the *mjesna zajednica* [roughly, the village council]. That's not a [voluntary] association but it might as well be. That's where they base their power. So to make sure they didn't do that with this association, we made it just women.

The women were bitter at having been excluded from the *mjesna zajednica*, or what should have been a place where both women and men had equal voice in community affairs.⁹¹ The main goals of the association were to help women establish income-generating projects which would ultimately benefit men as members of their families and the community as a whole. But the women were determined to preserve what autonomy they could by organizing themselves as women. There was an explicit recognition of women's gendered position, especially as non-actors in the public or political sphere to which the *mjesna zajednica* belonged. However, this women's organization also had political goals towards community development and fostering dialogue with their estranged Serb neighbors. They knew that the only way to realize these goals was to identify themselves explicitly as women. I explore this strategy and its consequences in more detail in chapter 7.

⁹¹ The *mjesna zajednica* was a village or neighborhood unit of socialist self-management introduced into the Yugoslav system in 1974. Leaders were elected by citizens' councils and their functions included organizing public services and community events, and resolving disputes. They continued to be used for wartime aid distribution and civil defense, and in the post-war period for community activities, elections, and other administrative functions, though their power has been markedly diminished (see World Bank 2002).

Women's Agendas, Donors' Agendas:

The Nation-ing of Gender Discourses and the Marginalization of Religious Identities

Feminist scholars have shown that national discourses are commonly gendered (e.g., Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1989; Gal 1994; McClintock 1993; Parker et. al. 1992; Verdery 1994; Williams 1996; Yuval-Davis 1996, 1997). But the effects on donor policies toward women's NGOs in Bosnia show that gender discourses can also be "nation-ed," forced into ethno-national categories. In this case, donors women's NGOs to explicitly reckon with ethnicized political divisions. Furthermore, as religion was so tightly bound to ethnic identity, the expression of religiosity was equated with support for nationalism and excluded from western funded initiatives unless they were specifically concerned with inter-religious dialogue and reconciliation. These policies affected both the practice and theoretical development of local women's NGOs.

The "Nation-ing" of Gender Discourses

As we have seen, there is a wide range among women's NGOs of approaches to ethnic relations, though most groups professed allegiance to the idea of a multi-ethnic Bosnia. It is difficult to evaluate the sincerity of these claims, however, as all organizations that received or hoped to receive western funding espoused multi-ethnic ideals. As Nataša of Medica Infoteka put it:

It's hard with these organizations, whether they are multi-ethnic by composition or in terms of contact [across ethnic lines]. Some of them do it out of deep conviction, because they really want to, while others do it because they will get money easier this way. So they grab (*hvataju*) [ethnic] others to make their composition mixed.

It is this pressure from the international community and western donors which forces the nation-ing of gender discourses and concerns. In other words, even when women's organizations strive to focus only on women's issues, donor pressures oblige them to integrate ethnic concerns into their rhetoric and activities.

This was evident through Infoteka's experiences with several projects to raise awareness of, and decrease incidences of violence against women. They maintained close contacts with other women's organizations that worked on the same issues, including several women's NGOs in the RS. These women's NGOs had created a loose network to facilitate their work, and to exchange

experiences and ideas, and they often gathered together to strategize on how best to deal with their common concerns. At such gatherings and in all their dealings with each other, these women consciously ignored ethnic cleavages. They were able to do this by insisting on their common goals as women concerned with women's issues.

Differences among the women based on ethnicity and residence in ethnicized territories were constantly present, however. This was visible both in formal situations, as seen through the cracks of carefully worded statements at multi-ethnic meetings, as well as in informal interaction within and among NGO members, especially during coffee break discussions at such meetings. These women had gotten to know and trust each other after having worked together over time and traveling to each others' towns and even abroad together. As a member of *Udružene Žene* in Banja Luka put it when I asked her how they had been able to discuss being on different sides of the front lines during the war:

We all know each other and how we think, so it's easier to talk about those things. And for sure the situation is now softer, less tense, than before. No one would have talked about those things in 1996. Now we know each other. Now we can agree to disagree.

Members of this group also shared a minimum rejection of nationalist divisions, though they consciously avoided issues they knew they disagreed about, especially on how to represent markers of national identity and how to characterize the war. The activists from the Bosniac areas of the Federation tend to think of the war as "aggression on Bosnia-Herzegovina" as an internationally recognized sovereign state by Serb forces with assistance from neighboring (rump) Yugoslavia. Likewise, most women from the Serb entity adhere to the dominant viewpoint in their entity of the war as a "civil war" between ethnic groups in Bosnia that could not agree on how to react to the dissolution of Yugoslavia. Even when avoiding talk about the past, attitudes about the war were relevant, as they carried implications for the way Bosnia should be structured (or not) in the future. The women in this network, however, spoke only of "the war" and avoided other linguistic and symbolic cues which might have been perceived as threatening by the women from other entities and ethnic groups.

Thus, these women consciously worked at ethnic cooperation through what one Banja Luka

activist called “strategic avoidance” (*strateško zaobilazjenje*) of sensitive “ethnic” topics. In other words, they attempted to address ethnic divisions by playing down their importance and playing up gender in its place. This was possible because of the way they constructed their common identity as women: not combatants or political decision makers who waged war and fueled ethnic animosities. The women’s underlying assumption, which they also often articulated was that none of them had wanted the war, everyone had suffered, and that their husbands and sons had had no choice (being males) but to serve in the army where they were living. This enabled the women to build trusting, cross-ethnic working relationships of the kind that western donors seemed to be promoting. Yet, they avoided probing too deeply. They did not want to find out anything which might compromise their working relationships. As Nataša explained, “If the husband of one of the women in another organization was in another army from mine, well, if I think about that, it can only hinder my work.” Forcing attention to ethnic differences everyone knew were there, even in the guise of superceding them, was counterproductive in this context.

From Medica’s perspective, therefore, donor demands worked at cross-purposes to their approach. At one point, western donors began insisting that every project be funded only on the level of cross-entity (i.e., cross-ethnic) networks or as joint projects of NGOs from different ethnic territories, rather than by individual NGOs. This frustrated the women who had long been involved in cross-entity work on their own. One of the issues Medica and other women’s NGOs in their multi-ethnic network were engaged in during my fieldwork was that of trafficking of young women for forced prostitution, which has become a major problem in post-war Bosnia. Donors were insisting that the women’s groups apply as one network for funding for a shelter project for women victims of trafficking. Nataša saw many problems with this idea, not least of which were the separate legal systems of each ethnically defined entity and similar variations by Croat or Bosniac controlled cantons and municipalities in the Croat-Bosniac Federation. Because of the practical realities presented by this problem, it made much more sense to the women activists involved for an NGO in each designated shelter town to apply for funding on its own. The rest of the organizations would refer clients and spread information about this project just as they did with their other initiatives.

Nataša illustrated this further with an example from a project that had brought together women working on Medica’s *SOS Telefon* hotline for victims of domestic violence with women at

a Serb women's NGO with a similar hotline.

It's like other ridiculous demands the international community has. Like cross-entity cooperation. This was obvious with the SOS project... The donors insisted we work together on this, as partners. And, yeah, the program was approved and I'm sure the donors will talk about this as a big success in cross-ethnic cooperation, but in reality we really didn't do anything together. We had the same donor and decided together on some guidelines for making the reports, but we wrote each part of the report separately and did the work separately.

Lejla, her colleague who had worked on the project, pointed out that members of all the groups had also attended a training session together on shelters for battered women. Nataša responded:

That's true. But after all of that [organizing] we would have done this [held joint activities] without donors and we'd started working together long before. We already had contact and knew each other. It's just annoying if I have a project all worked out and then a donor insists on expanding it so that other towns, other entities can be included. That's all great, but...

She went on, giving examples of several projects that had not met their potential because Medica had had to collaborate with women's NGOs in other ethnic territories in order to fulfill donor demands.

Donor demands for multi-ethnic membership had also been a problem. Medica's ethnic membership mirrored that of the surrounding community: most were Bosniacs but there were several Serbs, Croats, and women of mixed background at all levels of the organization. As I have indicated, they also maintained excellent contacts with NGOs in Serb and Croat controlled areas of Bosnia, as well as in Serbia and Croatia proper. Still, donors demanded they diversify their membership by ethnicity and were forcing cooperative projects with NGOs in the RS and Croat areas. Again Nataša, a Serb,⁹² explained:

We had problems at the beginning. We said we were multi-ethnic but we never

⁹² I identify Nataša's ethnic background here to show that she was not part of the Bosniac majority trying to make excuses for having few non-Bosniacs. I do so, however, keeping in mind the observations about the complexity of ethnic identity in Bosnia, discussed in chapter 1.

counted exactly how many members we had of which. Donors insisted on having numbers or proportions by ethnicity and then they said we had a small number of non-Muslim women. But Medica is concerned with doing its work, with helping women, so let the ethnic makeup be like it is. I think we have a reasonable recreation of the ethnic makeup of the town, and we have all kinds of people represented, like displaced persons, those from Zenica, even *došlje* [those from other Yugoslav republics]. But it's never been something we think about.

Dženana, a Bosniac Medica activist who has worked with many other women's and youth NGOs in Bosnia, pointed to the contradictions this created:

Sometimes it's impossible to have multi-ethnicity in an organization... Sometimes you [as an NGO] don't think about this because you think about what you need to get your work done, what kind of people you need. There's constant pressure to include people from different [ethno-]national groups, but you need certain skills, professional people. So sometimes members of other ethnic groups are just there for decoration. Multi-ethnicity looks great but this loses its real value, the positive picture it could have... Instead it's something forced.⁹³

In Medica's case, the professional skills needed were expertise in women's issues and domestic violence. Because of their opposition to nationalist ideologies, their approach toward ethnicity was to attempt to ignore it (or play it down as much as could be done in a context like Bosnia). Their focus was on women. As Nataša said, "Medica is concerned with doing its work, with helping women." Donor policies, however, forced ethnic categories back into prominence, even for NGOs that were committed to opposing nationalisms and ethnic cleavages.⁹⁴

One could argue that Medica and the other organizations in their network were just caught up in a donor policy aimed more toward organizations that lacked an explicit non-nationalist stance.

⁹³ I knew of several projects, in fact, where participants of different ethnic backgrounds had been forced by donors to work together. At times this did create the desired breaking down of barriers, especially when youth were involved. Just as often, however, such projects created more mutual resentment than reconciliation due to the forced nature of the projects.

⁹⁴ What's more, such policies actually created the incentive for some NGOs to nurture ethnic tension in order to show donors that there continued to be a need for funding their projects. Ana Dević has also noticed this phenomenon in her work with women's NGOs in Serbia (personal communication 2000).

I now turn, therefore, to an examination of NGOs that appeared in donors' schemes to be at the other extreme of approaches to ethnic relations and a multi-ethnic Bosnia.

Donor Policies and Religious and Mono-ethnic Women's Organizations

Western donors and international community representatives consciously evaluated local NGOs on the basis of "how nationalist" they were and targeted them accordingly. The two main feminist donors working in the country insisted on a "non-nationalist" stance from any women's group they funded.⁹⁵ In fact, they were more strict on this criterion than on "how feminist" a group was. I do not criticize donors for this approach; indeed it was a logical extension of these donors' ideologies, especially the feminist ones. However, I want to ask how this dominant policy from by far the majority of possible donors for women's organizations affected those groups perceived to be at the nationalist extremes of the spectrum. Specifically, how did this situation reflect upon discourses of gender and on donors' stated goals to build civil society and facilitate ethnic reconciliation?

Organizations of religious Muslims and those organized around Bosniac identity generally remained outside the circles of Western funded initiatives, round table discussions, and training seminars. Such groups did not use the buzzwords and concepts of standard "NGO-speak" that peppered the self-presentations of other groups. Terms like "civil society," "reconciliation," "women's rights," "gender," "project proposal," "networking," etc. were conspicuously absent from these organizations' written and spoken rhetoric. Even "NGO" was not used; these groups generally called themselves "associations" (*udruženje*), though they fit the definition of an NGO as well as others did (World Bank 2002). Clearly these groups would never win western funding or were not even interested in it. Muslim religious groups were more likely to seek funding from Islamic donors (in the case of all-Serb or all-Croat women's groups, corresponding religious or ethnic sponsors abroad were solicited). Many of them went with very little or no funding at all.

Nor did western donors seek out such organizations. In fact, these donors did not fund many

⁹⁵ These feminist donors were the Kvinna til Kvinna foundation from Sweden and the American STAR Project (Strategies, Training and Advocacy for Reconciliation). STAR's mission statement describes it as a project which "offers encouragement, technical help and financial support to non-nationalist women's groups that work toward social change in the successor states of the former Yugoslavia." (STAR 1998).

mono-ethnic groups. Exceptions were made for groups that represented a disadvantaged minority in their communities, in which case their presence strengthened the goal of multi-ethnicity, or which operated in an area with few NGOs and showed a strong willingness to work with members of other ethnic groups. Zahida, the leader of one women's NGO, told me how she advised another women's organization looking for funding. Since the group did not have a multi-ethnic membership, Zahida advised them to, "go with multi-ethnic cooperation. That's what's going now." *Bosanka* in Zenica had tried for years to secure funding from a western donor but had little success. The group's name and reputation did not help its chances in this regard. First, they were an exclusively Bosniac group in a majority Bosniac town, though *Bosanka*, or "Bosnian woman" could be taken to signify support for a united Bosnia without ethnic divisions. They had been closely associated, however, with the Sarajevo leadership of an umbrella organization of women's NGOs that had a reputation for being nationalist and exclusively Bosniac. Furthermore, they were constantly struggling against the perception that they were a branch of the Sarajevo women's organization called "Muslim Academic Club, *Bosanka*." The Zenica *Bosanka* did not have "Muslim" in its name (it was simply an "association of citizens"), yet this compounded their other difficulties in securing western (or any) funding. Aside from their lack of luck and the right connections, they were perhaps not as good as other groups that aspired to western funding in censoring themselves on topics concerned with ethnic or religious identity, and were not savvy enough in injecting their rhetoric with fundable buzzwords (see Hemment 2000; Sampson 1996; Wedel 2001).

Similarly, western donors generally ignored religious women's groups because they were assumed to be nationalist and therefore working against the multi-ethnic state project. It is not that these donors ignored religious groups altogether. Indeed, there were several donor-supported initiatives in inter-religious dialogue aimed at emphasizing common values of forgiveness, peace, and mutual respect among religious communities. When it came to women's initiatives, however, religion was seldom integrated into the topic further than in brief references by women who were not necessarily knowledgeable about religious issues. Although there were a few exceptions, which I will discuss below, I rarely encountered women from religious organizations at women's events sponsored by western donors, international officials, or organizations that aspired to win western funding. As an indication of how seldom such contacts were, a Bosnian government official who was

working with a Finnish funded “gender mainstreaming” project told me with some surprise how enlightening and novel it had been to have a woman from an organization of religious Muslim women at one of the training sessions they held in a Bosniac majority town. This woman, a practicing Muslim who wore *hidžab*, was able to give the gathering “some inputs” (*nekoliko inputa*) on “gender and Islam in Bosnia,” “manipulation” of religious precepts towards women, and other details the group of local NGOs would otherwise not have heard.

Therefore, while all initiatives were about (re)establishing multi-ethnicity, there seemed to be little connection made between religious initiatives and gender initiatives. In other words, women could be involved in inter-religious dialogue as Muslims (Catholics, Orthodox...) but not as Muslim women. Similarly, projects and meetings aimed at improving or analyzing the status of women could be attended by women, but there seemed to be no need for (religious) Muslim women as the issue of religion was kept separate from that of gender.

To be sure, many religious organizations tended to keep to themselves on purpose. The full name of *Kewser* was The Kewser Association of Muslim Women (*Udruženja Muslimanki Kewser*). Its founders had chosen this name out of principle. Aiša, Kewser’s president, explained: “This name was the result of the atmosphere and conditions of the time. It was war and a struggle for survival.” They wanted to make a statement with this name about their identity as Muslims, especially in the face of Serb attacks on Muslim people and markers of Muslim identity. The group’s members were also religious women. This made it even more important to declare themselves Muslims in both the ethnic and religious sense, rather than the more ethnic connotations of “Bosniac.” Their choice of an Arabic word for the group’s name was a further signal of identification with the wider Muslim world rather than association with a purely Bosnian identity (see Sorabji 1989).

Aiša was untroubled by the consequences their name had for the kinds of donors they could seek: “We were rejected by some donors because of this but this is normal. We knew it would be harder to get funding from westerners and easier with Islamic donors this way.” Islamic donors, like the western ones, had their own agendas, of course. Kewser had refused funding from several Islamic donors who, in the words of Kewser member Fikreta,

would come and say they would give us money if we all covered ourselves from head to toe but we didn’t want to do this. We can keep the *selam* (Muslim greeting) and

those things that are in our foundation (of our tradition) but we don't want anything that's from outside forced on us.

The religious women in Kewser wore *hidžab* but their scarves did not cover their faces and their hands and feet were uncovered. Many Islamic donors favored more all-encompassing traditions of women's Islamic dress and demanded that women's groups they funded conform to these styles. This often meant covering the face with the *nikab* veil and wearing long black gloves to hide the hands. Many Bosnians, including religious Muslims, rejected such styles as foreign, non-Bosnian, and especially un-European (Helms n.d.). They insisted on keeping their own Bosnian Islamic traditions. Aiša firmly told me, however, "We didn't go looking for help from those who we knew would impose conditions on us that we couldn't meet." They were content to operate without funds, which they were doing at the times I spoke with them, rather than bow to donor demands with which they did not agree.

Implications of Donor Practices for Women's Identities

For NGOs like Medica that attempt to privilege gender concerns over ethnic categories, donor policies promoting multi-ethnicity force a re-entrenchment of ethnicity and thereby detract resources and attention from the women's issues these women are trying to address. In this way, they force a nation-ing of gender discourses.

Western donors' further rejection of groups concerned with ethnic heritage or religious identity has removed ethnicity and religion from the arena of debate on women's and gender issues. My point is not to fault religious women, feminists, or other women's NGO activists in Bosnia for not communicating with each other. Feminist and other women's NGOs funded by western donors were mostly staffed by atheist, non-practicing, or less religious women who tended to hold much different views on questions of gender and ethnicity from members of religious women's groups. There could well have been several areas upon which they might have agreed, however. Indeed, in casual conversation women at the more civic-minded and feminist organizations often discussed the impact of religious practices and ideologies on women's lives, even if this was not often a subject of public debate.

There were other religious women who might have been receptive to such a dialogue if

religion were made a serious element of the debate on gender. Women like Halima and Sadeta, discussed above, might have been logical participants in such a dialogue. The inclusion of religious women in gender debates would obviously not guarantee agreement and harmony among these women. However, such inclusion might have opened new channels of dialogue—precisely what western donors professed to advocate through their policies of multi-ethnic civil society building.

These trends were also affecting theoretical developments in the approach to gender issues and feminism. As Žarkov argued in the case of radical Serbian feminism during the debates on nationalism, war, and rape in the early 1990s, feminist discourses which privileged gender and excluded ethnicity effectively surrendered ethnic identity to nationalism: “Radicalized feminism allowed nationalism to completely appropriate ethnicity, and thus missed an opportunity to engage in theoretical discussion about gender and ethnicity.” (1999: 382). In the Bosnian case, as we shall see in chapter 6, feminism has not been radicalized as in Serbia or among anti-nationalist Croatian feminists, yet Žarkov’s warning is still relevant. In Bosnia it also relates to religion as a prominent component of ethnic identity.⁹⁶ Yet ethnicity is not completely trumped by gender. In fact, it has returned in the guise of *multi-multi*. Women activists are forced to consider ethnic identities and territories and even to emphasize ethnic tensions in order to be allowed to pursue projects towards erasing ethnic cleavages in public life.⁹⁷

Ultimately, this separation of gender from religious and ethnic concerns works against donors’ stated goals, and that of many women’s organizations, of reconciliation and multi-ethnic civil society, because it ensures that the rift between those advocating multi-ethnicity and those concerned with their own ethnic identity will likely widen (see World Bank 2002). In the words of Azra, a Medica activist who supported donor policies despite acknowledging their problems, “Maybe

⁹⁶ In the Bosniac majority areas, where Islam is the religion in question, the danger is heightened by the presence of radical Islamic groups that identify with the wider Muslim world (see Blumi 2003). By this I do not mean that Islam as a religion is more dangerous than Catholicism or Orthodoxy. Rather, the nature of these small but extreme groups of Muslims is different from those of nationalist Serb and Croat groups. While radical Islamic groups have so far restricted their political activities to issues of Bosnian politics rather than global Muslim struggles (Bougarel personal communication 2003), many in Bosnia, including religious Muslims, see these radicals as a potential threat. Furthermore, the position and treatment of women among radical groups is held up as a marker of their extremism (Helms n.d.). This should provide even more reason for women’s organizations to engage in dialogue with Muslim religious women’s groups.

⁹⁷ This dilemma echoes the concerns of affirmative action activists in the U.S.

there are single-ethnic organizations that wouldn't be so nationalist but they're not funded and they should be part of society but no one includes them." In any case, more inclusion might give "nationalist" organizations a chance to disprove their reputations for ethnic animosity or to consider more moderate views. And it would inject consideration of religion and ethnicity as legitimate topics into discourses of feminism and gender.

CHAPTER SIX

BEING FEMINIST THE BOSNIAN WAY⁹⁸: FEMINISMS AND ANTI-FEMINISMS

Feminisms and Anti-Feminisms

A central question of my research was how women's organizations theorized and approached the task of improving the social and material status of women. How did they envision gender relations in the ideal? What did they realistically hope to achieve and through what methods? Did the concept of feminism help or hinder these efforts? What kinds of different "feminisms" were emerging among women activists and could there be a specific form of Bosnian feminism?

The purpose of this chapter is not to ask whether Bosnian women are "feminists" or even whether they are "feminist enough" as many western (feminist) observers of women's activism in Central and Eastern Europe tend to do (Gal and Kligman 2000). I admit that something like this question was never far from my own mind. I personally hoped to find women who were critical of patriarchal norms and who might be doing something to challenge them. To be explicit about my assumptions, this challenge to ideological and structural systems that subordinate females is what characterizes my idea of "feminist" orientations. However, I wanted to avoid imposing my own definition of feminism or even the term itself onto women's activities. I therefore paid attention to how women talked about the reasons for their activities and what goals they were striving for as women. In other words, I looked for ideal visions of how gender relations should operate and women's place in those relations. Whether my informants called these activities "feminist" or not was secondary (see Gal and Kligman 2000: 103-4).

Nonetheless, struggles over and against "feminism"—as a theoretical tool, ideology, label, or insult—and the issues with which feminisms have concerned themselves were central to processes of defining social change goals with respect to women. For most women, feminism in the positive sense was rarely an issue until foreign feminists, including those from Serbia and Croatia, began asking them about it or introducing it in training sessions. Feminism as a negative concept came up

⁹⁸ This is, of course, a reference to Tone Bringa's ethnography, *Being Muslim the Bosnian Way* (1995), but was also a common phrasing used by my informants: "I'm a feminist, but in a Bosnian way." (*feministkinja sam, ali na bosanski način*).

quite often without such prompting. In the wider community, the label “feminist,” like “nationalist,” was used almost exclusively in the pejorative. It was hurled around more like an insult, a way to dismiss or discredit someone, than a description of a legitimate ideological approach. I heard the term most often from women eager to distance themselves and their ideas from a feminism they perceived as negative. “Feminism” thus carried a positive charge for many (though not all) donors and other foreign visitors, while it carried a negative charge in the wider community. In fact, the terminology itself often became a major obstacle to dialogue, as this chapter will show.

In most cases in Bosnia, women’s (and men’s) notions of western feminism were not based on direct contact with feminists or feminist literature but drew on often outdated media accounts and stereotypes which did not reflect feminism’s diversity of thought and approach. As I discussed in chapter 3, local histories of feminist and other women’s organizing had been largely erased. Feminism and campaigns for “women’s rights” were widely seen as western imports⁹⁹ (Gal and Kligman 2000: 107) and seen in the western forms that reached Bosnia through the media and through members of the international community. Unlike other “western imports” that many people were eager to embrace— democracy, civil society, human rights, etc.— very few Bosnians saw feminism as a positive force. Foreigners in turn often operated with little knowledge of the Bosnian context and with simplified, inaccurate models of the western societies, democratic systems, and feminist movements from which they came (Sali-Terzić 2001). Their approaches, which often assumed that local women “needed” the same things that western women had, reinforced this notion of feminism as western import.¹⁰⁰

Many scholars of post-socialist countries of Central and Eastern Europe have noted widespread skepticism and rejection of “feminism” by women and women’s activists in the region (see e.g. Funk and Mueller 1993; Gal and Kligman 2000; Holmgren 1995; Huseby-Darvas 1996;

⁹⁹ As a general phenomenon, this is due as much to the strength and visibility of feminist movements in Western Europe and North America as to the long histories of colonialist-minded campaigns by western feminists to “liberate” their oppressed “sisters” (see Abu-Lughod 2002; Ahmed 1982; Mohanty 1991).

¹⁰⁰ Internationally led initiatives to promote western models of democracy, free markets, human rights, civil society, and other ideologies and systems also often produced over-simplified caricatures of western societies and ignored the specific historical developments of such concepts from the Bosnian context. However, local participants tended to reject the models offered rather than the concepts themselves, whereas “feminism” was nearly always rejected outright.

Marody 1993; Occhipinti 1996; Šiklova 1998; and see Rofel 1994 on China). In many ways, this has been a rejection of the forms of feminism advocated by western feminists whose feminisms grew out of a different social, historical, and political context. Western feminists' insistence on employment as the path to autonomy was inappropriate to women who had lived in the socialist system of full employment, where most women held paid jobs on top of their domestic and family duties. The family had become a refuge from repressive states rather than, as western feminists saw it, the locus of women's oppression (Gal and Kligman 2000).

While socialist Yugoslavia was much less repressive in this way than other socialist states, the family, and women's roles as mothers and nurturers within it, continued to be held in high regard, especially by women, even after the fall of socialism (Milić 1994; Žarkov 1999; and see chapter 3). As these roles were built upon women's (heterosexual) relationships with men, western feminist criticism of the patriarchal family and of men's power over women in the home conflicted with Bosnian women's sense of priorities. As Gal and Kligman argue, issues of motherhood and citizenship, variously defined, may resonate much more with women in post-socialist societies than those of individualism and autonomy, the central categories of western feminist approaches (2000: 103-4). Indeed, this observation is borne out in the debates over women's status I discuss in this chapter, as well as in women activists' strategies of representation discussed in chapter 7. Above all, Bosnians said they were wary of "isms" and utopian visions of any kind. As one of Medica's activists, a self-professed feminist, wrote, "Is it really worth fighting for an idea of some sort of utopia, something unrealizable? Haven't we, in this land, already experienced those kinds of utopias?— brotherhood, unity, self-management— all those big concepts and then their demise!" (Stakić-Domuz 1998: 94).

Still, a small number of educated, urban women (including a few academics) involved in women's NGOs, embraced feminism, though not very publicly or consistently. Medica was one such organization.¹⁰¹ The fact that Medica described itself as a feminist project was a major factor in my

¹⁰¹ Other women's groups embraced, or at least did not shy away from feminism as a concept, though this varied by group, individual, and the circumstances in which they are expressing their views. Most prominent among such groups are *Žene ženama* (Women to Women) in Sarajevo, the Center for Legal Aid to Women in Zenica, *Udružene Žene* (United Women) in Banja Luka, *Lara* in Bijeljina, and *Žene BiH* in Mostar (see Cockburn et. al 2001).

choosing Zenica as a research site. The women of Medica have grappled with the meaning(s) of feminism and its relevance to their work, even as they defended it to skeptical friends, family, and members of the community.

An inextricable element of these approaches was the relation between Bosnian women activists and the various foreigners with whom they came into contact, whether they were representatives of the international community, donors, feminists, women activists eager to offer support and to solidify contacts, volunteers, evaluators, or researchers such as myself. The few feminist donors operating in Bosnia, as well as occasional foreign officials, looked favorably on women's groups that embraced feminism, or at least a gender critique which donors could understand as "feminist." For the most part, however, these foreign feminists were keen to avoid imposing labels on Bosnian activists.¹⁰² They thus placed more importance on non-nationalist orientations than (self-consciously) feminist ones among the NGOs they funded. There has also been considerable dialogue between Bosnian women and feminists from the rest of former Yugoslavia—now technically foreigners but still considered more familiar, "ours" (*naš*). In fact, feminist literature produced and translated in Belgrade and Zagreb, and feminist courses and training sessions offered by women's studies centers and activist groups in these two cities, have arguably been the most powerful mode of transmission of feminist knowledge into Bosnia.

The influence of donors and the international community was not only felt on the question of feminism but also in terms of individual commitment to "activism," or dedication to a cause. Foreign observers often initially assumed that the proliferation of women's associations and NGOs signaled the emergence of a strong "women's movement" and many were subsequently disappointed when they realized that many of these organizations did little more than organize knitting and sewing circles and seemed in other ways to uphold patriarchal norms. These foreigners seemed to take for granted the political salience of "women" as a category of mobilization (Gal and Kligman 2000: 106). This had yet to be built. Furthermore, as we have seen, not all members and leaders of Bosnian NGOs were involved only out of dedication to their NGOs' causes. Many westerners, accustomed

¹⁰² One of the main feminist donors to local women's NGOs in Bosnia was the STAR project (Strategies, Training and Advocacy for Reconciliation). See Gagnon (2002a) for a deservedly favorable appraisal of STAR's approach which, also based on my experience, was very effective and appreciated by local women's NGOs.

to the assumed drive of low-paid NGO (or in US parlance, non-profit organization) activists in their societies, similarly assumed that women's NGO activists were all dedicated to the cause of working for gender equality and women's rights. This was not always or necessarily the case.

This chapter examines the kinds of articulations of gender ideals and womanhood which resulted from these interactions and explores the struggle to define a particular "Bosnian feminism." I explore conflicting approaches to improving the status of women between self-proclaimed feminists and a group of conservative women associated with the ruling Bosniac nationalist party. The tensions, which emerged through a discussion of parental leave and other labor laws, revolved around questions of women's difference from men and the role of the state in "protecting" women. A similar difference in theoretical orientation was visible among those activists who called themselves feminists, though in different ways, as I show through an examination of struggles to define a Bosnian feminism among the activists at Medica. I highlight theoretical debates over the inclusion of other categories of difference in feminist analyses, Medica's encounter with western feminists, and their stances toward the 1999 NATO bombing of neighboring Yugoslavia in light of their earlier support for anti-militarist feminist positions.

Gender Discourses in Women's NGO Circles: Questions of Difference

Regardless of women's stance on "feminism," there were discernable differences in approach to gender and women's issues among women activists. These differences over how to best improve women's lives and over the ideals of womanhood themselves mirrored well-established theoretical debates in western feminist movements and others around the world (e.g. Collins 1991; Fraser 1997: 173-88; Mohanty 1991; Moraga and Anzaldúa 1981). Most women activists shared a desire to improve women's status in society. Yet their definitions of "improvement" and prescription for what changes were necessary, based on competing notions of women's difference from men differed substantially.

As we have seen, many women argued for "protection" for and validation of women's roles as mothers and nurturers above all other roles. This stance was often based on the idea that gender roles, especially motherhood and child rearing for women, were "natural" characteristics of women and men. Others, including the activists at Medica, argued for a more liberal feminist approach of

equality under the law, based on a theory of gender as cultural construction. These were the positions that emerged at a meeting of the Women's Forum of Bosnia-Herzegovina (*Forum Žena BiH*) in February 2000 in Zenica. The Women's Forum had been established by a male Bosniac SDA politician, Ejub Ganić, and was made up of women in NGOs and in the SDA and other political parties, including those serving in the government in various capacities. Most of the members were affiliated with, or sympathizers of the SDA. Its name indicated its aspiration to become a forum for women in all of Bosnia,¹⁰³ but its association with the SDA and Bosniac areas of the Federation virtually guaranteed that it would never be thought of as all-encompassing or neutral unless respected women with more neutral credentials were to become more active in the group.¹⁰⁴ Such women, even in Bosniac areas of the Federation, viewed the Forum with heavy skepticism. The women at Medica, for example, derided the group as “Ganić’s chicks” (*Ganićeve koke*),¹⁰⁵ as much for its SDA affiliation as for the profound conservatism of the women members when it came to theorizing solutions to women’s subordination.

Despite their awareness of these differences, however, some of the more liberal or progressive NGO women, many of them self-proclaimed feminists from Medica, Žene Ženama and other NGOs, decided to attend the Zenica meeting of the Forum. This was because the scheduled speaker, Sevima Sali-Terzić, a Sarajevo lawyer from the Bosnian office of the International Human Rights Law Group (IHRLG), was a frequent participant in progressive women’s initiatives. The IHRLG in Sarajevo, staffed by local legal experts specializing in women’s human rights issues, had consistently put forth a sharp critique of patriarchal assumptions built into legal codes and had

¹⁰³ Given official SDA support for a multi-ethnic Bosnia, it was common to find the name Bosnia-Herzegovina attached to organizations, initiatives, documents, proclamations, and other forms of discourse, despite the association with Bosniac identities and nationalist ideologies embedded in many of them.

¹⁰⁴ Nevertheless, three women from the RS were there but were greeted as guests since the day’s topic was the Federation labor law which would not apply to the whole country. The RS women did not say much except to express their gratitude at having been invited and their interest in the issue at hand, given that a similar overhaul of the RS labor law was to be forthcoming.

¹⁰⁵ This formulation made fun of Ganić from the point of view of male politics—any self-respecting (male) politician would have no time for unserious diversions like women’s issues. It was also meant as a barb against his women supporters. According to several feminist activists who had attended previous Forum meetings, the government women, charmed by Ganić’s masculine charm and attention, had referred to him as “our boss,” while Ganić behaved condescendingly and called the Forum members “my women.”

vocally advocated the full implementation of international human rights treaties concerning women (see IHRLG 1999). Their approach, which was made clear at the meeting through Sevima's analysis of the proposed new Federation labor law, reflected the liberal feminist stance of the IHRLG's American patrons (IHRLG's Washington office), though Sevima and her co-workers made a firm effort to adapt these perspectives to the Bosnian context in which they lived. These women did not shy away from the term feminism, but they also did not usually introduce it into their public presentations. In fact, during the discussion at the Forum meeting, the only women to mention "feminism" were those advocating a more conservative approach who used the term as a negative label, stressing their *rejection* of "feminist" solutions.

The scene at the Zenica meeting was thus set for a debate over the best legal framework for helping and protecting women. The most contentious aspects of the labor law for women were parental leave provisions and the law's restrictions on women working at night and in physically demanding jobs. Sevima and her feminist NGO allies, especially Nataša from Medica and Alma from Žene Ženama, insisted on "gender neutral" (*spolno neutralno*) protections which would ensure "equal chances" in the workplace for both men and women. Sevima's major criticisms were aimed at prohibitions for women working at night and in jobs requiring physical work for which women's "natural characteristics" make them unsuitable (Article 52). She also recommended changes in the article on "the protection of women and motherhood" that deals with maternity leave. Like all of the women present, she was opposed to the recent neoliberal economic demands made by the World Bank that Bosnia limit maternity leave to 14 weeks in order to stimulate job creation and bring its system in line with "the majority of western countries"¹⁰⁶ (Sali-Terzić 2001: 146). Sevima caused a stir, however, when she insisted that fathers be allowed the possibility of taking "parental leave" (*roditeljsko odsustvo*).

Several participants objected to the idea of gender neutral laws. They argued that women needed to be specially protected by the law, not granted equality. As Mersiha, a professor and former

¹⁰⁶ "Previše radnih prava smanjuje uposlenost" (Too many labor rights decreases employment), *Dnevni Avaz* 27 August, 1999: 5. This article was an interview with Elaine Petterson, Director of the Permanent Office of the World Bank in Sarajevo, who explained that Bosnia's economy was not nearly strong enough to afford such a luxury and that, "the [maternity and sick leave] laws in force [now] fit into the socialist approach to work and they are appropriate for that kind of social structure. They are in direct opposition to the system which you have chosen for the future."

parliamentarian from Sarajevo, put it, “I’m not equal with men, I’m just complementary. My uniqueness just needs to be protected.” Vesna, a parliamentary representative from the Civic Democratic Party (*Građanska Demokratska Stranka*), which was in coalition with the SDA at the time, echoed this sentiment:

I’m afraid that with our protections for equality, we’ll end up protecting men more. The first priority needs to be the protection of children and their relation to parents. *Children are our future society....* And what’s this about men? Is my husband going to breast feed my child? I agree with everything else, but this is the one difference between men and women that we can’t do anything about. It’s the responsibility of the authorities to protect us. We have to have time as women. (emphasis added)

The comments turned back toward concerns about women’s unique roles as mothers and child raisers. Ismeta, leader of the SDA’s women’s association *Fatma*,¹⁰⁷ went even further with this approach, emphasizing motherhood and child rearing not just as women’s unique role but as a duty:

A mother doesn’t take [maternity] sick leave (*bolovanje*) for herself but for her child. [pause] Or a father. But don’t take this right away from the woman. It’s not a woman’s right just to give birth but *it’s her duty to bring up the child. The next generation is in question.* This does not threaten rights. Women should be spouses and parents, but a child when it is born is not a Barbie doll. We need education of mothers so that they know how to bring up children. (emphasis added)

Thus, the primary purpose of maternity leave was to benefit children and society by assisting women in the fulfillment of their duties of motherhood. Interestingly, women did not “naturally” know how to do this in Ismeta’s scenario, but they needed to be educated. Ismeta’s concern with children can be read together with Vesna’s comment, above, that “children are our future society,” and with the concern raised by another *Fatma* member about the “worrying levels of natality” that were being further threatened by suggestions for curbing the duration of maternity leave.

In this view, all of these women echoed the periodic warnings published in the media,

¹⁰⁷ *Fatma* worked with the mothers of children whose fathers were killed fighting for the Bosnian Army (*šehids*, or Islamic martyrs, and *pali borci*, “fallen fighters”) to ensure proper moral upbringing and the prevention of juvenile delinquency.

especially the main pro-SDA daily newspaper *Dnevni Avaz* (see ICG 1997), about falling birth rates among Bosniacs and the threat to these low rates posed by recommendations for limiting maternity leave.¹⁰⁸ One even asked whether a “white plague” (*bijela kuga*) was threatening Bosnia,¹⁰⁹ the same language used by nationalist advocates of pro-natalist policies in Serbia to counter the “threat” of higher birth rates among Kosovo Albanians (see Bracewell 1996; Drezgić 2000). Motherhood, in this view, needed to be encouraged for the sake of the nation. Whether this nation was defined ethnically or as all of Bosnia was frequently left ambiguous.

When Sevima asked Ismeta why they should not call for the education of “parents” rather than just mothers, Ismeta’s responded, “because mothers are the most responsible. Nine months of carrying a child is a strong bond between a mother and child I would say. You would have to ask a psychologist, but I would say it’s very dangerous to break this connection.” Subhija, a middle-aged professional from Sarajevo, further implied that it would be dangerous to grant men access to the same roles in the upbringing of children as are now indisputably assigned to women:

I’m a lawyer (*pravnik*) [the male form] but I’ll say something as a woman.... Our goal should be to protect children and the family. My nature is more refined. My husband can’t be like me. Let’s look at what belongs to women... I’m not worried about my equality (*ravnopravnost*) anymore. There’s a danger of bringing this down to a bad level. We are, after all, women. We can’t expect our husbands to care for our children. They don’t know how. He is a parent, but not a mother.

Women were here defined by their “nature” as care givers and men as incapable of taking over these roles. A man was “a parent but not a mother.” Subhija seemed threatened by the prospect of men encroaching on these roles, an attitude I encountered quite often among married women. This was

¹⁰⁸ Several articles quoting the same experts appeared in 1999-2000 in *Dnevni Avaz* that warned of a “drastic” and “alarming” fall in the birth rate, especially among Bosniacs: “BiH će za 20 godina biti zemlja starih” (BiH will be a country of old people in twenty years) (*Dnevni Avaz*, 3 February, 2000: 13); “BiH prijete drastično smanjenje broja stanovnika” (A drastic decrease in population threatens BiH), (*Dnevni Avaz*, 3 December, 1999). The Women’s Party, widely associated with the SDA and its ideology, also made a public statement against the World Bank’s recommendations to shorten maternity leave on the grounds that children, as the future of society, need “full parental attention” and that “It doesn’t mean that everything that comes from the west is the best and the most exemplary” for Bosnia (*Dnevni Avaz*, 27 August, 1999: 5).

¹⁰⁹ “Prijete li Bosni i Hercegovini bijela kuga?” (Is a white plague threatening Bosnia and Herzegovina?), (*Dnevni Avaz*, 1 October, 1999).

the one area in which women had indisputable authority and the sphere in which they were used to building their identities and sense of self-worth despite their high levels of participation in paid employment. Many women I encountered were unwilling to give up this position, even as they sought equal participation in public life and often complained that they had to do everything at home and among family. This, many women activists asserted, was one of the biggest obstacles standing in the way of true gender equality in Bosnia.

Sevima and her allies at the meeting recognized this and sought to lay the groundwork for at least the theoretical possibility that gender role boundaries might be crossed. Sevima thus countered the more conservative women by separating women's biological capacity to give birth and the social task of raising and nurturing children:

Of course men aren't going to breast feed. But there are also many women who won't or can't breast feed. I breast fed for six months while there was milk, but my female cousins both stayed at home, didn't work, and didn't breast feed. We're talking about caring for and bringing up children, about providing equal rights to each parent to choose how to do this.

Note that she mentioned her own experience as a mother, perhaps to ward off any criticism that she was personally neglecting her duties toward motherhood. Nataša jumped in at this point, pointing out that men are also constrained by gendered assumptions that assign women the primary role in bringing up children and men the role of sturdy provider and protector (symbolized by a sturdy fence post):

There's a saying, "*otac kolac*" (father [is the] post). Not all men are happy with this role. They feel limited. Some of them don't want to be the post. So in the law there needs to be the same rights for men and women. Not equality/sameness (*jednakost*)—men and women are not the same (*isti*)— but equal rights (*jednakopravnost*), with a stress on the *rights* part. We're not all the same.¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ The distinction here is between two sets of words which are usually translated into English as "equality." *Jednakost* means equality in the sense of sameness, while *jednakopravnost* or *ravnopravnost* literally mean "equal rights-ness." *Jednakost* was frequently used by those advocating gender equality, often to convey a broader meaning of equality than just legal equality. The word for "same," *isti*, was not used in the context of gender relations or rights, except in negation by those who stressed men's and women's essential differences. Still, these terms were frequently used interchangeably and those who advocated the maintenance of gender role differences tend to object

Nataša's terminology thus framed gender roles as a social construction rather than something based on "natural" sex differences. Following from this assumption, a gender neutral legal framework was needed—men and women were to be given the same opportunities under the law. Sevima likewise insisted that the law provide men and women with the rights to choose who would perform what roles:

The point is that each parent needs the same *rights* to *decide* and not for *us* to decide what's good for you. Of course we'll have mostly women who will take advantage of this. That's the kind of society we're in. But we're saying, you can't discriminate against women who don't want to breast feed, who want to work— not because they're bad mothers but because they've agreed with their partner that this is the way they want to do it. Parents have rights and duties but it's up to them to decide how to arrange them... The main thing is the *right to choice*... We're after equal chances and possibilities. (her emphasis)

The Forum participants, however, could not agree. Several women pointed out the apparent difference in approach. Suada, an older woman member of the Mostar women's NGO *Žena BiH* characterized the split as "differences in philosophy" between "a certain feminist approach" and "a concept of asking for protections of the specificity of women." She was not using "feminist" as an entirely negative concept, as she declared that she supported most of Sevima's suggestions (which, in Suada's formulation, belonged to the feminist approach). However, Suada also seemed to be sympathetic to the idea of protecting women's specificity. Later in the discussion, Alvedina, a young woman in her early twenties who worked for an international organization, shifted this characterization when she observed that "Some of us are saying we need to work for equality but you think women have more duties. This is a difference of opinion then." To Alvedina, it was "equality" rather than a "feminist approach" which was opposed to women's "duties" rather than their "specificity." She was in favor of freeing women from such duties, echoing Sevima's language about "the right to choose," which was evident from a subsequent statement Alvedina made in relation to whether maternity leave should apply only to women: "the Women's Forum is supposed to work

to all calls for "equality." Those working to dismantle culturally constructed gender differences, therefore, tended to stress equality of *rights* using "ravnopravnost" or "jednakopravnost," as Nataša did.

towards the improvement of the position of *women* and we're hearing today about the position of *children*! I think— and I am very young and not yet a mother— but that we need to have the possibility to choose.” She took for granted that she would become a mother once she was older, though she still favored having the “right to choose.”

The conservative women also linked what they viewed negatively as the “feminist” approach of gender neutrality with unwanted intrusion of “Europe” or “the west” into Bosnia. The shifting boundaries of what is considered Europe/west vs. Bosnia or Balkans/east were in this case redrawn to exclude Bosnia from the rich but morally compromised west (see chapter 2).

Subhija, the Sarajevo lawyer quoted above, implied that women in Bosnia could not expect as much help from the state as women in (western) Europe:

We're talking about getting to Europe. We're not Europe. We're in the very difficult state of dispersed families, women in difficult situations, and many other problems.

We can't provide the same things to women as in the west. Our goal should be to protect children and the family...

“Europe” was a place where there is plenty of money to go around for social programs, where women had the luxury of being “protected.” The things Bosnia was not in the position to offer women were thus the conditions under which they could go work *and* care for small children— daycare for small infants, time off to breast feed, etc. What Subhija considered a luxury was not long maternity leaves but a woman's career and personal aspirations. She saw nothing “luxurious” in calling for at least a year of leave for women. Because Bosnia was not “Europe,” it should do the minimum—protect children and the family. In other words, women performing their “natural duties” by bringing up children was necessary while women pursuing careers was a luxury. This is the reasoning some Bosnian women's organizations have used in calling publicly for up to three years of paid maternity leave.

Mersiha, the Sarajevo Professor who was also a Fatma member, similarly differentiated Bosnia from “highly developed countries”:

I can't locate this draft law into a social context without asking, are these in line with our economic realities? This analysis was done by an international group. They are always looking to developed countries as examples. They compare our situation too

much with these highly developed countries. Just because we know how women are protected at work and in motherhood in those developed countries, do we necessarily understand what that means for those societies?... Economic laws don't take into consideration the protection of the person (*čovjek*). Women haven't been protected from these economic laws in highly developed countries. There, women are seen as absolutely just for profit, so she's freed from everything else that would get in the way of making a profit. Our laws will be abstract in our current conditions and women won't be able to endure something that's contradictory. Because economics, like science, doesn't look at who is a man and who is a woman, just at where the profit is. We don't want to get to the point where the real face of humanism is shown, like under socialism.

She continued, praising the socialist system for instituting generous maternity leaves and insisted that the new law should represent “some sort of progress” over the last one. Clearly, a western model would not qualify as progress. However, she criticized “the feminist and socialist slogan of equality (*jednakost*)” for not offering women the right kinds of protection. This was a clear denigration of both socialism and feminism, a move to discredit feminism by association with a system many Bosnians, especially the more socially conservative, religious, and nationalist, rejected and denigrated. Ironically, as we have seen in chapter 3, the socialist state rejected feminism as an alien and bourgeois ideology. Interestingly, Mersiha decried campaigns for “equality,” for which she used the Bosnian word *jednakost* to convey equality in the sense of sameness. A common objection to feminism lay in the assumption that feminists want to erase all differences between men and women, to make them the same. “Jednakost” also invoked the socialist ideal of “brotherhood and unity” and rhetoric which placed everyone on an equal level as “workers.” As indicated above, Bosnians had had enough of these kinds of “utopias.”

Sevima, Nataša, and their supporters were advocating an approach that fit well into the liberal feminist ideologies being put forth by the IHRIG's foreign advisors and donors.¹¹¹ Most of these women had worked extensively with western legal experts and international human rights documents

¹¹¹ These included USAID, the Netherlands Embassy, the IHRIG Washington headquarters, and the UN Bosnia Office of the High Representative for Human Rights.

where the language of rights and choice dominated (see Goven 2000; Fraser 1989). They tried, however, to present their ideas in a way that would resonate with their Bosnian audience, many of whom saw the problem more in terms of women's "specific nature" and "duties" and with a wider view of society and nation rather than of the individual. Sevima did not present her analysis as "feminist" and she made frequent reference to women's wartime roles, so as to appeal to a common experience among all the women present. In arguing against special restrictions on women performing physically demanding work, she noted that women had performed all kinds of physical tasks and endured many hardships during the war. "And now someone comes along and says women are too delicate?" she asked the gathering, "And that's protection of women?!... Maybe it was disputable before the war, but after all of that, today women definitely are not the weaker sex." This appeal to wartime experiences, along with Sevima's references to her own motherhood, also placed Sevima within the "us" of local activists, not a part of the international community of foreigners bringing alien ideologies.

Still, the majority of the women present at this meeting, and indeed many other NGO women I encountered adhered more to the notion of women's specificity as mothers and nurturers.¹¹² This outlook coexisted perfectly well with initiatives to increase women's participation in politics, business, and other decision-making positions in the public sphere. Women's employment was taken for granted. Indeed, this was the precondition that made parental leave necessary in the first place.¹¹³ Moreover, all of the women putting forth this conservative position at the Forum meeting were highly educated and had solid careers in politics, government, education, law, and other "public" fields. The assumption was, as it had been under socialism, that women were capable of performing all of these public sphere roles, but that such roles should take a back seat to motherhood and nurturing. In fact, as we will see in chapter 7, women politicians and many women's NGO activists framed their participation precisely in terms of their mothering and nurturing roles. Thus, the

¹¹² Similar assumptions have been dominant in other post-socialist countries experiencing the NGO explosion of "transition." See Grunberg 2000; Phillips 2002.

¹¹³ A cartoon accompanying an article in the daily *Oslobođenje* about parental leave policies ridiculed women's efforts to lobby for changes in parental leaves when so many were out of work. The cartoon pictured two pregnant women demonstrating in the city holding a banner which reads, "We oppose reductions in maternity leave," while one says to the other, "Now all we have to do is find jobs!" (*Oslobođenje* 2 November, 1999: 7).

“feminist” approach of insisting on gender neutral laws did not resonate with many Bosnian women, especially the middle-aged and mostly married group present at the Forum meeting.¹¹⁴

Gender Separation and Radical Feminist Approaches

Sevima’s approach, with its liberal feminist emphasis on individual rights and gender neutral structures, was not the only approach favored by feminist activists in Bosnia. Like the differences which emerged at the Forum meeting, differences among self-proclaimed feminists and progressive women’s activists also turned on the question of women’s difference, i.e. whether women’s interests are best served by isolating women’s experiences or integrating them into general experience and stressing women’s equal status with men.

Nada of *Žene Ženama* in Sarajevo consistently argued the former position, expressing a view much more in tune with the more radical feminism of Women in Black, where she had been an activist during the war while she was a refugee in Serbia. While she did not advocate full separation of women from men, Nada insisted that there were “specific issues for women” which could not be addressed through a gender neutral approach. These issues, she asserted, “will not be addressed unless women themselves are conscious of their position.” At an earlier gathering of Sarajevo women activists and politicians, Nada disagreed with Lidija on whether women’s issues needed to be tackled separately or, as Lidija advocated, together with other “more pressing” social problems. Lidija, a human rights activist, readily participated in women’s initiatives, yet she constantly voiced her objection to “feminism” and approaches that singled out women and women’s issues from general social and political problems. Nada and her fellow activists at *Žene Ženama* felt just as passionately about developing a gender critique of women’s position. She countered Lidija saying:

Everything around us is political and we know this, and we also know we can’t close ourselves up into a circle... We’re acting, and doing a lot, on many different levels. But we also insist on developing women’s consciousness. Anything can be accomplished when women are aware of their position as women.

¹¹⁴ Very few younger women are even active in campaigns for women’s issues, but the two unmarried women in their twenties who attended the Forum meeting stood firmly on the side of the gender neutral approach advocated by Sevima.

To this end, Žene Ženama organized frequent workshops for women on topics such as identity and power, female experience, women's history, and gender studies. Their emphasis was on discussion, consciousness raising (*podizanje svijesti*), and the reclamation of "women's identities," much in the pattern of 1970's feminist organizing in the U.S. Žene Ženama insisted on its identity as a women's organization, being the only NGO to call itself an "association of *female* citizens" (*udruženje građanki*) rather than using the default masculine plural of citizens in their name as others did.¹¹⁵

Nada's position, like the conservative position put forth by the Women's Forum, turned upon women's unique experiences and roles, though Nada and Žene Ženama were critical of power differentials embedded in the system of gender divisions celebrated as "complementary" by conservatives. Both these positions, however, could be seen as opposing the focus on public sphere equality of men and women that was associated with socialism (and liberal feminism).

Most progressive women's activists combined these approaches, working both separately with women on specifically women's issues, as well as addressing "general" topics and encouraging women's participation with men in public life. In many ways, activists were still working out their positions on this issue. The members of Medica, for example, were forced to fend off accusations from members of the local community that they wanted to separate themselves from men. A local Zenica journalist was furious when he was refused entry to Medica for being a man. He had come to the entrance of the gynecological clinic rather than to Infoteka, where the press conference he had been invited to was to be held. Still, the journalist took this as a sign of Medica's "female fascism" and its being "against men." At the same time, Medica's work demanded a safe, all-female atmosphere for the recovery of women survivors of violence. The women of Infoteka, too, felt drawn, especially by the Belgrade and Zagreb feminists, to women's workshops and "consciousness

¹¹⁵ In the Bosnian language, all nouns are gendered masculine, feminine, or neuter, all modifiers must agree with the gender of nouns and verbs also indicate gender. Yet masculine forms also convey neutral, universal meaning (Iveković 1997). Bosnian (and Croatian and Serbian) women activists were therefore in a similar position to that of German feminists who insist on the use of feminine forms, in contrast to the move in English-speaking countries to use gender neutral nouns (e.g. server, flight attendant, actor, etc.). Many Bosnian women activists therefore insisted on "feminine language" (*ženski jezik*) to indicate that a woman held a position (*presjednica, psihologinja, doktorica*, etc.). The first woman elected president of the Zenica municipal council, who did not identify herself as a feminist, was said to have made a "feminist scene" when she insisted that she be referred to in the feminine, as *presjednica* rather than *presjednik*. Whether they insisted on women's difference or on equality and gender neutrality, therefore, the basic structure of the language forced women to emphasize their difference from men or else to disappear, subsumed under the masculine "default" form.

raising” efforts as a way of exploring women’s identities within established gender systems. Still, their work was gravitating toward an integrated approach toward helping *women* victims of violence by working with mixed (and male-dominated) state institutions like the police, social workers, and healthcare professionals. When I asked, Milica of Infoteka reflected on this question:

Work exclusively with women is a new experience for us, and through this we’ve discovered both good and bad sides... I think we need to pursue both tracks: I personally think that in working only with women we separate ourselves from reality which is “full of men,” and that we need to wean ourselves from that and learn to “take it to the limit” with men, too. I know that men are capable of valuing a woman who affirms herself in her profession as a colleague, and I think that we can achieve a lot in this area. Men are unavoidable, the world is full of them.

Difference—women’s difference from the generic and dominant male—was thus a major issue with which women activists had to contend. Of course, other categories of difference were also important, especially, as we have seen in the case of analyzing and dealing with wartime rape, that of ethnic and religious difference. Indeed, major strands of feminism in the west and globally have been struggling with ways to deal with all kinds of difference over the past thirty years (see e.g., Collins 1991; Fraser 1997; Ginsburg 1989; Mohanty 1991; Moore 1988). I turn now to the specific struggles over the meaning of “feminism” and approaches to difference at Medica Zenica.

Feminism(s) at Medica

Medica is one of a very few women’s organizations in Bosnia which describes itself as a feminist project. This terminology was introduced by the German feminists who started the project and wrote its first documents. However, the Bosnian women who helped to found Medica in Zenica and who now run it alone as a local organization have kept this feminist identity, having been compelled by the Germans’ stance to examine their own attitudes toward their identities as women and the meanings of feminism. Most Medica women to whom I posed the question told me they had had no problem with the German women’s being feminists and in fact did not give this aspect much thought because they agreed with the Germans’ approach in helping a segment of the population, women, that was truly in need. “They never imposed anything,” Almira, leader of one of Medica’s

sections told me, “There was a need and we accepted the task that they proposed because we saw that need, too.” Several others told me that the exposure to theories and terminologies of feminism had merely given form to attitudes they had long held. As Lejla, a young member of Infoteka, put it, “Medica just helped me give these ideas a name.”

The Germans themselves consciously held back from defining what they meant by feminism in order to concentrate on the task of helping women. This was as much an effort for the German women to remain united as it was to maintain their relationship with the Bosnian women. Gabi Mischkowski, one of Medica’s founders who visited Bosnia in 1999, explained that she and the other German feminists had been working to keep together a wide network of support from women in Germany, to “agree on a common minimum,” while maintaining a feminist political stance about the war and war rapes. As Gabi explained,

We never spelled out what do we mean by anti-nationalist or feminist. But for this reason it was easier for the Bosnian women to accept feminism... they saw us as feminists and liked us, so they could be this, too....And in Germany it was important that we were identified as feminists, that this wasn’t pure humanitarian aid but something with an alternative position behind it, not part of the big business system of humanitarian aid.

After some time, through interaction with the German women, with the end of the war, and as the Bosnian women took over more and more of the planning for the project, the Bosnian women began to think critically about what feminism meant to them. Some members of Infoteka began to write about it (Andrić-Ružičić 1997, 1998; Stakić-Domuz 1996) and to discuss it with other members of Medica (Kovač 1998). This was an on-going debate that surfaced periodically throughout my fieldwork (and continues in the present).

Not all of Medica’s women were comfortable with the term or its implications, especially those not involved in Infoteka or the therapy side of the work. Amela, a former medical worker at Medica, vehemently rejected the idea that the Bosnian women could be feminists: “Feminism wasn’t what guided our work., even though we have nothing against feminism and many foreign women who came to work with us and help us were feminists.” Rada Stakić-Domuz of Medica wrote that, at first glance, “Bosnia and feminism are complete opposites, or at least two things far removed from

one another.” (Stakić-Domuz 1996: 19).

Though Rada was to conclude that a kind of feminism was possible in Bosnia, her remarks echoed Amela’s separation of feminism from Bosnia, as if they were two mutually exclusive concepts. She seemed to regard feminism as a way of thinking that had to be accepted by all of society for there to be feminism or feminists in that society. In her words:

No woman from this milieu can distance herself from the Balkans as a feminist, to get to feminism... It can’t be sincere.... The Balkans are the Balkans and here feminism is alien— women are not valued, not respected, she’s not psychologically or socially even close to the level of men. Her place is in the home, cooking, etc. Here when a mother gives birth to a son, she is favored. And then *she* thinks she is better, superior because of this.

In her personal and professional life, Amela rejected this patriarchal thinking and lobbied for more respect for women and their increased participation in all spheres of public life. Yet she rejected feminism as an “alien” import of the west where, presumably, society was not so patriarchal as in the primitive “Balkans.” Her rhetoric reproduced the standard Orientalist framework of “the Balkans” (Bakić-Hayden 1995; Bjelić and Savić 2002; Goldsworthy 1998; Todorova 1997) in opposition to “the west,” the presumed homeland of feminism (Helms n.d.). It also reflected an erasure of the history of feminism in “the Balkans,” a history that seems to be obscured after each sequential wave of women’s organizing (Gal and Kligman 2000; Slapšak 2000).

Many of the women in Medica, thus concluded they were feminists “but in a Bosnian way” (Kovač 1998: 87). I was to hear this repeatedly from women, at Medica and a few other groups, who did not reject the term outright. Its meaning was harder to pin down. From what these women told me and from what some of them have written over the course of their participation in women’s NGOs, Bosnian feminism was defined in opposition to the West, seen as the source of feminism. The comparison with the west was constantly present, perhaps because I was an American and, to some, also a feminist, though I tried to confine my questions to meanings of women’s activism and feminism *in Bosnia* (see Rofel 1994). While these articulations attempt to take into account the historical and current cultural and political realities for women in Bosnia and the west, they tend to essentialize western society along with feminism, which is represented as homogeneous and only

western.¹¹⁶ That said, the women at Medica, especially those in Infoteka, the therapists, and a few others had acquainted themselves with feminist texts and comparative studies about women and gender in the west and other places. Several had attended feminist courses led by feminists from Zagreb and Belgrade, or had attended numerous feminist conferences around the world with “eastern,” “western,” and “southern” (or “Third World”) feminists. They were therefore more thoughtful about the comparisons they make between Bosnia and the rest of the world.

What distinguished Bosnian feminism was the importance of family to Bosnian women. In fact, as was the case with the conservative women at the Women’s Forum meeting, this was also given as the reason some rejected “feminism.” A radical 1970’s feminism and the west were inextricably linked in these narratives. As one young feminist put it, “The west is a different society with a more developed sense of individualism while here there’s still much more emphasis on family, community, society than in the west.” Others were much more blunt, asserting that western women placed low priority on family, children, and marriage, and that feminists outright rejected these things. Halima, a member of the therapy team at Medica, implied both these things when she told me, “Sometimes it was strange to feminists from the west that our women paid so much attention to their families. But through the work and living here, they saw that was the mentality of this people.”

Much of this impression of the west can no doubt be attributed to the individual feminists who visited Bosnia, especially during the war years. The German feminists who came to Medica were mostly young, unmarried, and without children, as they were best positioned to make long trips to Bosnia and to risk themselves in the war zone. (Other German women with families supported the project in Germany but did not travel to Bosnia.) The same can be said for most, though not all, of the western feminists who have worked for foreign agencies and donors in the post-war period.

Given their dependence on western funding for their jobs and the survival of the project, the Bosnian women in Medica were wary of being caught in a colonialist relationship with their supporters in Germany (as were the German women wary of creating one) (Ostojčić 1999). This awareness on both sides influenced the direction of feminism at Medica and kept the donor-recipient

¹¹⁶ This can be seen as an illustration of a broader phenomenon in contexts of development and “transition,” where western models are held up to either emulate or avoid (see Wedel 2001; Hann and Dunn 1996; and chapter 2).

relationship remarkably balanced. As Milica explained to another western visitor, the differences between the feminisms of the Germans and the Bosnians had strengthened both sides rather than having been a one-way transmission of ideas from the west to Bosnia. “We’ve softened them and they’ve sharpened us,” put in Nataša. Milica further asserted that,

Without this conflict or tension we would either be kidding ourselves, being dishonest with each other or else accepting the construction of a colonialist relationship— and BiH is right now in a prime position for the development of these kinds of colonialist relations. We’ve stood up pretty well.

Almira, leader of a Medica project that gives counseling and income-generating skills to rural women, agreed:

[The German women] never imposed anything. There was a need and we accepted the task that they proposed because we saw that need, too. And it’s not true we haven’t taken the context into account. This is precisely one of those things we disagreed with the Germans on— they didn’t think much of knitting sessions with a psychologist. But for these rural women, this was the only way they would come together and talk— and they needed to talk things out, get that support— but they had big prejudices against psychologists and therapists. They said, we’re not crazy. So they wouldn’t have gone to seek help.

Many western feminists in Bosnia looked down upon such women’s projects that used knitting, sewing and weaving as vehicles through which women could work through their traumas from the war and simultaneously earn some much-needed money. The westerners saw these projects as reinforcing women’s traditional roles because they used traditionally female-associated tasks (see Walsh 1998). But for Bosnian women with feminist goals, these tasks were less important than the opportunity they presented for strengthening and helping women. Indeed, Medica’s vocational programs in which women learned hairdressing, weaving, and sewing carried a much different meaning for the Medica activists than did similar programs run by more conservative women’s groups. For Medica, these activities “contribute[d] to women’s economic independence” and “strengthen[ed] their self-confidence and their self-reliance” rather than reinforcing gender-typed professions (Zvizdić 1996: 33). As the coordinator of this project wrote in Medica’s newsletter:

We are often asked why Medica, as a feminist organisation, trains the women in “typically female” activities. The reason is that we believe that traditional women’s activities neither conflict with feminism, nor with the things feminism fights for and against. These activities simply have to be valued correctly.... When women form cooperatives or workshops together and develop an organised system for marketing their products, they are on the way to economic independence. This is why women must not allow their work to be forced into categories which are defined by men. (*ibid.*)

Significantly, the ones who “often asked why” such “typically female” professions were taught were western visitors and donors.

Almira eloquently summed up the conviction held by most of the Medica women which gave shape to their particular practice of feminism vis-a-vis their western donors:

There are many feminisms, so it depends on which one you are talking about. We need to have one for here, for this environment. Each area of the world needs its own appropriate feminism. You can’t discount the family for women here when it really means a lot, for example. So you can’t tell women here not to put their families as important priorities. They’re not like the western women who came. Here there are other things to work for. We need to give women a chance, improve conditions for them. We don’t have some of the problems western women have. Women here are paid completely equally as men, there’s no difference for people with the same qualifications. But that man in the same position just has his job. At home he’s like this [crossing her arms over her chest] – he has no duties or responsibilities to keep him back from his job. If we would share those jobs and responsibilities a bit more, child raising and house work, conditions would be better for women. Here everything is perfect on paper, we have complete equality under the law. It’s just the practice we have to work on. But you can’t come here with some utopian view that you aren’t even close to having in the west and tell us this is how things should be!

Almira had thought a lot about these issues, as she had had to address these questions many times, especially with foreign visitors (like me). She showed her keen awareness of the diversity of feminist

approaches in the west, as well as the continuing problems faced by women there.

At the same time, however, outspoken feminists in Bosnia had to deal with prejudices about feminism in their own communities where they were assumed to be anti-men, anti-family, aggressive, and probably also lesbians. In reality, nearly every self-proclaimed feminist was married and had children or, in the case of younger women, had boyfriends or did not rule out marriage for their future. Still, for many, as one male acquaintance told me, “the image of feminist and a gentle, caring female don’t go together.” In this way, attitudes about “feminists” were personalized. The younger Medica feminists had all been asked, even by women in other women’s organizations, “what do you need feminism for? You’re pretty!” The older women feared that the younger ones would never find boyfriends if they were too aggressive, strong, and anti-men, which was what “feminism” signaled to them. Dženana, an Infoteka activist in her mid twenties, had heard this often. She complained that:

People think it’s personal. They don’t understand you’re thinking of *all* women, from the local community to the whole world. People think it’s too much but in fact it’s not enough. But whether you use this word or not, you still have to talk about it a lot.

Dženana thus pointed to the common failure to recognize the social and political aspects of feminist activism, as well as the misperception that “feminists” could not “get men,” i.e., participate in normalized heterosexual relations.

In reaction to this kind of thinking, Esma, one of Medica’s therapists, told me they avoid the term, calling themselves a “women’s organization” instead of a feminist one because “feminist here means that you are against men.” In her words:

This is a macho area and people are really sensitive. We try to talk about what we’re *for*, not what we’re *against*. It’s true that there are types of feminism that are aggressive and truly against men. But we want to be for the sexes working together, cooperation, and the consciousness raising of women, the strengthening of women to recognize their potential, to be aware of themselves and their strengths. Of course, for men, especially the violent ones, we’re really horrible, ugly and mean women (*baba roge*), but for normal men, it’s an understandable thing. (her emphasis)

Esma’s comments point again to the tension between approaches that separate out women and

women's issues and those that demand integration into the male-dominated world. Both because of common stereotypes of feminists and the views of the women themselves toward feminist movements in the west, it was very important to the Bosnian women that they not "reject men." "Rejecting men" meant also rejecting marriage, motherhood, and families (along with heterosexuality), which Bosnian feminists were keen to avoid.

Together with this insistence that women continue to embrace their roles as mothers and care-givers in the family, Bosnian feminists also insisted they "remain feminine" in their physical appearance. This was cited as another mark of Bosnian feminism, again in contrast with the west. Again, Amela rejected feminism precisely for this reason, explaining that "There's no femininity in feminism and I'm very much in favor of women being feminine." Most people still held to the image of feminists "burning brassieres" and not shaving their legs during the 1960's and 70's (Andrić-Ružičić 1997: 26). This was strengthened by the appearance of western feminists at the first international feminist conference held in Yugoslavia in 1978. Gordana, one of the few Bosnian women to have attended that conference, recalled that the western feminists "showed up unshaven, braless, dressed very casually, with no makeup, natural hair, etc., and they sat on the floor with their legs spread. We were so taken aback, this was not what we wanted out of feminism." Even now, many of the western feminists who visit Bosnia, though they do not appear as the "hippies" of the past, still seem much less "feminine" in appearance than most Bosnian women who wear more skirts, high heels, make-up and elaborate hair styles.

Among Bosnian feminists there were several who opted for a more natural look, or who rejected conventional styles for women. But there was still a good deal of talk over coffee among the feminists in Infoteka, for example, about clothing, make-up, hair styles, jewelry, etc., interspersed with discussions of sexism in the media, current events, and women's activism. Other western visitors and I were frequently admonished for not wearing make-up, doing our hair, or wearing skirts more often. Our appearance, coupled with the preponderance of women without children, no doubt reinforced the impression of western women and western feminism as less feminine (though for my part I was making an effort, which obviously did not go far enough, to dress more "feminine" in order to counter such assumptions). Holding onto femininity and the difference this created with an

imagined west were thus strong components of what it meant to be a Bosnian feminist.¹¹⁷

Women activists also stressed the different histories for women in the west and in Bosnia. This was partly because Bosnians felt that the kinds of issues western feminists talked about, such as equal pay for equal work, job guarantees, maternity and child benefits, health care, etc., had been solved for Yugoslav and Bosnian women decades ago under socialism. Recall Almira's indignant assertion about Bosnian women enjoying equal pay. This was a claim I heard over and over in women's comparisons of their situation to that of women in "the west," even though this claim did not represent the whole picture under socialism and even less in the post-war period.¹¹⁸ Despite the current problems, however, women felt they really had had something under socialism that western women could only dream of. This was a source of pride that was often held up against the otherwise privileged and/or more experienced western feminists who visited the Bosnian activists. Bosnians were eager to counter westerners' implications that the situation for women was all bad in Bosnia and all good in the west (see Gal and Kligman 2000: 91-108).

This was also part of the women's re-evaluation of their own pasts through the newly recognized lens of gender analysis. Infoteka's Rada Stakić-Domuz, the first in Medica to write about feminism and Bosnia, connected the current, post-Yugoslav situation with socialist times:

What about feminism in Bosnia? The answer that comes to me: we were legally, formally equal, that's a fact I cannot deny. I recall my fourteen years working under "that system." I ask myself, while I was working in the schools and foreign trade, did I feel less valued or paid less because I was a woman? The answer is no. Now I would say, that society back then dealt with the situation cleverly and cunningly. We were fobbed off with legislation so that we didn't open our mouths in complaint, but frustrations came from other directions. I remember sitting at those marathon self-

¹¹⁷ This difference has also been stressed by women writers and scholars from other post-socialist Central/Eastern European countries who emphasize their difference as "East Europeans" (Drakulić 1991; Šiklová 1998).

¹¹⁸ As we saw in chapter 3, while women had earned the same pay as men with the same qualifications under socialism, women tended to be concentrated in lower-paid and less prestigious jobs (Denich 1977; Woodward 1985). In the post-war period, women have begun to be paid less than men for the same work in the slowly expanding private sector, on top of blatant discrimination against women, especially older women, in hiring and a pattern of women being the first fired and last hired in many sectors of the economy (see Ler-Sofronić 1998: 91-2).

management meetings thinking, “Oh God, when am I going to fix dinner? I have to vacuum the apartment, do the ironing, diapers...” Patriarchy was the tenacious, resistant *éminence grise* of society. And then, we women at some point just gave up, stopped half way, stuck in the trap of apparent equality and unwritten norms of what was seemly or not. We’d be satisfied with our kitsch holiday [March 8th], fashions, and gossip coffee sessions, *Dynastys* and *Dalases*, but the basics had hardly changed at all. We plunged into a trap and, it seemed, were satisfied with it. (1998: 95).¹¹⁹

These Bosnian feminists were realizing in retrospect what the academic feminists of Belgrade, Zagreb, and Ljubljana had articulated in the 1980's. (Of course this was also because they read the work of those Yugoslav second wave feminists.) Most of the Bosnian women, however, were not academics and had not at first set out to analyze their society or improve gender relations but to address a specific need they saw being produced by the war.

In this sense, Bosnian feminism was “feminism out of necessity,” in the words of Duška, Infoteka’s coordinator: “By doing what we did, we understood that feminism is just what we have been doing: women for women, women to women, women because of women,” she wrote in a 1996 essay (Andrić-Ružičić 1997: 26). The war, in other words, and the women victims it created, is what propelled the Bosnian women into action and ultimately into feminism, which they later recognized as such with the help of foreign feminists. As Duška told me, “In a way I’m thankful for the war, for waking up women’s activism in me.” Her wording was significant, for she had written that “every woman more or less carries feminism inside herself– this is her female nature. My mother will never say that she is a feminist, but I have learned from her much of what I recognize today as being feminist theory and practice.” (*ibid.*: 26). It was a *conscious* feminism and women’s *activism* that had been awakened in her by the war. I now take up these questions of activism and being vocal in public, which were significant points of contention for Bosnian feminists.

¹¹⁹ This translation takes some phrases from the English version in Stakić-Domuz 1996, but is in other parts my own translation, which I feel more accurately conveys the author’s meaning, as expressed in the original.

Public Feminism

In an indication of the struggles Bosnian feminists had with voicing their opinions in public, Duška had also qualified Rada's statement, cited above, about Bosnia and feminism being complete opposites, or "poles apart.": "I would like to add that an acknowledged and public feminism and Bosnia are poles apart." (*ibid.*: 26).

In November 1999, the Federation Minister of Agriculture publicly compared pregnant women to pregnant heifers in a statement about a shipment of cows which had given birth to genetically deformed calves. Edina Bećirević, a reporter for the news magazine *Slobodna Bosna*, found this statement shockingly male-chauvinist and called Bosnian women's organizations to task for not reacting publicly and demanding the minister's resignation. She lamented the absence of any "female public opinion" and accused Bosnian women, "whose ear is not trained to register male chauvinism," of supporting patriarchal judgements made in public (Bećirević 1999). Similarly, I heard from various friends in Zenica outside NGO circles, who were sympathetic to campaigns for gender equality, that they did not consider the women at Medica "proper feminists" because they were not vocal enough in public. It was great that they were helping "raped women," they said, but Medica was too "closed up inside itself," and so, it was assumed, the activists there were not truly committed to the cause.

The activists at Medica agreed that "female public opinion" was far from developed, and that women's organizations need to be "louder" in public discourses. In their defense, the women in Infoteka pointed out that their frequent letters to news media were rarely printed or answered. In my regular monitoring of television and print media, I saw very few statements from local women's groups. Major features on women's issues usually had a powerful international agency behind them¹²⁰ or were connected to sensationalized stories such as crime, prostitution or human trafficking and in any case were not usually framed as women's issues.¹²¹

¹²⁰ OSCE, for example, had a program for promoting women's participation in politics which sponsored and produced a television special on women politicians that was aired for International Women's Day in 2000. Short announcements of NGO activities appeared regularly in the daily press, though many activists maintained that the press was required by its donors to cover NGO initiatives.

¹²¹ The rest of the coverage of "women's issues" appeared in special sections on the family, health, beauty, fashion, children, romance, etc.

Furthermore, the nature of Medica's therapeutic work demanded somewhat of a low profile, in the interest of protecting women patients using their psychological and gynecological services. Medica had thus started off quietly helping women war survivors inside its protective cocoon. Infoteka, however, had been established in part to communicate with the public about Medica's work. In fact, Medica's charter stated that part of its mission was to "advocate for change." As Nataša remarked, "you can't do this without public activity." This aspect had thus grown into a major part of Infoteka's mission by the time my fieldwork began. Medica's German sponsors (along with other foreign visitors) and some of the Bosnian women wanted the project to be more vocal on political issues. However, there was still substantial hesitancy about how "loud" and public Medica wanted to be. They were concerned about accommodating their public voice to the local surroundings, not being too shocking. As Nataša put it one day over coffee in Infoteka, the German feminists "wish we'd howl (*lajati*, lit. to bark) in public." But, Milica added, "it's one thing to live here and *stay* here over the long term and it's another to come here for a short time and then go back to your safe, secure country where the rule of law is in place."

Indeed, while Medica was visible and well-known in the town, its public profile was modest. Nataša and several of the therapists appeared most frequently in public—on local television, speaking out at events on women's issues, social issues, or crime. The publicity campaign for Medica's *SOS Telefon*, a hotline for women and children victims of domestic violence, was well known, along with its slogan, "You're not alone" (*Ti nisi sama*). But Medica members were divided on the extent to which they should publicly active. "Public" action was furthermore associated with being "political" and "feminist." To those inside and out of Medica who supported campaigns to increase gender equality, speaking out about this inequality would evidence Medica's dedication to their cause. This was perceived as the only way to really be effective in challenging sexism and violence against women.

On the other hand, however, going public with such critiques or even bringing up these issues was also seen as being political. And "loud" and political women were prone to being labeled feminists, in the most negative sense of the term. In any case, many women were not used to speaking in public. Women without the right elite connections and supreme confidence in speaking were frequently told this was not their place. Milica also credited the "mentality of Bosnia" and

habits leftover from the socialist system in which it was never wise to “put one’s neck on the line” by speaking in public. There were topics it was best not to probe, and women were “especially not used to having deep conversations” on social and political topics, especially “ethnic” ones. Even now, in the unstable post-war era, feminists did not have the necessary confidence to confront issues of women’s position directly. “We’re all in precarious positions personally and as an organization. No one is in a secure position materially and you never know what the consequences of your public actions will be,” Milica explained. Besides, many women pointed out, political institutions were not very responsive to public outcry. The newspapers were constantly digging up scandals and corruption but none of the officials involved were ever affected. Many Medica women were thus personally hesitant to speak out or to initiate campaigns which would attract a lot of attention. Some, especially the doctors, even felt that public action should not play any part in Medica’s activities. Their task was medical, therapeutic, professional, not *political*.

Nevertheless, most of the women, especially those in Infoteka and the therapy team, agreed that Medica needed to be more engaged with public opinion, to be more visible, if they were to really have an impact on society. After transitioning from work with women war survivors to their post-war focus on survivors of domestic violence, the psychologists began to rethink their public roles and the potential of Infoteka to help change public opinion and official practices. When I asked therapists Nađa and Ivana about their public or political roles, Nađa looked back to the beginnings of their work:

I never considered this a political job, or that it had a political part. The first step was for us to get the word out so that Medica was known, that women would come on their own, and that institutions would refer patients to us, that we were known. Now it’s true that not everyone knows about Medica but those who need to know do.

This was upheld by my experience in the town. Everyone knew about Medica and many women came to take advantage of its services, but it was mostly known either as a gynecological facility or as a place that “helped raped women.” Only a handful of people recognized Medica’s feminist stance or their advocacy for women’s rights and social change. As Adisa put it:

Medica isn’t so known in its true form among people. At the beginning Medica didn’t talk about itself much— it was working! And this work was supposed to have

spoken for itself. But Medica was working with a section of the population that was invisible, without much voice, and with issues that weren't talked about in social company.

Ivana was frustrated with this and pointed out that for all the contact Medica had had with foreign journalists and other visitors, they had not communicated enough with their local communities. She said of their therapeutic work with women:

I think it's not enough. We're constantly wiping tears. We can't let it go on this way forever. We *have* to act in the community. We can work with a woman to see what caused her problems, the environment she comes from. But this can create the illusion of what she can do, what her possibilities are, which might not work at all back in her environment if nothing there has changed.

Medica has recognized this and taken steps to counter misunderstandings about what they were doing, about rape in and out of wartime, and about domestic violence. Many of these projects have been small, one-time gatherings, however, and their publications have reached a limited audience of like-minded people. The major project of this nature during my tenure in Zenica in fact involved very little publicity, yet it was extremely effective. This was a Pilot Project to sensitize and train a variety of officials who deal with victims of gender-based violence. Medica conducted week-long, intensive training sessions with the police, social workers, medical personnel, court officials, journalists, and members of local NGOs that dealt with women's and children's issues.¹²² This targeted training produced dramatic and very positive results in attitudes and the practice of how survivors of violence were treated at state and community institutions. One could argue, however, that this project remained limited in terms of influencing wider public opinion and that its main effects remained "wiping tears" rather than attacking the root cultural, economic, and social factors surrounding gender violence.

In Medica's defense, Ivana pointed to other, more general campaigns, the successes they have had, and the huge challenges they have taken on. She concluded that,

¹²² It was a struggle with some of these institutions to get them to take this issue seriously enough to make the training part of their fully paid professional duties. Pressure exerted by the project's backers, the Bosnian office of the UN High Representative for Human Rights, was needed to convince employers to go along.

We've done a lot and there are many women working here. But still it's a very small number of people for the enormity of this problem. We weren't able to reach this level [of social change]. This shows not our failure but how huge the problem is... We lack the time and the people to do this properly. I often say I need to clone myself eight times to get it all done.

How did these concerns affect Medica's feminism? In addressing this question, the women compared themselves more with feminisms in Zagreb and Belgrade than with western movements. Dženana considered first western feminists and then Zagreb and Belgrade when I asked her whether a Bosnian feminism existed:

Yes. It's not so extreme or radical but it's also not so soft. Other feminists often come here and they think we're not feminist enough. Because we wear makeup, short skirts, and all that. We're in between. The Zagreb and Belgrade feminists are more radical, rejecting men, etc. We've taken what we want and what we think we can implement here.

Azra, another young member of Infoteka, was skeptical of the tactics used by feminists in Zagreb and Belgrade. Was their message really resonating with ordinary women?

Zagreb is a big city and it's easy to do things in Zagreb, but nothing gets to the villages there.... It's easier to work with educated women in the city. If we did that here it would be a big sensation. But it's a new thing here so you have to proceed slowly. BiH was different, more primitive (than the other republics in Yugoslavia, than Croatia and Serbia). Sarajevo is a small neighborhood (*mahala*) really. You even need to be cautious there. You can easily be rejected.

To achieve real change, she said, you have to move slowly, gradually spreading such ideas through networks of women. "Women in public will achieve their goals only when ordinary women start hearing this and understanding." In order to achieve this, part of "being a feminist the Bosnian way" was therefore the public denial of any connection to "feminism."

Milica noticed a difference in location and political identity. In Belgrade, Women in Black openly protested the Serbian regime that gave political and material support to ethnic cleansing campaigns in Bosnia. Milica explained why Medica was unlikely to take on such a public role:

We'll never be like Women in Black or something, first of all. We're not that kind of project... Bosnia is in a different position from Belgrade—Bosnia is the victim of the war so it's harder to stand up to the powers that be here. In Belgrade they opposed the regime on the grounds of their personal convictions. Here it's hard to criticize those in power because they're held as victims, heroes. For example, talking about domestic violence is very difficult. Who are the perpetrators? Local men! But they are the heroes of the war, our defenders and saviors.

Medica was encountering this problem more and more as its work turned from helping survivors of rape to survivors of domestic violence. This limitation affected Medica's approach because it applied mostly to the issue of domestic violence, Medica's focus. During the war, Medica had gained a level of public acceptance precisely because it had cared for rape survivors and had raised awareness of wartime rape. Publicly speaking about that issue only boosted the moral standing of the nationalist cause. With the myriad problems of the post-war period, however, issues of domestic violence and gender equality seemed even less desirable to the public ear.

Bosnian feminism, then, did not differ from its Croatian and Serbian counterparts "in ideas, but in practice and approach," as Lejla, also of Infoteka, put it. Because the Bosnian women had started later, they were able to learn from the mistakes of the Zagreb and Belgrade women's organizations, who Dženana felt had been less successful than they could have been because they had been too aggressive and appeared to be against men. Instead, she explained, in Bosnia:

we try to talk about gender roles, i.e., as affecting both men and women, to stress that we're not fighting for women to be dominant but for women to have more equality, that this is good for the whole society. But they still refer to us as feminists.

In other words, their public stance, however cautious, is still taken to be provocative. As Dženana had put it (quoted above), "People think it's too much but in fact it's not enough." Still, they had to be cautious. Nataša was strategic about how much of this Bosnian feminism the public could take:

The best way to proceed here at the moment is to be un-aggressive. We can be aggressive but not too often and in small doses. When I feel, in my mild approach that someone is really listening to me, then I come in conflict with them, irritate them, and then go back down to being mild and gentle, to bring things to a level of

rationality, to make them think and not just dismiss me. It's hard— how do you say something like, every man is a potential perpetrator of violence (*nasilnik*), which I do believe. You can see it in every man that he sometimes gets frustrated and is tempted to use violence. But this isn't because he's a man, it's because it's been served to him all his life. But how to say that all at once to someone [who's never thought about it]? I can speak in public and publicly say I'm a feminist and all that, but if I get into a situation and I feel the word "feminism" isn't appropriate, that it won't be understood, then I don't use it. There are prejudices against feminism everywhere and actually we're doing well, considering! There are actually some who are starting to take this seriously.

Nataša was particularly enthusiastic about the strategy they were pursuing with the Pilot Project for training local officials. This addressed specific institutions, laws, and practices but in a quiet, systematic way. She wanted Medica to pace itself for achieving long-term and deeper change in society.

Feminism and Activism

A crucial aspect of the public face of Bosnian feminism was the question of activism. Were these women truly dedicated to changing society or was this just a job, considering that all but the SOS Telefon volunteers earned partial or full salaries for their work? For Lejla, this was a negative aspect of the Bosnian approach. She had attended the Feminist Summer School run by some of the Belgrade and Zagreb activists including Lepa Mladenović from Belgrade, and noticed a different attitude than what she saw in Bosnia:

Sometimes I have the impression that Lepa is a woman who thinks with her heart and soul everything she does and says. But here with [she named another Bosnian feminist] for example, it seems that what she says is important but not because of women but because of herself and her career.

This was a delicate issue but one which was raised in not so many words by several foreigners working for the international community and with women's NGOs in Bosnia. Could these women be considered true activists? Was there a women's movement or was this merely an artificial

creation of foreign donors that represented nothing more than a job to the Bosnians who worked in these local NGOs? A representative of the Swedish feminist NGO, *Kvinna til Kvinna*, which maintained an office in Sarajevo and channeled donor funds to local women's NGOs, felt that women activists in places like the RS, where they had started their NGOs before the delayed arrival of donors, were more sincere. They had formed their groups out of conviction rather than (also) out of need for employment. Lejla felt that other women's organizations were just active in order to please donors: "In all of BiH I feel that only Medica really wants to achieve some change in society. Others go from project to project and do just what's sexy at the moment. They never finish anything, they just do what donors want."

Naturally, it was impossible to gauge who was sincere and a "true activist." Indeed, given the complicated economic and political situation, together with contradictory notions about what independent and NGO activism was even supposed to look like, the answer to this question was far from straightforward. It was difficult to expect anyone to dedicate the time and energy it took for activism on a volunteer basis when the economic situation was so dire. "We're not a club of rich women who can afford to do charity work," as one Infoteka part-time worker explained. It was equally unrealistic to expect women to put in the kind of hours and to travel as much as foreign activists did. Most foreigners were in Bosnia on short trips or limited contracts and were without families. Such a schedule meant a significant sacrifice in family and social lives for the Bosnian women. Furthermore, even if many women had initially gotten involved in women's groups primarily for the money or, especially during the war, for access to scarce resources, this did not necessarily mean they were not interested in or did not agree with the goals of the organizations they joined. Indeed, many had found their niche and had become truly dedicated to the work, regardless of their original motives. Several Medica women have been offered better paying or less time-consuming positions since the end of the war but turned them down in order to stay at Medica. Nevertheless, some foreigners expressed frustration at the slow pace of work and many breaks taken by the Bosnians. The Bosnian women, in turn, often found the western push to "exhaust themselves with work" irritating and unfair.

Activist Feminism and “Race/Class/Gender”

The presence of Kristen, an American volunteer in Infoteka, brought out some of these differences, not only in working habits but in the approach to feminism and, as Kristen came to understand it, in the idea of how to be an “activist.” When she came to Medica, Kristen was 24 and had been active in various progressive causes in college and after. At first she said she thought it was her idea of feminism which clashed with the way the women at Medica saw it. To her, feminism included an outspoken critique of power relations based on gender as well as its intersection with other categories of difference such as race, class, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. She also bundled it with other liberal, “activist” causes, as defined in the North American context. Yes, Medica was explicitly anti-nationalist and attuned to issues of ethnicity and sexual orientation, but Kristen had been surprised to find feminists who were not also environmentalists— they did not recycle paper in the office, for example. They relished watching beauty contests and scrutinizing the contestants’ bodies rather than opposing unrealistic, male-defined physical standards of beauty for women as Kristen did. Nor, when it came to the bombing in 1999 of neighboring Yugoslavia, were they strict anti-militarists, another stance Kristen (and others) associated with feminism (Erickson 2000, 2003).¹²³

To be sure, feminism among most Infoteka members included an awareness of heterosexism and a genuine sympathy for gays and lesbians. Although in Bosnia there was widespread and open intolerance for homosexuality, and certainly no open homosexual “scene,” in Zagreb and Belgrade there were small but active groups that were also active in feminist initiatives. The Infoteka women had good relations with lesbian feminists from Zagreb and Belgrade and supported the idea that acceptance of homosexuality was connected with gender equality. Of course, they did not mention this publicly for fear of confirming stereotypes of feminists as lesbians and therefore man-haters.¹²⁴

¹²³ Kristen would no doubt want me to stress that she quickly adjusted her expectations to the situation at Medica. She has since begun a graduate program in Anthropology and has begun to write critically about her experiences (Erickson 2003) and to continue her research on Romani women.

¹²⁴ When the German author Erika Fischer visited Zenica to promote the new Croatian translation of *Aimée & Jaguar*, her book (2000) about the love affair in Nazi-era Germany between a Jewish woman and the wife of a Nazi officer, Infoteka decided to hold the promotion in its own office and invite only a few sympathetic members of the community. They were nervous about encouraging associations of Medica with lesbianism. When a male acquaintance heard about the event later, he told me he would have been interested in attending, but was frustrated

Such a campaign would have to wait.

Opposing ethnic nationalism was also part of Medica's feminism, as I discussed in chapter 5. There was also some degree of awareness of class in the sense that Medica purposefully reached out through their mobile clinic to rural and refugee women who lacked the resources or information to come to Medica. These issues were not usually discussed in class terms, however, but in terms of rural/urban or education level differences, most likely owing to a general discrediting of Marxism and socialist rhetoric after the collapse of socialist Yugoslavia.

After their long experience with the Germans, other visiting feminists, and many discussions with Kristen and Marie, the previous American volunteer, the Infoteka women were well aware of the package of issues with which western feminists tended to be concerned. They were amused at Kristen's initial reaction and also proud because it highlighted their uniqueness as Bosnian feminists. As Nataša told it, "When Kristen came, she was confused—here were a bunch of so-called feminists smoking, not vegetarians, not ecological, not thinking about racism, etc.!" Kristen was in turn frustrated at this characterization. She was not here on a colonialist mission, she said, but to learn by working in an activist organization: "As a feminist I can accept the way they are here, their approach to feminism. It's perfectly normal that they're different here. But as an activist, coming here to learn from them, to do activism, this is why it's so frustrating." Kristen wished the Bosnian women were more driven in their work and more vocal in public.

Nataša was the most concerned with explaining this difference. She did it with a subtle dig at western progressives and local NGOs that followed donor-determined trends: "I'm not a feminist because it's sexy, and I won't become an environmentalist or whatever because it's sexy. I have to feel it down here." She put her hand on her gut, "Otherwise it's not real." On another occasion, in trying to explain Bosnian feminism to a male visitor, she again brought up the issue of environmentalism and Kristen's comments: "We throw away paper, we use it as much as we need to. But what do I care how much forest there is? I'm concerned about women."

It was Kristen, however, who led the Infoteka women to broaden their vision of feminism by pushing the issue of race through a project she initiated with Romani women. Following from her

that it had not been more openly publicized. This, he told me, was proof that Medica was closed and cliquish, though this same friend had frequently derided Medica for being "against men" and too closely associated with lesbians!

interest in understanding and fighting racism in the United States, Kristen had noticed the negative treatment of the Roma (Gypsy) population and wanted her contribution to Infoteka's work to be a research project on Romani women's lives with an emphasis on domestic violence. This was a group that was triply disadvantaged, being female, poor and uneducated (or perceived as such), and part of a racialized and denigrated ethnic minority (see ERRC 2000). For all of Infoteka's sensitivity to the ways in which ethnicity and gender had intersected in the phenomenon of wartime rape, the connection to race was not immediately apparent to most of them. At first, the Bosnians insisted that Roma were not discriminated against and certainly not in a racial way. There was no racism in Bosnia anyway since there were no blacks. (This was an assertion I also encountered in many contexts in Bosnia.)

For months Kristen persisted with support from only a few of her colleagues. However, through countless discussions with Kristen sharing what she was learning doing background research on the situation of Roma in Bosnia, the Infoteka women began to come around. Perhaps the most dramatic moment was the visit of a group of male Romani leaders whose stories dispelled any illusions the Medica women still held about an absence of discrimination against Roma by non-Roma Bosnians. As profound as this treatment was, however, the Medica activists also noted the way in which the Romani men talked about Romani women. One of the Infoteka activists recognized one of the Romani leaders as the man whom she had seen many times in her neighborhood brutally beating his wife in public. The dynamics of race, class, and gender were brought home in a powerful way (Erickson 2003). Gradually, the Bosnians in Infoteka more willingly joined the research, analysis, and production phases of the book they produced from the project (Medica 2001). I began hearing Infoteka members list the problems of Romani women when they discussed Medica's concerns with outsiders. They spoke about the intersection of race, class, and gender in a way that showed they had synthesized this aspect of Bosnian reality with the theories and cases they had read or heard about from other parts of the world.

Feminists, Anti-militarism and the NATO Bombing of Yugoslavia

Medica had always maintained contacts and good relations with the anti-nationalist, anti-militarist feminists in Belgrade and Zagreb. It was logical and easy for the Bosnian women to

support the anti-militarism of those feminists, especially those in Belgrade (Benderly 1997b; Women in Black 1993-1999; Žarkov 1999), because it was directed chiefly at Serbian nationalism and military forces that had perpetrated ethnic cleansing and mass rapes against the population to which the Zenica women belonged (Muslims, Croats, and supporters of a united Bosnia regardless of ethnic background). On a related issue, the Bosnians easily joined Women in Black in Belgrade in condemning the militarism, nationalism, and racism of the Serbian government in its policies toward and attacks on Albanians in Kosovo/a (see e.g. Women in Black 1999). The condemnation of Serbian nationalism remained a common element in both these issues. However, when Serbia itself became a target of NATO forces in the spring of 1999, the question became what would happen to Bosnian feminist positions?

I was not yet in Zenica during the NATO bombing but in Sarajevo. There I witnessed the euphoria of people who had spent four years under a brutal Serb siege, for which they held the Milošević regime substantially to blame. The house where I was staying was perched on the hill to the east above the city center with NATO bombers flying directly over our heads on their way to Serbia. My Bosnian host, who had survived the entire siege of Sarajevo, spent hours watching BBC coverage of the crisis, waving his fist at the television and chanting, only somewhat tongue-in-cheek, “Bomb them! Bomb them!” When I visited the leader of a Sarajevo women’s group in her home to celebrate Bajram, she was also watching coverage of the bombing and “rejoicing” (*radujem se*). Everywhere Sarajevans were toasting the bombers. Parallels were drawn between the targeting of Albanians in Kosovo and that of Bosniacs (and Croats) in Bosnia, all by Serb forces. The bombing was seen as necessary to stop Serb atrocities against Kosovo Albanians. The only people I could find who shared my concern about NATO’s militaristic intervention and its imperialist implications were a few other foreigners and a handful of Serbs, only some of whom were equally concerned about the plight of the Albanian population. To be sure, many Sarajevans of all ethnic backgrounds were uneasy with the way NATO was handling the situation, especially when it began bombing less obviously military targets. No one was concerned enough to raise objections publicly, however.

A similar atmosphere prevailed in Zenica and other Bosniac majority towns (Erickson

n.d.).¹²⁵ It was easy to understand that the Medica women of all ethnic backgrounds, who had worked so closely with or were themselves victims of Serb ethnic cleansing campaigns, would be happy to see the Milošević regime punished. Still, given their solidarity with Women in Black, their general stance against war and nationalism, and their concern for civilian populations, it was reasonable to expect that Bosnian feminists might be critical of the NATO bombing as a military solution to a conflict.

It is not that feminists in Bosnia claimed to be pacifists. Even Alma, a former Medica member and the leading Bosnian activist for the rights of conscientious objectors, did not oppose military action in certain circumstances. After having helped to organize peace demonstrations in Zenica at the beginning of the war, she told me, she had enlisted in the Bosnian Army:

I did this purely to fight to defend my country, my family and friends, literally to defend Bosnia. This is how I saw it and I'm still sure that the ideas I went off to war with were pure and honorable. Yes, pacifists said to me that it did no good, that violence was wrong. I didn't like holding a gun, none of us did, and we just hoped we didn't have to use it on anyone. But in those conditions, when you are attacked, it's ridiculous to talk about non-violence and pacifism, especially in the kind of conditions like in 1992.

Alma was one of the most critical feminists I met in Bosnia. She was acutely aware of racism, global injustice, sexism, heterosexism, classism, and was critical of state and corporate power on a global level. She, like other Bosnian feminists, including those at Medica, supported Women in Black and their principled stand against militarism and violence. I was therefore somewhat shocked when Alma said she had also supported the bombings. Seeing my surprise, she exclaimed, "I've waited eight years for someone to bomb Milošević!" After having suffered so much during the war at the hands of Serb forces, the point for her and for many Bosnian feminists was that action should have been taken against Milošević and Serb nationalists to prevent the atrocities they encouraged or perpetrated. At the very least, action should have been taken to punish them afterwards. However, even as they supported the bombing, Bosnian feminists were concerned about the safety of their

¹²⁵ The mood in the RS was entirely opposite. Many demonstrated against NATO and in solidarity with their fellow Serbs (see Cockburn et. al. 2001: 110-111).

colleagues in Serbia. Indeed, Sarajevo feminists provided shelter to several Serbian women activists and male conscientious objectors who had been threatened once the bombing began.

In early May I attended a planning meeting of five Bosnian women's activists and a few foreign feminists working for international agencies who wanted to gather members of Bosnian women's groups to formulate a public statement about the NATO intervention and the atrocities in Kosovo. The bombing had begun over a month earlier and this handful of Bosnian women felt, as one put it, that "women's NGOs cannot be silent anymore." Indeed, the fact that they had already waited so long was indicative of most women's ambivalence. The proposed statement was to criticize the NATO bombing, the ethnic cleansing of Albanians in Kosovo, and the fact that "peace" negotiators had been the same (male) politicians for the past ten years.

Of the five women present, three from the Federation and two from the RS, two regularly described themselves as feminists, and the others accepted the term feminism but did not identify with it publicly. Still, their stance was clearly part of a woman-centered, if not feminist orientation, as they wanted to make a clear statement as women rather than together with other kinds of NGOs. It was also clear that they were anti-militarist. Radmila, from the feminist NGO *Žene Ženama* in Sarajevo, lamented that "there are so many problems with [NATO's] approach. It will just end again in weapons and armed conflict." Mirsada was concerned about the Bosniac reaction she was seeing in Mostar, where her organization was based, and explicitly linked peaceful alternatives to war to women's stances:

The really important thing is to educate people not to take pleasure in the suffering of others. It's been obvious that many women in Mostar were happy when the bombing started, happy to see them suffering the way we did. But the public should know that there are women who support *peace*.

Despite these women's convictions, however, the initiative fizzled when they failed to follow up with their plans and events overtook the need for such action. It seemed that the rest of the women's NGO community was not united on this issue at all.

Medica had not been involved in this initiative. As they told me later, most of the women in Infoteka had cheered the bombing as Alma had, as a long-overdue vindication of the victims of Serbian nationalist campaigns. They kept in touch with their Serbian feminist friends by phone, even

if it was to tease them with the Bosnians' notorious black humor about how it felt to have bombs raining down on them. They offered the Serbian women advice on how to survive in a war zone, conveying both sympathy and concern as well as a reminder that Bosnians had been through a similar situation and for much longer.

The two Serb women in Infoteka's office, Nataša and Milica, were silent during most of this, as was Kristen, who was sympathetic to the Bosnians' feelings but opposed military solutions and the NATO action (Erickson n.d.). When asked, Nataša said she understood Bosniacs' joy after all they had suffered during the war at the hands of Serbs, but she could not support the bombing. She was "really torn," she said, because "part of me was really sorry for people there but the other part of me thought, eh, screw it. Let it be." (*E, jebiga, neka.*) Though it troubled her, it was not high enough on her list of concerns to risk speaking out. Milica began to voice her opposition to the bombing around Medica, saying she understood why Serbs felt like perpetual victims, even though she herself had suffered at the hands of Serb forces during the war in Bosnia. Clearly, there was no consensus on Medica's position; they issued no public statements on the bombing.¹²⁶

The divisions among Bosnian feminists on the NATO action were not only about differing stances on militarism and feminism. While individual national identities, experiences of war, and place of residence did not determine stances and reactions to political events, they played a large and perhaps even greater role than feminist analyses, just as they had for Serbian and Croatian feminists at the outbreak of the Yugoslav wars (Žarkov 1999). Events such as the NATO bombing, which shifted the roles of ethnic collectivities and identities of victimhood from the earlier war in Bosnia, brought out otherwise hidden facets of feminist and other woman-centered approaches. In many cases, ethnic loyalties built upon personal histories of ethnic-ized war experience overrode

¹²⁶ Controversy erupted in Germany, however, among the members of Medica Mondiale when Monika Hauser announced in public that she supported the NATO bombing. While she made her comments as an individual, they were interpreted as the stance of Medica as an organization. Many of Medica Mondiale's members did not agree with her. However, Medica Mondiale was united enough to quickly set up therapy centers for Albanian women war victims who had fled to Albania and Macedonia. (Medica opened new women's therapy centers in Albania and Macedonia where most Kosovar refugees had fled, later moving to Kosovo after the defeat and withdrawal of Serbian forces. In 2001, they also began work in Afghanistan.)

feminisms,¹²⁷ even as the women strove to maintain contact across ethnic boundaries and to oppose nationalist divisions (for an earlier example of this dynamic in Medica, see Cockburn 1998: 216-22).

¹²⁷ A similar dynamic occurred among Albanian women activists in Kosova after the withdrawal of Yugoslav troops and the occupation of the province by NATO. In Sarajevo in 2002, Nada of *Žene Ženama* told me of her recent visit to Kosovo. She had been disappointed with many of the Albanian women who, she said, were “not critical of their own people”, i.e. Albanians. They were not applying the same criteria to Albanian nationalists as they had to Serbian nationalists when the latter had been in power. Nada, a former Women in Black activist and of Serb background who had spent the past decade vocally opposing Serbian (her “own”) and all other nationalisms, had expected the Albanians to be critical because they were women’s activists and feminists– such a stance should have been part of that feminist activism in her eyes.

CHAPTER SEVEN

“POLITICS IS A WHORE”: REPRESENTATIONS OF WOMEN AND “THE POLITICAL”

A young woman is hanging out by an SFOR [military peacekeeping] base in Sarajevo practicing the world’s oldest profession. An older man from the community comes to her and says, “why are you doing this? You’re young and fit, you’re a Bosniac—surely you can find other things to do. Why didn’t you choose instead to get an education?”

The girl replies, “I have an education. I finished university.”

Old man: “Well, there must be another job you can do.”

Girl: “But I’m not a member of the party.”

Old man: “Why don’t you join the party?”

Girl: “Are you kidding, my mother barely let me do *this!*”

– joke recorded in Sarajevo, 1999

Introduction

Gender issues and women came in as low priorities for the international community as a whole in Bosnia, despite the work of a few feminists and feminist donors (Cockburn 2002; Lithander 2000; Rees 2002). Yet international donors and officials sought out women as agents of ethnic reconciliation and refugee return. Regardless of where they stood on women’s issues, donor discourses often cast women as nurturers, peacemakers, and anti-nationalists. They encouraged women’s involvement in society as an extension of their domestic roles, perceived as apolitical: as mothers and as not-men. While these essentialized portrayals focused on positive aspects of women’s roles— what Richard Fox (1996) has termed “affirmative essentialisms”— they also risked reinforcing patriarchal values, trapping women into domestic roles and excluding them from formal political activities. Nevertheless, many Bosnian women’s NGOs consciously embraced this association of women with the home, motherhood, and non-participation in “politics.” Women active in politics likewise stressed women’s domestic and mothering roles, even as they engaged in the male sphere of politics. Politics, as suggested by the joke which begins this chapter, is considered

especially immoral for women: as the common phrase went, “politics is a whore.” It was this gendered moral coding of “politics,” combined with policies and discourses of the international community and local political actors which shaped the kinds of representational strategies used by women activists.

This chapter explores the discursive strategies used by women activists and politicians to gain support and justify their involvement in the male-associated sphere of the political. I argue that these women’s self-positioning vis-a-vis “politics” must be seen in the context of locally produced gendered meanings and a political climate in which moral purity is based on war-associated victim identities. As female identity was commonly constructed on notions of victimhood and passive, non-involvement in the public or political sphere, women easily claimed moral purity when they stressed such qualities. International officials and donors contributed to this view using similar affirmative essentialisms of women. However, as I further argue, donor approaches presented a paradox for women: they were charged with achieving the very political goals of ethnic reconciliation and refugee return, yet the essentialist constructions used to encourage women’s peacemaking roles effectively marginalized them from formal political power. For politically active women, affirmative essentialisms also emphasized qualities that at first glance seem to inhibit their being taken seriously as political actors. However, given the strong resistance to the idea of women politicians, including the idea that a woman in politics is morally (sexually) suspect, women strove to continue to be perceived *as women*, and morally respectable women at that. They thus based their self-presentation on affirmative essentialisms which stressed women’s domestic roles and feminized victim identities forged during the war. At the same time, they argued that women did have a place in politics; their moral presence would “clean it up.”

In this chapter I outline the discursive context in which women activists operated, first examining portrayals of women in local political discourses and then discussing the gendering of international community approaches to women. I then explore the representational strategies of women NGO activists and women directly involved in formal politics. I conclude with a look at the effects of affirmative essentialist representations on gender equality and ethnic reconciliation initiatives.

Gender, Victimhood, and Politics

Images of female victimhood lay just below the surface when women were mentioned in public discourses. In chapter 4, I discussed the gendering of victimhood in terms of wartime rape and Bosniac nationalism. As we saw in the case of Bosniac nationalist discourses, when women did appear, it was more often as a homogeneous group or category (“women”) rather than in reference to individual actors. In the post-war media, this happened primarily when the subject turned to righting injustices from the war, or to problems of children, health, and unjust economic suffering. In other words, women were overwhelmingly the objects of “politics” rather than political subjects in their own right.

A common image which appeared in the media was that of women, usually rural and/or religious Bosniac women wearing head scarves, as symbols of (Bosniac) national suffering or identity. A typical example was an article and accompanying photograph of the widow and two daughters of a Bosniac fighter in the Bosnian Army who had been killed in the war in 1992. Their picture appeared both on the front page and on page 9 with the article in the pro-SDA daily *Dnevni Avaz* (April 18, 2000: 1), together with the headline “Will the Family of the Hero Safet Hadžić be Evicted?” Of the surviving family members, only the widow, head uncovered, and her two daughters, dressed in *hidžab*, were pictured; the son, mentioned in the text, was absent. The hero himself was pictured in a smaller insert with the caption “Hadžić: fighter for freedom.” In the text, the Safet’s widow is quoted talking about how he was a good, masculine husband and devoted Muslim, while the author stresses that he was a loyal Bosnian patriot. Three of the four subheadings emphasize precisely these points: “He loved people,” “The highest [military] honors,” and “*Mevlud* in the Švrakino village mosque,” the later indicating that a memorial service¹²⁸ would be held for Safet in the mosque in the village from which the family was expelled, presumably by Serb forces. The fourth subheading refers to the hero’s youngest daughter: “She longs for her father (*Vuče želja za ocem*).” Only three when her father died, the daughter is described as prone to crying for her father and craving contact with men. Her mother explains, “I guess she longs for her father.” In another part of the text, the widow declares (“with a deep sigh”) that she will forget her husband and the good

¹²⁸ A *mevlud* (Turkish, from the Arabic for “birth”) is a commemoration of the birth of the Prophet Muhammed. On *mevluds* in Bosnia, especially those conducted by women, see Bringa 1995, Sorabji 1989, 1994.

life she had with him “only when I die,” and indicates her resignation at their predicament saying, “But that’s the way it is when you are left without your head of household (*domaćin*).” Both the mother and daughter are thus portrayed as helpless and unfulfilled without Safet’s male presence. Even the son, not pictured but briefly mentioned, is said to be affected, although, in the words of his mother, “he’s male so he doesn’t show his emotions, but I see it’s difficult for him.”

The photo of the mother and daughters thus reinforces the image of three grieving but pious and pure Bosniac women/girls who have lost a noble, manly, and patriotic husband/father. They have also lost their home and land and are therefore a reminder of territory from which Bosniacs were expelled, territory which thus ceased to be Bosniac. Furthermore, as the headline suggests, the women—morally pure, innocent, victims—are to be expelled once again from their flat. The expelling force is unnamed, though it was common knowledge that the international community was enforcing deadlines for evictions to further the process of return of DPs to their original homes. Among Bosniacs there was a good deal of resentment toward the international community because it was felt that politicians in Croat and Serb held areas were not being pressured enough into forcing evictions in their areas so that Bosniacs could return. Many Bosniacs, too, like the family depicted in this article, had no homes to return to, as their houses in villages had been destroyed and few DP families had the money to rebuild their homes (IBHI 1998: 79-87; Stubbs 1999).¹²⁹ Yet, it was not important who or what was expelling this family because the article was about the irony and injustice of the continued victimization of the innocent family of a national martyr/of the Bosniac nation. The image of the women’s purity, piety, and victimhood, tempered by the robust (but kind) and patriotic masculinity of their fallen hero, were made to stand for the predicament of the Bosniac people. In other words, gendered images were used to naturalize and support a narrative of national victimhood and moral purity, not to mention upholding “traditional” gender ideals. In the most prominent spot, it was the picture of women, reproduced twice, which summoned the association with this familiar narrative of “what Bosniacs tell themselves (and others) about themselves” (Živković 2001

¹²⁹ Curiously, however, there is a working mosque in the family’s home village, suggesting that the mosque was never destroyed or that it has been rebuilt, obviously taking priority over the rebuilding of people’s houses. This was a common complaint among Bosniacs aimed at both the international community and the SDA leadership— that money was being supplied, by Arab and Muslim donors, to rebuild and build mosques rather than homes or factories in which people could find jobs.

paraphrasing Fernandez 1986, paraphrasing Geertz 1973).

Political discourses in the media further depicted women as symbols alluding to other common narratives, such as those positioning Bosnia or Bosniacs in relation to “Europe” and the west, signifying “modernity” or “tradition” (Helms n.d.), or simply as sexual/beauty objects. An SDA billboard campaign in the Sarajevo canton leading up to the local elections of April 2000 used images of young, beautiful Sarajevoan (i.e., mostly Bosniac) women to signify beauty, purity, and prosperity. The young women were pictured in front of recognizably Sarajevoan landmarks behind the slogan, “For a Sarajevo as Beautiful as Sarajevoan Women/Girls” (*Za Sarajevo lijepa kao Sarajke*). In one image, one of the two young women pictured wore a Muslim head scarf, while the background featured symbols of Sarajevo’s multi-religious and multi-ethnic past: the mingling of minarets, church towers, and synagogues in the old section of town. The message mixed symbols of Muslim piety with modernity (the uncovered girl) and a multi-cultural Bosnia (in which Islam was nonetheless prominent— the uncovered girl may be Bosniac or of another ethnic background).

In contrast, the same campaign featured billboards of actual male SDA politicians, each labeled with their full name. The politicians stand confidently, serious in their dark suits and ties. Men are therefore specific political actors while women are beautiful but anonymous symbols. The caption accompanying the male politicians reads “Vote for Your Own People/Men (*ljude*),”¹³⁰ indicating that it was men who would obviously be the ones doing the job of politics.

To be sure, women did make the papers as individual political actors from time to time. However, as so few women held prominent positions, these images were less common, though they began to increase as women’s participation in formal politics increased. An overview of women’s participation in parliamentary bodies since the late 1980’s shows both the level of male-dominance and the effects of various quotas for women (Table 1). Due to economic and political factors, women’s participation had already been on the decline in Yugoslavia since the 1970’s (Žarkov 1999: chapter 1: 20). Women’s participation in politics was thus not a new phenomenon.

¹³⁰ The word *ljudi*, plural of *čovjek*, is commonly used and translated as “people/person,” or the universal “men/man” (see Iveković 1997: 98). I often heard it used to mean only males, however, especially by those of rural origin, e.g. “*naši ljudi*” for “our husbands.”

Table 1: Women and Election Results in Bosnia-Herzegovina

Pre-war Elections:

% women in elected body number of women / total number of seats

	1986 (with socialist quota)	1990* (first multi-party elections) (no gender quota)
Republic of BiH Assembly	24.1%	2.92% (7 of 240)
Municipal Assemblies	17.3%	5% (315 of 6299)

Post-war General Elections:

(through 2000)

% women in elected body

women elected / number of seats

	1996 (no gender quota)	1998 (3 in 10 rule) (closed lists)	2000 (1/3 women on open lists, evenly spaced)
BiH House of Representatives	2.38% (1 of 42)	26.19% (11 of 42)	7.14% (3 of 42)
Federation House of Representatives	5% (7 of 140)	15% (21 of 140)	17.86% (25 of 140)
Republika Srpska National Assembly**	2.41% (2 of 83)	22.89% (19 of 83)	19.23% (16 of 83)

Source: OSCE 1998 citing SR BiH Statistical Institute data (1989 and 1991, Sarajevo), and see Ler-Sofronić 1998: 91

* in 1990, a woman, Biljana Plavšić, was one of three members of the BiH collective Presidency

** in 1996, Biljana Plavšić was elected President of the RS

However, even under socialism, female participation never exceeded 17% and very few women served in high level positions, with the prominent exception of Milka Planinc, Yugoslav Prime Minister during the 1980's (see Chapter 3). Women's participation in politics fell drastically, therefore, with the demise of socialism and its quotas, as it had in other parts of the post-socialist world (Gal and Kligman 2000; Watson 1993; Ruschmeyer 1994). Again, in Bosnia there was one high-level exception: Biljana Plavšić of the SDS, who served as the Serb member of the three-person collective Presidency of Bosnia in 1990 and then again after the war when she was elected President of the RS in 1996. Both Plavšić and Planinc stood out, however, as exceptions to the rule. As soon as socialist quotas were abolished in the 1990 elections in Bosnia, women's participation fell drastically. Percentages remained low until 1998 when the OSCE, with the support of local women's NGOs, pushed through a series of quota rules for women's representation on party ballot lists did women's presence in formal politics increase again, this time to 18% (Ler-Sofronić 1998).¹³¹

The data available does not indicate whether women were not voted for or whether they declined to stand for election in the first place. Indeed, many Bosnians, including many women, blamed women themselves for not joining political parties and running for election, and, as voters, for voting for male candidates.¹³² After the post-war quotas were introduced, many parties had difficulty finding enough women who would agree to stand for election, though women in some parties complained that "quality" women were being passed over for top spots on election lists in favor of the wives and cousins of male leaders who would presumably be easy to manipulate into following the parties' men. However, these assessments ignore not only women's continued time-consuming domestic roles which preclude participation in politics for many, but also the larger

¹³¹ The quota rule (Rule 7.50) mandated that 30% of candidate lists, including three out of the first ten, be "members of the minority gender," which generally meant women in all cases aside from that of the Women's Party (*Stranka Žena BiH*). (The Women's Party was required to list men in 30% of its candidate slots.) In the elections of 2000, however, a system of open lists was instituted, allowing voters to choose individual names from one party's list. Women activists feared that this would induce many voters to skip over women's names even though they appeared evenly distributed throughout the lists. In the end, only 18% of those actually elected were women, indicating that voters did not completely reject female candidates.

¹³² In a typical article from the daily *Oslobođenje* (16 April, 2002), a Bosnian woman election official is quoted saying, "Only women are to blame for the present state and no one else... Rather than women, who make up 57% of voters in BiH, voting for their representatives on the lists, they would rather vote for men and that's why they [women] aren't in parliament in such large numbers." By "their representatives," the official suggests that women should logically be voting for other women.

context of gendered associations with “politics,” which was commonly likened to “a whore.”

Politika je Kurva / Politics is a Whore

Ordinary Bosnians generally view politics with a large dose of skepticism (except in the increasingly rare case that they saw political policies as working in their own interests). Politicians were derided as corrupt schemers, only out for personal gain and engaged in dark deals and morally compromising activities. Since the dissolution of socialist Yugoslavia, politics have also been reviled for producing the politicized ethnic hatred which preceded and fueled the war and which continues, in the eyes of many Bosnians, to underlie obstacles to the (re)establishment of peace and prosperity. Of course, there was no consensus on *which* politicians are guilty of this obstruction, as members of one ethnic community were likely to regard the politicians representing rival ethno-national groups as the worst nationalists rather than “their own” politicians.

Despite such negative associations, however, when the question arose as to whether women should or could be effective politicians, it became clear the extent to which politics were nevertheless regarded as a source of prestige and power, and one meant primarily for men.¹³³ In a typical example, delegates at the opening session of the Federation Parliament in early 1999 were deadlocked after having elected a Muslim, or “Bosniac,” (from the dominant Bosniac party, the SDA) and a Croat (from the main Croat party, the HDZ) for two of three executive parliament positions. When the leading Bosniac politician, Ejub Ganić, suggested that the third post be given to a woman, the delegates burst into laughter.¹³⁴ The few women representatives present chuckled nervously but said nothing and when the laughter died down, parliament got back to business and elected a man for the post.¹³⁵ Despite the serious political differences between the two ethnically based parties, they were in perfect agreement that the only serious candidates for positions of power

¹³³ Julie Hemment notes a similar attitude in post-Soviet Russia, pointing to the irony that, now that democracy has arrived, people view politics with suspicion (1998).

¹³⁴ Ganić had forged a reputation of sorts for supporting women in politics and women’s initiatives, reportedly because he had two daughters with whom he sympathized. The Women’s Forum, discussed in chapter 6, was also Ganić’s initiative. This penchant, however, contributed to his reputation as a less-than-manly politician and no doubt to the laughter his suggestion provoked in the parliament.

¹³⁵ While Ganić’s suggestion was reported briefly and without comment in the press, the reaction of the delegates was described to me by a Bosnian woman media analyst who had witnessed the event.

and prestige were men. As Senka Nožica, a prominent opposition politician, observed, “A woman in politics today isn’t a rarity, she’s an incident.”¹³⁶

One man I knew in Zenica, Mirza, revealed these assumptions in a different way when, stopping in the street to chat, he began to complain about the corruption of the politicians in power. Knowing I was interested in female politicians, he declared:

I’d love to see a woman win at the top of the canton. This would show those asshole, if you’ll excuse me, politicians who go around acting all important, you know those manly (*muškobanjasti*) ones all puffed up (*sve napumpani*). [He swelled out his chest and arms to demonstrate.] They act so important. But if the voters picked a woman over them, that would put them in their places. [It would say to them,] We’d rather have a *woman* in office than you!

Mirza was eager for me to recognize him as an enlightened male who supported women’s participation in politics and who was morally offended by the corruption of the politicians in office (above the “primitive,” Balkan fray). The way he expressed this, however, showed not only the common association between powerful masculinity and politics, but also the misogynistic presumption that choosing a woman over a man should be a big insult to the man.

It was said that women have no place in politics, not only for the usual reason that they lack men’s strength of character necessary to endure its demands, but also because women’s role is in the home raising children and keeping house. This view was not necessarily incompatible with the general acceptance, among both men and women, of the considerable presence of women in the public realm of paid employment, even in positions of authority, which has been the rule since the socialist period (see Denich 1977; Woodward 1985). Working women still cared for the home and their children and were thus seen as respectable, while politics was nevertheless seen as too demanding and “dirty” for women.

For women, this dirtiness implied not only dishonesty but also sexual immorality. Monika, a nineteen-year-old political activist and candidate for the Zenica municipal assembly, told me that her boyfriend was now resigned to her involvement in politics but that, “at the beginning he would

¹³⁶ Suzana Andželić, “Žena u politici danas nije retkost, ona je incident,” *Žena* 29.10.1999: 5. Interview with Senka Nožica.

make [critical] comments, he thought it wasn't right. You know, they say politics is a whore and a woman in politics is therefore a whore." In this very common formulation, politics is feminized, but as a disreputable, immoral female—the whore. "She" corrupts men, compelling them to engage in immoral acts. Politicians were similarly cast as prostitutes who sell themselves and their moral principles for personal gain. Male politicians, however, do not lose their masculinity by participating in politics. Indeed, they engage in some of the most quintessentially masculine arenas: the public and the political. Even metaphorically, men's masculinity (virility) is enhanced rather than diminished through their association with a "whore," through the sexual double standard (see Simić 1983:79). Thus, politics as a whore did not feminize or emasculate male politicians so much as point to the corruption and immorality of their profession. Mirza, the man in Zenica who complained about corrupt male politicians, took pleasure in referring to government functionaries (*funkcioneri*) as "*fuksioneri*," alluding to the term *fuksa*, or loose woman. In other words, politicians were to be accorded as much respect as a whore.

Women, however, were doubly excluded from the realm of politics, both because they were not male and because, as females, association with such immorality called their own moral reputations into question. As the concern of Monika's boyfriend suggests, politics was clearly no place for morally respectable women.

The connection between politics and women's sexual immorality was further underscored by comments aimed at women politicians, especially those who had risen to positions of prestige. Sabina, a woman in her mid-thirties and a member of the Federation House of Representatives, told me that when she was first elected to parliament, the men in her party "questioned my abilities, my authority and knowledge. They said, 'if I were your husband I would have found another woman by now,' or 'how does your husband let you do this?'" Later, Sabina told a gathering of women activists,

I know one man who commented, "if I had known my wife would go into politics I wouldn't have married her. A woman talking on the same level as a man about politics?! And being gone from home so much?!" But women make good politicians. *Women are more sensitive to questions of family, children. We are the pillars of our country.* (emphasis added)

As we saw in chapter 5, a woman who spent a lot of time away from home was often seen as sexually suspect, even more so if she was known to spend time in the company of men. By the same token, an unmarried and/or childless woman was also less respectable. This did not make her fit for politics, however, as the many remarks I heard about two prominent single women politicians attest. One acquaintance told me that Amila Omersoftić, the leader of the Women's Party and a former highly ranked member of the SDA, was "in politics because she doesn't have children or a family, so she has nothing else to do and she decided to meddle into politics." Biljana Plavšić, the only woman politician to have served in a major office in the post-Yugoslav period, was also derided for not having children or a husband. In fact, Bosnians of various political orientations I talked to found reasons for her failings precisely in the fact that she was unmarried and childless.¹³⁷

These notions were beginning to change somewhat during my fieldwork as women, especially those seen as respectable, were becoming increasingly visible actors in both political discourses and formal politics. Still, the idea that politics are incompatible with female identity remained strong, even among politically active women themselves. It is in this light that we can understand Sabina's counter to her male colleagues' derogatory remarks— "Women are more sensitive to questions of family, children. We are the pillars of our country."— as an appeal to women's moral purity based on their domestic roles. Politically active women were caught in a contradiction. They wanted to retain the moral purity ascribed to women who conformed to their roles as passive victims and keepers of the home and family, yet they also sought to be taken seriously as political *actors*. To maneuver themselves through this dilemma, women sought to reshape both the definition of politics, as well as that of respectable womanhood.

Gender in the Discourses of International Intervention

Another important part of the context in which women activists operated concerns the role of the international community. By this I mean both international administrators and the international NGOs and donors that influenced local NGOs' approaches, strategies, and possibilities. In chapter 5, I outlined some of the overarching goals of international intervention, namely refugee return,

¹³⁷ It would be interesting to investigate attitudes toward Biljana Plavšić among both Serbs and Bosniacs in the wake of her recent conviction for crimes against humanity at the Hague Tribunal.

ethnic reconciliation, and the creation of a stable, multi-ethnic Bosnian state. The urgency of these goals colored international contact with local women activists, as we shall see.

The international community has only belatedly and unevenly turned its attention to gender and the specific situation of women (Cockburn 2002; Lithander 2000; Rees 2002). At the time of my fieldwork, women's issues generally took a back seat to other issues that were seen (by donors and by local male political elites) as more pressing. The Dayton Peace Agreement is a case in point: there is no attention to women or gender, despite their importance to social and political organization, which Dayton addresses at length (Rees 2002).¹³⁸ At other times, women's rights were paid lip service under a more general rubric of human rights, but specific efforts to address gender inequalities have been relatively rare. Moreover, many of the newer initiatives were kept separate from general policy considerations as they were seen as serving a narrow, special interest (Cockburn and Hubić 2002).

Donors have especially targeted women for projects of ethnic reconciliation and the re-establishment of cross-ethnic communication. This included existing women's organizations and individual women whom donors helped to establish NGOs, as well as, in separate projects, targeting women in politics. Largely due to their gendered position as non-combatants and outside politics (discussed in chapter 4), women were much more apt to engage in such reconciliation efforts. The fact that women have dominated cross-ethnic contacts and anti-nationalist initiatives since the war began (Cockburn 1998; Cockburn et.al. 2001) was a particular source of pride for these women and one which donors and others promoting women's role in reconciliation liked to emphasize.

Despite the low priority of women's issues for most international community actors, support and training provided for humanitarian relief, social service provision, and civil society building dealt, from the beginning, substantially with women and women's NGOs. One reason for this was simply that women had a large presence in these areas. Some donors thus targeted women for the accomplishment of goals having little to do with gender relations, while others specifically sought to advance the cause of women's rights or gender equality. The latter were often smaller, independent INGOs formed out of women's and peace movements abroad which channeled funding

¹³⁸ Nor were there any women involved in the peace negotiations. One woman, the head of the British delegation to the talks, witnessed the signing (Lithander 2000: 20).

from their own donors to implement projects locally in the region (Kvinna til Kvinna from Sweden, Medica Mondiale from Germany, and the STAR project from the U.S. were examples). There were also many individuals within donor agencies and the international administration with feminist sensibilities who pushed for varying levels of program commitment to gender equality even when their employers paid little attention to these issues. Donors and women in the local NGO sector were indeed responsible for many steps towards increased gender equality (see Lithander 2000; Rees 2002; Walsh 2000). Nevertheless, the ways in which the gender images that emerged from donor discourses and practices often worked to counteract or undermine those changes.

This is not to say that all international discourses conveyed explicit ideas about gender, or that patriarchal ideologies were always reflected in discourses which did make clear reference to gender relations. To the contrary, there was often no reference to gender differences at all in donor project descriptions. (This is problematic in itself, as gender inequalities were thereby erased.) Donor projects which did address gender hierarchies, however, tended to be designed by development officials working within liberal feminist or Women-in-Development paradigms (see e.g., Kabeer 1994; Visvanathan et. al. 1997). They were therefore consciously infused with the language of gender equality and images of women in powerful, decision-making positions. An informational bulletin from the U.S. Government initiated, UNHCR administrated Bosnian Women's Initiative (BWI) fund states:

The BWI offers opportunities for women in both urban and rural areas of Bosnia and Herzegovina to become *full participants in the economic recovery* of their country and to become *decision-makers and leaders*. (emphasis added) (Bosnian Women's Initiative n.d.: 2)

It goes on to list the "empowerment of women" as one of its key objectives. Like other donors concerned specifically with improving conditions for women, the BWI declared its support for the implementation of major international women's human rights declarations, including the Platform for Action formulated at the 1995 Beijing World Conference on Women. However, it was those implementing these projects (who were seldom also involved in policy-making) and the officials who publicly supported them (who were not necessarily concerned with improving gender equality) who tended to fall back on essentializing, patriarchal gender imagery.

Thus, while there was a range of immediate donor goals concerning gender roles, the message that emerged for local audiences was one which reinforced the primacy of women's domestic sphere roles as wives, mothers, and nurturers. Policy makers either did not or could not pay attention to the way in which their projects were presented and received locally.

On the one hand, women were praised for their abilities to rise above ethnic differences, to cross formidable ethnic boundaries which until recently were battle lines. The leading role women have in fact taken in this field was praised, especially by donors, as a step toward the affirmation of women in society and fuller gender equality.

On the other hand, however, the common explanation for *why* women play this role was based on a stark, patriarchal division of gender roles and an essentialist, albeit positive, portrayal of women—“affirmative essentialisms.” In this view, women were “naturally” more interested in peace, more tolerant of (ethnic) differences, and more willing to engage in dialogue and compromise to diffuse conflicts (Papandreou 1997; Ruddick 1989). Above all, it was stressed that women were outside of politics, where men had made the decisions which led to war. Women were therefore against the war and thus innocent (passive) victims, incapable of hatred and nationalism. The actions of one group of women peacemakers was generalized to all women, just as men were generalized as war-mongering nationalists on the basis of the actions of those (male) politicians and military leaders who were responsible for waging war.

In a typical example, a book of testimonies from women war survivors in the city of Mostar published by Cooperazione Italiana, an Italian NGO with funding from the Italian government, is entitled, “This War is Not Mine” (Cacace *et. al.* 1996).¹³⁹ The message is that war and politics were the sole activities of men; all women were therefore against war and the nationalism which fueled it. An introduction to this book by the Italian Foreign Minister at the time, Lamberto Dini, romanticizes women's war suffering and perceived innocence:

Reading the stories of the Mostarian women, the stories of mothers, wives, war widows, one has a strange feeling: *a message of hatred is never expressed* by these

¹³⁹ A book by Swanee Hunt (2001) with a similar title, *This Was Not Our War: Bosnian Women Reclaiming the Peace*, places more emphasis on specific women who have been active in reconciliation and women's initiatives, although the book also reproduces affirmative essentialisms of women as non-nationalist peacemakers.

incredible and marvelous women. (emphasis added) (*ibid.*: 5)

In the same book, Emma Bonino, then the European Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid, makes the case that women “can become, in the post-war period, one of the driving forces towards reconciliation and rehabilitation” because, “compared to men, women show a greater inclination towards peace rather than war. They, more often than men, reject ethnic, linguistic, or religious barriers” (*ibid.*: 6). Assuredly, she goes on to explain that “they do so for very practical motives: they want to continue cultivating the fields, maintain access to essential goods, and safeguard ‘mixed’ marriages and families,” thus tempering the argument that women are *naturally* inclined to peace. However, the general tone of her essay, and of the others introducing the book, emphasizes women’s vulnerability, victimization, and innocence. The result is an image of women as noble peacemakers and nurturers who stand high above those who initiated and waged war.

At a meeting of NGO and political women organized by OSCE in the town of Ljubuški, September 7, 2000, the regional OSCE representative, an older, American man, told the gathering that the international community supported increased participation in politics by women because, “women... typically bring up issues that go beyond ‘who’s a better Serb, Croat, or Bosniac’.” He implored the women to force voters and the rest of their parties to concentrate on issues such as “the economy, jobs, education, and health care” rather than those of national identity. While this was also the OSCE’s and other international bodies’ hope for male politicians, it is clear here that women were assumed *a priori* to be uninterested in national(ist) agendas and were being encouraged to think of themselves this way.

Similarly, many attempts to explicitly recognize and lend value to women’s existing roles and/or to encourage the full participation of women in all sectors of society nevertheless fell back on generalizations supporting patriarchal gender stereotypes. Another BWI report quotes the UNHCR’s Senior Coordinator for Refugee Women, Rita Reddy, addressing a multi-ethnic meeting of NGO women organized by the BWI fund with these words:

Women perform most of the tasks which contribute to the economic strength of a country, be it in the finance, business and administrative sectors, or through their strenuous activities in rural areas. Yet their contribution is rarely given due recognition, even by agencies providing funding for post-war recovery. ... Women,

proved by research studies to be *more predisposed to ensuring the continuance of life and promotion of peace than their male counterparts*, must be involved as decision-makers and take the lead in the peace-building processes. (emphasis added) (Bosnian Women's Initiative 1996)

It is clear that this initiative was aimed at countering women's relative powerlessness in society, especially in politics and other decision making positions. But again it is implied that women *as a group* are more peace-loving than men. Furthermore, this predisposition to peace promotion is linked to that of "ensuring the continuance of life," suggesting that women are inclined towards peace (only?) because of their roles as mothers.

Women were in this way defined not as individuals, but in terms of their roles within a patriarchal gender regime. The excerpt discussed above from the Italian book not only talks about "women," but adds, "mothers, wives, war widows" (Cacace *et. al.* 1996: 5). Women's suffering is thereby legitimated through these relationships to men, as wives and mothers (of sons-soldiers). Other common formulations rested on a view of women as self-sacrificing mothers whose concern for their children is what gives them the courage to cross borders. For example, the evaluation material from one donor, written by a local Bosnian woman staff member, states:

In our working experience, women are much braver than men, and more practical. They always dare what men do not. They are not afraid to go to another entity in order to achieve their goals, to meet people on (the) "other side." They understand each other, they are clear that people can be only good or bad, and that no other division matters. They do not look at people of another ethnicity as enemies but as people that have gone through the same hardships and trauma. They all know that *all mothers have been equally crying*, and that all of them have suffered a lot. (emphasis added) (Savić 2000: 4)

Women's participation in political decision making was here called for only on the basis of their continued ties to the home and the (patriarchal) family. The objectives of *Stope Nade*, the Bosnian offshoot of the British based Marie Stopes International, mixed this aim with the goal of female empowerment:

The overall objective of the programme is to facilitate the return and reintegration of

returnee women and girls *into viable family units* and communities by promoting *participation, empowerment, self-organisation and self-reliance*. (Stope Nade/Marie Stopes International n.d.)

Donor discourses such as these, which specifically addressed the situation of women, thus combined calls for gender equality (female empowerment, increased participation of women in politics and decision making, social validation for women's existing roles, etc.) with affirmative, often romanticized, essentializations of women as (apolitical) peace-makers and anti-nationalists. In contrast, while male NGO leaders and politicians have also been targeted in reconciliation initiatives, the rhetoric about them is quite different; it does not refer to men's natural dispositions toward peace, connections to family, and the preservation of life.

Essentialisms Locally: "If Women Had Been in Power, There Wouldn't Have Been a War"

Some of the more gender-critical (or feminist) local women activists took note of this approach by donors. As Dženana of Medica complained, "The picture that men make war and women make peace— that really annoys me. Women's groups use this all the time." Members of Medica and the other self-described feminist organizations generally refrained from reproducing such essentialisms, though they made use of them in other ways, as we shall see. Most Bosnian women's organizations, however, readily embraced these essentialist representations of women, as was apparent through their own presentations of their work. This approach not only coincided with donor discourses but also with local understandings of gender. During my fieldwork, I repeatedly heard Bosnian women (and a few men) state that, "if women had been in power, there wouldn't have been a war." Many similar statements were made at meetings of women active in NGOs and politics, reinforcing the stereotype of peaceful women/aggressive men.

In lamenting women's virtual absence from politics, especially during the years leading up to the war, Irena Soldat-Jovanović, a parliamentary representative from the Serb Republic speaking on Bosnian television concluded:

Had women had a higher degree of participation in 1991, maybe it would not have even come to this war, maybe we would have found, in some peaceful way, a compromise in which women were very prominent, and *through which the family*

would be preserved. (emphasis added)

As with donor discourses, these local activists often offered motherhood as the defining feature of women's peacemaking roles. At another cross-entity women's NGO gathering I attended in the eastern RS, the leader of *Izvor*, a women's NGO in Serb-controlled Zvornik, concluded a presentation about the need for women to get involved in politics by saying:

I wish to convey a message to all women and mothers of BiH [Bosnia-Herzegovina] that they are an important factor in maintaining the peace in this region. We need to bring up children in the spirit of tolerance, in valuing those who think and believe differently and not in the spirit of hatred and intolerance.

Similarly, many Bosnian women have publicly embraced their roles as mothers, as another women's NGO did on T-shirts which read, "World Peace begins right here. I will not raise my child to kill your child." Again, the role of women and their connection to peace-making are defined strictly through motherhood. Motherhood connotes not only the bearing, but also the raising of children, a role which includes both moral guidance and the (less desirable) job of cleaning up messes as the "sacrificing mother." As Dženana further noted, "This is still the expectation of society. Women smooth out what men have messed up," in other words, conflict and war.

Examples countering such generalizations were readily visible, as has been shown in other contexts (e.g., African Rights 1995; Lilly and Irvine 2002; Scheper-Hughes 1996). Several people related stories of women calling for even more violent measures to be taken against ethnic others than what was publicly advocated by the most extreme nationalist men. A few male ex-soldiers told me how, during the war, their female relatives scolded them as they returned from the front for not having killed more of the enemy. The men, in contrast, having experienced the carnage of the front lines, shrank from the violent, aggressive behavior many of them had exhibited in the time leading up to the war. Wartime reports, too, told of women taking part in blocking deliveries of badly needed humanitarian aid to communities of other ethno-national groups (Borneman 1998: 295). And, although it is difficult to know the precise motivation of such women from their brief mention in war reports, other aggressive roles of women were also reported, such as the Serb woman who worked at the infamous Serb-run "brothel," *Kod Sonje*, where Muslim women were detained, raped, and killed (*Vjesnik*, December 17, 1993: 11, cited in Žarkov 1999: Chap. 4: 22; and see Lilly and Irvine

2002).

Indeed, the actions and words of many women NGO activists contradicted the image of peace-loving women. As mentioned in chapters 4 and 5, many women's organizations were formed to work exclusively with women of "their own" ethnic group, or to support nationalist ideologies. One women's NGO leader told me that, in her view, it was women who were responsible, through their "gossiping and blabbing," for stirring up the hatreds which led to the war. I observed many instances in which women involved in cross-ethnic NGO activities used language or other cues that offended the women with whom they were supposed to be reconciling; in many cases, I also witnessed hostile attitudes towards other ethnic groups expressed by women "peace-makers." Even the affirmative essentialisms used to cast women as morally pure mothers belied their implied universalism. Implicit in the T-shirt slogan cited above is the suggestion that *some* (bad) mothers *do* raise their children to kill other people's children, namely the women belonging to hostile ethnic groups (Serbs in this particular case).

Yet, those who acknowledged these inconsistencies or who were critical of gender essentialisms generally made their criticisms in private conversations rather than public fora.¹⁴⁰ Regardless of whether local women's NGOs embraced this rhetoric of women as peace-makers, they knew their categorization as "women's organizations" helped them win funding, especially for reconciliation projects. This was because they were seen as better able to engage in inter-ethnic communication and carry out ethnic reconciliation projects, which, along with humanitarian aid, charity, and other social services in which women have engaged during and since the war, constitute feminized "clean-up work."

Strategic Use of Gender Essentialisms by Women's NGOs

A key component of these essentialist representations is the women's positioning themselves outside of politics and the portrayal of politics as a (corrupt, immoral, and nationalistic) realm of men. Somewhat paradoxically, this strategy is used to accomplish very political goals. Although NGOs are not always regarded locally with favor, when juxtaposed with the formal political sphere

¹⁴⁰ Here I would exclude contact with feminist donors, with whom such criticism was encouraged.

they gain an air of legitimacy when they emphasize their non-governmental, even apolitical character. As we have seen, women can more easily cast themselves as apolitical. They are also more readily associated with victim identities, especially those stemming from the war. All of these elements offered a reservoir from which women were able to draw considerable moral status in public, post-war processes. I now turn to three examples of how local women's NGOs made strategic use of affirmative essentialisms of women in order to achieve their (political) goals.

Women of Srebrenica

This connection between victim images, morality, and femininity has been made most successfully in the Bosniac parts of Bosnia by groups of women survivors of the biggest massacre of the war at Srebrenica in which an estimated 7,000 male Muslims were killed by Serb forces when they overran the enclave filled with Muslim refugees, expelling the women and children, in July 1995 (Burg and Shoup 1999; Sudetic 1998). To be sure, these groups have successfully wielded such feminized victim images because they were truly victims and had directly suffered a great deal. My point is to call attention to the effect of their emphasis on their roles as mothers and wives, which was underscored by their public appearance in traditional Muslim rural dress. The public protests¹⁴¹ of groups such as *Žene Srebrenice* (Women of Srebrenica) regularly drew sympathy and feelings of disgust towards both the Serbs and the Muslim politicians widely believed to have sold the enclave out.

Women of Srebrenica was emphatic that, as they put it at the top of their website homepage, “our task is not a fight for women rights” (*sic*), (a cause commonly understood as “political”) but the search for (the bodies of) their missing family members and the campaign to bring their killers to justice (Women of Srebrenica 2002). They specifically stated that they were not politicians and their banners used in public protests typically emphasize motherhood: “Mothers ask, where are the missing from Srebrenica?” and “Srebrenica Mothers want the truth.”

Identification as a victim of the nationalist forces of opposing ethnic groups (or of western interventions) also carried high moral value, and was one of the only acceptable kinds of identity one

¹⁴¹ These groups were the only women's groups that visibly protested anything on the streets, including those groups that called themselves feminist and their activities political.

could espouse in post-war Bosnia. As chapter 4 detailed, women have been especially linked to victim identities as bereaved mothers and victims of rape. Another organization of Srebrenica survivors calls itself “The Association of Mothers and Sisters of Srebrenica and Podrinja” (*Udruženja majke i sestre Srebrenice i Podrinja*), even though it is headed by a man. While women made up a large majority of Srebrenica survivors, it is nevertheless significant that these organizations emphasized not only a female identity, but that of mothers, sisters, wives/widows. The stress was thus on female familial roles far removed from anything political and which invoked images of victimhood by calling attention to the emotional bonds the survivors had with those who had been killed. In this way, these organizations hoped to publicly shame the authorities they held responsible for the massacre, just as movements like the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina (Taylor 1994) and the Mothers’ Fronts in Sri Lanka (de Alwis 1998a; Samuel 2003) have done through public *performances of motherhood* in the face of state violence.

Somewhat paradoxically, the Srebrenica women are acting in the public sphere on an intensely political issue in which their missing male loved-ones are the *ultimate* victims, though the women themselves have also suffered greatly. Nevertheless, the women’s emphasis on their identities as women/mothers/victims adds moral authority and political clout to their message. Feminization of the victim image combined with the male gendering of the political sphere allowed women to more easily claim distance from “politics” and, therefore, from culpability for everything negative— war, ethnic cleansing, poverty, corruption, unemployment, etc.— caused by politicians in the recent past.

Women of Podrinje and Kozarac

As we recall from chapter 5, *Žene s Podrinja* (Women of Podrinje) and *Srcem do mira* (Through Heart to Peace) were made up of Bosniac DP women whose main goal was to return to their former home towns after having lived through some of the most brutal cases of ethnic cleansing of Bosniacs by Serb forces in the war. Both the Podrinje area of Eastern Bosnia (Srebrenica, Bratunac, Zvornik, Vlasenica) and the area around Kozarac and Prijedor (in Northwest Bosnia) where *Srcem do mira* was from were now populated by Serbs and controlled by nationalist politicians who opposed the return of non-Serbs. Resistance by nationalist leaders to the return of

displaced persons of different ethnicity was, of course, also a continuation of wartime ethnic cleansing of territory (see Hayden 1996). Local Serb leaders did not want their control of these now ethnically homogeneous territories to be threatened by the return of ethnic others, be they women, children, men, or anyone. Their political power was based on their ability to get votes— votes from members of the now-dominant ethnic group only; any increase in the population of ethnic others directly threatened this power. The women’s goals of return were thus fundamentally political.

The women did not call their activities political, however, but humanitarian, a category understood as apolitical. They portrayed themselves as working within women’s circles rather than “meddling” into the male world of politics. Almasa of Srcem do Mira opposed her group’s “humanitarian” activities to what she said was the more “political” nature of Serb NGOs operating in her area. “Political” groups were, in her formulation, morally suspect. When I asked Zahida, the leader of *Žene s Podrinja*, why her group only worked with women, she looked at me as if I was asking the obvious. “*We have* to work with women,” she explained, “Because *we* are women. If we tried to talk to the men there [in our towns] then it would be political.” Male activity is, in this formulation, political, while female activity is not.

This approach conformed to the patriarchal gender divisions of affirmative essentialisms which marginalized women from formal politics. But it was also somewhat effective politically, precisely because women were seen as less threatening or politically consequential, and because they actually did lack power in the formal political realm. The women were able to quietly circumvent the spotlight without putting the public reputation of (male) officials directly on the line. In fact, since 1998, Srcem do Mira had been instrumental in the reestablishment of a viable Bosniac community in and around Kozarac. Ethnic relations there were far from smooth, but their goal of return was achieved against strong odds and they continued to successfully push for improvements in their community. *Žene s Podrinja* succeeded in October 2000, after several years of effort, in holding a cross-ethnic meeting in Bratunac, one of the most politically hardline towns of the region and the place where stones had been hurled at them to prevent them from entering a few months before. They were continuing to work to achieve their return and to improve communication with

their Serb former neighbors.¹⁴²

This quiet circumvention of public, political channels also drew on popular notions of hidden female power, the “cryptomatriarchy” of the family sphere described in Chapter 3 (Simić 1983; Hammel 1967). While such power is generally limited to the home sphere, women’s activists who adhered to this more “traditional” idea of gender relations hoped to use this channel to accomplish their *political* goals. Zahida explained how she envisioned this helping her achieve her goal of holding the Bratunac meeting:

Women can do a lot. Someone once asked me why I’m doing this through women and not through politicians. I said, “today we’ll meet and I’ll say what we want. You’re married to the mayor and you’ll lay in bed tonight and tell him that we want to meet in Bratunac and you’ll convince him to do it.” It’s much easier through women.

Again, although she spoke of the mayor as being a man (which the mayor at that time, in fact, was), she unquestioningly assumed the general category of “politicians” to be male and opposed it to the category of women.¹⁴³ She readily acknowledged to me that her goal was political and that she and her organization were counting on the prejudices of local male politicians to allow them to achieve their political goals through nominally non-political channels available to women. Zahida continued:

Women can make better progress, exactly on this path to reconciliation. The authorities didn’t think we’d be able to do too much in Bratunac, and now when they see how much we’re doing, they can’t do anything [to stop us].... They didn’t imagine– [they said] “well, so what?, there’s a couple of women there, what can they do?” But we criticize power and politics. But hey, we’re not politicians!!

Zahida delivered this last sentence with a big grin on her face and a twinkle in her eye. She was quite

¹⁴² Neither of these cases was without serious problems and there was some question as to whether refugee return would foster or complicate ethnic reconciliation. Indeed, as in the Kozarac case, return to many areas had been easier because they had been relatively ethnically homogeneous before the war. Return to urban areas, which were ethnically mixed before the war, was much more problematic and has been, for this and other reasons, much slower to realize.

¹⁴³ Women’s power was not only tied here to the informal, family sphere, but also to women’s sexuality, though this quotation was the only time I heard Zahida allude to this aspect.

aware of the way she was playing with other people's assumptions about women's political insignificance in order to achieve her very political goals.

At the same time, there was little guarantee that this strategy would be successful by itself, largely because many decisions crucial to the return process were still made by men. As Almasa noted, "[NGO work] is seen as humanitarian work and meaningless. But politics is serious and thought highly of. It's power." For this reason (and because it was also being pushed by donors), both Almasa's and Zahida's groups were active in campaigns to increase women's participation in formal politics and to support the female politicians who were there. Furthermore, Zahida was ultimately successful in organizing her meeting in Bratunac by working yet another channel available to her as a woman activist, that of the international community.

Indeed, none of these successes ultimately could have been achieved without support and pressure from international institutions which assisted movements for return regardless of views on gender. Return to Kozarac seems to have been allowed at least partly as a concession by the RS government in exchange for international funds for the economically depressed entity. The Bratunac meeting was also achieved through persistent pressuring of local Serb leaders by international officials who held out the promise of donor funds being released to local (Serb) NGOs in desperate need of assistance to help an even more desperate local population. In other words, significant change was ultimately achieved on the male-dominated level of formal political structures.

Feminists and "Strategic Avoidance"

Several of the Medica women expressed annoyance at donors and other NGO women who so wholeheartedly embrace essentialist thinking. Nataša was irritated at suggestions like Zahida's that women should influence reconciliation through husbands and other men in positions of power:

It can't work this way. I'm not thinking about women being active as someone's wife, influencing their husbands, but exercising direct influence on their own. When all is said and done, it's better to be in the margins than not at all on the page! At least you have a chance at getting into the text that way.

Nataša's metaphor pointed directly to the effective marginalization of women from the formal political sphere created through the use of affirmative essentialisms of women.

Despite their criticisms, however, even Medica and other like-minded activists made use of these familiar gender essentialisms to some degree. While these activists did not actively *promote* essentialist understandings of women's roles, they often did not object when their activities were publicly characterized in positive terms— as apolitical and humanitarian, or when they were included in descriptions of nurturing, peacemaking women. This only bolstered their sense of moral purpose as women helping women, not to mention their public image. As we have seen, Medica activists consciously tempered their public statements so as not to appear too “aggressive” or “feminist” (a term understood as political). This, they feared, might threaten their ability to influence change in society, both in terms of improving gender equality as well as working toward ethnic reconciliation. An image of apolitical, nurturing women in fact aided both these aspects of Medica's efforts.

The cross-ethnic network of women's activists, of which Medica was an active part, largely relied on affirmative essentialisms to maintain its working relationships (see chapter 5). These women, practicing “strategic avoidance” of potentially controversial “ethnic” issues, identified themselves primarily as women concerned with “women's issues,” rather than “politics,” though they readily acknowledged to themselves that their goals were political. At times they allowed themselves to joke and talk about ethnic differences to some extent, but this was based on the trust they had built up through their years of working together. Their underlying assumption, which they also often articulated, was that none of the women had been involved in, or had any sympathy for, waging the war, promoting nationalisms, or the corruption of politics. Indeed, these women did share a common rejection of both ethno-national and patriarchal ideologies. A public image as women and outside politics, however, was ultimately helpful in allowing these activists to cross ethnic divides and pursue their work.¹⁴⁴

The Dilemma of Women Politicians

Women activists had strategic reasons for distancing themselves from “politics,” especially in their public image, in order to more effectively participate in political processes, broadly defined.

¹⁴⁴ This image did not completely protect the women from harassment by local nationalists, however, especially in the RS. See Cockburn et. al. (2001: 106-126) for an account of the difficulties two Banja Luka women's NGOs had to endure for their cross-ethnic and cross-entity work.

Women politicians, political candidates, and political party members, however, could not claim non-involvement in politics. Instead, as I show below, they relied on similar affirmative essentialisms of women to justify and promote their participation in politics.

As a result of the new quota rules, however, women were becoming more and more visible in the sphere of formal politics. Certain elements of the international community, too, promoted women's increased participation in politics. The OSCE led these efforts through its Women in Politics program, part of its Democratization Department. The program organized training for women in political skills, regular gatherings of women parliamentarians to cultivate solidarity across party lines on "women's issues," and meetings of women politicians and NGO women designed to foster cooperation among women and communication across all levels of government and communities.

Other foreign donors also encouraged and funded efforts to increase women's political participation. A foreign contact had also been instrumental in the formation of the League of Women Voters, or *Liga Žene Glasača*.¹⁴⁵ The "Liga" had been formed after Swanee Hunt, the former American ambassador to Austria and a frequent advocate for women's issues in Bosnia, had described the American League to a group of NGO women in Sarajevo and suggested they start a similar organization. The Bosnian League was locally run, though sporadically financed from abroad, and, in contrast to the American League, it specifically encouraged women to vote, and for all voters to vote for women candidates. Its members included women politicians and NGO leaders, including Šehida from Zenica and Almasa from Kozarac, discussed in previous chapters.

Many women activists were worried that the sudden increase in women's political participation brought on by the quotas would render women little more than cosmetic dressing—"ikebane," or flower arrangements, for the table where men continued to call the shots. The Bosnian facilitator at an OSCE sponsored training session for women politicians¹⁴⁶ told a gathering of women

¹⁴⁵ Ironically, the Bosnian name was formed with the *masculine* plural of the word "voters." Šehida, one of the Liga's leaders, told me she had decided this was a mistake and wanted to change the name to the feminine *Liga Žene Glasačica*. This would also have respected the insistence by many women activists on the use of feminine grammatical forms when referring to females, or "female language" (*ženski jezik*).

¹⁴⁶ This training program, entitled "Women Can Do It" (*Žene to mogu*) was adapted from a Norwegian model and implemented in municipalities throughout Bosnia through OSCE-trained local (Bosnian) facilitators. I attended one such training session in Zenica in November 1999.

candidates for local elections, that once they got to parliament, “You’re not there to be silent. If you are, they’ll think you’re a good *woman* but not a politician. You’ll just be an *ikebana*.” On another occasion, three women politicians were scheduled to speak at an evening town tribunal (*tribina*) following a day-long meeting of the League of Women Voters and an afternoon hike. When the hike took longer than planned and it became clear that the group would have to go straight to the town tribunal in our hiking clothes, the three women speakers, all involved in politics, decided they could at least make their faces look presentable. They opened up their handbags and proceeded to put on makeup and fix their hair as we waited in a meadow for the rest of the group. “Look what politics demands of us!” joked one. “But we are real women!” countered another. How were women politicians to act as both politicians and women?

While they sought to avoid the role of *ikebana*, female politicians and their supporters also expressed concern that women politicians “remain women.” A woman activist ended a television program on women in politics by saying:

To the women of BiH I especially recommend that they do not under any circumstances cease to be women, that they remain women exactly the way they are—gentle, mothers and wives, but that they don’t stop fighting [for their interests in politics].¹⁴⁷

Women had to walk a constant line between being taken seriously as politicians and being perceived as unfeminine or “some sort of feminists.”¹⁴⁸ Most importantly, though this was not explicitly expressed, to retain their moral authority they had to continue to be seen as women rather than as following the model of aggressive, uncompromising, corrupt male politician against which they defined themselves.

This dilemma was discussed regularly by women politicians and activists. Amela, a woman who led her small party’s candidate list for the cantonal assembly, admonished her fellow women

¹⁴⁷ An unidentified woman’s voice in the OSCE sponsored television special on women in politics.

¹⁴⁸ Amila Omersoftić, president of the Women’s Party, during a televised candidates’ debate devoted to women candidates, broadcast October 26, 2000, on the Open Broadcast Network (OBN) just before general elections in November 2000. In an example of the denial of “feminism” discussed in chapter 6, Omersoftić repeated several times that she and her party were “not some kind of feminists” until the moderator pointed out that neither he nor anyone else in the studio had mentioned the word.

at a public presentation of female candidates gearing up for local elections in 2000 saying, “don’t just use the refined influence of women over men– sons, brothers, husbands. Startle them. Go for real male behavior– you won’t lose any of your femininity that way. Show them how professional and capable you are, how much you know.” Later, Amela explained to me that women can do men’s jobs, such as politics, but in a better way because they are women. A women needed to behave, “not like a real man with boots but as a person with opinions.”

Velida, a League of Women Voters leader, expressed to me her frustration at the way in which female politicians were presenting themselves. We had just attended another of the many round table discussions organized by the League on the subject of women in politics. Senka Nožica, a prominent Sarajevo lawyer, had spoken. While Nožica was generally recognized as elegant and articulate, Velida found her *too* much of an elite, refined “lady” to be appealing to Bosnian voters:

Women in Bosnia have to decide what kind of woman politician they want, what model they have in mind. Do we want a Margaret Thatcher? I don’t think so, that’s just following a male model. But I don’t think we want the model that Senka Nožica and [another female politician] follow either. This is so sweet and charming, nice, proper. That’s not what Bosnian women are like. Senka may be nice to look at and I think a lot of men like to talk with her because she is pretty and eloquent. She has to be eloquent, that’s her job as a lawyer, words are her tools. You can like her but in the way you like a Barbie doll, not a serious politician. This model of a woman politician may work in the West but not here. Senka is an elite woman and has always been presented that way, that’s how people will always see her. But she has nothing to offer the average woman– or man... She’s like from another world. In the last election the international community put a ton of money behind promoting Senka, she was constantly on the TV, everywhere. But she got very few votes. And [another woman] got many many more votes than Senka and she wasn’t ever on TV! People just don’t identify with Senka. Bosnian women aren’t like that– they are tough and direct and practical. We need a model of a style of woman politician who is still feminine but effective and who can represent Bosnian women.

These comments should not be read entirely as a reflection of class or rural/urban differences, as

Velida herself, though not from Sarajevo, was a prominent lawyer in her own city and an “elite” woman. Indeed, she did not dispute that Nožica was both feminine and an effective politician. Rather, Velida was bothered by Nožica’s image as too dainty and not sufficiently aggressive. For these women activists, then, being feminine and distinct from male politicians was important, but they also wanted female politicians to be assertive and to play a significant role in the political process.

Women Politicians’ Discursive Strategies

In keeping with these aims, women politicians expressed their motivation for getting involved in politics as an outgrowth of their identities as women and mothers and of the extraordinary conditions of the times. The war had forced “politics” into everyone’s lives in a way they could not ignore. With this claim, women infused their actions with a sense of moral duty, denying the possibility that they had had any preconceived aspirations for personal power or engagement with the disreputable realm of the political. As one woman candidate put the frequently stated assertion, “I started engaging [*baviti se*] in politics because politics was engaging with me!” One woman who was an SDA parliament member when I first spoke to her in 1997, stressed that her political engagement was only temporary. “This is a time of crisis,” she explained, “a fight for survival of the Bosniac nation... With the coming of the war I saw that politics wasn’t just about power (*vlast*) but it now had a life dimension (*životna dimenzija*)... You couldn’t say anymore that you’re not interested in politics.” She was answering the call of duty to her nation but when the danger passed, she said she planned to return to devoting her full attention to her children and home life—her feminine duties. Sure enough, when I looked her up in 1999, she had taken her name off the candidate list for parliament saying that politics was not as important as her family and her work. Interestingly, she had not mentioned the importance of her job as a distinguished university professor when she had first discussed her duty to the nation, but only after she had retired from politics and was devoting more time to her work.

Others cited injustice, by which they meant the abuses of the war and the economic inequalities of the post-war period, products of inept, corrupt (male) politicians. Edisa, a member of the Zenica cantonal assembly, a DP who had fled to Zenica when her town was ethnically

cleansed, explained:

I didn't choose politics, politics chose me. Politics started messing with my life. People/men (*ljudi*) in politics, that is, people making decisions in the name of others. It was a reflex for me to get involved— to defend myself. This reflex was not to be an outside observer... Now I'm in politics *out of need* because some other people took my life *and the lives of my family* and threw it in the air like a leaf into the wind. Our lives are now without security. I don't mean physical insecurity but the ability to plan for the future for us *and our kids*. (emphasis added)

This was a time of extreme crisis which warranted extreme measures in which the normal rules of social organization could be bent. Things were so bad that even women were feeling the need to get involved in politics.

What was worse, even those politicians in power who were supposed to be protecting the people were widely seen as incompetent or simply uncaring because they pursued their own personal interests. Amela explained to a group of female candidates in the Zenica municipality why she had entered politics:

For years I thought that a woman like me, a doctor by profession who does a highly sophisticated job and also a mother and wife, has no need to enter into politics as a classic male pursuit. But when I saw what kind of jerks (*kreteni*) were passing certain laws, which led to certain changes and brought me and those closest to me into the situation where we have to endure hardship because they're either not responsible or not intelligent, then I decided and I said I'm not going to just talk at home or over coffee about how our salaries are small, how we walk along the street with three centimeters of mud on our shoes, how there's nowhere to go to hear some music, how there aren't anymore festivals here, the school curricula are pathetic, my child is dissatisfied, etc., not to mention all the other problems you all know about already.

I decided, I'm going [into politics].

Amela makes it clear that she has been living up to her role as a respectable woman. It was the men who have failed to live up to the duties of *their* gendered role as defined in this view.

In keeping with women's emphasis on their female respectability, politically active women

justified this extraordinary engagement through their roles as mothers and nurturers, again in an effort to “remain women” and in opposition to the model of dirty, egocentric male politicians. As Edisa’s comments reflect, rather than a bid for personal status, power, or gain, the impetus for women’s involvement in politics was a noble sacrifice made on behalf of children and their future. In this way, they rooted their political presence in traditionally womanly roles, especially the familiar figure of the sacrificing, morally pure mother (cf. Simić 1983).

Comments to this effect were offered by women politicians and activists in many settings—in televised debates, at public meetings, in small groups of activists, and in conversations with me. As one woman politician speaking on television put it, “Women always think first of their own families, so women would have the right perspectives and priorities in politics. They’re thinking about the future of the country.” A candidate from the Women’s Party told a gathering of women politicians,

Motherhood was and has remained the strongest argument for women to engage in politics, because she has a natural advantage in opting for and working towards creating conditions for a better and more prosperous future for the generations [of children] she brings to the world.

And a *male* political leader from Zenica (from a small opposition party which won very few votes) declared on local television, “I advocate the equal participation of women in politics... because women have endured the trials of giving birth and raising children for 18 years until they are adults. If they don’t know something about life, who does? Women, mothers, know the needs in society.” The implication was not only that all normal women become mothers, but also that only women whose children have grown should enter politics.

These assumptions rest on essentialist characterizations of both men and women. Women claimed to have their own unique “female diplomacy,”¹⁴⁹ to be interested in dialogue and a greater good. According to Sabina, “Women are more honest, have more soul, and are more open in conversation. They’re not as arrogant. It’s easier to communicate with women.” “Bosnian women have a better feeling for justice,” claimed a woman member of another party, “so women would be

¹⁴⁹ Mediha Filipović, prominent figure in the Stranka za BiH (Party for BiH), speaking in front of other women activists and politicians at a round table sponsored by the League of Women Voters.

more honest. They *are* more emotional, but this is good. They will have more feelings for others.” These characterizations implicitly, and often explicitly, portrayed men as incapable of dialogue or compromise, more interested in personal gain and in one-upping their fellow male politicians. “Men are constantly insulting and degrading each other in public, in the parliament,” asserted a woman candidate in a televised debate with other women candidates. Another debate participant agreed: “Women always put general interests first, common interests, while men are in it for personal interests.”¹⁵⁰

Women’s abilities managing the home, especially in dealing with children, husbands, in-laws, and neighbors were cited as good training for women to be successful politicians: “We know how to rule/take charge (*vladati*) because we do that at home, too,” declared a prominent leader in the Women’s Party. Edisa pointed to men’s and women’s ways of getting things done:

I don’t give myself tasks, or take them on, if I’m not sure I can carry them out. Men do this all the time, but women finish one task to the end before taking on another one... With men it’s often the case that they take on many jobs and don’t follow through with any of them.

This kind of representation not only emphasized women’s practical skills and efficiency but also their morality. At a League of Women Voters round table, Senka Nožica argued that,

Women are naturally responsible because of our duties towards our children. There are so many small details we have to think of and take care of, and we have no choice, we have to do these things. They are things that can’t be put off, they have to be done everyday. We can’t stay in the *kafana* [café-bar] for another drink like men can.

The *kafana*, like politics, was a place for men and profane (immoral) women— out of bounds for respectable women (Simić 1983; c.f. Cowan 1991). Women had no time for such immoral pursuits because they were busy with the far more noble, and for women more respectable, domestic and nurturing tasks.

In these scenarios, men begin to sound like carefree, undisciplined children who need a

¹⁵⁰ Mira Štic (Democratic Socialist Party) and Amila Omersoftić (Women’s Party) during the October 2000 OBN debate (see above note).

mother around to take care of necessary tasks, to think responsibly, and to keep them on their best behavior. Indeed, Sabina, a school teacher by profession, told me that when male politicians behave badly toward her, she said nothing, but in her head kept “giving them minuses, like in school.” Mensura was famous in the Cantonal Assembly, where she was a representative, for admonishing the male politicians for their bad behavior: “I get up and say ‘shame on you all for not being able to agree!’ Just like that, like to small children... I actually educate men in parliament. And I’m not there to attain some position of power at the top.” Whether to themselves or to the public, women politicians consciously placed themselves in the role of mother to justify their involvement in politics and to retain their respectability.

Votes for Women: A Force for Change

During the local elections of 2000, the League of Women Voters held a public forum in Zenica at which women candidates from all parties presented themselves and their ideas. The theme of the event was “Votes for women: A force for change.” The League and many of the women candidates were promoting women as new faces who would change the dirty nature of male-dominated politics. This was not only for the reasons outlined above— that women are moral, nurturing, more capable of dialogue, more attuned to the needs of society— but also out of an unstated assumption that women were less nationalistic. Coming at a time when national parties still held undisputed control over the areas in which their ethnic group was in the majority, any suggestion of voting for change meant voting out the ruling nationalist parties. In Zenica this meant the Bosniac nationalist party, the SDA.¹⁵¹ Most people who wanted “change” were eager to vote the SDA out, whether they were bothered only by its corruption or also by its nationalist ideology. Again, this aspect of the political climate offered women a space in which their social position as non-combatants and victims in the war, and as non-participants in political corruption, granted them

¹⁵¹ The “international community,” led by the OSCE was also pushing hard for nationalists to be voted out of power. Indeed the OSCE’s publicity campaign to get out the vote featured the slogan “Vote for Change” (*Glasajte za Promjenu*), which Bosnians generally understood as a not-so-hidden endorsement of non-nationalist parties. The 2000 elections did in fact result in some gains for the multi-ethnic, “civic” oriented Social Democratic Party (SDP), which (with heavy international backing) formed a governing coalition called the Alliance for Change. After two rocky years in power, however, the Alliance was voted out in 2002, in favor of nationalist parties. This move was widely attributed to voters’ dissatisfaction with continued corruption, perception of the civic parties as puppets of the west, and distaste for the SDP’s outspoken leader, Zlatko Lagumdžija.

moral superiority. Not only were women not among those who waged the war and now obstruct the peace, this reasoning went, they are also less susceptible to the virulent ideologies which produced these terrible conditions in the first place.¹⁵²

For politically active women, the greatest evidence for this was their success in building cooperation among NGO women and female politicians across ethnic and party lines. Most of this activity involving politicians had been initiated by foreign donors, especially OSCE, which also encouraged the idea that women are less nationalist, aggressive, and violent than men.¹⁵³ Once the women representatives had been brought together, however, their cooperation proved to be quite successful, despite the antagonistic political views held within this group. Given the political parties in power, there were inevitably women present from all of the most hardline nationalist parties. What made this possible was also what enabled NGO women to work together to find common issues, namely, their identities as women. In this case, this meant a marginal position vis-a-vis male dominated political circles where real decisions were made.

As we have seen, women were able to cross politicized ethnic boundaries more easily and sooner after the end of the war than men could because they were not counted as significant political (or military) actors. Their political activity was also not taken as seriously, and was therefore less of a threat to the established male political leaders. Furthermore, because women came together to discuss “women’s issues,” their cooperation across ethnic and party lines was not as difficult. Sabina, a Bosniac participant in these meetings marveled that, “many people at the beginning took this cooperation with a great deal of skepticism... However, it was shown that women understand each other very well, even without opening their mouths.” Female solidarity, she implied, was almost instinctual and based on their common bond as women, mothers, and wives. She continued:

With women it’s a breeze (*sa ženama je pjesma*). There are no problems with women of any age. The last Friday of each month we have our women’s meetings with [OSCE]. Women of all parties are there, even from the SDS [the leading Serb

¹⁵² Young people, who shared with women the morally superior position of not having waged war or engaged in political corruption, were also promoted by those advocating a change from national parties. Indeed, the League of Women Voters also added youth as another “force for change.”

¹⁵³ As with the NGO donors discussed earlier, it was not so much the planners of OSCE’s programs for women in politics who reproduced essentialist images but those promoting it in the community.

nationalist party]. We're still talking about our common interests but there are lots of these– the labor law, maternity leave, social security/insurance, protection of children, etc. But other laws will come along, and we'll find agreement on that, too.

In other words, these women politicians were also practicing “strategic avoidance” in order to work on “women’s issues.”

The tight working bonds and many sound political initiatives dealing with “women’s issues” which these women developed were remarkable, especially given the overwhelming failure and refusal by male politicians to come to agreement across party and ethnic lines. Outside of these working sessions, however, the women still harbored many fundamental differences in ideological outlooks, especially on the question of ethnic relations and the character of the Bosnian state. These are, after all, the main sticking points which prevented the powerful male politicians from cooperating. At the end of the day, no matter what the women agreed on, they were also compelled to follow the directives of their parties. Sabina acknowledged in private that there were many of these basic differences, but she insisted, “Women have to get together, help each other change their opinions, get to know each other and understand each other, to *talk*.” It was on the basis of this belief that the women representatives had come as far as they had.

Conclusion: Gender Essentialisms, Victimhood, and Moral Categories

The discursive strategies of politically active women and the way they were received by the rest of their communities reveal much about the cultural construction of both gender roles and “politics,” or the relation between state and society, in present day Bosnia. When women (or men) cross the line of accepted behavior, basic common assumptions about gender and the political sphere come into view. Because of (urban) women’s significant presence in higher education and employment outside the home, many Bosnians (both men and women) insisted that women had been “emancipated,” that they were perceived exactly the same by society (just as socialism claimed to have achieved; see chapter 3). However, examination of how categories of gender and politics were negotiated reveals a strong association of women with domestic roles and patriarchal concern for women’s sexual purity. Women’s working outside the home was generally accepted, but their longer absences farther from home and assumption of positions of authority were much less desirable (see

chapter 5). Indeed, the commonly heard view that it was fine for women to enter politics once they had raised their children to adulthood points to a strong concern with the control of female sexuality. Women past their reproductive years could more easily step into male roles and mix with men other than their husbands (cf. Simic 1983).

Women politicians who stressed their domestic roles and feminine respectability thus did more to challenge definitions of “politics” than definitions of womanhood. While they challenged the limits of womanly social engagement, the automatic association of women with domestic roles remained firm. Indeed, they celebrated these roles and proposed to carry them into the sphere of politics, whether through direct political participation or as civil society actors influencing formal politics. They further reinforced the association between men and corrupt politics by drawing a temporal line between the corrupt, nationalistic, and male-dominated politics of the past and the nicer, more humane politics of the future when women would be more numerous participants—these women were out to “clean up” politics.

Despite the ways in which women’s activities were marginalized, women nevertheless wielded real, if limited, power through their identities as women and apolitical victims. Women activists emphasized their female respectability associated with their roles as mothers and victims. Noticeably, while they evoked certain victim identities, they seldom alluded to wartime rape, even though this has been the most notorious category of women’s victimization in the war. Clearly, the stigma of rape was worse for women than any moral status they may have acquired by evoking this sort of victimhood. I return to this issue in the concluding chapter. Here I am concerned with the effects of affirmative essentialist representations of women on campaigns for gender equality and on reconciliation and return initiatives.

International intervention contributed to the view of politics as immoral, attacking political corruption and nationalist parties, and championing the NGO sector as democratic and morally upright. Although similar images were used by donors and local NGO activists, their motives differed. Donors to local NGOs, concerned with promoting the multi-ethnic state, stressed women’s supposed anti-nationalism as their motive for disengagement from politics. International officials promoting women’s participation in politics likewise emphasized women’s alleged tendency toward anti-nationalism and peace. Local women activists, however, seem to have been more concerned

with their moral reputations as respectable women.

The effects of international approaches on women's activism presented a paradox for the women they targeted. NGO women were charged with accomplishing the highly political goals of reconciliation and return, while the images used to mobilize them effectively marginalized women from the circles of real political power. Even initiatives aimed at increasing women's participation in formal politics, only somewhat coordinated with donor policies towards women's NGOs, effectively constructed women as less significant political players. In the immediate, portrayals of women as (morally respectable) nurturers and outsiders to politics were helpful in getting women elected by voters who were fed up with corrupt "politics as usual." They were unhelpful, however, in allowing women to be taken seriously as politicians. They encouraged women's equal participation in politics, as in civil society, but with the message that they should do so in the guise of their home-sphere roles of mother and natural peacemaker, the one who cleans up messes. Men continued to hold the vast majority of decision-making positions and to shut women out of their own party processes, expecting women parliamentarians to stay silent and vote as the male leadership instructs them. "Real" politics, therefore (where the messes are made), remained the realm of men.

Nevertheless, these affirmative essentialist representations of women resonated strongly with women activists themselves. Even those who were critical of such portrayals took advantage of their power, especially when dealing with the local public. This was a practical, effective, and often conscious strategy in the moral and political climate of post-war Bosnia, whether the women embraced the patriarchal implications of such conceptualizations or not. Despite the risks that women be seen as abdicating any claim to full membership in the nation/state (Blagojević 1994; Iveković 1997; Spasić 2000), such portrayals may have been women's most attractive option in practical terms. Indeed, in some contexts, this form of women's action may be the only way women feel they can achieve their goals (see Aretxaga 1997; Ishkanian 2003; Samuel 2003). In Bosnia there was little room between the dirty, unscrupulous realm of the political and the morally pure, nurturing, domestic realm for women to position themselves as significant political actors.

Furthermore, the recognition of positive traits associated with women has also produced a healthy move by women towards engaging in dialogue, non-violent communication, and caring for the well-being of others (see Ruddick 1989). This emphasis is not necessarily and in all ways

counter-productive of efforts to dismantle patriarchal gender norms. Over time these essentialist positionings may actually position women activists to affect real changes toward increased gender equality. The affirmative essentialisms being used in Bosnia resemble nationalist representations from the late colonial period in India which Partha Chatterjee (1989) has described as narrowly relegating women to domestic roles and thus excluding them from participation in the political sphere. However, as I discussed in chapter 2, Richard Fox (1996) has argued that those discourses also allowed Indian women to emerge in significant numbers onto the political scene, to play an active role in the national struggle. This chance at involvement is what Chinchilla (1997) then argued put women in the position to become conscious of gender hierarchies and women's inferior status, in short, by some definitions, to develop a feminist critique of society.¹⁵⁴ These are the experiences which lead to organic feminist movements and ultimately, though not necessarily, to gender change from within a society (see also Basu 1999; Jancar-Webster 1990; Machado 1993; Taylor 1994). In the case of Bosnia, it is already apparent that a core group of women NGO activists (at Medica, Žene Ženama, Udružene Žene, and others) has begun to critically engage the rest of society on questions of gender roles and relations where such challenges had grown virtually silent before the war and international intervention.

The campaign for gender equality and women's rights was at best a low priority in the international project in Bosnia. The targeting of women for reconciliation and building multi-ethnicity was often completely unrelated to initiatives to support gender equality and women's rights. In fact, youth, children, and in some cases the elderly, were also being targeted for reconciliation projects. It therefore becomes clear that, despite the feminist-inspired discourse used to promote women's role in reconciliation, women were not initially targeted out of a desire to empower them, but because, like youth, children and the elderly, they were *not* fighting-aged men. In other words, they fell outside the category of potential (and potent) political and military adversaries. Affirmative gender essentialisms neatly bolstered this representation of women.

Portraying women as apolitical peacemakers also suited the international community's two-

¹⁵⁴ While women were welcomed by socialist revolutionary movements into the military as fighters, they were nonetheless expected to carry out traditionally prescribed female roles during and after the revolution, such as caring for war orphans, cooking and cleaning for male soldiers, and providing sexual "comfort" to male soldiers (Chinchilla 1997; Jancar-Webster 1990).

tiered approach to return and reconciliation which worked through both top-down (formal politics) as well as local level (outside politics) processes (Belloni 2001). International officials put heavy pressure on political actors to reform the system of governance while they targeted local actors using alternative channels to alter realities on the ground. This was especially important given the intransigence of political actors on many issues of concern to the international community such as refugee return and the establishment of a multi-ethnic state. As I have shown, women's NGOs were particularly suited to bypass formal political structures on these issues, especially when they were cast as apolitical and humanitarian. Moreover, while it was not always acknowledged by foreign actors, women were uniquely positioned to play a crucial role in the success of reconciliation at the community level. This was not only because in many populations of the displaced such as Srebrenica, women were virtually the only ones left alive, but also because women were the principle actors in the maintenance of community relations on a day-to-day, household-to-household basis (Bringa 1995; Sorabji 1994). On the local level, therefore, gender essentialisms actually complemented international efforts to encourage refugee return and ethnic reconciliation through channels outside formal politics.

Nevertheless, constructing women outside of politics also had negative consequences for the international project, even for those international actors not (primarily) invested in the promotion of gender equality. Firstly, the kind of circumvention of formal politics practiced by women's organizations and encouraged by donors contradicted international community calls for "transparency" in the workings of government at all levels (see Bose 2002). Secondly, however successful women's efforts towards community level reconciliation, their efforts remained dependent on actions in the formal political sphere from which they were consistently marginalized. Although women were able to make some progress by circumventing formal political channels and pressuring politicians in various ways, it was ultimately up to decisions made by local politicians and international actors as to whether return and institutional reintegration happened. Women working towards reconciliation, or any other goal, would have been much more effective if they were included and taken seriously as significant political actors.

On the other side of the same coin, the association of peaceful characteristics strictly with females restricts males to roles as aggressors and nationalists, self-interested profiteers, and in all

things incapable of dialogue or compromise. Given that men still dominated in social, economic, and political positions of power, it is doubtful that encouraging such qualities in men would have brought the international community or women activists closer to their professed goals of peace and reconciliation.

In sum, both international community approaches and the strategies of local women activists were fraught with contradictions in the way they constructed gender roles. These positionings carried real consequences not only for efforts to increase gender equality but also for reconciliation, return, and the multi-ethnic state-building project itself.

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSIONS: GENDER, MORALITY, AND WOMEN'S ACTIVISM

In concluding this study, I return to where it began: with images of Bosnian women as passive, silenced victims of rape and war. When I began this project, I had not wanted to focus on wartime rape but to investigate other, active aspects of women's roles and especially what they were doing after the war's end. Yet every aspect of "women in Bosnia" pointed me towards the issue. Nearly every time I gave a paper or presentation to non-Bosnian audiences on Bosnian women in the post-war period, someone who heard it would ask about rape. Most of these were legitimate and logical questions—indeed, part of what this dissertation shows is how pervasive wartime categories have been in the post-war period. However, in contrast to the ways in which Bosnian women represented themselves, audiences outside Bosnia exhibited a preoccupation with wartime rape in ways that mirrored the images being put forth in the press of Bosnian women as war and rape victims. I also encountered assumptions that "Muslim women" must live in very circumscribed, conservative communities (Žarkov 1995). This dissertation has endeavored to show a different side of Bosnian and Muslim women, while keeping in view the power that such pervasive images have had over these women's lives and public activities. I have pointed to the different ways in which the international press, local political discourses, as well as the discourses of foreign intervention have constructed women as passive outsiders to political decision making and other significant national arenas. We have seen how women activists both challenge and embrace various aspects of such images, even making strategic use of them in their public activities.

In this concluding chapter, I discuss some of the implications of women's representational strategies, both for the Bosnian context and in terms of women's activism in general. I outline the reasons for women's general avoidance of associations with rape and the implications for scholarship of gender and women of the acceptance or dismissal of women activists who embrace (patriarchal) affirmative essentialisms of women. I further explore the prospects for women's activism in Bosnia, pointing to some of the difficulties raised by international intervention and to the theoretical tools which might be used to evaluate women's activities.

Gender, Victimhood and the Rape Image

As the previous chapter illustrated, women themselves made use of certain kinds of victim images to promote their activities in the realm of the political. These self-representations make evident the importance of moral purity to public identities in post-war Bosnia. Specifically, we see various forms of victim identities as perhaps the only morally acceptable persona in post-war Bosnia (see Bougarel 1997b, 1999b). To be sure, women do not hold a monopoly over claims to victimhood. Recall that donors also target youth in a similar way as they do women, in terms of their non-involvement in political processes up until the present. Indeed, the politicized ethnic identities which have driven social and political processes in Bosnia for the past decade have been heavily based on claims to victimhood, at the hands of other ethnic groups and/or Western interventions and other foreign influences (Žarkov 1999). (Nor are such claims at all unique to the former Yugoslavia.) However, women are more readily associated with victimhood, and with certain (gendered) kinds of victimhood, due to the construction of female roles as apolitical, passive objects (victims) of male action. This construction, in turn, means that victim identities are all the more acceptable for women to embrace, as they pose little challenge to common expectations for respectable womanhood. Thus, women as public actors are targeted (by some donors, media, and politicians) and derided or ignored (by other donors, media, and politicians) in specifically gendered ways. Likewise, the women I have discussed in these pages cast themselves as innocent bystanders to war and nationalist chauvinism, as outsiders to the corrupt world of politics, and as the noble, self-sacrificing mother whose only wish is to protect her children and create for them a more peaceful world.

These women did not, however, stake much claim to the ultimate victim image, that of the female rape victim. While they often invoked the burdens faced by women during the war, they more readily emphasized women's suffering through displacement, loss, and having to support families under conditions of hunger, danger, and insecurity. Such predicaments were, to be sure, far more immediate and visible in the post-war period. Furthermore, as we have seen, women in politics strove to be seen as decisive, effective leaders— the opposite of what the common image of the defeated, dishonored, passive and weak victim of rape implies. As several women activists stressed, they were not “just old peasant women like the world media showed.” Mensura of the Women's Party told me she had entered politics to “show the dignity of Bosnian women to the world” in

opposition to the CNN images of rape victims and refugees “with five scarves on their heads.” One can only conclude from this that rape survivors and rural women were without dignity.

Indeed, there was a considerable social stigma against victims of rape, even wartime rape and the rape of “our” women by “their” men. This was despite official appeals to the contrary, public recognition of (certain, ethnic) raped women as national martyrs, and efforts by women’s organizations to raise awareness about the plight of rape survivors (see Andrić-Ružičić 2003). The attitude toward women rape survivors (not to mention the gendering of nations) was summed up in a statement made about his country by the well-known Serbian anti-nationalist singer, Đorđe Balašević, in the Sarajevo weekly magazine *Dani*: “With my country it’s like with a raped girl(friend): you can’t hate her because another (man) disgraced her, but you can’t love her anymore the way you once did.”¹⁵⁵ His point was not about rape or women but about his feelings toward his country (Yugoslavia). The Bosnian interviewer’s failure to comment on this choice of gendered image indicates that it was a familiar and accepted one (see Gal 1994; Scott 1999).

I encountered similar attitudes toward such “disgraced” women as individuals, even though they were “our” women raped by “their men,” ostensibly venerated as symbols of the nation’s victimhood. A Bosniac male friend in Zenica, who lived near one of Medica’s residences for women, assumed on the basis of Medica’s reputation that the young women he saw everyday had been raped. In fact, they were not at the residence as rape survivors but as refugees from Srebrenica: Medica was paying for their schooling. Nevertheless, my friend challenged their status as victims saying, “they don’t look like raped women– they’re always giggling and smiling and going out (with boys/in mixed company).” His implied expectation was that “raped women” should remain grieving and isolated for the rest of her lives, “ruined” for any further contact with men, much the way rape survivors were portrayed in the western press.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁵ *Dani* 10 September, 1999: 44. Making explicit the common feminization of territory/the nation and masculinization of its actors/politicians (Verdery 1994), Balašević further explained, “I can’t hate her because Milošević disgraced her, but can’t love her the way I loved the old Yugoslavia.”

¹⁵⁶ This friend, to his credit, quickly reevaluated his assumptions when he recalled the stereotypes he had had to put up with as a DP in wartime Zenica. Because the DPs had lost everything, they were sent brand new clothing from relatives who had fled to places like Sweden, while Zenica residents, still in their own homes with their own things, had to make do with their old clothes. The DPs had therefore failed to garner sympathy from the population because they did not conform to the image of destitute refugees (see Drakulić 1993b).

As the book *I Begged them to Kill Me*, discussed in chapter 4, shows, the rape of “a nation’s women” was still being used (in 1999) to underscore the victimhood of the nation itself. But when it came to women’s identification with the category of “woman” for the purposes of eliciting public acceptance for their actions as individuals, rape was not mentioned. This was especially true of women vying for a place in the male-dominated political sphere since politics, as a whore, was associated with female impurity just as rape was. In fact, though it was never explicitly stated in such terms, Balašević’s comments make clear that raped women, having been “dishonored,” made impure, were thereby placed in the category of the whore. They were no longer seen as whole, respectable women, a status that was also underlined by the move among Bosniac religious leaders to refer to raped women as “*šehids*,” or martyrs to Islam/the nation (Andrić-Ružičić 2003). This designation, though designed to recognize sacrifices made for the nation, effectively declared them dead as (respectable) women, as *šehid* is most commonly a status conveyed upon men killed in battle. Rather than their lives, the women had sacrificed their respectability and moral integrity, though, conceptually, this was the same thing.¹⁵⁷

Given these associations, it is not surprising that women shied away from association with both rape and with politics. The moral purity which politically active women achieve through their identification as mothers (respectable women), therefore, may be jeopardized by association with the rape victim identity. It also follows that many turned to images of motherhood to back up their claims to morality and respectability: the whore is commonly opposed to the mother. In one stark example from Kosovo during the last years of socialist Yugoslavia, Serb women demonstrated in protest of statements by an Albanian male politician that alleged rapes of Serb women by Albanian men (see Mežnarić 1994; Žarkov 1999) would be solved by bringing in more non-Albanian women as prostitutes. Taking this as an implication that Serb women were prostitutes, the demonstrators—“thousands of women who were otherwise far from any political activism” (Žarkov 2000: 177)—shouted and carried signs that said, “We are mothers, not whores!” (*ibid.*: 168). We might also be reminded of other contexts in which the moral power of motherhood was wielded as a political

¹⁵⁷ Raped women are not, however, considered “true” *šehids* in the way that soldiers (mostly men) killed fighting the enemy are; soldiers killed in battle are “first level *šehids*”, or “*šehids* in this world and in the other world,” while other war victims, women who die in childbirth, and others are “titular *šehids*,” or “*šehids* in the other world” only (Bougarel, personal communication 2003).

weapon. The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina chose this strategy as perhaps the only possible way in which they dared to demonstrate against the ruthless regime that had “disappeared” their children (Taylor 1994). As I outlined in chapter 2, mothers in Sri Lanka (de Alwis 1998a; Samuel 2003), Kenya (Tibbetts 1994), and elsewhere have also used this strategy, as have the Mothers of Srebrenica and other Srebrenica survivor groups discussed in chapter 7.

This is not only a calculated strategy but a “natural,” cultural idiom to which many women gravitate in contexts such as post-war Bosnia where moral purity is so important and female respectability is defined through motherhood. The discursive strategies of politically active women—the use of affirmative essentialisms—allowed them to walk the fine line between morality and corruption, purity and impurity, weakness and strength, actor and victim. This is not to say that there was no room for movement. Indeed, as these conceptual categories are malleable, politically active women were pushing the boundaries of what is considered respectably female. They have drawn a temporal line between (male, dirty) politics before, and (cleaner, more humane) politics after women have been successfully integrated.

Transcending Wartime Identities

Women activists must balance their public images between respectable femininity and being taken seriously as political actors. Their very presence in formal politics, and as participants in political processes, challenges established gender ideals, yet their need to retain the moral status attached to their identities as women leads them to utilize elements of more conservative female roles and certain victim images. It remains to be seen whether women will succeed in shifting the public persona of “Bosnian women,” of gender ideals and of perceptions of politics. Much will depend on whether women’s identities can be distanced from the image of passive (rape) victim and concern over women’s sexual purity to create new identities rooted in their present activities rather than the events of the war period.

Medica Infoteka offered some hope in this area. Medica as a whole had never avoided mention of rape. In fact, it was closely, and often exclusively, associated with it in the surrounding community. It was now trying, along with other women’s NGOs in their networks, to tackle issues facing women beyond their identities as war victims. In fact, at one point in my fieldwork, I felt that

by following the women's activities I had been taken far away from concerns over ethnic difference and associations with the war. As I described in several places in this dissertation, however, these women were "strategically avoiding" issues of ethnic difference and wartime divisions in order to build working cross-ethnic relationships and to concentrate on their goals as women. Ethnicity remained a salient category of social interaction, yet these women activists were attempting to go beyond them and thus to transcend a major cleavage associated with the war and its aftermath. Infoteka activists even noticed a difference in their priorities compared with those of their German donors at Medica Mondiale. As Nataša complained, "the way they raise money is like charity, showing horrible pictures of war and relying on crisis." Medica Mondiale had suggested several times that Infoteka collect testimonies and evidence from wartime rape survivors. The Bosnian women had turned to more pressing post-war problems, however, not wanting to dwell on the war but to "go forward." As Azra emailed me recently, after responding to a question I had about Infoteka members' stances on the war:

Oh dear Alisa, sometimes all these stories really make me tired. Why can't I somehow live for the future and not constantly return to the past, even though I know it's necessary in this region. That's why I can't wait for them to finish all that in the Hague¹⁵⁸ because then we can hopefully finish the past in our heads.

Many of the women activists I met felt this way. Many were in fact forced by the dire economic situation to concentrate on immediate needs rather than dwell on the past.

The main issue with which Infoteka had concerned itself, however, was domestic violence. In this way, their work remained focused on women's victimhood, even though they stressed women's need for dignity and agency. This analysis of victimhood, furthermore, was not connected to the victimhood of a national group. On the contrary, the victimizers were now "our men." As I argued in chapters 6 and 7, however, Infoteka used this association of victimhood with womanhood strategically. They avoided coming across as "aggressive," made a conscious effort to work with men and male dominated institutions, and carefully selected the kinds of gender critiques, including the

¹⁵⁸ She was referring to the War Crimes Tribunal in the Hague, as well as to the suit brought by the Bosnian government against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro) in the International Court of Justice for genocide. Azra is counting on this judgement to "settle" the question of whether the war was aggression on a sovereign state or a civil war (see chapter 1).

use of the term feminism, according to their audiences. In this way, they hoped to affect long term change toward real gender equality.¹⁵⁹

Women's Activism and Gender Identities

One of my goals has been to show the variety of women's *active* roles— roles outside the home and family. Despite their marginalization, women activists have contributed in a variety of ways to post-war social and political processes. At the same time, motherhood and nurturing have continued to form strong parts of these women's lives and sense of self-worth. In fact, many of the married women I met were reluctant to give up the power and accompanying sense of importance and moral rightness that went with their taking responsibility for household chores and various kinds of kinwork (di Leonardo 1987). Others had a difficult time convincing husbands and children to take over any of those duties. Many saw no use in trying to “change their husbands.” Most, however, defensively argued that they enjoyed making their families dinner, bringing their husbands a glass of water, and so on. The narrative of Lidija, a refined Sarajevan, grandmother, educated scientist, and human rights activist who was also active in local politics, was typical of her generation of women activists:

Women must fight for social awareness. Men accepted women in higher positions, they accepted that women went to university, got Ph.D.'s. But after 15,000 years of tradition in the east, women still rule the house even though she is mostly serving the men and children (sic). Western, educated women got appliances, got their men to do housework—the men could order takeout for dinner when the women couldn't get to the cooking. I don't feel at all bad about serving my husband and children. I'm happy to cook for them. This is what I'm used to.

Lidija rejected feminism, which she understood as aggressive and separatist. She felt that social problems, including those of women, should be solved together on a “human” level rather than

¹⁵⁹ Unfortunately, as of July 2003, it appears that Medica, after over ten years of work, will have to sharply curtail its programs and facilities in December for lack of funding. Their German donors have moved on to other crisis zones in Kosovo and Afghanistan and adequate new ones have not been found. This shows the precariousness of the Bosnian women's scene, a predicament shared to some extent by women's and other organizations in other resource poor areas of the world.

separating women out. And she insisted that women should remain feminine.¹⁶⁰ (Note that she also invokes the hierarchies of orientalist symbolic geography discussed in chapter 2).

However, Lidija, like a large number of women activists in Bosnia, belonged to an older generation that had built their adult lives in socialist Yugoslavia. The women of Infoteka, all but one of whom were in their 20's or 30's, were exceptions in an otherwise middle-aged community of women activists. While there were some teenaged girls and young women in their early 20's active in youth initiatives, only a handful of them had any sensitivity toward “women’s issues” or gender. As a rule, however, Bosnians under thirty had little desire for NGO activities and even less for anything political. This generation had seen only negative things come from politics and they were much more preoccupied with their education, jobs (and the lack of them), material goods, and opportunities for leaving the country (IBHI 2000). At the time of my fieldwork, the Sarajevo women’s NGO *Žene Ženama* had been struggling since its inception to engage young women in its activities but had attracted few apart from the handful of younger women recruited by one of the organization’s founders, a former Medica activist in her mid 20's. Infoteka, too, had taken part in several youth-oriented activities, including teaching the principles of feminism to groups of young people. None of this has produced any sustained women’s activism among the young, however.

Essentialisms and Women

The use by women activists and donors of traditionalist, yet affirmative essentialisms of women begs several questions, especially for feminist researchers and activists interested in how women’s involvement in conflict situations can contribute not only to peace, but to improved lives for women. Does the use of gender essentialisms only reaffirm patriarchal gender hierarchies or can one extract a positive message for women from such representations? If the women activists using “traditional” essentialisms and motherhood images are not themselves critical of patriarchal gender hierarchies, should feminists condemn their activities? Are the successes women do achieve through essentialist strategies doomed to eventual failure because positioning women outside the sphere of

¹⁶⁰ Lidija in fact had an on-going battle with a feminist from Belgrade who teased Lidija about her “lady-like,” formal style of dressing whenever they saw each other. While Lidija was always in a skirt, heels, make-up, and done-up hair, the Belgrade woman, a lesbian, favored jeans and shorts and wore no make-up— precisely the kind of “feminist” to which Lidija objected.

formal politics and power ultimately marginalizes them? Or, do such strategies make women vulnerable to being coopted by larger, patriarchal power structures such as nationalist and militarist states?

In Bosnia, the essentialist approach by donors and local activists does little to further the implementation of peaceful solutions among the men who wield power in the political and other spheres. Such portrayals obscure women's roles in the production and reproduction of chauvinistic nationalisms and patriarchal gender constructions. As the Serbian feminist sociologist, Marina Blagojević writes, "Releasing women of any blame for the war and 'crises' would be another trap of patriarchal narcissism. Where there is no guilt, there is no complicity and therefore no subjectivity" (1994: 475). This lack of subjectivity means that women are not readily taken seriously as political actors.

Despite this, I have tried to show that affirmative essentialisms offer women real possibilities and power, at least in the short run. Local political and cultural meanings strongly affect the possibilities of women's activism and how they envision ideal gender roles and relations. Many Bosnian women activists already acknowledge the tension between reproducing established, patriarchal values in order to achieve practical goals, and forcefully initiating a public critique of such power structures. The "Bosnian feminists" I met are keenly aware that they must balance the expectations of their local communities and their foreign donors with their own feminist ideals (see Ishkanian 2003). They may not always agree with other women activists who openly embrace the gender essentialisms of motherhood and nurturance, but they do not harshly condemn them. Indeed, as I have shown, they often allow themselves to be portrayed in affirmative essentialist terms.

Gender essentialisms are not only meaningful to women and their communities, but have also proved practical, especially in the short term (Samuel 2003). Over time, as I argued in chapter 2, this women's activism, initiated in response to violent conflict and its aftermath, may yet prove to be the foundation for continued women's activism that engages a wider population. Analysts of gender dynamics and women's activism must recognize these meanings rather than dismiss them for "not being feminist," even if they are to conclude that such strategies reinforce patriarchal hierarchies and values (Žarkov 2000).

Assessing the Effectiveness of Women's Activism in Bosnia

How are we to judge the women's activism I have described in these pages? Have women successfully articulated and fought for coherent goals? How "authentic" or democratic are women's NGOs? Are they merely the product of international intervention, or can we speak of a true grassroots "movement"? Are women forging new identities or relying solely on those that reflect wartime experiences?

This dissertation has depicted a broad range of approaches to questions of gender, religion, and ethnicity among women activists. This diversity I believe reflects a similar diversity in outlooks towards gender roles and relations to be found among the rest of the population in Bosnia. Differences in acceptance of established gender norms for women corresponds more to class differences—education levels and rural to urban backgrounds—than to differences in ethnic and even religious background. The sociological profiles of the women in this study reflect just such a pattern, though they do not determine these differences. The influence of western donors has carried notions of feminism, "women's rights as human rights," and gender equality to groups and individuals that otherwise would not likely have encountered them. The general infusion of (human) "rights talk" (c.f. Fraser 1989) into public discourses, largely as a result of international intervention but also as part of wider global and regional trends, has aided this proliferation of ideas. Whereas Yugoslav neo-feminism was barely known in Bosnia before the war, there are now women's NGO activists in remote villages and small towns all over the country who comfortably talk the talk of women's rights, reconciliation, networking, civil society, lobbying, and so on. The idea has been widely circulated that women's concerns matter on the political stage.

What local activists make of these discourses is another question. Inevitably they have "taken what they can use" in their own lives, as several activists told me. They are not merely parrots of international NGOspeak, though sometimes this appeared to be the case, as when a woman I met from an NGO I was unfamiliar with explained that they "did gender issue" (*mi radimo dženderišju*) even though her description was of standard small-scale income generating projects for *women*.¹⁶¹

¹⁶¹ Of course, programs for women are also addressing "gender issues," but this woman seemed to equate "gender" with "women." Considerable confusion reigned among women activists over the definition of "gender." Many women had never heard the term or, inferring from the target of donor-designed "gender projects," took it to mean attention to women's issues. A large portion of women activists understood gender as "equality

These activists are also savvy actors making do with the resources available to them to achieve goals as they define them. Medica Infoteka, for example, had become adept at tailoring grant proposals and adding the proper jargon to take advantage of funding priorities, even as they continued to approach their work the way they saw fit. This is a tactic that is all too familiar to academics applying for research funding and jobs. As Nataša said of one of the proposals she had altered in this way, “the project won’t change at all but the proposal will still be accurate because it’s all in there, it just depends on how you frame it.” At the same time, Naš Most took on a wide variety of donor-defined projects because its goal was merely to provide women with as many opportunities as possible and to keep their organization afloat. That activists also work on donor-defined projects that do not necessarily agree with their own priorities reflects their dependent position on donor money and many donors’ failure to listen to the local activists they fund (see Gagnon 2002; Hemment 2000). I therefore concur with other observers of “democratization” and other development efforts in Bosnia and elsewhere that foreign donors continue to impose often inappropriate or inadequately adapted agendas onto local activists (e.g., Hemment 2000; Ishkanian 2003; Smillie 1996; Stubbs 1995; Wedel 2001).

Nevertheless, international intervention has also had some positive results for women’s equality and democratic processes. Even the pervasive image of Bosnian women as symbols of one of the most notorious and well-publicized incidences of wartime rape mobilized many foreigners to become involved with aiding Bosnian women. Despite the problems inherent in “east-west” exchanges and donor-beneficiary relationships, western funding, support, and publicity has made possible various kinds of crucial medical, psychological, and material help that has vastly improved the lives of many women war survivors, among them some of the women activists I have discussed here. Furthermore, the few individual feminists working for international organizations have succeeded, in partnership with local women’s activists, in pushing for meaningful legal and institutional changes toward women’s equality (Cockburn et. al. 2001; Rees 2002). Urged on by certain foreigners, women’s organizations have pressured local governments to live up to the

(*ravnopravnost*) between men and women,” as a glossy UNDP brochure produced together with the Sarajevo NGO *Žene Ženama* asserted. And a smaller group of women activists who were more academically-minded or had better contacts with feminists abroad understood it in the standard social science sense of socially constructed roles assigned to men and women (but see Scott 1990).

international treaties they signed when they signed the Dayton Agreement, including the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and other major human rights documents (which the U.S. itself has not signed).¹⁶² The OSCE's gender quota for election lists and the recently adopted law on gender equality also reflect the combined efforts of local groups and powerful international actors. While these alliances have managed to put women's issues on the radar of local and international decision makers, they are still a long way from "mainstreaming" gender awareness into all areas of policy. These efforts strike many Bosnians as too "top down" to have any real impact. What's more, most decision makers are too preoccupied with balancing national, or ethnic, interests to pay attention to other axes of discrimination and subordination such as gender (along with class, "race" [the Roma], age, etc.).

Julie Hemment writes of women's organizing in post-socialist Russia that, "the contemporary Russian women's movement is rigid, hierarchical, and further away from the people than previously. What is more, it is professionalized, bureaucratic, reliant on foundations, western oriented, and irrevocably hitched to a neoliberal vision of development." Much the same can be said for the western-looking Bosnian women's NGOs, including those that espouse feminist orientations (see Cockburn et. al. 2001). Most of these groups relied on the charisma and direction of one or a few central leaders. Several times upon visiting a new organization, I was told to return because the women present could not tell me anything without their "President." Likewise, from my experiences among "ordinary," non-NGO people of all socio-economic levels in various parts of Bosnia, it is obvious that women's NGOs are not valued by the "grassroots" constituencies they purport to represent when they speak in Bosnia-wide or international fora. The infusion of donor money and the lack of other kinds of employment opportunities has likewise flooded the NGO sector with activists who are not necessarily committed to building the kind of democratic civil society or women's equality that foreign actors, or indeed some of the activists themselves, envision.

What is more serious for the development of democratic processes as well as the character of Bosnian feminism(s) is the urban, secular, middle-class bias of this emerging women's

¹⁶² In 1999, a group of women's NGOs published a "shadow report" on women's human rights in Bosnia (IHRLG BiH 1999) to alert Bosnian government officials of their duty to produce periodic reports on their compliance with CEDAW. In other countries, women's organizations have taken to producing shadow reports to balance the claims made by governments; in this case, the government had not even issued a report.

counterpublic. As we have seen, though there is a lot of talk about, and many programs aimed at, the problems of poor and rural women, refugees, and even occasionally Romani women, few such women have truly been incorporated into the high-level circles of women activists who lobby for changes at the level of local government and international agencies. Furthermore, as the encounter between Kristen and her Infoteka colleagues over race and the Roma reveals, discourses on women rarely extended beyond the experiences of secular, urban middle class women. To be fair, I think these failings can be expected for so young an activist network. As I indicated in chapter 6, Infoteka has only expanded its scope of feminist analysis and the implicit subjects of Bosnian womanhood. These are positive signs.

Based on her study with Infoteka of seven local women's NGOs in three towns, Cynthia Cockburn has concluded that a Bosnian "women's movement" "does not quite yet exist" (2001: 165; and see Cockburn and Hubić 2002). Indeed, though there are many women's organizations, only a handful of activists are vocal in public or have the ear of officials in positions of power. As I suggested in chapter 2, in the case of Bosnia, it is more useful to ask whether a women's "subaltern counterpublic" as described by Nancy Fraser (1997: 80-85) might be developing. In the sense that there exists a space away from the dominant public sphere of discourse in which women formulate, debate, and consolidate their goals and ideas about how to go about achieving them, such a counterpublic is surely present. In fact, I would count several overlapping counterpublics of women: those agitating for increased participation of women in politics, women working for refugee (DP) return, separate spheres of religious and national identity oriented groups, and the network of anti-nationalist political lobbyists, those most likely to embrace "feminism," though "in the Bosnian way" (i.e., the leaders of Medica, Žene Ženama, Udružene Žene, Lara, and others). As these counterpublics develop, they will become more and more visible in the dominant discursive sphere and, in theory, will have a chance at influencing it. In Fraser's scenario, then, such a move would lead to more truly democratic processes, even with existing levels of stratification. This is essentially what many feminist donors were pushing women's organizations to do. Donors organized countless meetings of NGO and political women at which they encouraged NGOs to form links with government officials and representatives, especially other women, in order to lobby (*lobirati*) for their interests. While it may be too early to judge these links, they were having difficulty functioning smoothly. This

was due to both inter-NGO competition (for donor resources and information) and to women politicians' ultimate loyalty to their parties.

Clearly, and most crucially, “woman” as a mobilized identity has not been made “politically relevant” (Gal and Kligman 2000: 106). As Gal and Kligman advise, “not all historical circumstances are auspicious for such mobilization” (*ibid.*). Bosnian post-war identities, especially politically relevant ones, have been so dominated by ethno-national categories that the only space for the construction of a universal “woman” has been within wartime experiences. In seeking to transcend ethnic boundaries, then, women activists called on common female experiences of the war that were not marked by ethnic belonging— women had suffered it all at the mercy of male politicians, military commanders, and criminals. Ethnic differences were not thereby erased, but the attempt was at appealing to a common subject position in the hopes that this category of identity could be made politically relevant. While women activists have had some success, the political relevancy of “women” has not (yet) been achieved.

Conclusion

These chapters have explored the discursive strategies of Bosnian women activists involved in post-war social and political processes. I have sketched the historical and current experiences and discourses that have shaped, constrained, and given possibility to the various strategies employed by women. I discussed the pre-war and wartime antecedents of current models of womanhood, sexuality, “domestic” and “public” roles, and of women’s organizing against which much women’s activism in the post-war period has been modeled. In this sense, I argued that the socialist-era *aktiv žena* model, built upon women’s social networks and ideas of mutual aid, has endured and profoundly shaped the way in which women approach the formation of women-only groups. The power of foreign officials and donors over local organizing was also explored in several aspects. In its overarching effects, the international community has forced a “nation-ing” of gender discourses as one of the unintended consequences of its intervention (see Ferguson 1994). Foreign actors have also aided in the re-entrenchment of patriarchal values, even as some parts of the international community champion “gender equality.” A failure to integrate gender concerns into international and local policies has undermined initiatives toward both multi-ethnic state building and towards greater

equality between women and men.

I have focused on women activists' genuine and strategic self-representation in opposition to images of women put forth by local political discourses and by foreign actors. I have emphasized Bosnian women's agency in determining the parameters of their own participation in social and political processes, even as they are constrained by public morality and practical/financial realities. Women activists have taken a variety of approaches to questions of gender, ethnicity, and religion. They disagree over women's relationships to men, the family, sexuality, politics, and war, and their actions have both challenged and reinforced dominant constructs affecting women's lives. Yet they share the passionate conviction that women and women's perspectives matter, and that Bosnian women deserve to be viewed as dignified agents, rather than passive victims. This is especially important for the many women of Muslim background discussed in this dissertation, in light of the way in which "Muslim women" have become symbols of passive suffering and wartime rape. It is also significant when read against the renewed importance of portrayals of "Muslim women" to justify foreign interventions and move world events such as those surrounding the aftermath of September 11th (see Abu-Lughod 2002).

Stepping back to consider the broader view of post-war Bosnia, or indeed any context of social and political flux, this study shows that examining the strategies of women activists is not only significant in terms of understanding gender dynamics or efforts to improve the position of women in society. As the materials I present here make clear, assumptions about gender permeate and even drive constructions of a variety of political identities on the levels of groups (nations, ethnic groups) as well as individuals (politicians and public figures). As Gal and Kligman point out in their theorizing of gender and postsocialism, "Attending to gender is analytically productive, leading not only to an understanding of relations between men and women, but to a deeper analysis of how social and institutional transformations occur" (2000: 3). The gendered analysis I have presented here reveals some of the less noticed ways in which power is contested and asserted in post-war Bosnia. The power of the international community (and the assumptions foreign actors bring to their interventions), notions of masculinity and femininity, ideas about the relationship between politics and society, understandings of public and private realms, and categories of morality and victimhood all play significant roles. Notably, in sharp contrast with most popular and scholarly depictions of

Bosnia since the break-up of socialist Yugoslavia, ethnic identity and nationalism may intersect with these elements but they are not the only stakes upon which political debates turn.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

Abbreviations and Acronyms

BiH	<i>Bosna i Hercegovina</i> : Bosnia and Herzegovina
BWI	Bosnian Women's Initiative
Cantons	The ten administrative units that make up the Federation. Four are controlled by Bosniacs, four by Croats, and two are mixed (but divided into ethnically marked and controlled municipalities)
CRS	Catholic Relief Services: an American humanitarian relief agency
Dayton	The Dayton Peace Accords, signed in December 1995: ended the Bosnian war, established a new constitution, and created international bodies to monitor and implement the agreement
DFID	Department for International Development: the British government's international aid agency
DPs	Displaced Persons
EU	European Union
Federation	Bosniac-Croat Federation: One of two entities making up the state of Bosnia-Herzegovina which was created by the Dayton Peace Agreement, jointly controlled by Croat and Bosniac parties, numerically dominated by Croats and Bosniacs
FRY	Federal Republic of Yugoslavia: Serbia and Montenegro after the dissolution of socialist Yugoslavia
HDZ	<i>Hrvatska Demokratska Zajednica</i> (Croatian Democratic Union): the dominant Croat national political party (in Bosnia, it is the HDZ-BiH; in Croatia just HDZ)
IEBL	Inter-Entity Boundary Line
IFOR	Implementation Force: Post-war peacekeeping force under the auspices of NATO
INGO	International Non-governmental Organization

IPTF	International Police Task Force: A UN policing body
LCY	League of Communists of Yugoslavia (the Yugoslav Communist Party)
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
OHR	Office of the High Representative: charged with overseeing the implementation of the Dayton Peace Accords
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe: charged with organizing and monitoring post-war elections until 2002; also runs programs for democratization, governance, and most recently, education reform
QUANGO	Quasi-governmental non-governmental organization
RS	<i>Republika Srpska</i> (Serb Republic): One of two entities making up the state of Bosnia-Herzegovina created by the Dayton Peace Agreement, politically controlled by Serb parties and numerically dominated by Serbs
SDA	<i>Stranka Demokratske Akcije</i> (Party of Democratic Action): the dominant Bosniac national political party
SDP	<i>Socialdemokratska Stranka</i> (Social Democratic Party): the main non-nationalist, “civic” political party
SDS	<i>Srpska Demokratska Stranka</i> (Serb Democratic Party): the dominant Serb national political party
SFOR	Stabilization Force: From 1997, the NATO-led peacekeeping force
SIDA	Swedish International Development Co-operation Agency
STAR	Strategies, Training, Advocacy, and Reconciliation: a US based, feminist NGO and donor
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	UN High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	UN Children’s Fund
UNPROFOR	UN Protection Force: Peacekeeping force deployed during the war in Bosnia
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

Appendix B

Local Bosnian Women's NGOs Discussed in this Dissertation

Zenica

Medica Zenica

Infoteka

(Information and public initiatives branch)

Bosanka

Bosnian (feminine form)/ Bosnian woman

Naš Most

Our Bridge

Merjem

(the Arabic name for Mary)

Sumejja

(the first female martyr to Islam)

Kewser

Spring/Source (Arabic)

Fatma

Centar za pravnu pomoć ženama

Center for Legal Aid to Women

Ilidža/Bratunac

Žene s Podrinje

Women of Podrinja (Eastern Bosnia)

Prijedor area

Srcem do mira (Kozarac/Sanski Most)

Through Heart to Peace

Mostovi prijateljstva

Bridges of Friendship

Sarajevo

Žene ženama (udruženja građanki)

Women to Women (association of female citizens)

Unija ŽAR

ŽAR Union of Women's Associations

Liga Žene Glasачa

League of Women Voters

Organizations in other towns

Udružene Žene Lara	United Women	Banja Luka Bijeljina
Žena BiH	Woman BiH	Mostar
Žene Srebrenice	Women of Srebrenica	Tuzla and other towns
Udruženja majke i sestre Srebrenice i Podrinja	Association of Mothers and Sisters of Srebrenica and Podrinja	Federation
Forum F		Posušje

Appendix C

NGOspeak in Post-war Bosnia

Below are some terms and usages which have been introduced into the Bosnian language as a result of international intervention and the accompanying prevalence of English. This list is not exhaustive but reflects the major terms in use by the network of women's NGOs I followed.

<u>Bosnian/ "local languages"</u>	<u>English</u>
advokasi (or, polisi-advokasi)	advocacy (policy-advocacy)
ciljane grupe	target groups
civilno društvo / građansko društvo	civil society
dibrifig	debriefing
diskriminacija	discrimination
domači nasilje	domestic violence
džender	gender (sometimes gender equality)
dženderišju	gender issues
implementirati, implementacija	to implement, implementation
input	input
lider, <i>fem.</i> liderica	leader
liderstvo	leadership
lobiranje / lobirati	lobbying / to lobby
lokalni jezici	local languages
(džender) mainstreaming	(gender) mainstreaming
NVO (nevladina organizacija), <i>pl.</i> NVOi pronounced: enveo, <i>pl.</i> enveoi, <i>instr.</i> enveoima	NGO (non-governmental organization)

ranjeve populacije	vulnerable populations
seks haresment / uznemiravanje	sexual harassment
treči sektor	third sector
tréfiking / trgovanje (ljudima)	trafficking (in people)
trejning (<i>pl.</i> trejninzi)	training (session)
umreživanje/networking	networking
(javno) zalaganje, zagovaranje	(public) advocacy

Appendix D

Mujo and Fata in Post-war Bosnia: Gender in Jokes

Telling jokes is almost as important to Bosnian sociability as drinking coffee. In the former Yugoslavia, standard jokes circulated in which each ethnic group conformed to certain stereotypes—Montenegrins are lazy, Slovenians cheap, Croats snobs, etc. Bosnians in these jokes are notoriously stupid, primitive country bumpkins who nonetheless often get the best of others in the end (see Sorabji 1989: 236-7). In fact, there is a celebration of the ignorance and backwardness of the Bosnian (Muslim) peasant, the marker for which is often extreme patriarchal behavior, hyper-sexuality, and the use of violence (see Helms n.d.; Said 1978; Žarkov 1995). The stock characters have typically Muslim names: male are Mujo and Suljo, or Huso and Haso; Fata is the female. Many jokes, especially those dealing with the war, are told with the famous “Bosnian black humor.”

The following is a sampling of reasonably translatable jokes dealing with gender roles and relations which I collected during and since my fieldwork. The Bosnian original is provided for shorter jokes and those I received over email, while longer ones I was told orally include only the original rendering of key phrases. They are grouped by themes that recur in these jokes, though I have left out another whole genre which would be rich fodder for gender analysis: the blond joke.

* * * * *

The Ideal Bosnian Woman:

Looks thin but feels plump.
Doesn't dare to bother her husband.
Knows how to cut hay and pass a driver's test.
Has a job but is on sick leave or is laid off.

Should be tall but shorter than her husband.
Must be smarter than her husband but doesn't dare show it.
Should know how to make sweet coffee even without sugar.
Should be able to nurse, cook, wash, and iron at the same time.
Roots for the team her husband roots for.
Works more than her husband but earns less!

Misogyny

Before religion class a son quizzes his father:
Daddy, what was the name of Adam's mother-in-law?
Father: Well, Adam didn't have a mother-in-law. It was paradise, my son.

Fata is walking in front of Mujo and they run into Haso.
Haso: Mujo, it's not in the Kuran for a woman to walk in front of her husband.
Mujo: It's not in the Kuran but it *is* in a mine field!

Mujo goes to a restaurant with his wife and mother-in-law. The waiter comes and asks for their order.
Mujo: I'll have the steak.
Waiter: What about the mad cows?
Mujo: I don't know, let them order for themselves.

Idealna Bosanska Žena:

*Na oko tanka, na opip debela
Ne smije da žulja muža
Da umije položiti sijeno i vozački*

*Da ima posao, ali da je na bolovanju ili čekanju
Trebalo da je visoka ali da je niža od muža
Mora biti i pametnija od muža ali to ne smije pokazati
Trebalo da zna i bez šećera skuhati slatku kahvu
Trebalo da je kadra u isto vrijeme i doći, kuhati, prati i peglati
Da navija za koga i muž navija
Da radi više od muža ali da manje zarađuje!*

*Prije sata vjeronauka sin ispituje oca:
Tata, kako se zvala Adamova punica?*

Otac: Pa Adam nije imao punicu. To je bio raj, sine moj.

Ide Fata ispred Muje i naidju oni na Hasu.

Kaze Haso: Nije Mujo, po Kuranu, da žena ide ispred muža.

Odgovara Mujo: Nije po Kuranu, ali je po minskom polju!

*Izlazi Mujo u restoran s ženom i punicom.
Dođe konobar i pita šta će.*

*Mujo: ja ću biftek.
Konobar: a lude krave?
Mujo: Ne znam. Nek' one same kažu.*

Housework

Two women friends are talking over coffee. The first is telling the second about her grown kids. She raves about her daughter's wonderful marriage: "Her husband makes her coffee and brings it to her in bed every morning! And he brings her flowers and helps with everything around the house. But my son! What a miserable situation his marriage is. He has to make coffee for his wife and bring it to her every morning!"

Mujo sends Fata to wash the clothes down at the river (by the old method). Fata scrubs and scrubs and beats the clothes until she slips and falls. She hits her head on a stone and dies. The neighbors ask Mujo what happened and Mujo says, "Damn, that's the third wash machine that's broken on me and all because of stones." (A play on the similar words for stone and the small stones/grit that can ruin a washing machine.)

Mujo comes home, flops down on the couch and calls out, "Fata! Bring me a beer before it starts!" She glares at him but brings him a beer. When he's drunk the beer, Mujo calls out again, "Fata, bring me another one— it's gonna start!" Fata's getting angry but she brings him another beer. Mujo drinks that, too, and calls out, "Hurry! Another one— it's gonna start!" This sets Fata off: "What the hell is your problem?! You come home, plant your fat butt on the couch without even saying Hello and you expect me to run around all day like your slave?! Don't you know that I've been cooking, washing, ironing, and working like a dog all day without your crap?!" Mujo takes a deep breath: "Uf, it started..."

Poslao Mujo Fata da opere veš na rijeci (na stari nacin). Fata lupala i lupala i - padne - oklizne se te udari glavom od kamen i pogine. Pitaju Muju - šta bi bolan Mujo i Mujo kaže: Jebiga, ovo mi je već treća veš mašina koja se pokvarila i to sve zbog kamenca.

Dođe Mujo s posla, baci se na kauč, upali TV i vikne : "Fato, donesi pivo prije nego što počne!" Ona ga pogleda zbunjeno, ali donese pivo. Kad ga je popio vikne opet: "Fato, donesi jos jedno, počet će!" Ovaj put pomalo ljuta, ali opet mu donese. Kad je i njega zgotovio, vikne: "Brže, počet ce, još jedno!!!!" To je totalno raspizdi: "Dobro, koji je tebi kurac! Dojedriš doma, uvališ tu debelu guzicu u kauč, ne kažes mi ni dobar dan, a očekuješ da cijeli dan trčim oko tebe kao rob! Jes'ti svjestan da ja po cijele dane kuham, perem, peglam i da se naradim ko konj i bez tvojih preseravanja!!!!" Mujo uzdahne: "Uf, počelo je..."

A Husband's Infidelity

Huso: Haso, is it true you had a baby boy?

Haso: Yes, I'm really happy.

Huso: What about your wife?

Haso: She doesn't know anything yet.

Huso: Je li istina da si dobio sina?

Haso: Da, i presretan sam.

Huso: A supruga?

Haso: Ona jos ništa ne zna.

Fata's Promiscuity

Mujo runs into Haso on the street and complains to him:

“Man, you should've seen it– yesterday I come home and find Fata naked in the bedroom with a Japanese man and a black man!”

Haso says, “Ugh, how horrible! What did you do?”

Mujo: “Nothing– I took their picture and sent it to Benneton. We'll see if anything comes of it.

Sreo Mujo Hasu, i zali mu se:

*E, bolan Haso, da vidiš jucer, dojdem ja kući
i nađem Fatu голу u spavačoj sobi sa
Japancem i crncem!*

Haso: Uh nesreće! I šta si napravio?

*Mujo: Ništa, slikao ih, poslao u Benneton, pa
ćemo vidjeti hoće li šta biti.*

Mujo tries to convince Fata to shave herself down below.

Fata: Ih, you idiot! You want the whole village to laugh at me?

Nagovara Mujo Fatu da se obrije dolje.

*Fata: Ih, budale! Pa da mi se cijelo selo
smije!*

Fata goes to the doctor and says, “doctor, doctor, help me, I'm suffering from impotence.” The doctor replies, “you mean your husband is, you can't have impotence.” Fata says, “of course it's my husband who's impotent but I'm the one who's suffering!”

Mujo complains to his friend Suljo:

“Oy, Suljo, I think my wife Fata is a fag!”

“How can Fata be a fag?” asks Suljo.

“She really loves men!” answers Mujo.

Mujo se žali svom jaranu Sulji:

*“Joj, Suljo, mislim da je moja žena Fata
peder!”*

*“Ma, kako bolan to da je Fata peder?” kaže
mu Suljo.*

“Puno voli muškarce!” odgovara Mujo.

On their wedding night, Mujo and Fata are in the bedroom, each lying on their own side of the bed. Fata sees that nothing's happening, so she says: "Mujo, I'm cold. Can I lean up against you and warm up my back?"

Mujo: "Sure!"

Fata snuggles up against him and waits and waits... and nothing.: "Mujo, my chest is cold."

Mujo stays lying where his is and gropes around to warm up Fata's chest.

Fata's finally had enough: "Man are you stupid, Mujo, can't you see I've got a hole between my legs?!"

To this, Mujo says: "Well there you are, girl, where the draft (of air) is coming from!!!" (to make you cold)

Prva bračna noć, Mujo s Fatom u spavačkoj sobi, svako na svojoj polovini kreveta. Vidi Fata da se ništa ne dešava, pa reče: "Mujo, meni je hladno, mogu li se primaći da mi griješ ledja?"

Mujo: "Možeš!"

Prisloni se Fata uz njega, čeka, čeka...I ništa. "Mujo, hladno mi po grudima."

Mujo se onako ležeći okrenu i protrlja Fati grudi da ih ugrije.

Fati više puko film: "Ja jesi glup, Mujo, pa imam ja i neku rupu medju nogama!"

Na to će Mujo: "Pa eto, bona, odakle tebi puše!!!"

During the siege of Sarajevo, Mujo was on the front lines fighting and came back home to find Fata gone. He looked everywhere for her. He knew she had gone to get water near one of the Četnik lines, so he was very worried. After three days she came home and he said, Fata where have you been?! Oh, don't ask (*ma, šuti, ne pitaj*), she said sadly, I was getting water and the Četniks captured me and dragged me off. They raped me and said they would rape and beat me for seven straight days. But it's only been three days, Suljo said. Fata replied, Oh, I just came back to let you know where I was (*došla sam samo da ti javim*).

Domestic Violence

At the first International Feminist Conference, women are taught how to coax their husbands into doing their share of the housework and giving them more respect. The women go home and a follow-up evaluation is done. First they call up the German woman representative and ask her how things are going. She tells them, "Well, on the first day when I didn't cook dinner, my husband yelled and screamed and sulked and eventually went out and ate at a restaurant. On the second day, he actually made himself some eggs. But by the third day, he even made dinner for me and the kids." That seemed to be going well. They called up the French woman, who reported, "Oh the first day was tough because I didn't iron my husband's shirts, so he had to go to work with a wrinkled shirt. The second day he had to get out the iron for himself and iron his shirts, although he grumbled a lot. The third day he stopped complaining, ironed his shirts, and even ironed my things." This sounded good, too, but these were all European women. "Let's call up one of the women from a more backward

place,” they said. So they called Fata in Bosnia. “Did you see any changes on the first day?” they asked. “No, nothing,” Fata said. “What about the second day?” “Still nothing,” Fata said. “Did you see anything on the third day?” they asked. She brightened. “Well, yes, by then I was just able to open my left eye a slit.”

Fata puts up with Mujo’s beating her for years and years. Finally she can’t take it anymore. She goes to the river, stands on the bridge and gets ready to throw herself in when a golden fish sees her and cries, “Stop! Don’t jump! I’ll grant you three wishes if you don’t!” Fata says OK but the fish says, “of course, since you haven’t caught me, whatever you wish for, I’ll have to give Mujo 10,000 times more.” Fata thinks and says, “OK, I want 10 million marks.” “But,” the fish says, “you know that Mujo will now get 100 billion marks?!” “Fine” (*neka, neka*) says Fata, and “Second, I wish to be stunningly beautiful.” “But,” says the fish, “you know that Mujo will now be 10,000 times more good-looking.” “Neka, neka” says Fata. “And for my third wish,” she says, “Let me get a teeny-weeny, eentsy-weentsy little tiny heart attack.”

Masculinity and Homophobia

After months and months of war in Bosnia Mujo and Suljo each manage to get out, separately, and they finally see each other in Zagreb. They’re so happy to see each other they kiss each other on the cheek, then on the other cheek, and then a third time back to the first cheek. They pause and Mujo leans in to kiss Suljo once more and explains, “Better that they think we’re fags (*pederi*) than Serbs!” [Serbs greet each other with three kiss, while Muslims and Croats kiss only twice.]

Suljo goes to the Orthodox priest with a terrible secret. “I’ve sinned,” he says, “I slept with my mother-in-law (*punica*.)” The priest says, “this is terrible!” And he tells him what to do to repent and earn forgiveness. “But there’s more,” Suljo says, “I slept with my sister-in-law (*svastika*), too.” “Oh this is horrible! You must repent and never do this again!” says the priest. “And there’s one more thing, says Suljo, I also slept with my wife’s cousin”. The priest says, “this is really too much, you’ll have to really work hard to get over this one.”

Then Suljo goes to the Catholic priest and tells him the same thing and gets the same reaction and a list of Hail-Mary’s and rosaries he has to say to be forgiven.

Then Suljo goes to the *hodža* (imam) who is sitting in his office on the floor drinking coffee from a low table. Suljo starts to tell him what the problem is but the *hodža* says, “first drink coffee with me.” So they do and when they’re finished the *hodža* says, “OK, now what’s the problem? What did you do?” Suljo says, “I slept with my *punica*.” “Oh what an act of great *sevap*! (doing good deeds that will in some way be returned to you),” the *hodža* says. Suljo is confused but he goes on— “I also slept with my *svastika*”. “Ah, *meraka!*” (what pleasure) says the *hodža*. “And my wife’s cousin!” “*Mašala!*” (God be praised) says the *hodža*.

Suljo is confused and says, “but how can you say this when the Orthodox and Catholic priests told me this was a great sin, that I had to repent?”

The *hodža* says, “they said that? Fags!” (*pederi*)

Mujo: Fata, would you like to be a man?
Fata: Sure, why not? And you, Mujo?

Mujo: Fato, bi li ti htjela biti muško?
Fata: Bi, što ne bi, a ti, Mujo?

Appendix E

Suggestions for Further Research

This dissertation has examined women's active roles in social and political processes as they are performed through NGOs and political parties. These are only the most visible of women's activities; it should also be noted that women are prominent among journalists, judges, university professors, and in the ranks of government bureaucracies, as well as in other professions, though they rarely rise to top positions of authority or pay. Furthermore, women are active in various institutionalized and informal ways in urban neighborhoods and villages as key actors in community life. A thorough look at women's changing public roles would include investigation of women's activities in these other spheres.

In terms of region, this study has focused on Bosniac spaces, though women activists from Serb and Croat areas are also part of the women's networks I explored. A similar study focusing on women's activism in Serb and Croat areas would be interesting for comparative purposes, especially if it were to include mono-ethnic women's organizations and those that support nationalist politics and/or religious agendas. Similarly, for Bosniac areas, further investigation into Muslim religious communities and women's organizations would shed light on debates which invoke stereotypical views of Islam, European-ness, and gender roles. In the whole of Bosnia, gender dynamics among ethnic "others," especially the Roma as a racialized outcast group, are also poorly understood (but see Erickson 2003; Medica 2001).

On a broader level, many other avenues of women's changing identities remain to be explored. Gender roles within the family are undergoing profound pressures as many women were widowed during the war, marriages fell apart, many men are not coping well, and state social services have been sharply curtailed. In many cases, young women working for international organizations are supporting whole extended families on their good salaries, potentially upsetting

entrenched hierarchies of gender and generation. In urban areas such as Sarajevo, Mostar, and Banja Luka, it would be interesting to investigate the effects of the sustained presence of large numbers of “internationals” on a variety of conceptions of gender, sexuality, materialism, family, and other aspects of life.

As little substantive research as has been done on women in Bosnia, especially on subjects other than women’s victimhood and peace activism, next to no attention has been paid to men and masculinity. Given that men and their patriarchal roles have been “blamed” for much of women’s subordination and marginalization in Bosnia, it seems critical to come to some understanding of how male identities are being shaped and contested.

In general, future projects could usefully focus on youth and the wide range of ideas, role models, and identity discourses to which they are being exposed. Understanding these dynamics might lead to a deeper understanding of Bosnia’s future and on the long-term legacies of socialism, the war, and post-war international intervention.

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