

**Feminist Activism in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia:
Political Potentials for Social Change**

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Abstract

The contemporary feminist movements in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia are rooted in the 1990s wars, which led to the break-up of ex-Yugoslavia. While all three countries share a mutual history of belonging to a vanished state, their paths have diverged in political and economic terms. This difference is also reflected in the feminist movements with respect to their political goals, tactics and development. The objective of the study is to compare and contrast feminist activism in the three countries in a period when the region of South East Europe is witnessing regressive trends, such as the return to nationalism, the rise of neo-conservatism and populism, and re-patriarchalization. It will be argued here that the increasing marginalization of political engagement of feminist activists is affected by broader political and social developments, combined with the NGO-ization of women's rights organizations, which restricts their possibilities. Feminist resistance in the three countries will be researched through the case study approach, including interviews with members of the feminist movements in order to explore their experiences, motivations and expectations. The research will be situated in social movement and feminist theories as well as theories of citizenship and practices of contentious politics.

Keywords: *Feminist Activism, Social Movements, Political Regression, South East Europe*

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Research

Feminist activism in the Western Balkans emerged in its contemporary form during and after the 1990s wars. This was the time when the first civil society organizations appeared, as well as international donors that began to fund projects that targeted women's rights. In the case of the three countries used as case studies here – Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Croatia – the feminist activist movement started out as a form of anti-war activism. Numerous women's Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) were created after the conflicts, with the primary goal of bringing attention to women's human rights violations in the aftermath of the wars, primarily war rapes but also ethnic cleansing, displacement of people and loss of property. Feminist activism in the three countries remains heavily un-researched. Yet, its specificities offer clues as to why such movements are moving at a different pace when it comes to protecting women's human rights. They have practiced various strategies of resistance, including some that served the purpose to facilitate EU (European Union) accession in the case of Croatia or to help the accession process when it comes to Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Several scholars have written about social and political activism in the three countries from different aspects. Ankica Čakardić has examined the position of women in socialist ex-Yugoslavia, comparing it to that of the successor states in their transition to liberal democracy¹. Aida Bagić has dealt with the phenomenon of NGO-ization² and how it affects woman's organizations and their potentials to foster social change. With respect to Croatia, Paul Stubbs has developed a model encompassing what he terms "three waves" of activism,³ whereas Nicole Butterfield has approached activism within the context of EU accession.⁴ Elissa Helms' work has engaged with the topic of post-war women's activism in Bosnia and Herzegovina⁵ and Zilka Spahić Šiljak wrote about the life stories of women peace builders in

¹ Ankica Čakardić, "Women's Struggles and Political Economy: From Yugoslav Self-management to Neoliberal Austerity," in *Welcome to the Desert of Post-Socialism. Radical Politics After Yugoslavia*, eds. Srećko Horvat and Igor Štiks (London and New York: Verso, 2016).

² Aida Bagić, *International Assistance for Women's Organizing in South Eastern Europe: From Groups and Initiatives to NGOs* (Budapest: Central European University, Center for Policy Studies, Open Society Institute, 2001/2002).

³ Paul Stubbs, "Networks, organisations, movements: Narratives and shapes of three waves of activism in Croatia," *Polemos* 15, No. 2 (2012): 11–32.

⁴ Nicole Butterfield, "Discontents of Professionalisation: Sexual Politics and Activism in Croatia in the Context of EU Accession," in *LGBT Activism and Europeanisation in the Post-Yugoslav Space. On the Rainbow Way to Europe*, ed. Bojan Bilić (London: Palgrave Studies in European Political Sociology, 2016).

⁵ Elissa Helms, *Innocence and Victimhood: Gender, Nation and Women's Activism in Postwar Bosnia-Herzegovina* (Madison and London: University of Wisconsin Press, 2013).

the country.⁶ From the Serbian perspective, Marina Blagojević has analyzed the role of women in the 1996–1997 protests in Serbia, which prepared the ground for the overthrow of president Slobodan Milošević⁷ in 2000 and about the women’s movement in Belgrade in the 1990s.⁸

While these studies illuminate different forms of activism in the three countries, they either center on social movements, in general, or on events and issues that have affected feminist activism, in particular. No comprehensive attempt has been made to study individual feminist movements in the three countries and compare their activities from a transnational angle. The main focus here is on the new political challenges that these movements face as a part of functioning liberal democracies in a time of political nationalist regression and on the possibilities of the feminists to advance their progressive social agenda.

This study deals with feminist activism in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia by exploring their interrelated histories, legacies and current political contexts. All three share a mutual history as a part of ex Yugoslavia but also carry a troublesome legacy of the 1990s wars (predominantly in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and, to a lesser extent, in Croatia and Serbia). Moreover, they share an almost identical language as well as interconnectedness in terms of nationalities that make up the population,⁹ reflecting a multitude of overlapping cultural practices. Their paths, however, diverged after the conflicts. Croatia became part of the EU in 2013 and has achieved some political stability. While both Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia want to join the European Union, the former remains a quasi EU protectorate and Serbia maintains its strong relationship with Russia. Serbia is advancing more quickly on the European path (even if it will not join the EU any time soon) than Bosnia and Herzegovina, which has been in a domestic political deadlock for years.

The creation of women’s civil society organizations introduced a new principle of civic organizing for societies that were in transition from socialism to liberal democracy. Yet, after more than 20 years, the women’s movement has been deeply affected by what has been termed NGO-ization or depoliticization and bureaucratization due to donor policies that discourage feminist activism and public agitation. However, it is worth noting that there has

⁶ Zilka Spahić Šiljak, *Shining Humanity: Life Stories of Women in Bosnia and Herzegovina* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014).

⁷ Marina Blagojević, “Duhovito je biti žena: seksizam u protestima 96/97” [It is Funny to be a Woman: Sexism in Protests 96/96], in *Mapiranje mizoginije u Srbiji: Diskursi i prakse [Mapping Misogyny in Serbia: Discourses and Practices]*, ed. Marina Blagojević (Belgrade: Asocijacija za žensku inicijativu, 2002).

⁸ Marina Blagojević, *Ka vidljivoj ženskoj istoriji. Ženski pokret u Beogradu 90-tih* [Towards a visible women's history. Women's movement in Belgrade in the 90s] (Belgrade: Centar za ženske studije, istraživanja i komunikaciju, 1998).

⁹ Members of all three nationalities live in all three countries. Bosnians and Herzegovinians and Serbs are ethnic minorities in Croatia, whereas Bosnians and Herzegovinians and Croats are minorities in Serbia. In Bosnia and Herzegovina the three constitutive nationalities, as defined by the Constitution of BiH, are Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats.

been a tradition of feminist activism, based on strong anti-fascist and socialist legacy, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Croatia dating back to World War II. It started with the establishment, in 1942, of the Anti-Fascist Front of Women (AFŽ), which became a very strong women's movement as well as a political organization. It actively took part in the Second World War, as well as in the re-establishment of Yugoslavia at the end of the conflict.¹⁰ The legacy of this women's movement which lasted until 1953¹¹ remains present in feminist activism even today, even if it differs in intensity across the three countries. Feminist activists often refer to the activities of the AFŽ when they want to illustrate how women's rights were part of state policies during Yugoslavia and were implied by law (for example, the right to abortion was granted to women in Yugoslavia through the Constitution already in 1974), as opposed to the current contestation and/or neglect of many women's rights.

Also, all three countries are currently embracing neo-conservative political trends that are characterized by re-traditionalization¹² and re-patriarchalization. The term "re-traditionalization" is closely related to that of "anti-modernization" as defined by Pieter Leroy and Jan van Tatenhove. They describe it as "a societal and scientific reaction to the unsolved 'reality problems' in the modernization model."¹³ According to it, "Western values" and the philosophy of human rights have not brought prosperity and the return to traditional values can amend the situation. Similarly, "re-patriarchalization" reflects a social sentiment, which favours the restrictions of women's rights, and the forces that seek to put such a political program into effect by limiting abortion rights, increasing pro-religious and pro-natal advocacy, and by espousing traditionalist notions of heterosexual marriage and obligatory childbearing, insisting on binary gender roles, etc. As Riesebrodt writes, one of the varieties of re-patriarchalization stems from the "dissatisfaction of men and women with the new roles and social relations offered by 'modern' life-styles"¹⁴. We can observe the trends of re-patriarchalization through this prism, as it reflects the notion that female subordination to male authority is acknowledged, but partnership and mutual responsibility remain stressed.¹⁵

Thus, the transnational similarities with respect to the political and social context, economic situation and historical heritage need to be taken into account in the research. It is true that

¹⁰ Arhiv antifašističke borbe žena Bosne i Hercegovine i Jugoslavije [Archive of the Antifascist Fight of Women of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Yugoslavia], CRVENA Association for Culture and Art, <http://afzarhiv.org/da-zivi-afz> (Accessed 3 March 2018).

¹¹ AFŽ was (self)abolished in September 1953 in Belgrade.

¹² Pieter Leroy and Jan van Tatenhove, "Political Modernization Theory and Environmental Politics," in *Environment and Global Modernity*, eds. Gert Spaargaren, Arthur P J Mol and Frederick H Buttel (London: SAGE Publications Inc, 2000).

¹³ Pieter Leroy and Jan van Tatenhove, "Political Modernization Theory and Environmental Politics": 189.

¹⁴ Martin Riesebrodt, "The Political Mobilization of Fundamentalist Women: A Paradox?" in *The Political Dimensions of Religion*, ed. Said Arjomand (New York: State University of New York Press, 1993): 254/255.

¹⁵ Ibid, 255.

feminist activism did not develop equally in the three countries. But 26 years after the dissolution of Yugoslavia, it remains one of the rare things that connects activists across borders who want to make a change in their political system and social imaginaries in order to ensure that women's human rights are fully respected.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The feminist movements in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia predominantly share the same goals and advocate the same things. These mainly include gender equality, gender mainstreaming, elimination of gender-based violence, and increased visibility and presence of women in public life, especially in terms of political representation.¹⁶ Yet, they also differ significantly from each other. Their main differences are reflected in the level of development, tactics used to obtain goals, and forms of cooperation with the official political framework. Therefore, the main problem is to study (a) when, how and why the feminist activist movements went their own separate ways in terms of these variables; (b) and what affected this change in pace and direction.

There are several reasons why the feminist activist movements developed differently, but the one most obvious is reflected in the level of economic development of the three countries after the 1990s wars. Croatia, which together with Slovenia was the most economically developed republic in ex-Yugoslavia, rushed to the forefront of improving the state of women's rights after joining the EU. A strong Croatian feminist activist movement developed in Croatia. It is now moving towards non-institutionalization and leaning towards left-wing principles of action, with emphasis on the importance of labour rights and protection of abortion rights consistent with the legacies of socialism. Yet, at the same time, it is facing conservative challenges, such as the threat to abortion rights. Serbia is still in the process of EU accession that is declaratively supported by its political elite. However, domestic violence and femicide are on the rise, along with an increase in re-traditionalization and re-patriarchalization, not to mention homophobia and xenophobia. Bosnia and Herzegovina ranks last among these countries, both within the context of the EU accession trajectory and the lack of economic development. Feminist activism in terms of visible and public acts of protesting and/or contention is virtually non-existent. Instead, feminist NGOs usually focus on advocating women's rights through the institutional framework.

Feminist activists in all three countries face obstruction and resistance from various political actors who are determined to undermine their goals. While adapting to these adverse conditions, the feminist movements have adopted several forms of civic action, which have made them capable of fighting in different ways but has also led to exhaustion of ideas

¹⁶ Of course, these are not all the advocacy goals of the feminist activist movements in Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, but the mentioned ones overlap within the movements most acutely.

and/or lack of enthusiasm. This remains one of the main problems of feminist activism: while fighting regressive policies on women rights – and trying to secure funds, as most of the activists do their work as a part of the institutionalized civil society framework – they do not have the time, energy or possibilities to pay equal attention to core problems, such as unpaid labour, discrimination of women in the labour market, as well as discrimination of women who belong to marginalized groups. As a result, their opportunities to act are limited, which has also affected the level of development of their respective activist movements.

1.3. Research Questions

1.3.1 Main Research Questions

Research Question: What are the political potentials of feminist activist movements in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Croatia?

1.3.2 Sub-questions

- What are the social circumstances that are shaping and influencing feminist activism in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Croatia?
- What are the key factors affecting the disproportional development of feminist activism in the three countries?
- What are the most important points of discrepancies in the development and activities of the feminist movements?
- What are the main ideas that shape the feminist movements, and the main events that provide opportunities to advance the feminist agenda?
- What are the potentials of transnational cooperation between the feminist movements?

1.4. Research Objectives

1.4.1 General Objective

The objective of the research is to study the development of the feminist movements in the three countries and to show how activism, as a (potential) political tool, can change the way activism is practiced at a time when the region of South East Europe is witnessing regressive political trends. To assess the political potentials of feminist resistance, the current modes of action prevalent in the women's movements will be explored with the aim of uncovering the difficulties they are facing and the political context that is influencing their struggle.

1.4.2 Specific Objectives

- How do feminists organize themselves in the three countries?

- How do they find courage and energy to engage in activism?
- What is the magnitude of their successes/failures to change the circumstances in their countries that affect the state of women's human rights?
- Why are the feminist movements choosing different forms of action and what is affecting their choices?
- Which feminist groups are part of the feminist activist movement and facilitate feminist activism in these countries?

1.5 Hypotheses

Hypothesis: The political imaginary of the three countries holds one mutual characteristic: the increasing marginalization of political engagement of feminist activists. It will be argued that it can be explained by two developments: (a) broader political and social trends that have resulted in the rise of populism, nationalism, and neo-conservatism; (b) the negative influence of what may be termed NGO-ization of women's rights organizations due to donor policies, which restrict the scope and nature of feminist activism and which deter them from engaging in political action, including public protests.

1.6 Methodology and Methods of Data Collection

1.6.1 Research Design

This research proposal adopts a case study approach in line with the transnational aims of the project. It requires an extensive interviewing process with members of the feminist activist movements in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Croatia in order to answer the research questions and to explore their experiences, motivations and expectations.

The research will also be complemented with interviews with other relevant stakeholders, such as members of political parties, public officials, academics, legal experts, etc. Additionally, a content analysis of laws, news articles, reports, publications, and other relevant materials will be undertaken to provide an insight into the social contexts in which the feminist activists work.

1.6.2 Research Sites

Research activities will take place in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia.

1.6.3 Method of Data Collection

Data will be collected through semi-structured interviews in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia. With respect to interviews with feminist activists, they will be able to share their experiences in a safe environment. Anonymity will be granted to interviewees if requested. Other data collected will include laws, interviews, news articles, reports, publications,

photographs and other data that provide insight into the social and political circumstances that surround the functioning of the feminist movement in these countries.

Suggested questions for interviews:

- How are feminist activist movements responding to the trends of NGO-ization?
- Which tactics and/or strategies of resistance are feminist activist movements using?
- Which political goals unify and which separate the transnational feminist movements?
- Do the feminist activist movements contain any transformative political potential?
- What is the involvement of feminist movements in public protest activities?
- What are the ideological frameworks shared by the feminist movements?
- What are the potentials of transnational cooperation of these movements?
- Do the feminist movements facilitate active citizenship among its members?

1.7 Method of Data Analysis

After the interviews, the data will be analyzed and compiled in order to answer the research questions. Additional documents, such as interviews, laws, news articles, reports and publications, will be analyzed through content and document analysis.

1.8 Contribution/Relevance of the Research

Feminist activism in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia has not been researched or represented enough in mainstream academic, political or media circles. Therefore, the enormous work that has been done by feminist activists in the past 20 plus years remains marginalized. The existing literature centers more on activism as a whole than specifically on feminist activism. A stronger focus on feminist activism is needed to encourage research and scholarship and to analyze the activities of individual women's movements that are facing various limitations in the political and social spheres. This research will add to the body of knowledge about the women's movements in South East Europe by exploring contemporary trends that both facilitate and hinder feminist activism and by evaluating its political potentials. Bearing in mind the mutual legacy of history and the cultural similarities of these three countries, transnational research on feminist activism would provide new insights into modes of action, shapes and forms of resistance and its outcomes.

This research seeks to illuminate different strands of feminist activism in a region often perceived to be only a part of the institutionalized CSO sector whose modes of action are often defined by donor policies. Its purpose is to observe what activism means today for people who choose to practice it in a current political and social environment driven by populist and neo-conservative ideas and by hostility towards the ideas of civil society.

The spectrum of activist initiatives needed to achieve change and protect human rights is

broad, and research on these phenomena in the three countries would provide additional knowledge on the topic. By default, women have a devalued societal position. In the three countries, gender equality is not considered a political goal, and it is still expected of women to occupy traditional gender roles. By initiating activities that help protect women's rights, the activists take on a long-term mission to change the circumstances that would, in the short and long run, violate women's human rights. The research seeks to provide new insights into modes of activism and demonstrate how feminist activism is practiced in specific political and social contexts, and how it can contribute to social change.

1.9 Ethical and Security Considerations

I do not foresee any particular ethical and security considerations that would present obstacles to the research.

All participants will sign an interview form, explaining the research in detail. By signing the form, they would provide consent for their answers to be published under one of three offered options: consent to be identified as an interviewee in the research with all of the statements provided; consent to be identified as an interviewee in the research, but do not want to be named in particular statements; consent to be identified as an interviewee in the research, but do not want to be named in connection to any given statements. Special attention will be given to providing safety and anonymity to the participants of the research who wish to remain unknown.

Expected limitations could include an overwhelming amount of data as compared to the limited amount of time necessary to gather it and analyze it, but also the potential unavailability of activists for interviews due to other obligations, or their unwillingness to participate in the research.

1.10 The Structure of the Research

The research proposal will be divided into four sections. The first section will be an introduction, which provides the following: the overview of the theoretical framework; the research aims, questions and hypotheses. It will also situate the research proposal in relation to the scholarly literature, sources and methodology. The second section will feature a theoretical framework and a discussion of all applying theories. The third section will feature country-by-country case studies for Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia. Finally, the concluding section will be a discussion of the research findings.

CHAPTER TWO: THE CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Theoretical Approaches

The examination of feminist activism in the three countries will be situated in social movement and feminist theories. Theories of citizenship will also be considered through the prism of what constitutes active citizenship in relation to protest activities of feminist organizations and/or groups, as well as the practices of “contentious politics” as they play an important part in feminist activism. By analyzing various protest strategies and activities, it is possible to show how (un)successful the movements are in achieving their goals. The organization of women in feminist movements has always been a challenge. For women in these three countries, the type of organization was marked by the wars in the 1990s, their transition from socialism to liberal democracies, economic hardship and nationalism. The latest challenges include the rise of neoconservative trends as well as the marginalization of the Left. In the contemporary sense, three “branches” of feminism are usually used to describe the “women’s movement”: liberal/reform feminism, socialist/Marxist feminism and radical feminism.¹⁷ When analyzing the movement in the three countries, the overall trend is that feminist activism transformed into liberal feminism, despite the strong tradition of socialist feminism. The research aims to discover whether there are any opportunities to revive left-wing principles of action that were once a tradition in the region.

In her text *Women in Serbia: Post-Communism, War and Nationalist Mutations*,¹⁸ Žarana Papić states that during the post-communist period, men took on the deciding role in the political and reproductive control of women. She used concepts such as “male democracies,” “new patriarchies” or “falocracies” to describe this phenomenon. This provides a fitting context to observe the feminist movements in the three countries, as they developed at a time when these “new patriarchies” were emerging and developing into market democracies under the auspices of Western European countries. Papić further asserts that nation, tradition and patriarchy intersected on four basic levels of identity: self identity, gender identity, civic (urban) identity, and the identity of the Other.¹⁹ Feminist activism emerged at a time when female identities sustained heavy damage in the process of transition. Anti-war activism, which sparked the first glimpses of feminist activism in the three countries, sustained the notions of solidarity across borders and focused on providing

¹⁷ Sherna Berger Gluck, in collaboration with Maylei Blakwell, Shannon Cotrell and Karen S. Harper, “Whose Feminism, Whose History? Reflections on Excavating the History of (the) U.S. Women's Movement(s),” in *Community Activism and Feminist Politics. Organizing Across Race, Class, and Gender*, ed. Nancy A. Naples (New York and London: Routledge, 1998): 31.

¹⁸ Žarana Papić, “Women In Serbia: Post-Communism, War And Nationalist Mutations,” in *Gender Politics in the Western Balkans: Women and Society in Yugoslavia and the Yugoslav Successor States*, ed. Sabrina P. Ramet (Pennsylvania: Penn State University Press, 1998): 153–169; Adriana Zaharijević, Zorica Ivanović and Daša Duhaček, eds, *Žarana Papić. Tekstovi 1977–2002* (Belgrade: Centar za studije roda i politike, Fakultet političkih nauka, Rekonstrukcija Ženski fond, Žene u crnom, 2012): 305.

¹⁹ Ibid, 311.

support to women who suffered from the war (through rape and sexual violence, ethnic cleansing and relocations). As Bojan Bilić put it, anti-war initiatives in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia resulted in “cooperation, resistances and interactions that also shaped their subsequent nationally-bounded developmental trajectories.”²⁰

Feminist activism was born under these circumstances, but underwent many changes. Today, the three countries are liberal democracies faced with various political challenges, but with a strong civil society presence.²¹ The “international community”²² invested a lot of time and money in strengthening CSOs. The development of civil society was, in the words of Tijana Morača, viewed as a “measure of democratization”²³ with an “inherently positive role”.²⁴ This also strengthened women’s civil society organizations in their work. In addition, it allowed feminist activism to turn towards advocacy through institutionalized frameworks rather than demanding rights through the politics of contention. With the recent rise of neo-conservatism in all three countries (albeit in different intensity), feminists are struggling with new attacks on women’s human rights, which require new tactics of resistance.

As bell hooks observed, and Theresa O’Keefe repeated, feminism is for everybody.²⁵ Feminist activism in the three countries employs this motto, drawing its inspiration from the Anti-Fascist Front of Women (AFŽ) and anti-war activism of the 1990s. In the present, however, it needs to be observed through notions of nationalism, collective identity and citizenship, as well as within the new context of neoliberalism. In the words of Caldwell, Coll, Fisher, Ramirez and Siu: “Women stand at the intersection of not only multiple identity categories but in the crosshairs of political and economic policies targeting diverse subjects of globalization and neoliberal policies.”²⁶ These are central categories in an analysis of how women position themselves in the activist movements and how they organize to attain their feminist goals. The activities of the feminist groups and/or organizations can be analyzed through the definition of a social movement as a “rational, purposeful and organized

²⁰ Bojan Bilić, “Post-Yugoslav anti-war engagement: A research topic awaiting attention”, *Filozofija i društvo*, 4 (2011): 88.

²¹ Only in Bosnia and Herzegovina, there are 1975 registered associations and 153 foundations.

²² In the three countries, the term “international community” is used to refer to the presence of United States of America and Western Europe countries in fostering the transition towards liberal democracies. The term is still very present in everyday discourse and is usually used as an umbrella term when discussing EU accession related topics and foreign policy.

²³ Tijana Morača, “Between defiance and compliance: A new civil society in the post-Yugoslav space?” (Trento: *Osservatorio Balcani e Caucaso Transeuropa*, 2016): 3.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Theresa O’Keefe, *Feminist Identity Development and Activism in Revolutionary Movements* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013): 8.

²⁶ Kia Lilly Caldwell, Kathleen Coll, Tracy Fisher, Renya K. Ramirez, Lok Siu, “Introduction: Collectivity and Comparativity: A Feminist Approach to Citizenship,” in *Gendered Citizenships. Transnational Perspectives on Knowledge Production, Political Activism and Culture*, eds. Kia Lilly Caldwell, Kathleen Coll, Tracy Fisher, Renya K. Ramirez, Lok Siu (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009): 24.

action.”²⁷ As Donatella Della Porta and Mario Diani put it: “A social movement develops when a feeling of dissatisfaction spreads, and insufficiently flexible institutions are unable to respond.”²⁸ This is the common denominator for all social movements, and in this sense, the feminist movements in Croatia, Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina are no exception. In addition, feminist activist movements can be analyzed through the three mechanisms of collective action, in which engaged actors are, as Diani observes, “involved in conflictual relations with clearly identified opponents; are linked by dense informal networks; share a distinct collective identity.”²⁹

The feminist movements in these countries have been undergoing various cycles of contention, phases of “heightened conflicts across the social system” (Tarrow),³⁰ ranging from a diffusion of collective action from more mobilized to less mobilized sectors, to the creation of new or transformed collective action frames.³¹ This is why the prism of collective political struggle and contentious politics provides another point of view when observing feminist activism in these countries. McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly define contentious politics as “episodic, public, collective interaction among makers of claims and their objects when (a) at least one government is a claimant, an object of claims, or a party to the claims and (b) the claims would, if realized, affect the interests of at least one of the claimants.”³²

The activities of the movements in question fit the suggested definition, but the magnitude of the impact differs. The feminist movements use both contained and transgressive contention as means of action. Contained contention, which refers to action in which “all parties are previously established actors employing well established means of claim making,”³³ is present in all three countries through the actions of the civil society sector. The women’s organizations are the most active ones and they have a running list of claims and goals that they advocate on a regular basis. Transgressive contention that employs “innovative collective action”³⁴, on the other hand, is rarer, but is being increasingly practiced in Croatia’s new feminist movement, which advocates the preservation of abortion rights. Contentious politics are a part of feminist movements in all three countries. But they differ in scope and intensity, depending on the possibilities of such activities and the general inclination of supporters of the movement to join them more actively. The movements would benefit from increasing their transgressive contention, for, as McAdam, Tarrow and

²⁷ Donatella Della Porta and Mario Diani, *Social Movements. An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006): 14.

²⁸ Ibid, 13.

²⁹ Ibid, 20.

³⁰ Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement. Social Movements and Contentious Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011): 199.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow and Charles Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004): 5.

³³ Ibid, 7.

³⁴ Ibid, 8.

Tilly argue, “social change more often emerges from transgressive than from contained contention, which tends more often to reproduce existing regimes.”³⁵

The first factor to be observed here is nationalism as a prevailing notion of belonging to an ethnic group, which was strengthened during and after the 1990s wars. It still remains omnipresent in the public discourse of the three countries. Feminists in Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina have been quite successful in reducing the importance of nationalism in the history of the region, mostly by engaging in transnational forms of cooperation (particularly during and after the wars) that demonstrated the mutual suffering of women as a result of war activities. As Theresa O’Keefe points out: “Feminist interrogations of nationalism have elucidated the gender patterns evident across nationalist movements and chronicled the numerous ways in which women are oppressed by nationalism and nationalist movements.”³⁶

The time when women’s bodies were considered to be a battleground is over. Thus, the activists have taken on new modes of activism, advocating gender equality, political representation and elimination of gender-based violence. But these issues continue to intertwine, and if the struggle for women’s rights is observed within the political spheres of the three countries, it is easy to notice how “women’s citizenship is gendered and their membership defined in the most restrictive of ways.”³⁷ This creates a space for dangerous notions of questioning women’s reproductive rights, as women are considered to be reproducers of the nation. Or as Yuval-Davis and Anthias observe, “they are a social category with a specific role (particularly human reproduction).”³⁸ It only reinforces O’Keefe’s statement that “nationalist movements are ultimately bad for women.”³⁹ This is why feminist activists in the three countries have continuously fought against being perceived as “incubators of the nation” (as proclaimed, for example, at the latest Night March on the occasion of International Women’s Day in Croatia by feminist activist groups⁴⁰).

By actively participating in feminist movements, women are articulating new citizenship identities.⁴¹ Feminist activists transform their roles as citizens through local struggles and by actively taking part in advocating women’s rights. Thereby, they stimulate broader social

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Theresa O’Keefe, *Feminist Identity Development and Activism in Revolutionary Movements*: 7.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias, *Woman – Nation – State* (Hampshire and London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1989): 6.

³⁹ Theresa O’Keefe, *Feminist Identity Development and Activism in Revolutionary Movements*: 8.

⁴⁰ “If we don’t want to have children, we will not have children! We say: step away from our uterus and we will not be incubators of the nation!” as proclaimed at the Night March in Zagreb, on 8 March 2018 by the independent feminist collective fAKTIV. Libela.org / fAKTIV, *Thousands on Night March on March 8: We demand the resignation of minister Murganić* [Tisuće na Noćnom maršu za 8. mart: Zahtijevamo ostavku ministric Murganić], 8 March 2018, <https://libela.org/vijesti/9382-tisuće-na-nocnom-marsu-za-8-mart-zahtijevamo-ostavku-ministric-murganic/> (Accessed 10 March 2018)

⁴¹ Kia Lilly Caldwell, Kathleen Coll, Tracy Fisher, Renya K. Ramirez, Lok Siu, “Introduction: Collectivity and Comparativity: A Feminist Approach to Citizenship”: 27.

processes and participate in political action. In this sense, the notion of “infrapolitics” introduced by James C. Scott is useful. He describes “infrapolitics” as a struggle of subordinate groups that remains unnoticed by superordinate groups, as these struggles are, “like infrared rays, beyond the visible end of the spectrum.”⁴² To be sure, it can be contested that women’s groups are subordinate in the context of the societies analyzed here. But being a feminist is often dismissed as a “Western thing,”⁴³ and the struggles of women’s groups and feminist activists often remain unnoticed by public and governmental bodies and the media. Scott emphasizes that this invisibility is “a tactical choice born of a prudent awareness of the balance of power”⁴⁴: “(...) the relationship between dominant elites and subordinates is, whatever else it might be, very much of a material struggle in which both sides are continually probing for weaknesses and exploiting small advantages.”⁴⁵ Scott shows how feminist activism today fights its battles; too often, the process resembles the “two steps forward – one step back” principle.

Engin F. Isin notes the new ways citizenship is transformed in the present through the emergence of new “sites”, “scales” and “acts” through which “actors’ claim to transform themselves (and others) from subjects into citizens as claimants of rights.”⁴⁶ He explores the notion of the “activist citizenship” and calls for a “new vocabulary of citizenship.”⁴⁷ Feminist activism in the three countries is largely performed through the civil society framework. But it is through the notion of the “activist citizenship” that we can observe its forms. Those are collective actions that exist outside the institutionalized NGO framework, are self-organized, independent and self-sustainable. Adam Fagan and Indraneel Sircar note that this type of “non-institutionalised forms of activism have long been seen in established Western democracies (Melucci 1988) and have, as Dolenec et al. observe, become a global phenomenon since the financial crisis of 2008.”⁴⁸ Examples of this type of feminist activism can be found both in Croatia and Serbia (and in Bosnia and Herzegovina as well, but not with a feminist designation). The “colonization of NGO space”⁴⁹ needs to be taken into account here, as the majority of women’s civil society organizations are limited to using the NGO framework to advance their advocacy goals.

Collective identity also plays an important role in this analysis, as it provides a framework for protest mobilization and political action. Polletta and Jasper define collective identity as “an

⁴² James C. Scott, “The infrapolitics of subordinate groups,” in *The Global Resistance Reader*, ed. Amoore Louise (London and New York: Routledge, 2005): 65.

⁴³ A term very often employed to illustrate concepts that were introduced to the post-socialist ex-Yugoslavian countries in transition after the 1990s conflict, and associated with EU integration. Same term is often employed when describing LGBTI rights.

⁴⁴ James C. Scott, “The infrapolitics of subordinate groups”: 65.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Engin F. Isin, “Citizenship in flux: The figure of the activist citizen,” *Subjectivity*, 29 (2009): 368.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Adam Fagan and Indraneel Sircar, “Activist Citizenship in South East Europe,” *Europe-Asia Studies*, 69, No. 9 (2017): 1337.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

individual's cognitive, moral, and emotional connection with a broader community, category, practice, or institution."⁵⁰ They also point out that "collective identity seemed to capture better the pleasures and obligations that actually persuade people to mobilize."⁵¹ It is crucial to examine the reasons why feminist activists organize in the first place and what motivates their collective action to be able to understand the dynamics, struggles, successes and failures of these feminist movements and their initiatives.

In this sense, it is also crucial to observe the women's movements in the three countries from a transnational point of view. As the countries share a multitude of similarities, we can observe the movements as not limited to each country. The inception of the women's movement during and after the 1990s was created a network of activists, and facilitated what Moghadam refers to as transnational feminist networks, "structures organized above the national level that unite women from three or more countries around a common agenda."⁵² These networks also contribute to the creation of a transnational public sphere, try to influence policy-making as well as to insert a feminist perspective in transnational advocacy and activism.⁵³ Yet, the transnational component of the feminist movement does not come without difficulties. D'Enbeau points out that a variety of issues need to be managed: collective identity, engagement and openness, as well as organizational differentiation.⁵⁴ Transnational feminist networks are also constrained by gender mainstreaming policies, lack of funding, diverse stakeholder accountability, and lack of resources.⁵⁵ The transnational feminist potentials of the movements in the three countries are facing the same difficulties. Their strength comes, however, from the fact that they were least tainted by the nationalist rhetoric of the 1990s and managed to fight it through anti-war activism and solidarity across borders. Thereby, they also raised awareness about the dangers of nationalism. In this sense, the movements were able to overcome one of the difficulties transnational feminist networks face, which is shifting "organizing around nations to organizing around issues (Ferree, 2007; Steans, 2007)"⁵⁶.

By sharing the same advocacy goals, feminist activists in the three countries are attempting to unite them through various initiatives. One example of this endeavour is the Women's Court – A Feminist Approach to Justice,⁵⁷ an opportunity to gather women's organizations from all countries of former Yugoslavia since 2010. The initiative was inspired by the fact

⁵⁰ Francesca Polletta and James M. Jasper, "Collective Identity and Social Movements," *Annu. Rev. Sociology*, 27 (2001): 285.

⁵¹ Ibid, 284.

⁵² Valentine M. Moghadam, *Globalizing Women. Transnational Feminist Networks* (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 2005): 4.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Suzy D'Enbeau, "Transnational Feminist Advocacy Online: Identity (Re)Creation Through Diversity, Transparency, and Co-Construction," *Women's Studies in Communication* 34, no. 1 (2011): 64.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 65.

⁵⁷ Ženski sud – Feministički pristup pravdi [Women's Court – A Feminist Approach to Justice], Web page: <https://www.zenskisud.org/> (Accessed 4 May 2018).

that women's organizations were most active in countering war, nationalism, ethnic homogenization and militarism. As it is put in the Women's Court declaration: "Despite the obstacles and prohibitions by nationalist and militarist regimes, the activists maintained cooperation and created peace networks beyond state and ethnic boundaries and divisions."⁵⁸ As a part of the initiative, they organize events in which women publicly testify about their war experiences, including war crimes against women, violence against women, military, economic, domestic and political violence, misuse of reproductive rights, and also women's resistance.⁵⁹ Art and culture festivals that are organized by women's organizations in the three countries (BeFem in Serbia, VoxFeminae in Croatia and Pitchwise and Blasfem in Bosnia and Herzegovina) also testify to the efforts feminists are making to organize transnationally around similar goals.

Finally, no social movements today, including the feminist movement, can be studied without taking into account the neo-liberal context and its effects on feminist activism. As the feminist movements in the three countries deal, directly or indirectly, with various forms of gender injustices, it is important to examine their positioning in relation to neo-liberalism and capitalism. Thus, Nancy Fraser, as a critic of liberal feminism, refers to the notions of recognition, redistribution and representation to reaffirm social justice. Fraser's critique situates the critique of liberal feminism in relation to capitalism and warns that "feminist ideals of gender equality, so contentious in the preceding decades, now sit squarely in the social mainstream; on the other hand, they have yet to be realized in practice."⁶⁰ The three dimensions of gender injustice – economic, cultural and political, have, in Fraser's opinion, become separated both from one another and from the critique of capitalism.⁶¹ A change in attitudes has by no means eliminated practices such as sexual harassment or unequal pay.

The feminist movement in Croatia is now increasingly moving towards employing leftist/socialist practices, and several newly emerged left-wing political parties have supported the actions of civil society in response to recent attacks on reproductive rights. In Serbia, many activists are reluctant to frame the movement as leftist, even though several initiatives exist, but with no effective political Left to support the movement itself. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, feminist activism exists solely through the civil society framework and employs advocacy strategies addressed almost exclusively at state authorities, while the political associations with the Left remain impossible, as the declarative Social Democratic Left usually transforms into a Center-Right formation after elections as part of a clientelist political culture.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Nancy Fraser, *Fortunes of Feminism: From State-Managed Capitalism to Neoliberal Crisis* (London and New York: Verso, 2013): 210.

⁶¹ Ibid, 211.

CHAPTER THREE: CASE STUDIES

In all three countries, feminist activism came, as noted, to the fore during the 1990s conflicts and was based on anti-war agitation; it gradually transformed into a different kind of feminist activism through the framework of civil society and after the appearance of international donors that sought to assist the countries' democratic transitions. In the last 20 years, the three countries have ratified the CEDAW convention⁶² and adopted a substantial legal framework that protects women's rights (gender equality and anti-discrimination laws). However, this legal framework does not ensure the full protection and practice of women's rights, and it is on this lack of protection that feminist activists mostly focus their attention. The research project will provide an overview of the inception of feminist activism in the three cases, but it will primarily center on contemporary activism and its accomplishments in the last ten years.

The study aims to discover how feminist movements in the three countries exist and function in their civil society environments through a comparative analysis of the social circumstances that influence their developments. Political trends surrounding women's rights are starting to reflect the rise of re-patriarchalization and re-traditionalization, along with an appearance of neo-conservatism. The political aspect of feminist activism is being increasingly marginalized in relation to these trends, which is, in return, affecting its engagement in securing that women's rights are not being violated.

The case studies will reflect the relevant groups and/or organizations that are at the forefront of the feminist movements in the respective countries as well as relevant feminist events that provide an opportunity for activism and advocacy. They will also cover the nature of feminist activism practiced in each of the countries – whether it is conducted through the NGO framework or whether it relies more on independent actions. Each of the case studies will describe the social context and political atmosphere that shape the possibilities and circumstances of feminist activism.

The organizations and collectives that will be researched are the ones that have a proven track record in advocacy and public presence in relation to women's rights. The additional aim is to discover the (possible) extent of their leftist political orientation, as well as their affiliation with the political Left. In general, this connection is mainly present in Croatia, where newly formed left political parties are supporting the feminist protesting agenda. Such examples cannot be found in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia, which are currently devoid of a left-wing political option. There is, however, a lot of discussion in all three countries about what constitutes a left-wing orientation of these civil society organizations,

⁶² United Nations Treaty Collection, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=IV-8&chapter=4&lang=en (Accessed 15 March 2018).

groups and activists. And one of the research aims is to detect such links, define them, and to assess their influence.

3.1 Croatia: A Feminist Struggle for Reproductive Rights and Against Neo-conservatism

In 2013, Croatia became the second ex Yugoslavia country to join the EU. Although the country experienced a significant improvement in terms of economic stability, it struggled with brain drain after the accession, as many young people decided to seek work elsewhere in the EU. Croatia has the fourth highest unemployment rate in the EU, of 9.8% (sharing its place with Cyprus).⁶³

These are specific social circumstances that are currently shaping the feminist activist initiatives in Croatia, along with a populist and center-right government dominated by the political party HDZ⁶⁴ (Croatian Democrat Community), which won the September 2016 elections. The social situation in Croatia provided a framework for increased feminist action. The main instigator was the contestation of abortion rights by the family movement that mobilized broader civil society as well as individual activists. In this sense, Croatia can be viewed as being at the forefront of feminist activism compared to Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Croatian feminist activist initiatives led to protest and awareness-raising actions that have transcended the boundaries of the state, and are being taken up and referenced as examples of positive protesting action by feminist activists in other countries of the region.

In 2014, Croatia adopted a new Labour Law that was subject to many protests from civil society organizations, because it reflected neo-liberal policies stimulating outsourcing and precarious work. The adoption of the law was heavily criticized by the feminist movement at the time, predominantly by the informal group Women's Front for Labour and Social Rights.⁶⁵ At the same time, the appearance of a strong neo-conservative family movement started to permeate the public, with groups such as "In the Name of the Family,"⁶⁶ Vigilare⁶⁷ and the political party HRAST⁶⁸ (Movement for a Successful Croatia), which advocated heterosexual families, traditional rights, devotion to Catholic faith, and as of late, ban of abortion rights and opposition to the ratification of the Istanbul Convention.

⁶³ Eurostat, Unemployment rates, seasonally adjusted, January 2018 (%), 1 March 2018, [http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statisticsexplained/index.php/File:Unemployment_rates_seasonally_adjusted_January_2018_\(%25\)_F2.png](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statisticsexplained/index.php/File:Unemployment_rates_seasonally_adjusted_January_2018_(%25)_F2.png) (Accessed 10 March 2018).

⁶⁴ HDZ – Hrvatska demokratska zajednica [Croatian Democratic Alliance], Web page: <http://www.hdz.hr> (Accessed 10 March 2017).

⁶⁵ Ženska fronta za radna i socijalna prava [Women's Front for Labour and Social Rights], Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/zenskafronta> (Accessed 10 March 2018).

⁶⁶ U ime obitelji [In the Name of the Family], Web page: <http://uimeobitelji.net> (Accessed March 10 2017).

⁶⁷ Vigilare, Web page: <http://vigilare.org/> (Accessed 20 March 2017).

⁶⁸ HRAST, Web page: <http://www.h-rast.hr/> (Accessed 10 March 2017).

The Croatian parliament recently ratified the Istanbul Convention⁶⁹, which the neo-conservative movement considers to be a tool of “gender ideology,” a concept invented by the Catholic Church that distorts gender theory. As it is put by the Croatian CSO CESI: “The Catholic Church and its allies claim that gender ideology endangers marriage and family, promotes homosexuality, same sex marriages and adoption of children by same sex couples, teaches children that anyone can arbitrarily choose its sex, and negates the duality and complementarity of men and women.”⁷⁰ The adoption of the Istanbul Convention led to protests by neo-conservative groups that expressed their discontent with the Convention that “promotes gender ideology and meddles with basic traditional, cultural, identity and legal determinants of the Croatian society.”⁷¹

The group, which is been behind most feminist activism at the moment, is the independent feminist collective fAKTIV,⁷² having appeared two years ago, with a street performance about femicide. Since then, fAKTIV has provided a new space for feminist activism by organizing three Night Marches on International Women’s Day in 2016, 2017 and 2018 in Zagreb. The Night March is considered to be the first proactive feminist initiative in Croatia. The work of fAKTIV continues to provide opportunity for protest activities, not just in Zagreb but also in other Croatian cities, such as Rijeka, Split, Zadar, Šibenik, where the Night March is now being organized as well.

fAKTIV is an independent self-financed collective that organizes street protests that have a clear left-wing orientation; the proclamations of the Night March initiative reflect similar political views. Their current focus is on preserving abortion rights. The appearance of fAKTIV on the civil society scene led to the creation of other informal feminist groups, such as the independent feminist Marxist collective Fematik and the Initiative for a Feminist Faculty of Philosophy.⁷³ What fAKTIV also initiated is the Platform for Reproductive Rights, which has joined other organizations and activists in the struggle for the preservation of abortion rights. The first protest organized by this platform took place on 28 September 2017, on the Global Day of Action for Access to Safe and Legal Abortion in Zagreb, and the group continues to be active.

⁶⁹ HRT, *Hrvatski sabor ratificirao Istanbulsku konvenciju* [Croatian Parliament ratifies Istanbul Convention], 13 April 2018, <http://vijesti.hrt.hr/438846/hrvatski-sabor-ratificirao-istanbulsku-konvenciju> (Accessed 4 May 2018).

⁷⁰ Nataša Bijelić and Sanja Cesar, *Vrag odnio šalu. Priručnik za zagovaranje seksualnih i reproduktivnih prava i zdravlja u svjetlu neokonzervativnih napada* [Manual on Advocating Sexual and Reproductive Rights and Health in Light of Neoconservative Attacks]. (Zagreb: Center for Education, Counseling and Research – CESI, 2017): 20. http://www.cesi.hr/attach/v/vrag_odnio_salu.pdf (Accessed 4 May 2018).

⁷¹ Al Jazeera Balkans, *Završen protest protiv ratifikacije Istanbulske konvencije* [Protest against the ratification of Istanbul Convention ends], 24 March 2018, <http://balkans.aljazeera.net/vijesti/završen-protest-protiv-ratifikacije-istanbulske-konvencije> (Accessed 4 May 2018).

⁷² fAKTIV, Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/fAKTIV/> (Accessed 10 March 2017).

⁷³ Inicijativa za feministički filozofski [Initiative for a Feminist Faculty of Philosophy], Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/feministicki.filozofski/> (Accessed 10 March 2017).

Of other significant groups, the Association B.a.B.e.⁷⁴ is one of the oldest feminist civil society organizations, having been founded in 1994. This group has been active for over 20 years in advocating for gender equality and against gender-based violence; it also provides psychological and legal counseling to survivors of domestic and gender-based violence. B.a.B.e. was founded by the feminist activist Sanja Sarnavka. She is no longer part of it, but is still active as an independent feminist activist. Another important civil society organization is CESI,⁷⁵ which was founded in 1997; it has its roots in anti-war activism and has worked with women who survived war trauma. Their work focuses on gender-based violence and youth sexual education. CESI also founded the web portal Libela.org,⁷⁶ with the aim of reporting on the political participation of women. It gradually transformed into an independent web portal that focuses on activism, human rights, women's rights and critiques of capitalism. The editors of Libela.org are mostly members of the fAKTIV collective who use the web portal to advance their advocacy goals.

Another web portal that supports and facilitates feminist activism is Voxfeminae.net.⁷⁷ It promotes culture and art created by women in Croatia and the broader region. The web portal team also organizes the annual Voxfeminae Festival, which attracts feminist artists, cultural workers, film makers and activists from Croatia, the region and the world. Apart from Libela.org and Voxfeminae.net, there was another feminist web portal, Muf.com.hr,⁷⁸ which was actively participating in the feminist movement until its recent shut-down due to a lack of financial support in January 2018.

The Center for Women's Studies in Zagreb has also played an important role in the feminist activist movement in Croatia.⁷⁹ It is headed by Ankica Čakardić, a professor and left-wing activist, who is the coordinator of its educational programme. The Center for Women's Studies was founded in 1995 by prominent Croatian feminists of the older generation (Aida Bagić, Rada Borić, Nadežda Čačinović, Sanja Iveković, Željka Jelavić, Biljana Kašić, among others), and has had an immense influence on left-wing thought among young intellectuals and activists through its socialist/left-based educational curriculum.

Several LGBT organizations also contribute to feminist activism and practice feminist principles of action. These are primarily Zagreb Pride,⁸⁰ which has been organizing the Zagreb pride parade for the past 16 years and has adopted queer-feminist principles in its work;

⁷⁴ B.a.B.e. – Be Active, Be Emancipated! Web page: <http://www.babe.hr/hr/o-nama/> (Accessed 10 March 2018).

⁷⁵ CESI – Center for Education, Counseling and Research, Web page: <http://cesi.hr/hr/> (Accessed 10 March 2018).

⁷⁶ Libela.org. Web portal on gender, sex and democracy: <https://libela.org/> (Accessed 10 March 2018).

⁷⁷ Voxfeminae.net. Web portal: <http://voxfeminae.net/> (Accessed 10 March 2018).

⁷⁸ Muf.com.hr. Web portal: <http://muf.com.hr/> (Accessed 10 March 2018).

⁷⁹ Centar za ženske studije [Center for Women's Studies], Web page: <http://zenstud.hr/> (Accessed 10 March 2018).

⁸⁰ Zagreb Pride, Web page: <http://www.zagreb-pride.net/hr/> (Accessed 10 March 2018).

AUT,⁸¹ the LGBTIQ initiative of the Faculty of Philosophy in Zagreb, and LORI⁸² in Rijeka that promotes LGBT rights and elimination of homo/bi/transphobia.

Most of the groups significant for the movement operate in Zagreb, but the activities of the feminist movement are increasing in other cities as well. This can be viewed as a consequence of the “new wave” of feminist activism that emerged with fAKTIV two years ago in reaction to the agenda of the neoconservative groups to limit women’s rights. Some of the organizations that do significant feminist activist work outside of Zagreb are PaRiter⁸³ in Rijeka, Center for Civic Initiatives⁸⁴ in Poreč and Domine⁸⁵ from Split.

3.2 Serbia: Feminist Activism within the Contemporary Advocacy Standard

Like Croatia, Serbia has a long tradition of anti-war feminist activism that started during the 1990s wars. It was initiated by anti-war groups that organized a number of actions to oppose Serbian involvement in regional wars and helped victims of war (refugees, conscientious objectors, victims of sexual violence, etc.).

Serbia is currently run by a neoliberal government, represented by the dominant figure of its prime minister Aleksandar Vučić, who continuously expresses Serbia’s dedication to join the European Union. However, the country remains ridden by economic difficulties and unemployment. At the end of 2017, the unemployment rate in Serbia was 14,7%, with the unemployment rate of women being 15,4%.⁸⁶ The influence of the Serbian Orthodox Church, which publicly advocates the preservation of a patriarchal system bent on subjugating women, also remains strong. Only recently, Serbian patriarch Irinej, the 45th supreme pontiff of the Serbian Orthodox Church, declared that “mothers are obliged to bear children according to God’s blessing.”⁸⁷ This is an example of how the rhetoric of the Orthodox Church targets women’s rights by influencing public opinion and by gathering support for patriarchal norms. It is in contradiction to the official rhetoric of the state, which professes its dedication to the protection of all human rights, women’s rights included, but the political role of the church is facilitated by government policies.

⁸¹ LGBTIQ inicijativa Filozofskog fakulteta 'AUT' [LGBT Initiative of the Faculty of Philosophy 'AUT'], Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/LGBTIQFFZGAUT/> (Accessed 10 March 2018).

⁸² LORI, Web page: <http://www.ori.hr/hr> (Accessed 10 March 2018).

⁸³ PaRiter, Web page: <http://www.pariter.hr/> (Accessed 10 March 2018).

⁸⁴ Centar za građanske inicijative Poreč [Center for Civic Initiatives Poreč], Web page: <http://www.cgiporec.hr/> (Accessed 10 March 2018).

⁸⁵ Domine, Web page: <https://www.domine.hr/?lang=hr&index=47> (Accessed 10 March 2018)

⁸⁶ N1 Serbia, RZS: U Srbiji na kraju 2017. stopa nezaposlenosti 14,7 odsto [Rate of unemployment 14,7% in Serbia at the end of 2017], March 5 2018, <http://rs.n1info.com/a369351/Biznis/RZS-U-Srbiji-na-kraju-2017.-stopa-nezaposlenosti-14-7-odsto.html> (Accessed 4 May 2018).

⁸⁷ Telegraf.rs, Irinej poručio Srpkinjama: Dužne ste da radate! [Irinej declares to Serbian women: You are obliged to bear children!], 24 October 2017, <http://www.telegraf.rs/vesti/srbija/2906393-irinej-porucio-srpkinjama-duzne-ste-da-radate> (Accessed 10 March 2018).

Another statement, which has disturbed many civil society organizations in Serbia, stemmed from prime minister Vučić himself, who asked women “to understand the needs of Serbia” by bearing more children.⁸⁸ CSOs, led by the feminist activist movement Women in Black, countered that the decision to bear children is to be made exclusively by women, not the state or church; they also denounced a motherhood rhetoric “directed towards reproducing the victims of future wars.”⁸⁹ In addition, Serbian society is grappling with xenophobia, homophobia and racism stoked by the influx of refugees who have sought shelter in Serbia in the past years, while traveling through the Balkan route on their way to Western Europe.

From the 2000s onwards, Serbian feminist activism mostly focused on anti-fascism and post-war militarism as well as on the elimination of gender-based violence.⁹⁰ It was connected to Women in Black (Žene u crnom – ŽUC),⁹¹ a women’s feminist and anti-militarist organization founded in 1991 that led the way in anti-war organizing. The group has, up to now, organized around 700 peaceful street actions⁹² (including street protests against the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which were held every Wednesday from 1992 to 1996; they often sparked violent attacks on activists by citizens who supported Serbian military involvement in the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina). Women in Black remain active as one of the most recognizable feminist groups in Serbia.

The lesbian civil society organization Labris,⁹³ which was founded in 1995, focuses on lesbian feminist activism; it is one of the few LGBT feminist organizations in the region that actively advocates the rights of lesbian women. Other organizations of significance include the Reconstruction Women’s Fund,⁹⁴ the first local women’s foundation in Serbia. It was created in 2004, with the goal of supporting “the feminist political platform against war, nationalism, racism, militarism, discrimination and violence against women”;⁹⁵ the network “Women Against Violence,”⁹⁶ a coalition of women’s civil society organizations that fight for the elimination of gender-based violence; Roma Women’s Network,⁹⁷ which advocates the rights of Roma women, who are part of the biggest ethnic minority in Serbia; and

⁸⁸ Autonomija.info, *Nevladine organizacije osudile Vučićevu izjavu, jer žene svodi na mašine za rađanje* [Civil society organizations condemn Vučić's statement, because it describes women as birthing machines], March 19 2018, <http://www.autonomija.info/nevladine-organizacije-osudile-vucicevu-izjavu-jer-zene-svodi-na-masine-za-radjanje.html> (Accessed 19 March 2018).

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Lepa Mladenović, Feminist and LGBT activist of Labris and Women in Black, E-mail interview (semi-structured), 19 March 2018.

⁹¹ Žene u crnom [Women in Black], Web page: <http://zeneucrnom.org/> (Accessed March 15 2018).

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Labris, Web page: <http://www.labris.org.rs/> (Accessed March 15 2018).

⁹⁴ Rekonstrukcija Ženski fond [Reconstruction Women's Fund], Web page: <http://www.rwfund.org/> (Accessed 15 March 2018).

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Mreža žena protiv nasilja [Network Women Against Violence], Web page: <http://www.zeneprotivnasilja.net/> (Accessed 15 March 2018).

⁹⁷ Romska ženska mreža [Roma Women's Network], Web page: <http://mrza.info/about-us/> (Accessed 15 March 2018).

Autonomous Women Center,⁹⁸ established in 1993, which operates on the basis of feminist principles and theory and provides support to victims of gender-based violence.

The Center for Women's Studies⁹⁹ in Belgrade, founded in 1991, had a role in shaping the feminist movement as well, and was initiated by renowned anti-war feminists of the time (Žarana Papić, Daša Duhaček, Lepa Mladenović, Jasmina Tešanović, among others). Its aim was to examine, theoretically, "possibilities of resistance as well as political agency against social practices of discrimination and exclusion."¹⁰⁰ Several organizations working outside Belgrade have their role in the movement as well, such as Women's Space¹⁰¹ from Niš; it advocates empowerment of marginalized women, social justice and full equality. The Association of Women Pešćanik from Kruševac shares the same goals by connecting and educating women from the County Rasinski through its Women's Information and Education Center, and there is also the Association Roza for Labour Rights of Women¹⁰² from Zrenjanin.

The march for International Women's Day in Belgrade is one of the most prominent feminist activities in the country. This was also the case with the last march on 8 March 2018, organized by the network "Women Against Violence", Reconstruction Women's Fund, Labris, Astra¹⁰³ (CSO that fights against human trafficking, with a focus on women and children), Roma Women Network, Women in Black, Network of Women from County Rasinski¹⁰⁴, Left Summit of Serbia¹⁰⁵ and Plenum of Women for Strike. The march proclaimed that it wanted to fight "against oppressive policies of patriarchy and capitalism that endanger women",¹⁰⁶ and emphasized its dedication to "international solidarity, antifascism and against all policies that endanger our – female – lives."¹⁰⁷

BeFem Festival¹⁰⁸ provides an opportunity for feminist activists, artists, film makers, theorists and cultural workers to assemble, discuss and contribute to the women's movement in Serbia through participating in various cultural activities. It was created in

⁹⁸ Autonomni ženski centar [Autonomous Women Center], Web page: <https://www.womenngo.org.rs/o-nama/misija-i-rad> (Accessed 15 March 2018).

⁹⁹ Centar za ženske studije [Center for Women's Studies Belgrade], Web page: <http://www.zenskestudie.edu.rs/> (Accessed 15 March 2018).

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ženski prostor [Women's Space], Web page: <http://www.zenskiprostor.org/> (Accessed March 15 2018).

¹⁰² ROZA – Udruženje za radna prava žena [Association Roza for Labour Rights of Women], Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/ROZA-udru%C5%BEenje-za-radna-prava-%C5%BEena-464567367029560/> (Accessed 15 March 2018).

¹⁰³ Astra, Web page: <https://www.astra.rs/o-astru> (Accessed 15 March 2018).

¹⁰⁴ Mreža žena Rasinskog okruga [Network of Women from County Rasinski], Web page: <https://www.udruzenjepescanik.org/o-nama/2-uncategorised/653-mreza-zena-rasinskog-okruga> (Accessed 15 March 2018).

¹⁰⁵ Levi samit Srbije [Left Summit of Serbia], Web page: <http://levisamitsrbije.org/> (Accessed 15 March 2018).

¹⁰⁶ 8. mart - Međunarodni dan žena "Smrt fašizmu - sloboda ženama!" [8 March – International Women's Day 'Death to Fascism – Freedom to Women!'], Facebook event: <https://www.facebook.com/events/1579727325479227/> (Accessed 15 March 2018).

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ BeFem Festival, Web page: <http://www.befem.org/index.php> (Accessed 15 March 2018).

2009, and its last event was the BeFem Feminist Summer Games, which was held in June 2017. BeFem has stated that only by organizing transnationally, “by using the strength of different identities that build us, with a strong feminist edge, can we stand up to the ruling nationalist and patriarchal politics.”¹⁰⁹

Feminist activism in Serbia differs from that of Croatia in the sense that the level of public protesting is lower. Moreover, when it happens, it does not involve a particular issue (such as abortion rights in Croatia), but retains a more general stance. However, the level of feminist organizing is quite extensive and remains a tradition within the civil society sector of Serbia. In this sense, Serbia occupies the middle position in this triangle of countries, as its feminist movement is active, but focused on issues that could be called the contemporary standard, which are gender-based violence and gender equality.

3.3 Bosnia and Herzegovina: Limitations of Feminist Activism in a Political Deadlock

Of the three countries, Bosnia and Herzegovina can be considered the least progressive in terms of the strength of its feminist movement. What needs to be taken into account here are the social and political circumstances, which have, for a number of years, obstructed the development of a civil society that practices direct political protest and action.

Like Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina has proclaimed its intention to join the European Union, but remains in a political deadlock, which stands in the way of reaching this goal. It has a complicated administrative structure (it is comprised of two entities and one district) that makes political decision-making difficult, which is the main reason why many social and political issues remain unsolved. The always present political tensions between the ruling elites of the constituent people (Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats) are most to blame for the current stagnation of the country that has been going on for years.

Women’s rights are declaratively supported by the government, but in practice women are suffering from great inequality, especially economically, as the unemployment rate is high, the country under-developed and women are very often forced to stay at home as they are unable to find stable employment. The average unemployment rate in Bosnia and Herzegovina from 2012 to 2017 has been 32.5%, with a gender gap in employment of 18.45% in favour of men.¹¹⁰

The culture of protest in Bosnia and Herzegovina is almost non-existent. The last large-scale protests took place in 2013 (JMBG protest in Sarajevo that demanded unique identity numbers for all citizens, resulting in a blockade of the Parliament of Bosnia and Herzegovina) and 2014 (workers’ protests that spread through the cities of one of the entities, Federation

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Diskriminacija.ba, *Infografika: Diskriminacija na tržištu rada* [Infographic: Discrimination in the labour market], 24 April 2018, <http://diskriminacija.ba teme/infografika-diskriminacija-na-tr%C5%BEi%C5%A1tu-rada> (Accessed 4 May 2018).

of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and led to the creation of citizen plenums). As both protests failed to yield a change of policies, the public's willingness to participate in such activism dissipated. Since then, there have been no significant protest activities in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This apathy has also characterized the feminist movement, which practices its advocacy work mostly through donor-driven projects and by lobbying with state institutions.

As is the case with Serbia and Croatia, anti-war activism was prominent in Bosnia and Herzegovina during the war from 1992 to 1995. The first civil society organizations focused on helping women who were victims of war in relation to assuring prosecution of perpetrators of war rape, gender-based and sexual violence and ethnic cleansing that many women were subjected to during the war. This is where feminist activism in Bosnia and Herzegovina stems from, and for many years, the focus of civil society organizations was on providing care, legal and psychological counseling and shelter for survivors of war rape and/or sexual violence, as well as seeking justice for them. One of the pioneers in this sense was the association Medica Zenica¹¹¹, founded in 1993; it provided care and support to women and children who were victims of war, and today it provides shelter to women and children who have been subjected to gender-based violence.

One of the biggest successes of feminist activists in Bosnia and Herzegovina was the ruling of the International Criminal Tribunal for former Yugoslavia, which categorized mass rape as a crime against humanity,¹¹² after three Bosnian Serbs (Dragoljub Kunarac, Radomir Kovač and Zoran Vuković) were sentenced to a combined sentence of 60 years for these crimes in 2001. The activities concerning the court cases regarding mass war rapes resulted in the formation of civil society organizations that seek to involve women victims of war who lost their husbands, brothers, fathers and sons during the conflicts. One of such organizations is the Movement of Mothers of Enclave of Srebrenica and Žepa,¹¹³ founded in 1996, that gathers survivors and family members of men and boys who were murdered or disappeared during the Srebrenica genocide.

In connection with women who survived war rape, it is significant to mention an activist endeavour that stemmed from the movie *Grbavica* directed by Jasmila Žbanić in 2006. This is the first (and so far the only) post-war movie made in Bosnia and Herzegovina that dealt with the issue of war rapes from the perspective of the victim – a woman who gives birth to a child that was conceived in war rape. The movie won the Golden Bear at the Berlinale Film Festival in 2006, but the director Žbanić also initiated a campaign called "For the Dignity of

¹¹¹ Medica Zenica, Web page: <http://www.medicazenica.org/> (Accessed 20 March 2018).

¹¹² Andrew Osborn, *Mass rape ruled a war crime*, *The Guardian*, 23 February 2001, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2001/feb/23/warcrimes> (Accessed 20 March 2018).

¹¹³ Pokret "Majke enklave Srebrenica i Žepa" [Movement of Mothers of Enclave of Srebrenica and Žepa], Web page: <http://enklave-srebrenica-zepa.org/> (Accessed 20 March 2018).

the Survivors”¹¹⁴ in order to advocate for a change in the law so victims of war rape could be recognized as civil victims of war, which was not the case at that time. The campaign featured a petition that gathered 50 000 signatures, and was delivered to the Parliament of Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, subsequently resulting in a change of legislation that granted women who survived war rape the status of civil victims of war, which qualified them for state financial aid (albeit only in one entity of Bosnia and Herzegovina).

After the war, with the appearance of international donors, more organizations that advocated women’s rights sprung up. One of them was Women to Women,¹¹⁵ dedicated to the affirmation of women in all spheres of private and public life. Gender-based violence, however, has remained the main focus of many organizations because of rising domestic violence; it was one of the consequences of post-traumatic stress disorder experienced by many men who took part in the war. Foundation of Local Democracy¹¹⁶, founded in 2003, is one of the rare organizations that operate a safe house for women who are victims of domestic violence. Gender-based violence remains central to the work of many women’s organizations, but feminist activism has also involved advocating gender equality, particularly in the field of political representation, which has been flagged as one of the main priorities of women’s organizations.

Many women’s civil society organizations operate under the “Women’s Network of Bosnia and Herzegovina”,¹¹⁷ a collective of various CSOs from all over the country. The network was established in 2009 and comprises 46 civil society organizations, some of which are not women’s CSOs by orientation, but share feminist principles of action. The network is co-ordinated by Foundation CURE,¹¹⁸ which is considered to be the leading feminist civil society organization in BiH. Advocating gender equality, it is an organization that speaks against patriarchal norms, with zero tolerance for violence. Most of its advocacy is carried out through donor-funded projects and in co-operation with state institutions, with a focus on political representation, education, local and regional networking, engaged art and building an inclusive and sustainable women’s movement.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁴ Klix.ba. *Kampanja “Za dostojanstvo preživjelih”* [Campaign “For the Dignity of the Survivors”], 27 March 2006, <https://www.klix.ba/vijesti/bih/kampanja-za-dostojanstvo-prezivjelih/060327012> (Accessed 4 May 2018).

¹¹⁵ Žene ženama [Women to Women], Web page: <http://www.zenezenama.org/zene/> (Accessed 20 March 2018).

¹¹⁶ Fondacija lokalne demokratije [Foundation of Local Democracy], Web page: <https://www.fld.ba/> (Accessed 20 March 2018).

¹¹⁷ Ženska mreža BiH [Women's Network of Bosnia and Herzegovina], Web page: <http://zenskamreza.ba/o-nama/> (Accessed 20 March 2018).

¹¹⁸ Fondacija CURE [CURE Foundation], Web page: http://www.fondacijacure.org/index.php?do=article&article_id=1 (Accessed 20 March 2018).

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

Sarajevo Open Center¹²⁰ (SOC) is another organization, which employs feminist principles of action, while fighting for women's rights, as well as rights of LGBTI people (also, being one of the few CSOs in the country that focus on LGBTI rights). SOC and CURE are partners in many ways; they organize mutual activities, coordinate their advocacy goals, and even share the same office spaces. Both organizations regularly publish reports concerning the state of women's rights in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In that way, they have assumed the role of state authorities who are not so prompt in providing up-to-date information. Because of this, SOC and CURE can be considered as leading organizations of the feminist movement in Bosnia and Herzegovina, although their goals intersect and they often join forces in promoting advocacy projects.

The positive trait of the feminist movement in Bosnia and Herzegovina is that it is not divided along ethnic lines, which is one of the rare examples where this division has been avoided. Feminist organizations usually work together in advancing their goals, which is evident from the breakdown of the CSOs that are members of the Women's Network of BiH; many come from different parts of the country and from both entities. Another positive trait is that feminist activism takes place in local communities with the aim of empowering women who live in smaller cities, and rural areas of the country. In this sense, there is broad networking between the organizations. Yet, the work of the CSOs has faced criticism and is seen by many as focusing too much on conferences and roundtables that do not always have the desired effect with marginalized women or women from rural areas.

Organizations that operate in other parts of the country, outside the capital of Sarajevo, include Women United¹²¹ from Banja Luka, founded in 1996. It advocates the elimination of gender-based violence and strengthening the role of women in decision-making positions; and Center for Women's Rights¹²² in Zenica, which provides free legal counseling for women in need. A new actor on the scene has been the Tuzla Open Center,¹²³ a sister-organization of Sarajevo Open Center; it also advocates LGBTI rights and occasionally organizes feminist cultural events, such as poetry nights.

As for public events that provide space for feminist activism, Foundation CURE has organized the annual PitchWise Festival¹²⁴ for the last 12 years. The festival gathers artists and activists from Bosnia and Herzegovina, the region and the world, and provides a unique opportunity for affirmation of feminist art and culture. Another interesting grassroots initiative with a strong left-wing potential has appeared last year in Banja Luka, in the entity of Republic of

¹²⁰ Sarajevski otvoreni centar [Sarajevo Open Center], Web page: <http://soc.ba/> (Accessed 20 March 2018).

¹²¹ Udružene žene [Women United], Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/unitedwomenbl/> (Accessed 20 March 2018).

¹²² Centar ženskih prava [Center for Women's Rights], Web page: <http://cenppz.org.ba/> (Accessed 20 March 2018).

¹²³ Tuzlanski otvoreni centar [Tuzla Open Center], Web page: <http://toc.ba/> (Accessed 20 March 2018).

¹²⁴ PitchWise Festival, Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/PitchWise1/> (Accessed 20 March 2018).

Srpska, when the first edition of the feminist festival Blasfem took place, organized by activists and members of academia, with a focus on migration, position of women workers, motherhood on the periphery in neoliberal capitalism and women's literature.¹²⁵ The second edition of Blasfem is expected mid-June 2018.

Feminist activism in Bosnia and Herzegovina does not show its potentials in the form of protests, but rather in working with local communities. This is also activism, but one that is not equally visible, resulting in the marginalization of its potential political role. Apart from the annual International Women's Day March, which this year took place simultaneously in Sarajevo, Tuzla and Banja Luka (with a very small turnout of citizens and mostly activists leading the marches), no other feminist protests have been organized in the last couple of years, apart from several street gatherings to promote certain initiatives, such as the political representation of women. It should also be pointed out that, unlike Serbia and Croatia, in Bosnia and Herzegovina there are no academic institutions or initiatives that resemble the Center for Women's Rights in Belgrade and Zagreb. An MA programme in Gender Studies was initiated in 2006 and existed briefly as a part of University of Sarajevo, but was soon abolished due to lack of funds. The absence of official academic education on gender issues also affects the dynamics of feminist activism, as in both cases of Zagreb and Belgrade, the aforementioned Centers for Women's Rights contributed to the feminist education of many activists who are now part of the movements.

In general, feminist activism in Bosnia and Herzegovina is closely connected to lobbying international organizations and state authorities to achieve social and political changes. On the other hand, the civil society organizations that focus on protecting and attaining women's rights have had certain successes with this approach; for this reason, it should not come as a surprise that it is still used as the preferred way of action, as opposed to direct action and protest. One of the aims of the research is to find out why this is the case, and why the culture of feminist protest is so low in Bosnia and Herzegovina as compared to the other two countries.

3.4. Comparing the Three Cases Through a Frame Alignment Approach

When analyzing activism in Croatia, Paul Stubbs refers to three waves. He sees the "first wave" through the initiation of anti-war campaigns; the "second wave" concerns the establishment of professionalized NGO's; and the "third wave" includes formation of inter-linked activist initiatives.¹²⁶ With minor differences in scope and intensity, these three waves

¹²⁵ Maja Dobrijević Isović, *Prvi banjalučki feministički festival: Feminizam je borba i trajaće dok za to postoji potreba* [First feminist festival in Banja Luka: Feminism is a fight and it will last so long there is a need for it], BUKA portal, 29 May 2017, <http://www.6yka.com/novost/124595/prvi-banjalucki-feministicki-festival-feminizam-je-borba-i-trajace-dok-za-to-postoji-potreba> (Accessed 20 March 2018).

¹²⁶ Paul Stubbs, "Networks, organisations, movements: Narratives and shapes of three waves of activism in Croatia": 11.

were present in all three country case studies, with the biggest differences appearing in the “third wave.” Croatia is now leading with the newly founded women’s movement that consists of independent initiatives that are interlinking. This sets the country apart from Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, where similar women’s initiatives have been smaller in scope and occurrence, or have taken place in different activist settings (such as the *Ne davimo Beograd (Let’s Not Let Belgrade D(r)own)*¹²⁷ initiative in Serbia or the February 2014 protests¹²⁸ in Bosnia and Herzegovina).

The comparison of feminist activism in the three countries can be observed through a frame alignment or what Snow et al. refer to as “the linkage of individual and SMO (social movement organizations) interpretive orientations.”¹²⁹ It presupposes the complementarity of interests, values and beliefs of SMOs with their activities, goals and ideology.¹³⁰ Frame alignment is a necessary condition for movement participation.¹³¹ The case studies will be compared through three types of frame alignment processes – frame bridging, frame amplification and frame extension – which reflect the differences and similarities in the movements.

Frame bridging is the type of frame alignment that is most obvious in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and refers to the “linkage of two or more ideologically congruent but structurally unconnected frames regarding a particular issue or problem.”¹³² It can occur between SMOs that exists in the same “movement industry”,¹³³ which is, in this case, the women’s movement in Bosnia and Herzegovina. As opposed to Croatia and Serbia, which have more structured feminist and women’s movements, many of the civil society organizations in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which take part in the women’s and feminist movement, have sought to merge or align their ideologies to achieve common advocacy goals.

The unification of these CSOs around the common goal of advocating women’s rights happens whether they are strictly feminist in orientation, or whether they are focused on a different social issue (for example, peace building, rights of the Roma minority or rights of people with disabilities). As the movement is scattered, this reflects the “lack of the

¹²⁷ An activist initiative that appeared in 2015 with the aim to struggle against building luxury housing on the coast of Sava river as a part of the big urban project *Beograd na vodi (Belgrade on Water)*, funded by United Arab Emirates.

¹²⁸ A wave of workers' protests that spread throughout the cities of Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina in February 2014 and led to the formation of citizen assemblies – plenums.

¹²⁹ David A. Snow, E. Burke Rochford, Jr., Steven K. Worden and Robert D. Benford, “Frame Alignment Processes, Micromobilization and Movement Participation,” *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 51, No. 4 (1986): 464.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid, 467.

¹³³ Ibid.

organizational base for expressing discontent.”¹³⁴ Thus, collective action is connected with what Snow et al. term “an ideologically isomorphic SMO”.¹³⁵ In this sense, civil society organizations in Bosnia and Herzegovina are using frame bridging to shape their efforts around a common notion that women’s rights need to be protected, and are willing to extend and unite their advocacy potentials to obtain this goal. Frame bridging is also present in Croatia and Serbia (as it is often the primary form of alignment¹³⁶), but it is the dominant type of frame alignment in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The second type of frame alignment which will be analyzed is frame amplification, which refers to the “clarification and invigoration of an interpretative frame that bears on a particular issue, problem or set of events”.¹³⁷ This type of frame alignment is currently present in Croatia, where the focus is on a particular issue, that is, reproductive rights of women. Frame amplification in Croatia is taking place through a variety of value amplification,¹³⁸ which Snow et al. describe as “identification, idealization and elevation of one or more values presumed basic to prospective constituents but which have not inspired collective action for any number of reasons.”¹³⁹ As was the case in Croatia, reproductive rights as a topic were not being questioned until the appearance of neoconservative groups that began to challenge the need for free, legal and available abortion. By putting this issue in the center of feminist activism, the women’s movement in Croatia has managed to amplify its message and bring into focus abortion rights as an integral part of Croatian law since the 1970s. This type of frame alignment that focuses on amplification of a single issue is not currently present in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia, where advocacy points are largely dispersed or concentrated around common advocacy topics in the region (i.e. gender-based violence, political representation, etc.).

In Serbia, the type of present frame alignment is frame extension, which takes place by promoting causes of advocacy that appeal to the larger body of potential supporters, and, thereby, by also inviting them to join the cause. Snow et al. explain that when SMOs do not cause enough interest from potential supporters, or are considered irrelevant, the movement attempts “to enlarge its adherent pool by portraying its objectives or activities as attending or being congruent with the values or interests of potential adherents.”¹⁴⁰ Civil society organizations in Serbia expand their advocacy by appealing to the values and interests related to women’s rights and align them with their activities (for example, the International Woman’s Day March that brought together a variety of civil society

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid, 468.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid, 469.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, 472.

organizations and aligned them around a common message). In general, frame extension is also present in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia as well, as it is one of the logical steps in appealing to the larger body of supporters to join the cause.

It should be noted that at least two types of frame alignment – frame bridging and frame extension – can be applied to all the countries in question, albeit in different forms and intensities. These differences stem from the political and economic circumstances described for each of the countries in the case studies above. But, again, a certain hierarchy can be observed in terms of the advancement of the women's movements and their activist goals and potentials. By amplifying the issue of abortion, Croatian activists managed to put the spotlight on reproductive rights; by using frame bridging, feminist activists of Bosnia and Herzegovina are trying to do the best they can to advance their activist agenda; and by using frame extension, Serbian feminist activists are attempting to unite their causes and to extend them to a larger body of support. These differences have varied and will vary in the future.

Frame alignment cannot be taken for granted, as it is temporally variable¹⁴¹ and subject to reassessment and renegotiation¹⁴², but also because, as Tilly pointed out, collective actors will come and go,¹⁴³ depending on the frame alignment. Frame alignment is also crucial for movement mobilization, and because of that should be carefully analyzed in terms of potential hazards. Snow et al. describe one of these hazards as an excessive use of frame bridging techniques which can lead to an oversaturated market¹⁴⁴, which is what can now be observed in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where frame bridging, however useful it was to connect various activists under an umbrella goal, is increasingly dulling the edge of the women's movement. Frame extension and frame amplification have hazards too. If the activists in Croatia fail to protect the right to abortion that is now amplified in their activities, their activist power could significantly decrease. If the women's movement in Serbia, while expanding its circle of advocacy goals, does not manage to win enough battles, the sincerity of their objectives will be increasingly questioned.

3.5 Tensions and Contradictions: NGO-ization and a Marginalized Political Left

The feminist movements in the three observed countries face tensions from within but also in relation to the broader social environment. The feminist activists often disagree among themselves over the desired courses of action. Some of them push for feminist goals more because their circumstances allow it, whereas others cannot because they are affiliated with an institutionalized NGO policy shaped by the requirements of donors. Indeed, the

¹⁴¹ Ibid, 476.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid, 478.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, 477.

phenomenon of NGO-ization provides an additional problem for the women's movements in the three countries and has created tensions within them.

It is becoming increasingly difficult to secure funds for projects, because the countries are classified as incipient liberal democracies; thus, less international patronage is considered needed for the development of civil society. However, a lack of support to civil society from the state creates deep problems within the CSO sector, as organizations struggle to secure funds for projects and regular salaries. These problems, which are faced by feminist movements in all three countries, produce larger problems at the transnational level. They can hamper the possibilities of transnational cooperation, which is considered very important for feminist activism in the region. Aida Bagić rightly observes that the women's organizations are still most interested in improving the socio-economic and political conditions of women in contemporary societies, and that they are primary advocates of gender equality and public debate on gender issues.¹⁴⁵ She also claims that international assistance profoundly affected the organizational development and agenda of women's organizations.¹⁴⁶ In all three countries, international assistance has fostered the development of civil society organizations, which, at the time, helped initiate public discussion and awareness of women's rights.

The professionalization of activism has led to higher visibility of the women's rights agenda,¹⁴⁷ in line with the assumption that strong civil society organizations open the space for public action and contribute to social change.¹⁴⁸ This was certainly the case in all three countries. Today, however, women's civil society organizations are mostly dependent on foreign funds to ensure their existence. Were it not for these funds, most of the activists would be unemployed, and public advocacy on women's rights would suffer greatly. This puts the women's movement in a difficult position – if they are unable to act independently of donor policies, their work will suffer, but if they conform to donor policies, they inevitably encounter difficulties in the process of this conforming. Bagić describes this conditionality: “The relationship of 'donor' as the one who is giving of his/her own will, without strings attached, to the 'recipients' who is in need, for altruistic reasons, or out of solidarity, has been slowly transformed into contracting relationship between the 'donor agency' and the 'recipient'.”¹⁴⁹

Nicole Butterfield explains the unfortunate result of this switch: “Organisations have increasingly dedicated their capacities towards influencing state institutions as opposed to

¹⁴⁵ Aida Bagić, *International Assistance for Women's Organizing in South Eastern Europe: From Groups and Initiatives to NGOs*: 3.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, 5.

¹⁴⁷ Nicole Butterfield, “Discontents of Professionalisation: Sexual Politics and Activism in Croatia in the Context of EU Accession”: 26.

¹⁴⁸ Aida Bagić, *International Assistance for Women's Organizing in South Eastern Europe: From Groups and Initiatives to NGOs*: 7.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, 14.

strengthening communities or increasing larger community involvement.”¹⁵⁰ On the other hand, public hostility towards the civil society sector, which is often facilitated by ruling political parties and/or elected governments, has created additional tensions in the work of feminist activists. These tensions are sometimes ameliorated by strategies of cooperation, which some civil society organizations employ to make the political parties and elected officials allies in their work. Yet, sometimes feminist activists are being directly attacked verbally by elected officials and/or members of political parties, making their work harder. It reflects unequal power relations, with political figures having far more public influence than civil society organizations and/or its members.

In the absence of an independent political Left, the women’s movement is effectively left without an ally in the political arena and, therefore, has to concentrate its efforts on state institutions. This is precisely where the political potentials of the women’s movement are challenged the most. When observing all three countries, Croatia seems to be most advanced in terms of having a political Left. Several new political parties are part of the City Council of Zagreb through the Club of Representatives of the Left Block,¹⁵¹ consisting of representatives of three political parties: Zagreb is Ours!,¹⁵² The New Left,¹⁵³ Worker’s Front¹⁵⁴ and For the City.¹⁵⁵ These political parties are supporting the newly formed feminist activist movement that is fighting neo-conservative trends and contestation of abortion rights.

The two other countries have not been so advanced in the formation of the political Left. The Left does not really exist as a category in organized politics and is not present in the elected government. In Serbia, the political Left is most articulated through the activist Left and the collective Left Summit of Serbia, comprising 10 civil society organizations¹⁵⁶ that also participated in the May Day 2018 protest in Belgrade.¹⁵⁷ Its motto was: “For pay to rise, for young people to stay.” The proclamation of the protest focused on the official average pay in Serbia, which is about 400 EUR. This pay average is not applicable to many people in Serbia who are forced to work in shadow economies and receive lower payment that is, at the same time, not taxed by the state. Two activists of the Left Summit of Serbia got arrested during the protest and were accused of verbal insults directed towards the Serbian minister

¹⁵⁰ Nicole Butterfield, “Discontents of Professionalisation: Sexual Politics and Activism in Croatia in the Context of EU Accession”: 27.

¹⁵¹ City Council of Zagreb, Club of Representatives of the Left Block, <http://www.skupstina.zagreb.hr/default.aspx?id=601> (Accessed 3 May 2018).

¹⁵² Zagreb je naš! [Zagreb is Ours!], Web page: <http://www.zagrebjenas.hr/> (Accessed 3 May 2018).

¹⁵³ Nova ljevica [The New Left], Web page: <http://novaljevica.hr/> (Accessed 3 May 2018).

¹⁵⁴ Radnička fronta [Worker’s Front], Web page: <https://www.radnickafronta.hr/> (Accessed 3 May 2018).

¹⁵⁵ Za grad [For the City], Web page: <http://za-grad.com/novosti/> (Accessed 3 May 2018).

¹⁵⁶ PARISS, Solidarnost, ROZA – Udruženje za radna prava žena, Centar za politike emancipacije, Kontekst kolektiv, Forum Roma Srbije, STRIKE, Društveni centar, Zrenjaninski socijalni Forum, Zelena omladina Srbije, Žindok.

¹⁵⁷ Prvomajski protest [May Day Protest], Facebook event: <https://www.facebook.com/events/184561342356460/> (Accessed 3 May 2018).

of labour, Zoran Đorđević, as they asked him questions about a worker who committed suicide a year ago and women who are getting fired because of pregnancy.¹⁵⁸ But, even this small agitation is an important step forward when it comes to the political potentials of the activists in comparison with Bosnia and Herzegovina, where no May Day march/protest was held at all.

These discrepancies in the development of the political Left reflect the contradictions among the countries, but also show how possibilities for action emerge where there is more potential for social change performed either by activists or political parties. A strong activist movement would surely foster more opportunities of the political Left, but the struggles within the movements as well as those that concern the social and political circumstances make it hard for these opportunities to happen. Given these adverse circumstances, it is understandable that the social movements, including the women's movements, in the three countries are, as Horvat and Štiks point out, "diversified in their struggles, ideological orientations and type of action"¹⁵⁹. But, there is room for optimism, as these movements create new ideas and stimulate the creation of more proactive projects, as well as offer a progressive vision of their societies"¹⁶⁰.

¹⁵⁸ Libela.org, *Privedeni aktivisti na Prvomajskom protestu u Beogradu* [Activists arrested on the May Day protest in Belgrade], 2 May 2018, <https://libela.org/preko-plota/9528-privedeni-aktivisti-na-prvomajskom-protestu-u-beogradu/> (Accessed 3 May 2018).

¹⁵⁹ Igor Štiks and Srećko Horvat, "Introduction. Radical Politics in the Desert of Transition," in *Welcome to the Desert of Post-Socialism. Radical Politics After Yugoslavia*, eds. Srećko Horvat and Igor Štiks (London and New York: Verso, 2015): 21.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

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