

# Balkan PERSPECTIVES

*A magazine on Dealing with the Past*

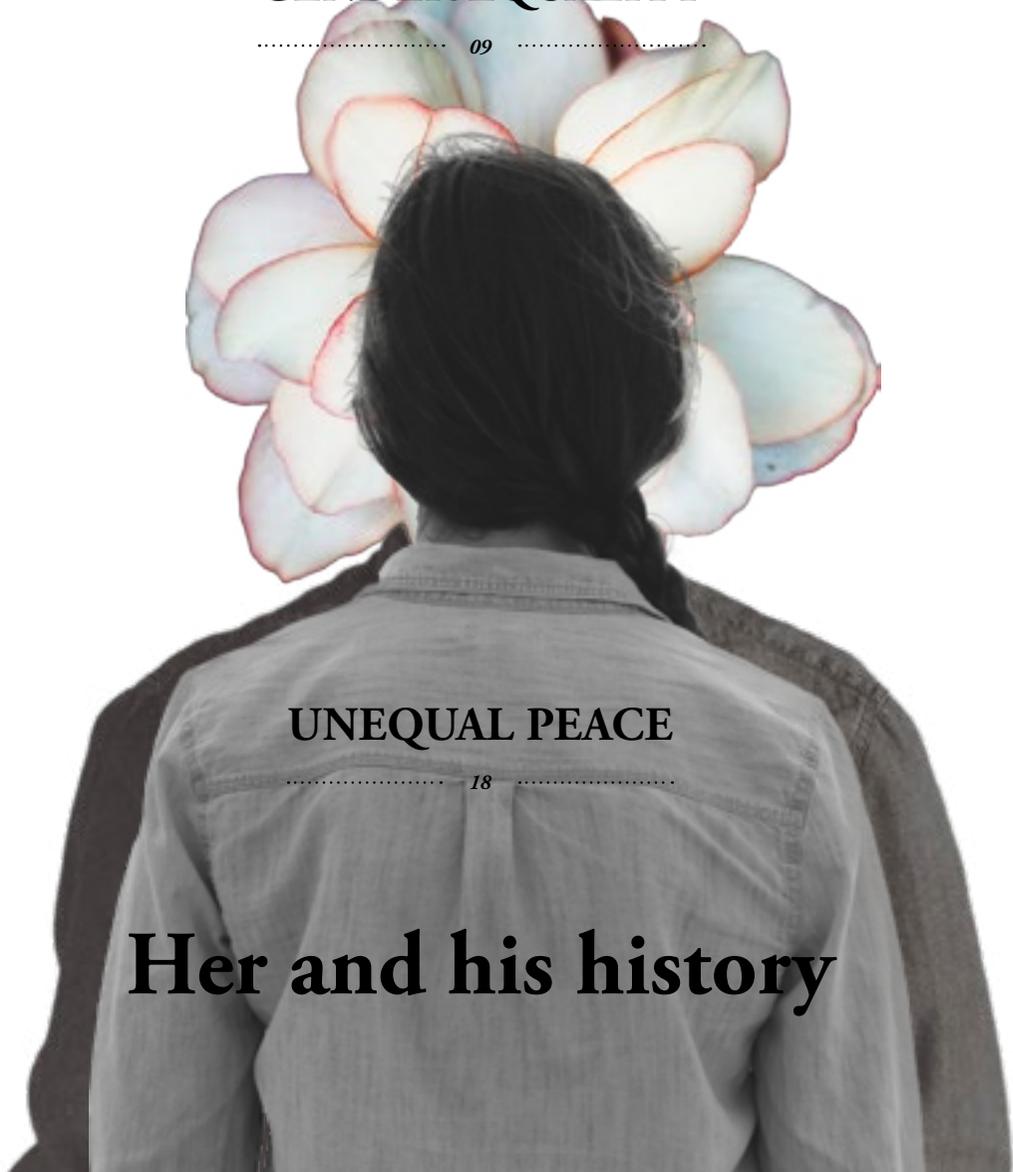
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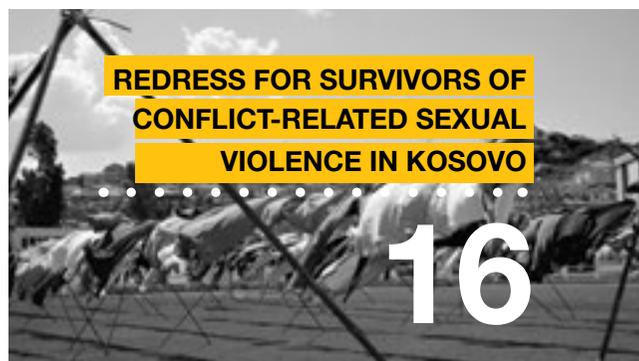
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# EDIT- ORIAL

*Pristina, August 2016*

Dear Readers,

Welcome to the fifth issue of the *Balkan.Perspectives*, forumZFD's magazine on dealing with the past. This current issue is dedicated to the topic of gender and numerous questions on why gender matter in the process of dealing with the past.

When it comes to dealing with the past in the Western Balkans, respecting gender usually means discussing only and exclusively about sexual violence against women during war times. As a consequence, women are not seen as agents of change; and they are also not included when trying to overcome the violent past and rebuilding rebuild a peaceful society.

The aim of our discussion today is not intended to exclude the conversation on sexual violence against women during the war and the consequences of that violence. We hope to broaden the frame and discuss other pertinent aspects of gender equality in the process of dealing with the past.

In our lead article, Marina Blagojević argues for a feminist approach in dealing with the past and establishing positive and healing knowledge to (re)build a society.

Similarly, Besnik Leka (in our interview) and Vojislav Arsić who are both dedicated to working with men on gender equality consider the inclusion of young men in processes related to gender equality to be key in creating a stable society.

Just as men should not be excluded from working on gender equality, Nela Porobic Isakovic in her article about the Women Organising for Change in Syria, and Bosnia and Herzegovina Initiative argues that

women should be included in the peace processes. By transferring knowledge and experiences from Bosnia and Herzegovina to Syria, the organizers hope to create stronger alliances that include women into peace building processes.

Since language creates and influences our realities, Bukurie Mustafa reflects on how gender relations and taboos in the intimate spaces are reflected in Albanian language and how such taboos and values have to be considered when thinking about change making.

Women in both Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo have experienced sexual violence during the wars in the 1990s. Two articles in the current issue describe how the survivors are dealing with their past. Nita Gojani and Siobhan Hobbs from UN Women Kosovo describe the current state of gender and dealing with the past and the challenges that remain for the survivors. Selma Korjenić from TRIAL Bosnia shares her experiences in working with survivors of sexual violence and advocating for compensation and recognition.

As in the past issues of *Balkan.Perspectives*, additional aspects could have been added and said. But today I am very happy to share with you our fifth issue as a first step towards a long journey on creating more knowledge about gender and how it connects to meaningfully dealing with the past.

Sincerely,  
*Maike Dafeld/ Editor in Chief*

# WHAT DOES GENDER EQUALITY MEAN TO YOU?



## **BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA**

For me it means that there is equal chance that God might be a woman. It is nonsense to even think that men are more competent than women.

**Dario N.S. , 30**

“For me gender equality means a society with common and equal chances for everyone despite their gender background. A society where one’s gender does not determine their status, employment opportunities, and salary rate.”

**Denis P., 26**

Although I do not consider myself a feminist in any way, I am aware that a woman’s life used to be more blood than honey throughout history. Today, I find myself lucky to be able to work, to vote, and to be able to choose whether to have children or with whom to have children with. And more than lucky to have a male friend who is just a friend, not superior in any way. I am not sure that I completely understand the definition of gender equality but I am sure that it does not exist in half of our planet. So, what does gender equality mean to me? It is being asked this very question in the first place. And the ability to answer it, as a Bosnian girl in English.

**Irena P. 33 years**

## **SERBIA**

“Gender equality is a phenomenon that should be everywhere in the world. At the moment it is not just present in some Islamic countries, but it is neither present in Europe and Western countries. I also think that it is being artificially imposed; such an idea is not globally internalized by both men and women.”

**Ana J., 30**

“Gender equality means that all human rights are applied equally to both sexes; and that both men and women have equal influence in all political, scientific, educational and other spheres of life.”

**Dorđe Đ., 32**

“Gender equality means equal salaries for men and women performing the same jobs. The awareness of social position of women has been at a primitive level for centuries and I do not think that it can be changed through education only. If women had the possibility to be economically independent as men are, I believe it would have an impact on the views of people and that women and men would finally be treated the same – as people. Scandinavian countries are a positive example.”

**Anja M., 31**

## **Kosovo**

“Gender equality is a human rights principle and a precondition for a more just and equitable society. We need to change historical and social disadvantages towards women. There is systemic inequality between men and women, as globally. Gender equality is an indispensable tool for advancing sustainable development and reducing poverty with equal access to resources and opportunities, and voice in decision-making processes that shape society.”

**Rozafa K., 28**

“Gender equality encourages equal involvement of men and women in family, and socioeconomic and political areas of life. It is important to provide equal opportunities to men and women to enable social change. Such opportunities can be used equitably only when responsibilities are equally shared. Therefore, in order to have women involved in decision making, professional and institutional life in the most effective way, men should be more involved in family life.”

**Kadri G., 32**

“Gender equality means equal opportunities in all sectors of life. It means to respect needs, values and aspirations of men and women in the same way.”

**Linda B., 40**

## **MACEDONIA**

For me, gender equality is a situation where no one from either gender feel like they deserve more rights from the other.

**Elham B., 29**

Gender equality is when women aren’t afraid to wander the streets alone, during the day, or at night; when their minds are more respected than their bodies. Gender equality is also when men do all kinds of household chores without being ridiculed; and when they can become ballet dancers, or cry and show emotions in public without being called names.

**Angela M., 23**

For me personally, gender equality means RESPECT in every way possible. For instance, if it takes 100\$ to properly perform a job, then no one should care if it has been done by a woman or a man. In this case, the outcome should be respected and awarded 100\$, and not by 75\$ because it was done by a person of different gender.

**Danijela Z., 23**

# Facing the Future: — Changing the Attitude Towards the Past

*A Gender perspective in Dealing with the past is not only a “Nice to have” but a crucial element in order to create a different future. Marina Blagojević argues for a Feminist intervention that will contribute to the establishment of stable and peaceful society.*

Are the future and past related, and if they are, in which way? This question is so simple that everyone has an “obvious” answer to it, which results from their daily lives: “Of course they are related; what I am doing today leads to consequences tomorrow.” But it is specifically that “obviousness” that is not simple. Because what one is doing today is in essence conditioned by what one wishes to have, be, achieve – tomorrow.

Why is then such a simple logic of wishes, hopes, positive expectations not simply transferrable to the collectivity one belongs to? Why does collective future scare us, whether

it is about the region, Europe or the world, even when our personal future looks quite interesting and attractive? What do we attribute to collective future, and therefore leave out from ours? And finally, why do we believe that we can impact our personal future or at least that we can impact it much more than we can impact the collective future? And, generally speaking, why should the past be of importance in future, be of a greater importance than what we allow? How can we face the future we are afraid of, since we are marked by the scars of the past?

## **Gender perspective in reconciliation**

Until the last decade, women had been mostly invisible, whether as specific victims of wars or peacemakers. The interest for feminist research has been growing. Thanks to this new awareness, the relevance of specific, gender based aspects in conflicts and reconciliation has gained more attention. There is also an obvious change from the essentialist perception of women as “natural peacemakers” towards a more critical examination of the different positions of women and men in relation to war. Both women and men can be victims, warriors or peacemakers. Figures or percentages cannot



be realistic indicators of the “true nature” of women or men. Actually, they can only be a starting basis for an analysis of social conditionality and cultural construction of gender as such. Gender mainstreaming policies by their nature stress the differences between women and men, but such differences should not be understood as fixed, “natural” and unchangeable.

However, the feminist perspective I advocate here goes beyond the usual gender perspective applied primarily in case of consequence analysis and facing the past. Namely, I would like to claim that a feminist intervention in knowledge itself, knowledge of wars, but also knowledge of reconciliation, may change not just the perception of past, but also impact the creation of a different future.

A different perception of past, different knowledge and understanding of past, does not mean that conflict and victim-related facts should be erased or downplayed. It means that other facts should be added to these, such as facts relating to cooperation, mutual assistance, solidarity and resistance to wars. In addition to a “negative history” it is necessary to also write a “positive history” in order for the picture to be comprehensive and render possible not only a better understanding of war dynamics but also healing and hope. Only the creation of an unbiased perception of the past, which also includes positive history, makes it possible to create a conflict-free future. The very insistence on “positive history” as another side of history sends a message about the possibility of choice, which is made by every individual or group all over again.

History is not stringency, it is a product of human activity. It is not subject to natural laws but rather a consequence of a series of choices. This also means that every social actor, individual or group actor also bears a responsibility since they have the possibility of choice. Such a choice is limited by their power and position in a community but such choice always exists. Therefore, only an understanding of history as a choice may also ensure understanding the responsibility of an individual. Because if there is no choice, there is also no responsibility. If history is an inevitable course in which conflicts always occur, then the future is hopeless, and individual and collective actors are mere objects of the “historical force of gravity”.

The feminist approach, as a consistent reading of the feminist theoretical heritage sees science, and even historical science, as androcentric and “inclined” towards the male

side. It sees it as a construct created by those in power (“history is written by the victors”) in order to help them gain and maintain power. What remains excluded, outside or marginalised in dominant narratives maintained by androcentric knowledge is exactly what reveals the feminist approach to knowledge and makes it visible.

Reconciliation cannot rely on knowledge, the basis of which is the idea of history as domination and conflict. In the same manner as wars were a “self-fulfilling prophecy”, reconciliation is possible only as a “self-fulfilling prophecy”, as something that is invited, produced and resulting from a fully different knowledge matrix than the one that produced the wars. Reconciliation is impossible without creating a “meta narrative” on the joint life, exchange, solidarity and cooperation, which would make it possible to include various individual experiences that resist the dominant narrative about the inevitability of conflict.

The main lessons for the knowledge project to be established in order for facing the past to produce the desired conflict-free future would be the following ones:

- It is necessary to overcome essentialism (“women are peace lovers”, “men are aggressive”);
- It is necessary to deconstruct and position “the knowers”, those who produce knowledge, in order to understand their products from the perspective of positions of power they hold;
- It is necessary to raise awareness about the position of those working on reconciliation, since only self-reflection and raised awareness of their own position, including also a deconstruction of their own privileges, a requirement for an objective and effective approach;
- It should be rendered possible to create a meta narrative on reconciliation, which necessarily must be based not only on “justice for victims” but also on “positive history”;
- It should be understood that knowledge is a construct that reflects the patriarchal system;
- It is necessary to discover “blind spots” that are closely connected to war-related helplessness; it is necessary to disclose all those that had power, irrespective of the field or social position they come from;

- It is necessary to affirm the “bottom-up” perspective, perspective of daily life (social history) as opposed to the top-down perspective (political history);
- It is necessary to understand that individual actions are closely related to social hierarchies and power;
- It is necessary to advocate knowledge that will have a healing and reconciliatory power, rather than power of creating conflicts and misunderstandings.

#### Healing knowledge: “Positive history”

For a feminist-oriented scientist the true challenge lies in the question on how to create knowledge that in itself will be part of the reconciliation process, instead of being part of new confrontations. It is thus not “only” about showing the suffering and victims, but rather about creating “knowledge as reconciliation”, creating knowledge that will have the power of healing by uncovering the helplessness on so many different levels, with many different conflict actors, both at micro and macro level. “Positive history” might be a feminist healing knowledge project.

In case of the former Yugoslavia, the history of “joint life” lasted longer than the history of conflicts. The picture of reality would be quite warped if only conflicts would be taken as “history”, and not also the part related to the “joint life”. In addition to all of this, if an interpretation that only emphasizes history of conflicts prevails, it actually makes them stronger. There is a close and circular relation between the interpretation and specific results in reality. If history is interpreted as a history of perennial conflicts, unavoidable conflicts that are regularly repeated, with only short and irrelevant “outbreaks of peace” between the conflicts, social actors are facing a lack of true choice. In such a case “negative history” becomes their destiny and a future is abolished.



**Marina Blagojević** is a Serbian sociologist, gender scholar, gender expert, and feminist. In 1991, along with other members of the feminist activist group “Women and Society”, Blagojević co-founded and served on the first board of the Women’s Study Center in Belgrade, Yugoslavia. Her work as an international gender expert has been across various organizations, such as the European Commission, European Parliament, United Nations Development Programme, UN Women, Sida, and the International Fund for Agricultural Development. She has published more than 100 academic and 20 expert publications.



*Besnik Leka promotes gender equality in Kosovo. In our interview he reveals why gender equality is closely linked to dealing with the past. He also shares with us the motivations for his day-to-day work.*

# A Young Man for Gender equality

## **What does gender equality mean to you?**

The perception of gender equality has been evolving as the years pass. There are cases when it is misinterpreted and misunderstood unfortunately. Many people these days confuse gender equality with the empowerment of one gender over another. One of the main reasons for this misunderstanding is the fact that the number of movements and groups of people raising their voices for gender equality has been increasing a lot recently.

In my opinion gender equality is nothing more and nothing less than equal opportunities and equal rights and the rule of meritocracy for both men and women.

## **You are one of the few men working directly on gender equality in Kosovo. How did you get to work on this topic?**

The topic of “gender” has always been an integral part of my life since childhood. I have three sisters and growing up I never viewed any

The interview was conducted by *Maike Dafeld.*



*Campaign work:  
The intervention  
“React as a  
Human” promotes  
civic courage  
amongst young  
people.*

difference between us although I received more attention as one of the sons.

When I was bullied in school, instead of bringing a man to protect me - as the tradition requires - I brought my sisters. My sisters were my best friends and role models growing up. Today I have three nieces and one nephew; and they keep me inspired to work on the promotion of gender equality. In the past I have worked on projects related to gender, but mainly focused on women and girls. Today with great joy and pleasure I work with young men and recently with fathers and fathers-to-be. It is easy for me because I believe in gender equality and it is an integral part of my life. I know how important being treated equally is, a basic human right.

**Why do you think it is important to work especially with men on the topic of gender equality?**

The issue of gender equality has been traditionally perceived as a women’s concern. But according to the statistics, men are the main cause of gender inequalities. Mainly because of the way they are raised in their families and the way society expects them to act

based on their gender. The rigid social norms that have shaped the way men act towards one another and women are our main concern. Something needs to be changed as soon as possible challenging rigid norms of masculinities. That is why we consider working with young men tackling the gender inequality at the very core. If you raise boys in an environment where they are expected to show love, affection and care instead of being tough, emotionless, rude and violent, I believe that is when you have taken the biggest step towards dismantling social norms that perpetuate gender inequality and building an equal society.

**What kind of reactions did you get from men in Kosovo when you introduced this topic at the beginning of the project? How much did they already know about gender equality?**

The promotion of gender equality with an approach towards young men was something new for Kosovo society. We have witnessed that there was such a need for a project like this as it had been missed for a long time. It was not the easiest to approach young men, to sit with them and to talk about gender, gender-based-violence and their health and well being. The longer the project went on the more eager they were. When addressing these issues the



*Promotion of the  
“Be a Man Club”  
at the cooking  
show “Diçka  
po zihet” on the  
National television  
21.*

simple response often has been that no one has talked to them earlier as if gender was not applicable to them. Helping the young men understand their role and responsibility created more interest. They even learned how much men and boys benefit from gender equality. I can proudly say that today many of these young men are the agents of change.

Young people in Kosovo are more open minded than we think. We just haven't given them an opportunity thus far to be a part of such programs as the Young Men Initiative.

### **How do you work with the boys and men? What are concrete measures you took to achieve your project goals?**

As a new initiative we decided to invest a lot on research to measure the impact of our project, learning what works and what doesn't and what should be changed. We implemented a baseline research, and thereafter we started to implement workshops in schools and started the "Be a Man Campaign".

Because of successful results achieved within the project years, we managed to accredit the program within the Ministry of Education as a part of the curriculum for schools. This program has been very useful and fits with the criteria that the Ministry of Education. More importantly it fills the gaps in the preexisting programs. We started to train and prepare professors and scale the program all over Kosovo and the region. This was one of my biggest challenges, with difficulties convincing the Ministries of Education that such programs and its accreditation are indeed necessary in our schools.

### **In which way do you think gender plays a role for the topic of dealing with the past?**

Actually, this is one of the most sensitive issues when dealing with gender, especially in mentalities like the one of Kosovo and the rest of the region which are dominated by a lot of patriarchal elements. The attitudes and behaviors of the current generation of young men in Kosovo and the Balkans are influenced by the fact that they were born during

*On Human Rights Day: Boys from the "Be a Man Club" are cooking in the pedestrian zone "Mother Theresa" in Pristina under the slogan, "Who says that boys can't cook?"*



or immediately after the Yugoslav wars. Young men have come of age in a time of tumultuous post-conflict rebuilding. Militarized versions of masculinities are still present, as are tensions around socio-cultural and political identities. This broader backdrop plays a fundamental role in shaping young men's ideas on masculinities.

The Young Men Initiative enlists young men to make a change in the world they live in. It challenges them to become modern men who express their masculinities in a healthy way.

It is nevertheless still a great challenge to explain some of the basic ideas on gender equality to people who were raised under such rigid norms.

### **The Young Men Initiative (YMI)**

The Boys and Men as Allies in Violence Prevention and Gender Transformation in the Western Balkans or Young Men Initiative (YMI) seeks to build on national strategies to address gender inequalities by addressing social norms and harmful masculinities impacting boys and men in the countries of Serbia, Kosovo, Bosnia & Herzegovina and Albania. The project goal is to promote healthy, non-violent and gender equitable lifestyles amongst boys and men (and girls and women) participating in the program.

*Additional information is available at: <http://www.youngmeninitiative.net/en/>*



# Behave like a man!



***Vojislav Arsić** is the founder of Centre E8 in Belgrade. He believes in non-formal education and “learning by doing”. He works as a trainer in several areas, and enjoys using theatre methods in education the most. He is one of the creators of the “Be a man” programme through which young men promote gender equality and non-violent behaviour, and create a new image of the “Balkan man”.*

*The topic of gender equality is often perceived as “women’s business” and mixed up with feminism. Men’s roles are rarely questioned and rethought. However, their inclusion into processes that work towards a more equal society is crucial.*

What does it mean to apply a “gender perspective” to the work with young men? Gender – as opposed to sex – relates to different, socially conditioned ways in which men and women have learned to think and behave. That is the way in which these roles, usually stereotypical roles, are learned and reinforced. We sometimes assume that the way in which boys and men behave is “natural” and that “boys will always be boys”. It is not easy to change the way in which we raise and see boys. However, it has the potential to transform gender relations and reduce numerous challenges that men and women face.

Research has shown that the ability to understand and express emotional stress in a non-violent way constitutes a factor of protection against various problems faced by young men during their development. Young men are thus vulnerable when they feel limited in expressing feelings related to unfavourable circumstances and stressful events in their lives.

Our societies have assumed for years how young men feel. We most frequently assume that they are fine and that they have less needs than girls. In some other circumstances we assume that they are difficult to work with, aggressive and unconcerned for their lives. We frequently see them as perpetrators of violence against other young men, themselves, and women without stopping in order to analyse the ways in which the society frequently ignores violence committed by young men. For their healthy development, new findings and approaches require a more careful understanding of their needs and the way in which young men socialise.

Just as with other aspects of life and health, gender norms have an impact on the emotional and mental health of young men. Social expectations that promote the idea that “real men” have to be “strong” and “brave” may lead to situations in which young men hide their fear, sorrow and even kindness and may lead to situations in which they do not ask for help when they need it. Denial or suppression of tensions and problems as well as difficulties in discussing feelings related to these can again lead to violent and self-destructive behaviour.

In Serbia, just like in many other societies, there is frequently one or more versions of masculinities or expectations considered the right or dominant way a man should behave; it is called hegemonic masculinity. This hegemonic masculinity is being idealised, becoming a way of submission and discrimination against men who are different than the majority. By analysing different surroundings, we frequently see many similarities in the definition of masculinity and the way in which men are expected to behave. For example, many cultures support the idea that a real man is the head of home and the protector of his family and community. But we never ask ourselves how men feel in these prescribed roles. Boys are frequently raised in such a way to possess skills needed for the role of a protector, to be aggressive and prone to competition. They are also frequently raised in such a way to believe in strong codes of “honour” that oblige them to compete or to use violence to prove their manliness. Those boys who are interested in household chores such as cooking, cleaning or taking care of their younger sibling who easily show their feelings or had no sexual relations are frequently subjected to derision and mockery as being weak or not being real men by both their peers and families.

From the moment of birth, social roles related to one’s biological difference are assigned. One can hardly find a gender-neutral gift at the shop for children. For girls, toys such as dolls, kitchen toys, cleaning elements, microphones are always in pink. And on the other hand, guns, cars or soldiers for boys, and of course, in blue. So, while we are still unaware of what and who we are, we do know what colours we should use and what toys we should play with.

While growing up, young men do not fantasize about being perpetrators of violence beating their wives or friends, they frequently dream about greater things, about becoming pilots, doctors or travelling the world. Ask yourselves how many times you heard some clear messages as to how you should behave as a man or woman while growing up. Gender is such an important cultural construct that learning about it is not needed. All messages around us tell us how to behave and we simply adopt such behaviour. On the other hand, nobody teaches us about gender and we have no filter for messages reaching us.

In order to be able to work on the transformation of masculinity, we have to first understand who young men of today are, how they become what they are and who is responsible for that. At that moment we will understand that we as a society have this responsibility and in order to contribute to the transformation of the notion of masculinity, we have to assume that responsibility. Gender equality is not a biological matter, but rather a set of knowledge that leads us to an equal and fair society. In order to work towards this society, men and young men need to be included into the process. If men are part of the problem, they also have to be part of the solution.

# The Survivors A

## For Their Righ

*On December 2, 2015, TRIAL organized a round table discussion in Sarajevo on the exercise of the right to*

*compensation of war crimes victims in criminal proceedings.*

I first met Ana B. in 2012, a connection made through close colleagues at a women's rights NGO. (Ana B is a pseudonym used by TRIAL when discussing the above case in public.) I immediately understood that she was a mild tempered woman but also that she was determined on insisting her rights that have been denied for more than 20 years. Despite visible determination that was a direct result of the support she received from her family members, she also needed professional support. And that is what TRIAL provided for her.

From our conversations later, I found out that she was raped as an underage in the beginning of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina in June 1992. Ana B found the courage to report the crime to the police in Kotor Varoš immediately thereafter. She and her family made statements and clearly identified the perpetrators. However, criminal proceedings were never brought by the District Prosecutor's office. The perpetrators lived freely convinced that they would never be brought to justice and account for the crimes they perpetrated more than twenty years ago. On the other hand, Ana B was no longer convinced that she could ever hope for any positive outcome after such a long time. With no proper investigation and prosecution for crimes committed against her, nor any form of reparation, she was one of many survivors that stopped believing that justice will be brought. TRIAL led several discussions followed by joint activities with responsible judicial institutions and other state mechanisms; the main goal was to ensure access to justice for Ana B. and provide her with full information on her case.

TRIAL provided legal counsel and, in cooperation with other organizations, psychological support, and advocated on her behalf, putting needed pressure on proper judicial institutions to take actions. An indictment against two persons was finally brought and confirmed two years later. With TRIAL's firm conviction to advocate for the rights of war crimes survivors, the organization hired a lawyer to represent Ana B. for the right to proper compensation for the trauma she has suffered. At the

end of 2014, Ana B. testified before the court. After several years of legal battles, the Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina finally sentenced the two soldiers of the Army of Republika Srpska (VRS) to 10 years of prison each in a first-instance ruling for the war crime of rape that they had committed against the minor girl. For the first time in the history of criminal proceedings in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Court provided compensation for a war crime victim ordering the accused to pay pecuniary compensation to the injured party.

Ana B. later explained in her own words what it meant for her to work with TRIAL: "My fight would not have been possible without the efforts and support of TRIAL. During the entire time we communicated I felt a deeply sincere relationship; a kind that is only shared among women. The ruling and decision of the Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina means a lot for me, especially since I had lost hope that perpetrators would ever be brought to justice. My fight has shown me that justice is attainable and that war crimes are not subject to statute of limitations."

Ana B.'s case and its ruling are part of a series of important cases that were brought before judicial institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and for the survivor and her family, it is the most important one. After many years of waiting the ruling and compensation brought a grain of satisfaction to the victims and their families who had been waiting for justice for many years. The persistence to fight for exercising their rights



# Ask ts!

turned out to be the right one. The trial and the punishment of perpetrators has meant that the state has acknowledged its duty to protect rights and its citizens and are starting to take care of the women who have lost so much during the war. The ruling while verifying facts is also a formal and legal recognition of the suffering victims have experienced.

Ultimately, it also brings survivors of gender and sexual violence during the war one step closer to gaining their rightful dignity back.

In addition to Ana B there was another important ruling around the same time, for the case against Slavko Savić. He was sentenced before the court of Bosnia and Herzegovina several days before Ana B's ruling. Both of these cases are the first in the history of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the broader region where wartime rape survivors and war crime victims were provided compensation as part of criminal proceedings for the damage they suffered. Such cases thus have an even greater significance as they pave the road to justice for many other victims who are still waiting for their rights.

During the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1992-1995) rape was used as means for ethnic cleansing and increasing inter-ethnic hatred. A considerable number of important sexual violence and rape cases from the war were prosecuted before the Hague Tribunal (ICTY) and the courts in Bosnia and Herzegovina. However, many individuals guilty of perpetrating such crimes still enjoy impunity.

Some progress has been made in Bosnia and Herzegovina in regards to the exercise of rights of war victims and wartime sexual violence survivors. As long as survivors and their families are not exercising their full rights throughout the whole country, their marginalisation and discrimination will still be present. Associations of victims and NGOs have been making efforts for years for the large number of survivors who have been waiting to exercise their guaranteed rights for many years. For reconciliation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the first in a series of steps needed is the exercise of rights for the victims of war.

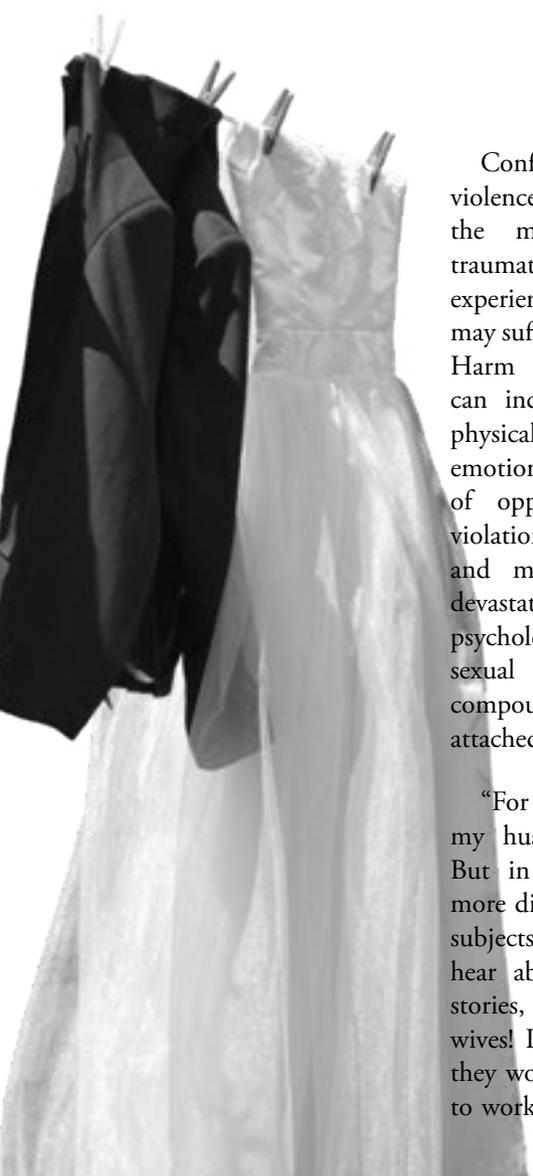
*Established in 2002 in Geneva, TRIAL is an organisation with the mandate of putting law to work for victims of international crimes (genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, torture and forced disappearance), fighting against impunity of perpetrators of the gravest international crimes. The organisation is representing the interests of victims before Swiss courts and numerous international bodies for human rights protection and it is also working on raising awareness of the government and public regarding the need for a more efficient national and international judicial system for prosecuting crimes. Over the past years, it provided legal assistance to 360 victims through 145 international procedures regarding Algeria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Burundi, Libya, Nepal, Russia and Tunisia. The work in Bosnia and Herzegovina started 2007 in the framework of provision of support to missing persons' families, and as of 2010 the organisation is also providing support to wartime sexual violence survivors. The activities of the office in Bosnia and Herzegovina are focused on provision of free legal aid to victims of war crimes before domestic and international bodies and human rights protection mechanisms. Through strategic litigation in the field of human rights protection the organisation contributes to the improvement of the overall state of war victims in Bosnia and Herzegovina and exerts pressure on authorities in order to make them respect their human rights. TRIAL also raises awareness of the public and advocates justice by exercising pressure on competent authorities for an active involvement in solution finding for problems faced by the survivors.*



**Selma Korjenic** joined TRIAL in August 2010 as a Human Rights Officer in charge of the Program for Support of Wartime Sexual Violence Survivors, and as Head of Program in their Bosnia and Herzegovina office in November 2014. Before joining TRIAL, she worked at the Research and Documentation Centre Sarajevo as a Project Manager on issues related to the causes and consequences of the Bosnia and Herzegovina War (1992-1995). Selma graduated from Sarajevo Faculty of Political Sciences in Sociology and she is currently finishing her Master's degree at the same university. She is a specialist in international human rights mechanisms and procedures and in the field of transitional justice, as well as in direct work with wartime survivors. Her working languages are Bosnian/Serbian /Croatian and English.

# Redress for Survivors of Conflict-related Sexual Violence in Kosovo

*Significant progress has been achieved in providing access to justice and redress for survivors; a legal framework for reparations is being finalized; and the taboo of speaking about the issue is being slowly tackled by various awareness raising initiatives. However, a remaining challenge is targeting the full variety of needs of survivors.*



Conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) is often the most horrific and traumatic of the many experiences an individual may suffer during a conflict. Harm and consequences can include long-standing physical, mental and emotional trauma, loss of opportunities, further violations of human rights, and moral damage. The devastating physical and psychological impacts of sexual violence are often compounded by the stigma attached to it.

“For me it was easier as my husband is educated. But in some areas, it is more difficult to raise these subjects. They don’t want to hear about other people’s stories, let alone their own wives! If they would know they would not allow them to work... they would lock

them in the house without any support,” said a survivor from Kosovo.

In Kosovo, as in many places, conflict-related sexual violence has been difficult to speak about. Survivors have self-censored, or been censored by those around them for fear of bringing shame upon themselves and their families.

“We need to educate them [people] that for women the war didn’t bring us flowers, but suffering. And that the same fate could have befallen their wives or mothers. It is very difficult because if you touch the honour of an Albanian woman and if a criminal sexually abuses a woman, he directly affects the family’s honour. And so a man should not openly accept these things,” said an ethnic Albanian survivor.

In the aftermath of the conflict, a few organisations quietly provided lifesaving services to survivors of CRSV. Survivors of different ethnic groups, mainly women and several men have received some emergency mental and physical health services.

Civil Society led public discussions to recognize and document survivors’ experiences and needs date to 2003. From 2012, these efforts gained momentum. Today, few -if any- other issue has received the same across the board recognition and support. The Office of the President, Office of the Prime Minister, Ministries, Parliament, political

parties, civil society and international supporters have pledged support to uphold the rights of survivors of CRSV. The establishment in March 2014 of the National Council on the Survivors of Sexual Violence during the War, by then President Atifete Jahjaga, served to coordinate these responses, highlight and address the needs and rights of CRSV survivors. UN Women has and continues to support these processes.

Under international law, victims of CRSV have the right to remedy and reparation. This includes equal and effective access to justice; adequate, effective and prompt reparation for harm suffered; and access to information concerning violations and reparation mechanisms.

Steps have been taken towards ensuring access to justice. As competencies for prosecutions are transferred from the EU Rule of Law Mission to Kosovo authorities, emphasis has been placed on facilitating the investigation and prosecution of CRSV. Among its many achievements, the Council and its members created an access to justice plan for victims of CRSV that is being implemented by the Ministry of Justice and partners.

A legal framework to establish reparations for survivors of CRSV began with the March 2014 amendment of the basic law providing benefits to veterans and civilian

victims. In February 2016 a regulation came into force to implement and establish an independent Commission to verify the status of CRSV survivors enabling access to individual benefits. The Office of the Prime Minister is leading the practical establishment of the Commission, a Secretariat has been selected, and steps to functionalize the Commission are underway.

The current legal framework which the Commission will implement is a large step in the right direction to recognize survivors of CRSV right to remedy and reparation. However, it is yet to take into account the full variety of needs of CRSV survivors. For example, under the law survivors of CRSV (and their families) will not receive access to healthcare in Kosovo or education and training opportunities which are critical to transforming their lives. The Council has sought to supplement the benefits provided under the legal framework for CRSV survivors. President Jahjaga signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Ministry of Health to enable survivors' access to health insurance and provide support to service providers working with survivors; and the Council piloted an economic empowerment program for survivors in partnership with the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare. The President and Council members have also focused many initiatives towards breaking the previously deafening

silence surrounding CRSV and survivors in Kosovo, a challenge the legal framework is not yet able to address.

UN Women has been working with survivors of CRSV in Kosovo to hear and prioritize their voices to guide the development of further targeted reparative efforts. These voices are the focus of a soon-to-be published report by UN Women. While all survivors have the right to remedy and reparation, their needs are not uniform. Though access to health care and financial means are top priorities for many, widows, single mothers and those married to the war injured or people with disabilities face additional difficulties. Survivors with children focus primarily on their ability to feed and educate their children, in the hope they can provide a better life for them. Survivors want an official apology and acknowledgement of their suffering and their rights from parliament. The report also outlines the important steps that have been taken in Kosovo to uphold survivors' rights to remedy and reparation, and proposes measures that can supplement those efforts to fully accommodate the variety of survivors' needs to make reparations as transformative and inclusive as possible. A key recommendation in the report is for the meaningful participation of survivors in the design and decision-making of all processes that affect them.

*Globally, UN Women supports states fulfill their obligations to ensure the right to remedy and reparation for survivors of CRSV. In Kosovo, UN Women has assisted the development of an action plan to implement UNSCR 1325, of which one objective is the provision of redress for survivors of CRSV. UN Women also supported the development and amendments to the legal framework to recognize survivors of CRSV, supported the Council and service providers working with survivors, and is currently supporting the establishment process for the Commission to verify survivors.*



**Siobhan Hobbs** is a Gender Justice Specialist at UN Women and author of the forthcoming report on designing a reparation programme for survivors of CRSV in Kosovo.

**Nita Gojani** is the Project Manager of the joint UN Women and EU gender-sensitive transitional justice project in Kosovo.

# Unequal

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Women are very rarely included into post-war peace processes and are left out when it comes to rebuilding societies. The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom has decided to bring about change.

During conflicts gender-based violence is widespread and women suffer greatly. However, women's experiences of violence and gender-based violence, and their active participation in peace making and peace building are not mutually exclusive.

Unfortunately the involvement of women in different phases of peace building tends to be reduced to their experiences of victimhood while their active participation in peace making is ignored. This dichotomy between the understanding of women as victims and women as agents of change is further reflected in formal peace negotiations where space for meaningful participation of women is seriously impaired, but also during the post-conflict periods where women are often confined to working within areas considered to be less politically sensitive or 'traditionally' women's issues.

Since 2013 Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) is leading an initiative that focuses on the importance of taking into consideration experiences and empirical knowledge of women who went through an armed conflict and struggled for women's rights. This initiative combines WILPF's work in the areas of human rights, and women, peace and security, trying to change the dominant narrative of women as victims. This initiative is an international collaboration started as a cooperation between activists for women's rights from Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) and Syria, and was thus named Women Organizing for Change in Syria and BiH. Since then it has grown to include activists from other countries in an attempt to galvanize and benefit from experiences of women from diverse conflict settings, and empower ourselves in developing our own strategies for demanding and accessing social justice.

# Peace

## Pushing for the participation of women

As the Syrian revolution turned into a war and the international community and Syrian warring parties started rounding up for peace-negotiations it became more and more apparent that women of Syria would not be represented in peace talks – despite the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 and numerous lessons from other conflicts about what happens when women are left out. A lot of these lessons we have learnt (and are still learning) from the Bosnian example. BiH is a prime example of how easy it is to lose space for women's political, economic, and social engagement and how fast pushing back women's position in the society can happen. When women demanded access to justice or economic and social rights during and immediately after the war, or de facto equality, they were told too many times by the international community and domestic political elites that “it is not time yet, it is too early”. But we see now that the space for political engagement and political positions must be taken immediately, even in the course of the war itself, in order to maintain that room and participation after the conflict.

One of the most important spaces that need to be claimed is at the negotiating table. When the political elite, the male political elite,



negotiates peace they don't only negotiate a cease-fire, they also negotiate a vision of the post-war society. The approach to creating that vision taken by key actors in peace negotiations (UN, regional systems, and the majority of mediators) is grounded in a narrow understanding of the armed groups as both the problem and part of the solution, making them the only "legitimate" party in negotiating peace, thus excluding groups with the greatest investment in peace. This is evident by the level of participation by women and civil society in the most recent peace and transition processes, in Syria and Libya, but can also be seen if we look at the peace negotiations that took place 20 years ago in BiH. In BiH it was the women who led the difficult process of patching back society. It was the women who pushed for their right to know the whereabouts of the missing ones, they were the first ones crossing the borders to the other communities and initiating a dialogue, they were the first returnees, they demanded prosecution of war criminals and provided testimonies on wartime sexual violence so that the perpetrators could be prosecuted. But when the time came to transpose these practical experiences into laws and policies, constitutional amendments etc. no women were invited to the table.

### **Feminist solidarity dialogue across conflict lines and borders**

The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, together with its partners and women activists from BiH, since June 2013, has worked on analyzing the processes that took place in BiH and capturing both successful and less successful strategies used by civil society organizations and women organizations in their struggle to overcome the faulted system created by the Dayton Peace Agreement.

WILPF gathered some 40 BiH women that were active in different times and segments during the last 20 years. We gathered them to sit down and discuss what they did, how they did it and what was the outcome. In these meetings, we looked at access to justice, peace negotiations, transitional justice, and sexual violence in conflict, economic and social rights, the return process and violence against women in the post-war BiH.

Parallel to women from BiH meeting in their thematic groups, WILPF organized workshops with women organizations from Syria to begin

discussions about what peace needs to look like in Syria, occasionally feeding into their discussions some of the early findings from the Bosnian women's meetings. We wanted to provide for a space where this particular set of experiences from BiH could interact with the Syrian experience – to learn and draw lessons from each other – but also to put these different experiences together in a coherent picture of what women's activism in conflict and post-conflict settings looks like, and the different spaces that need to be created for their participation.

For that purpose we set up a groundbreaking feminist solidarity conference in February 2014. The outcome of this conference is an incredible place to start, but there is still much to do ahead to capitalize on the momentum that was built out of the four days. The connections and growth that formed from the discussions and self-reflection throughout the entire process confirms the importance of utilizing women's empirical knowledge and existing experiences in creating a strong feministic international front for peace.

More information about the conference, the conference report, as well as information about other activities of the initiative Women organizing for change can be found at:

*BHS:* <http://womenorganizingforchange.org>

*ENG:* <http://womenorganizingforchange.org/en/>

***Nela Porobic Isakovic** is the Project Coordinator for the initiative Women Organising for Change in Syria, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. She has been with Women's International League for Peace and Freedom since 2013. The main area of her work is Women, Peace and Security, with a focus on Conflict-related Sexual Violence, and Transitional Justice.*



**Bukurie Mustafa** works at the Institute for Cultural and Spiritual Heritage of Albanians in Macedonia since 2008. In 2014, the Scientific Council of the Institute honored her with the title of Senior Research Associate. She continues to work on the topics of language and ethnology, and at the same time is leading projects that are fostering cultural heritage of ethnic Albanians in Macedonia.

## Let's (not) talk about **sex**:

# Reflections about taboos in Albanian language

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**S**imilar to other traditional Balkan societies, the Albanian society is constructed upon moral principles that are determined by the collective. The individual, as a member of the collective, behaves according to those principles. These principles are applicable to the functioning of a family as it is considered to be the fundamental cell of the society with defined relations among its members: husband, wife, and children. Given such relations, the role of the housewife and educator is traditionally assigned to women. Women are the ones who should

see that the children are reared in accordance with family educational values. Nevertheless, as children grow up, these roles change. A father is concerned with the sons, whereas a mother is concerned with the daughters. She has to get the daughters ready to marry and to pass these family values onto them. The main principle of such behavior is based on the lens of traditional moral values of learning, which are: forbidden, shameful, moral, immoral, and sin etc. These are the values of a so-called Balkan mentality. The system based on the moral values has given rise to taboos, which are neither discussed in the family nor in the society. They have even conditioned the emergence of a special form of speech that does not call things by their names but instead uses code-names that imply figurative entendres about intimate affairs.

The subject of intimacy between husband and wife is a collective taboo and as such, is only discussed within the kind. Therein stem expressions like “men’s talk” or “women’s cackle”. Likewise, the expression “the talking goes around the belt” is a synonym of

the belt used for breeches or women's pants, and sexual intercourse. One often hears this expression when men or even women talk. Usually, linguistic comparisons arise from things or actions taken out of our daily lives and are directly related to what they do, considering the division of labor between women and men.

Taboos of this nature include women who choose manners and ways to communicate that are transformed into codes and a characteristic terminology for a way of speaking, distinguished as women's talk. This form of speech, woven with the moral principles of a traditional culture is usually indirect and figurative and aware of the place and role it bears. Under such circumstances, it naturally creates a coded vocabulary for things that the society considers shameful, and finds varied ways to communicate such topics. The euphemisms and metaphors are transformed into linguistic expressions that talk about certain subjects such as intimacy, creating a distinct vocabulary of folk speech that is based on tradition. The ethno-cultural dimension is also relevant. Expressions such as "She finished her chores early in the morning"; "She has already done her chores at dawn"; or "The cauldrons were rattling tonight" allude to an intimate night with the husband. Allusions to sexual encounters can also be put forth as questions, such as: "Did you take a bath?" or "Did you mess up the bed sheets?"

Communication between men is no different when they talk about intimate affairs. Uttered through the use of special terms or figurative expressions known only to them, they again refer to "work" when discussing intimate affairs: "The field was not ploughed"; "Your plow must work to be able to plough the garden/field"; and "Did you water the garden". You may even hear a more embellished style of speech like, "Did you plant flowers so that flowers may bloom". The reference to flowers blooming implies to having a baby.

It is clear from various types of speech that language is related to the cultural and collective mentality. A mullah addressing his congregation about conjugal life would use terms taken from the folk speech avoiding direct language for intimate affairs. On the other hand, a Biology teacher would speak to students using medical Latin terms. Sadly, the Albanian collective mentality doesn't really offer any other options to address the topic in a less morally loaded way.

Nowadays we can no longer talk about a clash between the traditional and the modern in the Albanian society and families. Transformation and change cannot ever be completed. Instead, the change is gradually keeping alive the gap that connects the past and contemporary.





# news & updates

## Now Available: Feminist Conversations - History, Memory and Difference

*forum*ZFD Kosovo, Alter Habitus - Institute for Studies in Society and Culture, and the University Program for Gender Studies and Research, and University of Prishtina are publishing the transcript of a day-long panel “Feminist Conversations: History, Memory and Difference” on February 27th 2016.

The panel featured leading feminist activists from Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Kosovo. They shared their experiences organizing and mobilizing resistance against war and violent nationalist politics, and recalled public interventions and actions before, during and after the 1990s. Women actions included cooperation across ethnic divides and borders. This public activism – forged through cooperation, solidarity and sisterhood, as well as contestation – fostered the development of a feminist movement in the region. And the movement put at the center, women as agents of change, politics, and power.

The transcript highlights the experiences of struggle and resistance, peace building efforts and the ways in which the mobilization of women during wartime affected the transformation of societies. The publication aims to highlight experiences of activists on the frontline in the 1990s for the broader public.

The panel discussants include: Igo Rugova, Sevdije Ahmeti, Lepa Mladjenović, Shukrije Gashi, Staša Zajović, Nazlije Bala, Nela Pamuković, and Daša Duhašek. Linda Gusia, Nita Luci and Vjollca Krasniqi moderated the thought provoking and very emotional panel.

‘Feminist Conversations - History, Memory and Difference’ was the 5th Atelier within the framework of the Memory Mapping Kosovo project, exploring official but contested memory sites and past events. Memory Mapping Kosovo aims to produce a new multi-perspective understanding of memory and memorialization in Kosovo.

The transcript is available on the website [www.dwp-balkan.org](http://www.dwp-balkan.org). For questions and remarks please contact Korab Krasniqi ([krasniqi@forumzfd.de](mailto:krasniqi@forumzfd.de)) or Linda Gusia ([lindagusia@gmail.com](mailto:lindagusia@gmail.com)).

## next issue

The 6th issue of *Balkan Perspectives* will explore nationalism and ethnocentrism in the Western Balkans. The essays will analyze: (1) How nationalism and ethnocentrism are contributing to the revision of the past; (2) How they are spread in our societies; and (3) What kind of mechanisms could prevent them.

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In the Western Balkans, the focus is on projects in the field of dealing with the past and on fostering dialogue between opposing parties. This includes school mediation projects, the support of civil society, or enhancing media capacities for a more constructive approach to dealing with the past.

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