



EWI Fellowship Research Programme

**FEMINIST CONTRIBUTIONS TO SYSTEMIC PEACEBUILDING
PROCESSES IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA: A FEMINIST AND
WOMEN'S PEACE CULTURE OF REMEMBRANCE**

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Biography



Vildana Džekman, LL.M. is president of the "Make a Difference" Women's Association and a long-time feminist and women's human rights activist. She received her master's degree in Private International Law from the Faculty of Law, University of Sarajevo, in 2021. She has been an activist and actively engaged in CSOs for over ten years. She has been one of the initiators of numerous existing initiatives in the field of gender equality. She initiated the enactment of the Law on Infertility Treatment by Biomedically Assisted Fertilisation, which was adopted in FBiH after eight years of struggle. For two years she participated in the work of the Commission organised under the same name, which she also helped to establish. She was president of the Management Board of one of the largest peace networks in BiH – the Peacebuilding Network. She contributed to registering the network as an association, which is still active today. She has moderated and presented at numerous panels, seminars, workshops and conferences, on the topics of gender equality, women's rights, rights of marginalised groups, peacebuilding and media freedom. She actively supports women's activism, mentoring women's associations and connecting women activists whenever and wherever she has a chance. She is an active author as she sees writing as part of social responsibility and an effort to preserve the history of feminist activism. She is the author and co-author of around 30 texts, research papers, publications, international reports and analyses. She is the author of the Collection of Texts "A Journey Through Activism", telling stories of fabulous women activists and heroines of the society of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Abstract

Despite the fact that the national legal framework in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) guarantees the respect of women's human rights and gender equality, the institutional implementation of feminist memorialisation is, unfortunately, still at a low level. Even though many women activists and feminists from Bosnia and Herzegovina have actively engaged in peacebuilding processes since the 1990s, their contributions are almost invisible in the form of written or otherwise documented testimonies. The study is based on a feminist approach of drawing conclusions through interviews and surveys with women activists. It examines the feminist and activist aspects of the women's culture of remembrance in the field of peacebuilding in BiH. The paper offers an overview of the documented work of the "Peace with Women's Face" Initiative (Bosnian "Inicijativa Mir sa ženskim licem") and other relevant findings and evidence, and presents feminist memorialisation as a kind of compass for future women peacebuilders. The conclusions of the study point to the importance of integrating feminist heritage into institutional and educational structures in Bosnia and Herzegovina in order to preserve a women's culture of remembrance, highlighting the lack of systemic support for informal aspects of feminist memorialisation of women's contribution to peacebuilding processes in BiH.

Keywords: peace, feminism, activists, feminist memorialisation, peacebuilding, transitional justice, women's culture of remembrance, women's organisations in BiH.

Introduction

The war that took place in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) in the 1990s has left an immeasurable impact on the entire society. Women, who make up more than 51% of the population of Bosnia and Herzegovina, have been completely marginalised in the field of transitional justice and peacebuilding, and their voices both institutionally and socially undervalued. Following the adoption of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 “Women, Peace and Security” (UNSCR 1325)¹, in 2008 the UN Secretary-General issued a directive relating to the implementation and reporting processes in accordance with the Resolution. This Act calls upon the Member States to develop national action plans for the implementation of UNSCR 1325.

This study aims to examine the extent to which a feminist and women’s peace culture of remembrance is present in the domain of peacebuilding in BiH, and the mechanisms in place to promote and preserve such a culture.

Following the theoretical part of the paper that gives an overview of the institutional and legal setting in which Bosnian women activists operate in the field of peacebuilding, including a presentation of national and international regulations by which the protection of women’s human rights and gender equality is ensured in this domain, most of the research deals with the work of the “Peace with Women’s Face” Initiative, which is almost a phenomenon in its efforts to preserve a feminist and women’s peace culture of remembrance. Applying a feminist approach, the paper also uses the case study form to present data on the creation of the Initiative and its feminist peace activities.

Theoretical and methodological framework

In 2010, the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina adopted a National Action Plan (NAP)² for the implementation of UNSCR 1325 for the period 2010-2013. This was the first action plan for the implementation of the Resolution to be adopted in South-East Europe, and at the time served as an example for other countries of the Western Balkans region. Every

¹ United Nations (2000). Resolution 1325, <https://arsbih.gov.ba/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/UN-Resolution-1325.pdf> (Accessed: 5 May 2024)

² „Službeni glasnik BiH“ 92/10 [BiH Official Gazette 92/10].

four years, the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina adopts a new NAP as a document guaranteeing the equal participation of women in all areas of peacebuilding. Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security has undoubtedly been the most significant document for women's groups in advocacy processes for the enactment of national legislation and the establishment of gender mechanisms. Nevertheless, the work and efforts of women activists in conflict prevention and peacebuilding have rarely been recognised and valued in practice, and even less often institutionally, both then and now. Peace activism is part of the women's and feminist agenda and is most often manifested in opposing all forms of violence.

Elmaja Bavčić, an independent researcher engaged on the research project “Women, War, Peace and Security”, emphasises the absence of formal spaces for women's action in the domain of peacebuilding: “Informal women's organising, which occupies a significant space in this text, is important precisely because it stands as almost the only public space in which women can act.”³

In their book titled „Neprekidno traganje za smislom – Žene i izgradnja mira u Bosni i Hercegovini i Srbiji“ [The Incessant Search for Meaning – Women and Peacebuilding in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia], Zlatiborka Popov Momčinović and Adriana Zaharijević⁴ confirm that although “women's voices have remained marginalised” in peacebuilding processes, women continue their work in the domain of peace activism.⁵

Ever since the 1990s war, women activists and representatives of women's organizations from Bosnia and Herzegovina have been developing peace projects and programs and crossing numerous borders—especially institutionally established ones, national, ethnical, religious—to implement them. In their research paper “Ženski mirovni aktivizmi” [Women's Peace

³ Elmaja Bavčić (2019). Rodna ravnopravnost: “Teorija, pravo, politike”. Uvod u rodne studije za studentice i studente društvenih nauka u BiH [Gender Equality: “Theory, Law, Policies”. Introduction to Gender Studies for Students of Social Sciences in BiH]. Sarajevo: Sarajevski otvoreni centar, p. 203. <https://soc.ba/site/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Rodna-ravnopravnost-verzija-za-web.pdf> (Accessed: 3 October 2024)

⁴ Zlatiborka Popov Momčinović and Adriana Zaharijević (2022). “Neprekidno traganje za smislom: Žene i izgradnja mira u Bosni i Hercegovini i Srbiji”. Belgrade: Jelena Šantić Foundation, p. 19.

⁵ Ibid., p. 21. “Given the selectivity of memory in these territories, the permanent politics of not dealing with the past and the dominance of ethno-warrior narratives in the public space, where hate speech not only lacks adequate regulation, but is also encouraged and provoked by certain groups and the dominant politics, with generations of young people who have not directly experienced the violence of war being uncontrollably pulled into such narratives, women's voices in peacebuilding have unfortunately been and remain marginalised. The constant production of fear and the general climate of insecurity have particularly taken their toll on women as the Other, but despite this (or precisely because of it) women remain persistent in their peace activism and feminist engagement.”

Activisms], authors Tatjana Žarković and Jelena Gaković⁶ underline the lack of formalisation of women's peace initiatives as the reason why they remain insufficiently visible and both publicly and politically undervalued.⁷

Crossing borders continues today, through membership in the “Peace with Women's Face” Initiative, which demonstrates the unity and work of women's groups in this field. The initiative brings together numerous women's organisations from across BiH that are actively engaged in peace processes. However, written records of this and similar peace initiatives are lacking. Feminists, women activists, especially representatives of women's civil society organisations—which belong to the so-called third sector, the one with the lowest level of social power—remain in the whirlwind of peacebuilding activities despite the resistance to their work, driven on by the very need of building peace in society.

All the more significant are, therefore, the results of cooperation within the “Peace with Women's Face” Initiative in the form of written and audio or video materials that aim to preserve the feminist and women's peace culture of remembrance, especially bearing in mind the lack of any systemic support to the preservation of the women's culture of remembrance.

The paper starts from the research hypothesis that women's peace activism, including the feminist culture of remembrance, hasn't received sufficient affirmation and visibility in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In order to test this hypothesis, I examined the documentary materials of the “Peace with Women's Face” Initiative consisting of books, publications, exhibition records, videos, but also of other available formats of memorial records. Within this study, I set out to document the work of one of the largest peace initiatives in the domain of women's culture of remembrance and peacebuilding in BiH. Moreover, given the diligent efforts of the “Peace with Women's Face” Initiative in recording women's and feminist peace history, this research paper is a token of gratitude to all members of the Initiative for their relentless work and persistence in opposing the erasure of women's voices.

⁶ Tatjana Žarković and Jelena Gaković (2020). In “Kojeg je roda sigurnost?” [What Is the Gender of Security?] Sarajevo: Sarajevo Open Centre, p. 114. https://soc.ba/site/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Kojeg-je-roda-sigurnost_BHS_web1.pdf (Accessed: 3 October 2024)

⁷ Ibid., pp. 110, 111. “As women's peace activisms have mostly operated from formal and informal initiatives and actions of the civic sector, and as the feminist movement is often perceived as subversive to traditional masculine structures and values, it has not been given adequate space, and the public and political significance of such initiatives from the non-governmental sector has mostly remained unrecognised, except in the context of remedying damage already done, such as providing support and psychosocial assistance to victims.”

Aware also of other existing written sources that point to the role of women in peacebuilding, I base this study on records of women's voices that examine personal experience, placing value on it as an important aspect of feminist memorialisation. In this context, one must not ignore the role of advocacy that strives towards achieving social change, which represents one of the major efforts of the "Peace with Women's Face" Initiative.

In addition to the documentary materials of the "Peace with Women's Face" Initiative, the study also refers to the book by Zilka Spahić Šiljak titled "Shining Humanity: Life Stories of Women Peacebuilders in Bosnia and Herzegovina" as it offers a collection of personal experiences of women activists in the field.

To gain a better insight into the current condition of feminist and women's peace culture of remembrance, two interviews were conducted to shed light on both its activist and academic aspects.

Quantitative data were collected through surveys of activists from women's and feminist organisations. A questionnaire was distributed to women activists, women's organisations and associations, and was published on social platforms and in public social network peacebuilding groups. It was sent to the Network for Building Peace in BiH, to members of the Women's Network BiH, the Roma Women's Network "Uspjeh" [Success], Women Leaders Network for Development and other women's peace and feminist networks or groups active in Bosnia and Herzegovina. By using the snowball sampling method, a convenience sample was formed consisting of 29 respondents who filled out the questionnaire. The questions were designed to cover the key aspects of the feminist and peace culture of remembrance in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The introductory set of questions referred to basic information such as age, place of residence and work, and educational background. This set of questions helped to gain a better understanding of the respondents' profile and to analyse their social and professional context. The second set of questions focused on examining the respondents' perceptions of the current condition of peace and feminist activism, including their personal engagement or experience in these domains. The third set of questions was about identifying the barriers that limit the presence of women in the feminist and peace culture of remembrance. At the very end of the questionnaire, respondents were asked to provide any suggestions or recommendations that could contribute to greater affirmation and visibility of women within a feminist and women's culture of remembrance.

An interview was conducted with Radmila Žigić, a representative of the “Lara” Foundation and one of the founders of the “Peace with Women’s Face” Initiative, who provided an overview of the feminist and women’s peace culture of remembrance from an activist’s perspective. An academic view of recording women’s peace history was provided by Zlatiborka Popov Momčinović from the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of East Sarajevo.

The “Peace with Women’s Face” Initiative

Feminist Peace Contribution to the Women’s Culture of Remembrance

The “Peace with Women’s Face” Initiative was launched in 2014 by women activists of the “Lara” Foundation from Bijeljina and the “Horizonti” Humanitarian Organisation from Tuzla, who were later joined by representatives of women’s organisations and women activists from across BiH. The Initiative brings together 14 civil society organisations which, through the Initiative, contribute to the culture of remembrance, speak about the importance of preserving and promoting women’s experiences and achievements, and emphasise the significance of marking the contributions of women to building peace in BiH. In addition to women’s activist organisations from BiH—the “Lara” Foundation from Bijeljina, the Association “HO Horizonti” from Tuzla, the Association of Citizens “Budućnost” from Modriča, the United Women Foundation from Banja Luka, the Helsinki Citizens’ Assembly of Banja Luka, the “Glas žene” [Voice of a Woman] organisation from Bihać, Women’s Association “Grahovo” from Bosansko Grahovo, the Association “Žena BiH” from Mostar, the Women’s Association “Most” from Višegrad, the “Forum žena” [Women’s Forum] from Bratunac, the CURE Foundation from Sarajevo, the Center of Legal Assistance to Women (CPPZ) Zenica, the Association of Prijedor Women “Izvor” from Prijedor and the Civil Peace Service Forum (*forumZFD*)—the Initiative is made up of more than two hundred other women: activists from other organisations, politicians, journalists, members of the academic community, educators, etc.

The initiative was born from the project *Peace with Women’s Face—Empowering Women to Deal with the Past*, which included a series of workshops on peace activism in BiH

and feminist memorialisation attended by representatives of women's associations from across BiH in 2014.

In 2014, the publication "Peace with Women's Face" was created as part of the project⁸, presenting the continuous commitment of feminists and women activists from across BiH to building peace. The publication was a step further in the promotion of the work and efforts of women peace activists from BiH, which Zilka Spahić Šiljak gave a new momentum to in 2015 with her book "Shining Humanity: Life Stories of Women Peacebuilders in Bosnia and Herzegovina". The first part of the publication "Peace with Women's Face" deals with the activities and context of the project, and the second contains photographs and personal stories of women activists, members of the Initiative and project participants. This publication remains a permanent testimony of women's activist and feminist struggles for peace in BiH, shedding light on it both through the activists' personal stories shared with the wider public and through all the activities they undertook as members of the Initiative in the domain of peacebuilding.

The Initiative strives to preserve a feminist and women's peace culture of remembrance for future generations of girls and women. One of the most notable parts of the Initiative's feminist and peacebuilding documentary material is the exhibition "Peace with Women's Face", which is a result of their cooperation with the Civil Peace Service Forum (*forumZFD*) and their joint efforts to integrate the female perspective into the process of confronting the past and building peace in BiH, presenting the female side of the story of survival and overcoming the impacts of war. Women have been and remain active participants in peace processes. Nevertheless, few streets in BiH are named after women, and the scarcity of monuments dedicated to women peace activists speaks in favour of the argument on the lack of institutional support to the women's and feminist culture of remembrance.

The exhibition "Peace with Women's Face" presents the stories of 20 female peace activists and feminists from across Bosnia and Herzegovina, of different ages and ethno-national identities, who are shown in the exhibited photographs and introduced in the accompanying exhibition catalogue under the same title.⁹ The exhibition tells the story of

⁸ Mirjana Tanasić, Mirsada Rešidović, Radmila Žigić (2014). "Mir sa ženskim licem". Bijeljina: "Lara" Foundation, <https://www.fondacijalara.com/images/docs/MirSaZenskimLicem.pdf> (Accessed: 10 May 2024)

⁹ Forum Civilna mirovna služba (*forumZFD*) & Historijski muzej BiH. (2010). "Katalog Mir sa ženskim licem". Sarajevo: ForumZFD i Historijski muzej BiH, <https://www.fondacijalara.com/images/docs/Katalog%20-%20Mir%20sa%20zenskim%20licem.pdf> (Accessed: 15 May 2024)

women who, in the aftermath of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, waged small battles for their rights and the rights of others, working to rebuild the war-torn society. With their life stories, they continue to write new pages in this country's history. These stories are special in that they focus on women and their personal experience, as opposed to the dominant politics of supremacy of the nation and the collective over the individual and marginalisation of women's experiences and achievements.¹⁰

In BiH, remembrance is exclusively associated with the three ethno-national narratives, and in such a setting real-life experiences of women in peacebuilding remain consigned to oblivion. Rather than simply telling the stories and illustrating the tragic destinies of women during the 1990s, the exhibition seeks to document women's experiences, so that they remain recorded for future generations of peacebuilding activists and feminists to remember. It is also a compass for future generations of women activists and feminists, showing them how they can be peacebuilders and also reexamine feminist peace values, continuing to oppose the patriarchal beliefs and practices that promote the dominance of men. Without women's voices, transitional justice is incomplete, and the exhibition "Peace with Women's Face" erases the boundaries between invisible women's activism and peacebuilding. In his review for the "Peace with Women's Face" exhibition catalogue, Srđan Puhalo highlights the exhibition as dangerous, special and bold, as it shows how women have been forgotten by institutions and the very system. As he puts it, "Our histories are heroically male, and there is not much space for women, emotions, second guessing and dilemmas."¹¹

At the seventh "Peace with Women's Face" exhibition organised in Modriča in 2022, Radmila Žigić pointed out that the goal of the exhibition was to show the "female side of war", and to remind the public, on the one hand, of the different forms of suffering, experiences and challenges that women had faced during the war, but also to tell the story of their activism and the struggle to survive and build a better society.¹²

This reveals the true desire of all Initiative's members to move women beyond the role of victim by adding a feminist and peacebuilding element to all the documented women's

¹⁰ For more on the *Peace with Women's Face* exhibition, <https://www.fondacijalara.com/mir-sa-zenskim-licem/132-o-izlozbi-mir-sa-zenskim-licem> (Accessed: 15 May 2024)

¹¹ Ibid., p. 5, 6.

¹² <https://srpskainfo.com/cilj-je-da-se-isprica-zenska-strana-rata-otvorena-sedmodnevna-izlozba-mir-sa-zenskim-licem-foto/> (Accessed: 18 May 2024)

stories and by presenting women as active participants in building peace and a just society, which allows us to conclude that the exhibition is dedicated to all women in BiH who continue to put effort into building peace on a daily basis.

The book “Rat nije jednorodan”¹³ [War Is Not Single-Gendered] represents an effort by the Initiative’s members to save from oblivion the stories of 17 women and girls who were killed in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the period from 1991 to 1995. Their stories and contributions to peacebuilding remained hidden under a veil of secrecy and silence. The book sets out not only to call for nothing similar to ever happen again, but also to oppose the ruling and dominant, so-called male, ethno-national narratives that seek to dictate what we should remember. It is a way for the members of the Initiative to recall their friends who are no longer with us, but whose resistance to the violent conflicts in BiH was noteworthy and memorable. In this light, the title of the documentary produced by the Initiative in 2019, “One umiru drugi put”¹⁴ [They Die the Second Time Around], is symbolic as it represents a general criticism of the formal and institutional structures and systems that seek to silence women’s voices in peace processes.

Just as their predecessors came together regardless of their ethno-national identities to protest for peace in BiH during the violent conflicts of the 1990s, the members of the Initiative are joined together in their efforts to preserve the feminist and women’s peace culture of remembrance. In paying tribute to their female predecessors and friends who had stood up for the values of peace, waging a non-violent struggle against all forms of conflict and violence, the Initiative went a step further. They launched an initiative for December 8 to be declared the official *Day of Remembrance of Women Killed in the War*, which, despite the members’ efforts, has unfortunately never been institutionalised. In September 2014, the Initiative’s members submitted a request to the Commission for Gender Equality of the House of Representatives in the Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina¹⁵ to make December 8 the *Day of Remembrance of Women Killed in the War*, but the request was denied without explanation.

¹³ Vildana Džekman, Mizeta Tomljanović, Danka Zelić et al., (s.a.) “Mir sa ženskim licem – Rat nije jednorodan” Bijeljina: “Lara” Foundation, <https://fondacijalara.com/images/docs/RatNijeJednorodan.pdf> (Accessed: 18 May 2024)

¹⁴ The film “One umiru drugi put” (2019), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=OlvBxiUWqrA> (Accessed: 18 May 2024)

¹⁵ Amila Ždralović (2019). “Istorijat (pokušaja) institucionalizacije jednog sjećanja” [The Institutionalisation of a Memory: a Brief History (An Attempt)]. *Balkan Perspectives*, (11), pp. 26, 27.

In contrast to the important contributions by the Initiative to building a different narrative of remembrance, Amila Ždralović draws attention to how civil society actors are ignored by the official structures through masculinised narratives, “which not only paralyses peacebuilding processes, but often deepens conflicts.”¹⁶ The global *16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence* campaign is an international campaign to challenge violence against women and girls, running every year from 25 November to 10 December. As part of the campaign, numerous members of the Initiative have taken to the streets across Bosnia and Herzegovina to mark *December 8 – the Day of Remembrance of Women Killed in the War*. This form of women’s cooperation and solidarity between women’s associations and women activists regardless of ethno-national and/or religious identities, as one of the fundamental values of feminism, testifies to the continuous efforts to preserve women’s peace history.

Female persistence and the desire for women’s voices not to be silenced is strong and unanimous. Members of the Initiative continued their activities in May 2014 by organising the “Women’s Peace Caravan – Peace with Women’s Face” in most towns and cities in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This event was a women’s reminder to the system of how important it was to maintain a culture of remembrance of the lives and tragic deaths of women in the war and to engage women in peacebuilding by formalising December 8 as a day of remembrance for women killed in the war. In a press release announcing the “Women’s Peace Caravan – Peace with Women’s Face” event, the representatives of the Initiative called for the processes of women’s and feminist memorialisation to be adequately valued, and to be participated in by all:

“In these cities, through various events, women will send messages of peace and open debates on the inclusion of women’s experiences and achievements into a common culture of remembrance in their communities. All organisations will submit requests to their local governments to increase the number of streets named after women, especially women who have contributed to the development of these communities, so that women’s achievements are integrated into a common culture of remembrance. The culture of remembrance is the way in which a generation passes down memories of events and its present and past values to future generations. Although an integral part

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 26, 27.

of our present and past has been the efforts of many progressive, courageous and intelligent women and men to achieve gender equality, emancipation and the enjoyment of women's human rights, this part of our history remains excluded from history books and the common culture of remembrance. It may seem marginal, but naming streets and public institutions after women is in fact a question of valuing women's achievements and gender equality within a culture of remembrance that should also have a female face.”¹⁷

Another testimony of the Initiative's efforts for women's peace contributions to never be forgotten is the “Lexicon of Women Who Have Pushed Boundaries in Their Communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina – 100 Women – 100 Streets Named by Women”¹⁸ from 2021, which advocates for as many squares and streets as possible to be named after women, to save from oblivion the stories of women who have made huge contributions to the community. This is another voice of women's activist resistance seeking to change the current gender-unaware culture of memorialisation in the public space.

“Shining Humanity” in the Feminist and Women's Peace Culture of Remembrance

Apart from the documentary materials of the “Peace with Women's Face” Initiative, another noteworthy and relevant contribution to the feminist and women's peace culture of remembrance is the book by Zilka Spahić Šiljak titled “Shining Humanity”¹⁹, which combines the activist, feminist, peace and personal perspective. It is precisely this methodological approach, the one in the domain of transitional justice and peacebuilding, that the Initiative itself applies. Therefore, Zilka Spahić Šiljak's book is rightfully incorporated into and referred to in this research paper. In her book, the author goes beyond merely listing the names of women peacekeepers but rather seeks to highlight through their personal stories all the activities they led as part of their peacebuilding efforts. In doing this, she removes the discontinuity of remembrance of women's contributions to peace in BiH, motivating women

¹⁷ Mirjana Tanasić, Mirsada Rešidović, Radmila Žigić (2014). “Mir sa ženskim licem”. Bijeljina: “Lara” Foundation, p. 28.

¹⁸ “Leksikon o ženama koje su pomjerile granice u svojim zajednicama u Bosni i Hercegovini: 100 žena – 100 ulica po ženama” (2021). Sarajevo, Bijeljina, Tuzla: Forum Ziviler Friedensdienst eV. (forumZFD), Foundation “Lara” Bijeljina, “HO HORIZONTI” Association Tuzla, https://fondacijalara.com/images/docs/100%20zena%20100%20ulica%20po%20zenama%20WEB22_compressed.pdf (Accessed: 29 May 2024)

¹⁹ Zilka Spahić Šiljak (2015). “Sjaj ljudskosti: Životne priče mirotvorki iz Bosne i Hercegovine” [Shining Humanity: Life Stories of Women Peacebuilders in Bosnia and Herzegovina]. Sri Lanka: TPO Foundation.

to document their work and thus allow future generations insight into the feminist and peace efforts involved in preserving a women's culture of remembrance. The author emphasises the importance of writing down women's stories, as they testify to women's heroism that disrupts the patriarchal order of homogeneous communities, highlighting the humanity and women's innate capacity for building peace through networking and collaboration.

Referring to this book, journalist Milkica Milojević points out the importance of documenting the experiences of women peace activists, since such a chronicle – whether about women or men – does not exist, and there is a reasonable concern that their stories might *fade away into the darkness*:

“Irena Krndija’s peace activism has been forgotten. The silent parade of forgotten peacekeepers will soon be joined by many other women in Banja Luka and other cities and towns across Bosnia and Herzegovina. Who still remembers, for example, that the Women’s Association “Duga”, headed by its founder Galina Marjanović, accepted, rescued and cared for thousands of refugees and victims of war torture... And I believe that there were such activists in all our towns and cities... It would be good for each of us to remember a forgotten peacekeeper, to write down her name and a short note about her peace efforts, so that we can research the story, fill in the blanks and document everything. Because a chronicle of peace activities and activists in BiH does not exist. These are precious and untold stories, and unless we reclaim them, they will fade away into the darkness. And the media and public space in general will continue to be dominated by celebrities from the police blotter, businessmen of the “don't ask me about my first million” type, politicians whose only accomplishments are incendiary nationalist statements, would-be singers and starlets...”²⁰

Denying the experiences and even the existence of women creates an incomplete history. Women in BiH have been both directly and indirectly impacted by the war and we must not allow them to be a part of collateral damage. The systemic violence that women are exposed to, ultimately causing them to be forgotten and their efforts covered with a veil of silence, requires resistance. It is precisely this kind of resistance to the systemic and institutional

²⁰ Milkica Milojević (2014). *Mirovnjakinje u BiH* [Women Peacekeepers in BiH], <https://fondacijalara.com/aktuelnosti/8-decembar/79-mirovnjakinje-u-bih> (Accessed: 18 May 2024)

attempts to eliminate the feminist and women’s culture of remembrance that women activists across BiH have been putting up.

Analysis of the Questionnaire on the Feminist and Peace Culture of Remembrance

To obtain reflections and insights of women activists in BiH on the current condition of the feminist and women’s peace culture of remembrance, a questionnaire was created under the title “Feminist Peace and Women’s Culture of Remembrance”²¹, which was then forwarded to 100 addresses of civil society organisations, women’s organisations, individual women activists and five networks bringing together civil society organisations in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and distributed to the general public through social networks and social media.

Respondents were asked to respond to a total of ten semi-open and closed-ended questions in the period between June 22, 2024, and July 25, 2024. A total of 29 respondents responded to the questionnaire, with 20 of them from women’s organisations (Chart 1):

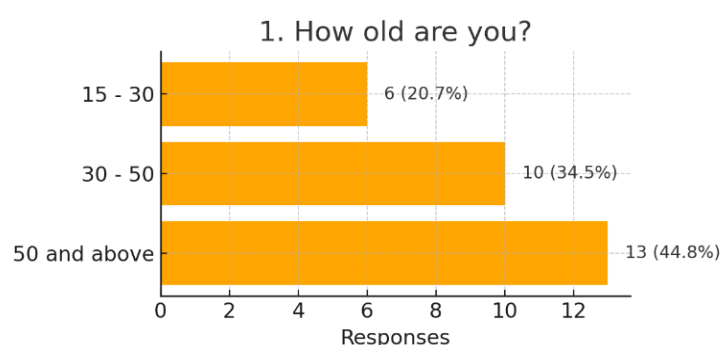


Chart 1

Of the total of 29 respondents who responded to the questionnaire, 6 respondents were aged between 15 and 30 years, 10 respondents were between 30 and 50 years of age, and 13 respondents were 50 and older.

²¹ Answers to the questionnaire: Feminist Peace and Women’s Culture of Remembrance, URL: <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1Z4GC2n4WlZSDRmLqIDwrDmQCSmuMrFm9Fac0ebfThw/edit?gid=1146066737#gid=1146066737>

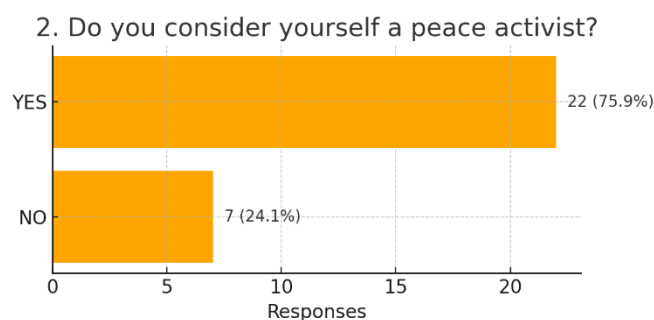


Chart 2

A total of 22 respondents (75.9%) considered themselves peace activists, while 7 respondents (24.1%) denied this identity (Chart 2). One respondent pointed out: “I find that the word activist involves active participation in and/or planning of peace events, performances, etc., and I don’t do that.”

The most common reasons why respondents did not see themselves as peace activists were insufficient participation in peace activities and the lack of knowledge to initiate peacebuilding activities.

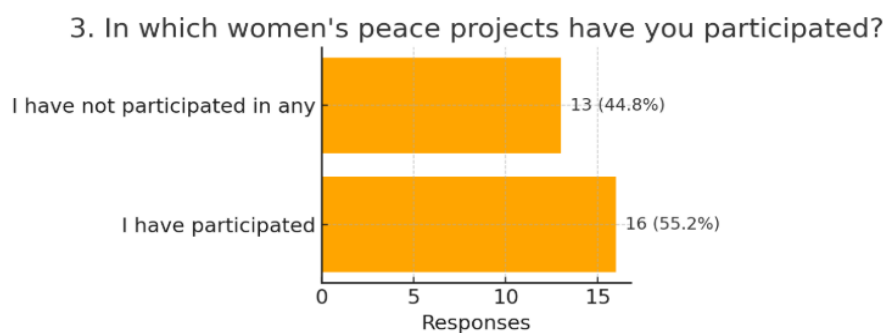


Chart 3

More than half of the respondents, 16 of them (55.2%), declared to have participated in women’s peace projects, while 13 participants (44.8%) reported not having participated in any women’s peace project (Chart 3). Respondents who had actively participated in women’s peace projects stated that these were projects implemented in cooperation with the Peacebuilding Network and other projects: Peace Pasta and Pizza, PitchWise, International Women’s Day

Walk, Protests Against Violence, Dialogue for the Future, Active Citizens, Peace Operations Project, Young Women for Peace in Central Asia and others.

When asked whether and to what extent women's contributions to peace activism were visible, the majority of respondents descriptively stated that women's contributions to peacebuilding were invisible, with some of them pointing out the following:

"They are not visible, and neither is peace activism. I'm glad to hear that there is some progress when it comes to the inclusion of women and feminism in the domain of peace activism."

"No, unfortunately not. Although there are many women peacekeepers, women's contribution in this context is almost invisible in BiH."

Some of the respondents found the visibility of women in feminist and women's peace activism to be insufficient: *"They are [women] visible, but not as much as they should be, and this is reflected in the respect women are shown both in society and at work."*

In this context, a general lack of respect for women, and women being treated as *second-class citizens* were cited as the most common reasons:

"They are visible, but with a lot of effort and time because in these territories women are more or less considered to be second-class citizens and it is very difficult to become a voice that everyone not only hears but also listens to and trusts."

5. How familiar are you with the activities of the initiative "Peace with a Woman's Face"?
29 responses

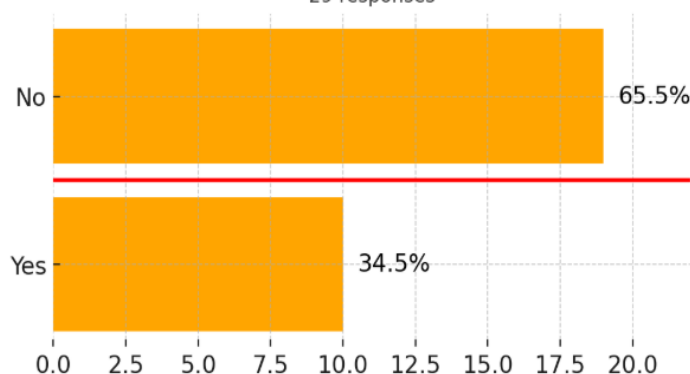


Chart 4

Most respondents were not familiar with the activities of the “Peace with Women’s Face” Initiative (19 of them; 65.5%), while 10 respondents (34.5%) answered this question in the affirmative (Chart 4). The respondents who were familiar with the Initiative listed some of its activities: work on de-gendering transitional justice and the culture of remembrance, the 100 Women 100 Streets initiative, the exhibition of all BiH women activists to promote women’s peace activism, connecting women of all nationalities and working together towards a culture of reconciliation with acknowledgement of all victims, the photo exhibition at the City Hall, the “Peace with Women’s Face” exhibition.

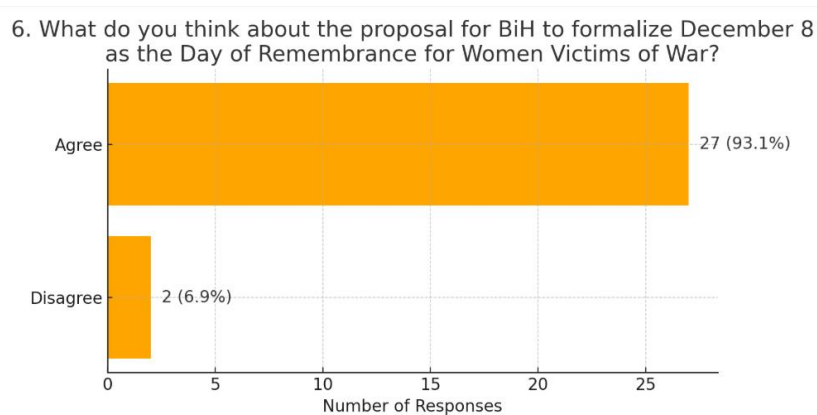


Chart 5

The vast majority of respondents (27 of them; 96.4%) found that the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina should formalise December 8 as a day of remembrance for women killed in the war (Chart 5). This finding showed the respondents wish for the feminist and women’s culture of remembrance to be formalised and institutionally acknowledged.

When asked how important and present feminist memorialisation was in the society of BiH, all 29 respondents agreed that feminist memorialisation was extremely important, but was not significantly present in the BiH public.

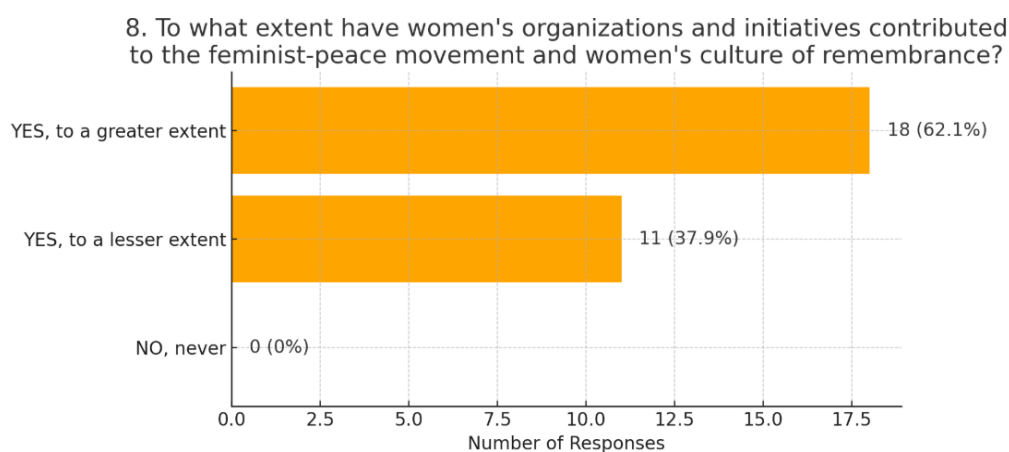


Chart 6

The majority of respondents (18 of them; 62.1%) found women's organisations and initiatives to have contributed to the feminist and women's peace culture of remembrance to a great extent, while 11 (37.9%) believed that this contribution was evident to a lesser extent (Chart 6). Not a single respondent answered negatively to this question, which reflected their general view that the contribution of women's action was significant for the preservation of feminist memorialisation in BiH.

When asked how academia could contribute to a feminist and women's peace culture of remembrance, most respondents pointed out that it was important to raise awareness on this topic through non-formal and formal modes of education. One respondent suggested that this should be done:

“By formally including this topic in curricula, if possible, if not, it can be addressed as a topic through lessons in a number of social sciences; by encouraging students to explore the involvement of women in the culture of remembrance; by supporting peace organisations and initiating actions of remembrance.”

When it comes to informal modes of education, respondents suggested public discussions, panels, round tables, study visits and research. They also listed continuous advocacy and a feminist approach to the given topics, in such a way that students are continuously educated about feminist memorialisation.

One respondent pointed out the need for a greater level of openness in academia concerning the given topic: *“[It is necessary] to open the doors of their academic communities and to acknowledge, support and participate in the women’s peace movement, at least as declared supporters.”*

Breaking the fear of obstacles and the freedom of public expression of thought are, according to one respondent, essential for the visibility of women in the domain of the feminist peace and women’s culture of remembrance and could be achieved *“by speaking out more often and more clearly in combating injustice, without fear of what others will say and without fear of being judged by society, even by other women.”*

The questionnaire also provided space for recommendations on what respondents considered to be necessary for a greater presence of women within the feminist peace and women’s history. Some of the recommendations were a higher level of education to empower women in expressing their own views on the topic. The respondents stated that, in order to break the patterns of patriarchy, this education should start as early as in kindergarten. It is necessary to raise women’s awareness on the topic, especially of women who made their mark on history, and to advocate for greater representation of women in positions of power. One of the suggestions was for this to be achieved through promotion and interactive lectures that would strengthen a solidarity approach among women, enabling them to be more active and to understand each other better.

Some of the respondents’ recommendations were that women needed to be encouraged in understanding their activism as work *“for a better tomorrow”*, that women could not allow themselves to be *“degraded”*, but had to have *“their own attitude, self-esteem and that certain I CAN AND I WILL frame of mind”*.

Respondents also found that it was necessary for *“more research papers to be published on the impacts women have made on history as pacifists. I believe that writing about this more is necessary to raise awareness. There is little on this topic documented in literature,”* and *“to constantly promote the activities [of women activists] through the media, social groups, inviting them to get involved, to participate. Unfortunately, women are, generally, quite uninterested. Maybe we need to go back to elementary school and introduce specialised peer to peer education programs.”*

Feminist and Women's Peace Culture of Remembrance

Activist aspects

I gained a deeper insight into the condition of the feminist and women's peace culture of remembrance in an interview with one of the initiators of the "Peace with Women's Face" Initiative, an activist of the "Lara" Foundation from Bijeljina, Radmila Žigić.²² Although I had known Radmila before, I believe that it was working together on the Initiative's project that truly connected us. Radmila is a journalist, a researcher, a person who questions everything, goes into the depth and core of things to get to the heart of a story and deliver true emotion. Her desire to look at all aspects of memorialisation that have been observed within the Initiative from a feminist perspective has been an immense contribution to the peace culture of remembrance.

My interviewee emphasised that the feminist and women's peace culture of remembrance was not sufficiently visible in society, associating this with the huge impact of patriarchy, where *the male* comes before *the female*. This is also the reason for the lack of awareness among women about what peace activism and peacebuilding actually are. This is deepened even further by the discontinuity of memory, caused by the fact that women's contribution has virtually been erased from the socialist, anti-fascist and labour movement, which women have not been able to reclaim and reaffirm as part of both the women's and the general culture of remembrance.

"Efforts to reaffirm and document women's achievements have been present in the past and today, but they are not sufficient to make visible the entire work of the women of this country in the struggle for emancipation, equality and peacebuilding. Another challenge is a certain lack of understanding, even among women, of what kind of work peacebuilding actually includes. It was perhaps not before 2010 that we started to think of our work as peace activism. This is a result of patriarchy and the patriarchal division of roles in which war and peace belong to men, while women are left to deal with other 'less important' issues. But this is not only the case among our contemporaries today. If you go through literature on women from the time of socialism and the anti-fascist

²² Interview conducted on 6 June 2024.

movement, everything that women did, and they did a lot, was even then not referred to as peacebuilding work.”

When asked about how large the contribution of the “Peace with Women’s Face” Initiative to the feminist and women’s peace culture of remembrance has been, the interviewee points out that this is just the beginning and that its members continue to work relentlessly in this domain.

“When you’re directly involved, it’s hard to make an objective assessment. I think it has been significant because we have managed to make the gender gap in this domain visible and to gain the attention of the media, other organisations, institutions, even of women in political parties. For as long as we have been working, we have felt that this matters to women, but that many of them did not have the appropriate arguments and support in their communities to address these issues. What we have done—and it is important to note that a greater number of women’s organisations are involved—is that we have provided continuity to the discussion and that the problem is now clearly visible. There have also been initiatives from others, there is an interest of institutions to get involved, and I would say that this has been a good “entry” and that we should continue and intensify our actions. By the way, some of the key contributions have already been recognised by both male and female authors who have written about our initiatives, the campaign ‘100 Women – 100 Streets Named After Women’, the initiative to formalise the day of remembrance of women killed in the war in BiH, so there is no need to write about these things in detail here – which is another success of these actions. It is particularly important for peacebuilding in BiH that these are inclusive actions organised together by women’s organisations from both entities and that the remembrance we advocate is also multicultural, multiconfessional and multiethnic, erasing the consequences of the artificial betrayal of our common past.”

When asked how activist circles could contribute to a feminist and women’s peace culture of remembrance, the interviewee emphasises that “remembrance tells a story”, a story that represents a small women’s history that we can remember. In all aspects of its work, the

“Peace with Women’s Face” Initiative seeks to preserve the memories of all actions that women take on a daily basis.

“By supporting existing initiatives, both ours and those of other organisations, as well as by launching new initiatives, because this story has only just begun. Every sphere of life— culture, science, sports, politics, medicine and other—has its own small women’s history that has been neglected, and all these spheres offer a space to explore, remember and affirm the work of women. It is also important that remembrance tells a story about the struggle for emancipation, so that young generations know how difficult it is to win rights and freedom, and that the threat of these rights being taken away is growing. Apart from that, we need greater affirmation of women’s peacebuilding work, but also the inclusion of the women’s side of history in the general culture of remembrance.”

Marking important dates would help to preserve memories of women’s contributions to peacebuilding, concludes Radmila Žigić.

“I believe I have already stated some directions, but it is important to establish a greater number of significant dates to remind us of what we need to change, perhaps establish a day of remembrance for the victims of femicide, mark certain international dates with authentic content from the women’s history of our country. For example, connect the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture with war rape and remember those women on that day, think of the level of criminal and restorative justice achieved, and the like. We should remember both the good and the bad that mark our lives.”

Academic aspects

In addition to the activist aspect, I was also interested in an academic view of the feminist and women’s peace culture of remembrance and therefore decided to complete the pages of my study with an interview with Zlatiborka Popov Momčinović.²³

²³ Interview conducted on 14 July 2024.

Zlatiborka Popov Momčinović is an associate professor of political sciences at the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of East Sarajevo. She completed her studies in sociology as part of the double-major study of philosophy and sociology at the Faculty of Philosophy in Novi Sad, she received her master's degree from the Faculty of Philosophy in East Sarajevo, and her PhD on the topic of “Women’s Movement in Post-Dayton Bosnia and Herzegovina: Achievements, Initiatives and Controversies” at the Faculty of Political Sciences in Belgrade. During and after her studies, she worked in non-governmental organisations and remained active in civil society. She has published more than eighty academic papers and analyses with a focus on gender and the position of women in society, activism and feminism, reconciliation and trust building processes, professionalisation of the media, and the position and role of religion in the public sphere.

The impact of current initiatives in the domain of the culture of remembrance is not satisfactory, as my interviewee points out.

“I believe there are two levels to be considered in answering this question. On the one hand, what women’s organisations are doing in this domain, and we have a lot of great initiatives that nurture a feminist approach to this topic, such as the regional Women’s Court initiative. On the other hand, if we consider the impact of these initiatives, it is not satisfactory in my opinion. Generally speaking, the culture of remembrance as a separate topic in the context of peacebuilding and reconciliation has not had a significant impact on local politics and the general condition of the society. And since feminism and gender issues at large are marginalised in our country and treated as irrelevant or less important, this is also reflected in the current condition of the feminist peace and women’s culture of remembrance.”

The interviewee sees the greatest value of the contribution of the “Peace with Women’s Face” Initiative to the feminist and women’s peace culture of remembrance in the dedication and persistence of its members, as well as in their territorial presence and action.

“The significance of this Initiative is that it has been implemented for a number of years successively and such continuity points to the commitment and persistence of those carrying it. Its special value lies in that it brings together a considerable number of women’s organisations from both entities and different parts of Bosnia and

Herzegovina. It is important that it combines both an individual and narrative aspect—focusing on the stories of women peacekeepers whose contribution to peacebuilding has been immense—and a group and organisational one. But here, too, in my opinion, we have a problem of the impact on the political and social mainstream. A certain step forward has been made, for example, by organising the exhibition of the same name in the BiH Parliamentary Assembly last year, but we see that some initiatives, such as for December 8 to be declared the day of remembrance of women killed in the war, have not been accepted by politics, and remain on an informal level. In this context, I'd also like to mention the '100 Women 100 Streets' initiative, which, if I'm not mistaken, is part of, or at least associated with, this initiative. It is valuable because it shows how structural and symbolic violence against women spills over from wartime to (apparent) peacetime and vice versa. It is precisely this invisibility of women that is an integral part of the systemic, gender-based violence which we cannot seem to step out of."

Zlatiborka Popov Momčinović points out the necessity of connecting academic and activist circles in order to obtain a comprehensive approach to the feminist and women's peace culture of remembrance in the peacebuilding domain.

"Academia should include this aspect in its research and official curricula. However, since peace topics are not adequately represented in our curricula, the feminist peace aspect follows along the same line. Also, more should be done in terms of connecting the academic and activist circles, as the problem in our country is that many things are done in parallel, without actual contact with one another, and no synergy is possible. For example, when it comes to the role of academia, universities and education in general in building peace, and the initiatives that have been carried out in this context—they have rarely included a feminist peace dimension. Cooperation was mostly established on an individual basis, for example by including someone from the academic community in feminist peace initiatives, which was mostly done outside of academic institutions. But, on the other hand, that's something, too."

Finally, the interviewee points out that in order to contribute to the feminist and women's peace culture of remembrance, it is necessary to engage young generations of women and girls in (peace) activism.

“To keep working and not to give up, and to try to devise a new approach for a greater impact on decision-makers. Given the change of generations, it is necessary to continue engaging the younger generation, especially young women and girls, in the activities being implemented or planned.”

Conclusion

Despite numerous initiatives and the constant efforts of women activists and feminists in the domain of peacebuilding, the culture of peace does not provide sufficient space to the women's and feminist perspective of remembrance. Although the legislative framework in BiH guarantees the respect of women's human rights and gender equality, the institutional implementation of feminist memorialisation is, unfortunately, still at a low level.

The efforts of women activists and representatives of women's organizations in BiH, that created the environment out of which the “Peace with Women's Face” Initiative was born, prove that it is possible and necessary to erase both visible and invisible borders, whether institutionally established, or national, ethnic and religious ones. Women's heroism disrupts the patriarchal order of homogeneous communities and highlights women's humanity and innate capacity for building peace through networking and collaboration. Documenting women's contributions, both past and present, is a useful tool in preserving the women's and feminist culture of remembrance. The “Peace with Women's Face” Initiative and this study lay the groundwork for future feminist memorialisation processes, enabling peace values and knowledge to be passed down to new generations of women and girls. Many women still lack awareness of how important their own participation in peace work is, which is a prerequisite for a greater presence of women's histories in the culture of remembrance. Raising awareness can, therefore, be one of the mechanisms to reaffirm the women's culture of remembrance. The survey and interview responses obtained as part of the research highlight the importance of education, also pointing out the need to open academic circles towards a feminist culture of remembrance and connect the activist and academic circles in peacebuilding. It is in this

connection that we recognise the possibility of developing a mechanism that would contribute to making the feminist way of building peace more visible within the institutional setting.

Feminist memorialisation could be said to be a compass for succeeding generations of women as future peacebuilders, to direct them in opening space for women's voices. The interview and survey findings speak both to this and the fact that women activists in BiH believe the responsibility for the lack of awareness among women on what peace activism and peacebuilding actually are lies with the society as a whole.

Through all elements of memorialisation, the "Peace with Women's Face" Initiative seeks to move women beyond the role of victim and present them as active participants in peacebuilding processes, thus breaking the patriarchal patterns of male domination and ensuring equality. A feminist and women's peace culture of remembrance is necessary if we want to oppose the ruling and dominant *male* and the political ethno-national narratives that take it upon themselves to dictate what we should remember. The lack of institutional support for the women's and feminist culture of remembrance is also confirmed by the—still fruitless—long-standing efforts of the Initiative's members toward institutionalising December 8 as a day of remembrance for women killed in the war. The majority of the survey respondents found that the contributions of women in peacebuilding processes, including the work of the Initiative itself, were not sufficiently visible, and agreed that the feminist and women's culture of remembrance should be formalised and institutionally acknowledged in BiH. The visibility of these processes is diminished through the lack of support from institutions such as the Commission for Gender Equality of BiH, the Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees of BiH and the Parliamentary Assembly of BiH. All written sources and available literature on the "Peace with Women's Face" Initiative, as well as advocacy documents including written and audio-video materials, testify to the enormous, practically immeasurable contribution of the Initiative to the women's and feminist culture of remembrance. The tenets upon which the Initiative's practices are based are, without doubt, important in putting an end to the exclusivity of male heroism in peace processes, as well as in providing a feminist perspective to memorialisation in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

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