

## **Food and Electricity: The War and Women's Memories and Stories<sup>1</sup>**

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### **Aims and Intentions<sup>2</sup>**

War is an act of violence with the aim to force the enemy to submit to the other's will. In accordance with patriarchal understanding war is the duty and business of "real men," whereas women must keep silent and support armed men morally, physically and materially, with all their capabilities and powers as required by the war machine.

In public discourse, war is often constructed in patriarchal ways, as exclusively a men's affair. The result is that men are much better adapted to a generally accepted universal model of war than women, who can adapt partly or not at all. Therefore they "deserve" mistrust. This is why the memories of women affected by war at certain historical periods are so important as they challenge these prevailing negative attitudes. During the violent disintegration of the former Yugoslavia in the nineties, it became obvious that women were no longer willing to adopt a passive attitude to war, but wanted to be politically active and participate in peace building politics ("Ženska" 341-351).

### **Another Way is Possible**

Political divisions in Serbia are always as sharp and dangerous as the blade of a knife. The recent division of participants into "traitors" and "patriots" originated in the nineties, a decade which saw the violent disintegration of Yugoslavia and the consequent impossibility of legitimizing difference. Sticking out in any way could lead to charges of attempting to subvert patriotic aims and interests. In this context, women's non-violent discourses are always dangerous, because they oppose common impulses to violence. This is particularly difficult when

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<sup>1</sup> The title makes reference to the frequent shortages of food and electricity during the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia (March 24, 1999-June 10, 1999). The NATO bombing marked the second major combat operation in the history of Yugoslavia, following the 1995 NATO bombing campaign in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The first interviews were conducted during November 1999, the last ones in May 2000, but most of the interviews took place during the winter months of 1999/2000.

<sup>2</sup> The aims and intentions as set out in this chapter result from a project of collecting War women's memories conducted by Zorica Mršević, financed by the Open Society Fund, New York.

violence becomes an over-arching phenomenon. This occurs when many maintain that violence is the only way. It is precisely at this time that it becomes particularly important to show alternatives by highlighting the living experience of rejecting violence and aiming to heal war wounds and regain different value systems ("Network" 79-106).

In Serbia little attention is paid to discussions of contemporary political problems led by women, mostly because the social relationship between genders is only formally set up as symmetry. It is actually a case of false symmetry, supported by a symbiotic asymmetry (in power, in minds, and in language) (Zajović 52-90). Manhood and politics "naturally" go hand in hand, therefore everything that stands in contrast with and is opposed to mainstream political life and political virtues has been associated with women and with what is perceived as "natural" to their sex and abilities. Among the greatest wrongs done to women has been their exclusion from participation in political debate as full members and citizens (Shanley and Pateman 3). The academic canon and classical political theory have been instrumental in achieving and maintaining this exclusion. The dominant model of a political subject is thus a white, early middle aged man who is socially successful, able bodied and healthy and does not want to accept responsibility for social injustices, and therefore does not have any interest in them. Everything associated with the female gender appears in relation to this dominant model as secondary, second class, weaker and lower, just a copy of a better original. Her opinion about anything important for the survival of the nation is simply rejected, ignored or diminished ("Antimilitarizam" 265-314). The historically dominant subject is male, especially in wartime.

Therefore thinking about the female subject is important because it reflects patriarchal prejudices that are hardly noticeable in philosophy (with its emphasis on neutrality and its universal mission). Recognizing women's memories and experiences, women's voices and women's emotions is the first step towards this aim (Kašić 27). In order to break this rule of power and violence, it is first necessary to establish different relationships between men and women. This involves a privileging of "soft," "weak," non-dominant, "decent" subjects, and very likely female subjects, as more adequate to the foreseeable needs of the near future than actual reality. By collecting and presenting women's War memories, my intention is to encourage others to join in reinterpreting and rebuilding history (Zajović 19-90).

### **The “War Women’s Memories” Project**

The idea was born in Budapest in the winter and early spring months of 1999, during the NATO air campaign against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. The project emerged from some intense formal and informal discussions which took place at the Central European University among Serbian women scholars who temporarily found themselves there. What was at the beginning just an internal political matter eventually included regional and Western colleagues and inevitably led to the conclusion that it was necessary to have women’s war experiences and memories recorded.

The main intention was not to let this war be remembered only through men’s official records documenting mainstream political and military activities. The strong determination was to collect women’s experiences during the war as an authentic document of the war seen from the women’s point of view, through the women’s eyes. The essence of women’s oral histories is no more than the sum of women’s lives. The aim of collecting them was to justify and legitimize women’s lives lived in the war (“NATO” 117-202).

This collection of women’s stories was meant to serve as an important present and future database of authentic women’s experiences in the war. It will provide written records of women’s histories as no less important than men’s. Thanks to it, women’s war experiences will no longer be invisible, forgotten, erased from collective memories as if they hadn’t existed, as was the case in previous wars. This will also serve as a collection of women’s wisdom, survival strategies and strategies of overcoming problems imposed by the reality of the war, to be used by women writers, poets, historians, art historians, journalists and everybody interested in this aspect of the conflict.

The project comprises the oral histories/stories of a hundred and ten women. The stories were grouped in ten thematic groups: “Anger,” “Fear and how to cope with it,” “Activities,” “Shortages,” “Being informed,” “Opinions,” “The increase of violence and intolerance,” “Children,” “Consequences,” “Funny moments” (Mršević, “Novac i struja” 123-153). The main emotions generated by the bombing (the persons interviewed were instructed to choose three options from the list offered) were: the feeling of injustice 45.6%, fear 28.2%, hope for improvement 24.6%, resignation and hopelessness 23.6%, anger and bitterness 22.7%, hatred and aggression 8.2%. When it came to defining fear, 13.5% experienced permanent and intense fear, 55.6% low intensity and temporary fear and 30.9% no fear at all. The activities that women undertook during the bombing (again, interviewees were instructed to choose three options from the list) were: socializing, social games, and activity in various anti-war organizations 52.7%, increased intensity of domestic chores 38.2%, following

media presentations of war events 28.2%, intensified working and professional duties 27.3%, reading books 19.1%. Shortages that caused the most hardship during bombing (again choosing three options from a list) were: electricity 59.1%, food 47.3%, money 36.4%, water 27.3%, cigarettes 18.2%. When it came to preferred sources of information 24.5% relied on domestic media 16.4% on all sources combined 16.4%, 12.7% on foreign media, whilst those who permanently or temporarily ignored the media accounted for 12.7%.

The international community cited the armed conflict in Kosovo as the main reason for the NATO air campaign against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, but 65.5% of the women interviewed stated that they had a "lack of any interest for anything connected with Kosovo" and preferred to ignore "all Albanian problems." 24.5% of women maintained that they did not realize there was any connection between the NATO bombing and the political situation in Kosovo, but 17.3% of women did recognize a link between the political situation in Kosovo and the bombing. For many non Serbian readers of women's oral histories, the prevalence of ignoring the connections between the Kosovo situation and the bombing was a disappointing surprise.

All of the stories, no matter in which group they belong, present a snapshot of the reality of war, a moment of survival, an example of women's creativity, and proof of their indestructible sense of healing humor (Mršević, "The Opposite of War" 41-55). As Voznesenskaya said, women typically fight for survival in any given and imposed situation is to tell personal stories concerning various events (Voznesenskaya 15). This is commonly acknowledged as being women's tool against despair and helplessness.

The interviews were conducted with women of all ethnic origins, of different educational and economic backgrounds and adult women of all ages willing to share their war stories. The stories were collected by ten experienced women, longtime volunteers of SOS Hotline, Counseling Place against Domestic Violence and Women in Black. Most of the women's oral histories were collected at the Institute of Social Science in Belgrade, which is already well known to women as a friendly place for women's discussions, panels, workshops and various forms of women's activities ("Antimilitarism" 283-309). Some of the interviews were conducted on the telephone, as often happens in the case of the SOS Hotline communication, an organization that was already well known and trusted by women. Some women were given the opportunity to "speak" via e-mail or other forms of communication (letters, fax letters, self-recorded tapes etc). Other women's stories were collected from their female relatives and women friends in situations when those women were so beaten down by tragic events that they would not speak for themselves (Mršević, *Rečnik* 181).

Women spoke about their war experiences in the form of openly conducted interviews without the intervention or with very discrete interventions of the facilitators. The facilitators were instructed to collect mainly two forms of oral histories, namely, shorter ones, containing one event, one story, one moment picked up from women's war experiences. The second were the longer ones, containing stories on various topics in the format of almost lifelong oral histories. The format depended completely on the women interviewed, not on the facilitators.

### **Migrant, Refugee and Displaced Women's War Experiences**

In accordance with the internal political terminology, "migrants" were those who left their places of origin freely and willingly, pursuing their hopes for a better life somewhere else. Most of them were Serbs living outside Serbia who left their homes before the nineties in anticipation of tragic conflicts. "Refugees" are people expelled by force from their homes in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina or people who ran away from the battle line after these parts of the former Yugoslavia declared independence. "Internally displaced" persons (IDPs) were motivated by the same reasons as refugees, but came from Kosovo, which has never been recognized by Serbia as an independent state. Nowadays the term "migrant" is used for all three categories. Officially, more than 700,000 people from war-affected territories of the former Yugoslavia have found shelter in Serbia ("Serbia Home to Highest Number"). They make up almost 10 percent of the country's population. According to UNHCR data for 2010, Serbia hosted the highest number of refugees in Europe (600 refugee centers existed on Serbian territory in 1996), and is ranked first in Europe and thirteenth in the world. The latest statistics (2012) from the Serbian Ministry for Labor and Social Politics indicates that there are still 74,500 refugees living in Serbia at the moment, while the number of internally displaced people from Kosovo is estimated to be 200,000 (Ristic).

The number of refugee women who were part of Serbian NGOs dealing with violence against women was high, especially in the larger cities. Since at that time the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare failed to establish a project for the prevention of violence against women refugees, the practical task of providing assistance has fallen mostly on non-governmental organizations which also collected women's experiences and stories.

While the Institute of Social Science was collecting women's memories of the NATO bombing, at the same time life stories of women migrants, refugees and IDPs were being recounted at the Belgrade based Counseling Office for Women Victims of Violence. This wasn't part of any particular project, since

the women activists there simply began listening to and writing down the life stories of women relocated to Serbia due to the break-up of Yugoslavia and the events of war.

One of the main conclusions in the Counseling place was that male refugees have a similar (low) risk of becoming victims of domestic violence as men belonging to the host country majority population, but the risk of refugee women becoming victims of such violence was twice as high as for women from the host country. Different groups of refugee women were vulnerable to violence from their Serbian or refugee partners and husbands, but there seem to be specific ethnic patterns of violence. Migrant Roma women, for example, often fall victims to beating, while women of Bosnian and Croat origin are more often victims of sexual violence.

When comparing recorded experiences of migrant women with the NATO War stories of women from the host country Serbia, differences and similarities were noticed. Unlike the majority of women in the host country, most migrant women experienced more violence in their everyday lives, had more pessimistic expectations regarding the future, experienced more material losses and existential and economic difficulties, and had more family members separated by war related events. Unlike women in the host country who mostly expressed sincere surprise after the "outburst of the NATO air campaign," almost all of the migrant women expected an escalation of war operations of the kind carried out by NATO:

We were shocked in a way, but not as shocked as others. My husband is from Croatia and we hardly survived previous wars. We have been in this situation for ten years and the bombing was just a logical development in the succession of events and we were not very surprised, or resentful and we had no thoughts such as "How do they dare to do this to us?" Unlike our friends, we didn't feel outraged. In fact, the bombing diminished the feeling of guilt that we had had before. Earlier we had been agonizing over the horrible things that were happening to other nations and we were asking ourselves why were we "better," how did we deserve to be exempted? And when those things started to happen to us we didn't think it was absurd as people around us did. During the bombings the worst thing for me was not what was happening, but what would happen after the war. The "afterwards" I imagined like a hole, black and bottomless. It is not as bad now as I thought it would be. I was afraid that the basic goods would not be available at all, because I knew that the "plenty" of goods that were in su-

permarkets during the war were all reserves that the state had and that it was only a façade for people to keep their spirits up. And I wondered what would happen when those were spent. (Master of political sciences, 37 years old, working in a library, married, mother of two, Serbian, living in Belgrade)

Another important characteristic of migrant women's experiences is worth mentioning. Namely, on the basis of those records, one may figure out not only that the migrations didn't start with the beginning of military operations in the nineties, but also that they didn't finish with them. The growing interethnic intolerance, along with the ongoing manipulative evocation of the bloody events of the Second World War led the cautious ones (who were, in fact, most often wealthy and educated) to decide to change location before the outbreak of the war, rightfully fearing repeated violence against Serbs. In the 1990s, huge masses of "real refugees" joined the previous, silent and almost invisible first wave of voluntary migrants, who were "in search of a better and safer life," but who, actually, made up a wave of silent migrants. At the end of the armed conflicts, the quiet exile continued, and it still exists, since the 1990s confirmed the old rule "that there is no life for Serbs outside Serbia." Therefore, the Serbian youth of today, living outside Serbia, were deliberately sent to study at Serbian universities (mostly the University of Novi Sad). They are sent off with a warm message from their parents that apart from obtaining their university degrees, they should try to get accustomed to living in Serbia at all costs and seek professional and marriage opportunities there.

It is also worth mentioning similarities with the stories of women in Serbia as the host country, which were numerous. The most blatant similarity was their mutual refusal to stay silent any longer. This was the way both migrant and host women were creating a new history, using their own voices and experience. As such both groups of women were challenging the traditional concept of history, of what is historically important, affirming that their everyday lives were history. Using oral history, women were reconstructing not only their own past but also their future. Women of the war generation set themselves new priorities, different from those accepted by their mothers' generation, not to mention their grandmothers'. Maybe migrant women put more stress on moments of heroism and the need to search for the "lost heroines and heroes," not known by anybody outside the circle of close family members, friends, relatives, and colleagues (typical cases are those of Marina B and Marina M). But as with the host country women, they evidenced the typical and atypical roles of their mothers, fathers and brothers, and highlighted forced mobilization in war time, and instances of wartime humor and intellectual escapism (Marina Z).

### **The Three Marinas (Migrant Women's Experiences)**

1. Marina from Borovo Selo (Borovo village), hereinafter referred to as Marina B, tells a story about her six years in Belgrade during the migrant 1990s, which she spent in a rented apartment. Talking about those times, Marina B admired mostly the discipline and heroism of her brother, who managed to stay cooped up in his apartment for over four years. However, while listening to her story, there is no doubt that in fact she was a hero too, because she had subordinated her whole life and professional future to hiding her brother and ensuring that he completed his studies and enrolled on a graduate course in the USA. Their mother worked day and night in order to earn a living for her two children, who were students (another invisible woman hero), whereas their father, who was mostly absent, traded with the same objective, but in fact rarely and irregularly contributing to family survival. The story is dominated by the four-year voluntary confinement of her younger brother Stefan. When he finished grammar school and enrolled in the Faculty of Mathematics, Arkan's<sup>3</sup> Tigers<sup>4</sup> patrols were active in Belgrade and other cities. Without asking any questions, they would literally hunt down and arrest young men of army age in the streets and other public places (with the tacit consent of the government), and would then forcefully send them to the recruiting center in Erdut,<sup>5</sup> where they undertook harsh training and from where they were sent to one of the many fronts to fight for "the Serbian cause." All of them were treated as traitors and deserters, and once it was found out from their documents that they were refugees, their

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<sup>3</sup> Željko Ražnatović widely known as Arkan (April 17, 1952-January 15, 2000) was a Serbian career criminal and later a paramilitary leader who was notable for organizing and leading a paramilitary force in the Yugoslav Wars. He was on Interpol's most wanted list in the 1970s and 1980s for robberies and murders committed in a number of European countries and was later indicted by the UN for crimes against humanity. Arkan was assassinated in 2000 before his trial.

<sup>4</sup> Members of the Serb Volunteer Guard led by Arkan called themselves "Arkan's Tigers."

<sup>5</sup> Erdut is a village and municipality in eastern Croatia. It is located in the Osijek-Baranja County, eastern Slavonia, 37 km east of Osijek. When Croatia declared independence from Yugoslavia in 1991, eastern Slavonia was soon overrun by the Yugoslav National Army and Serb paramilitaries, led by the notorious warlord, Željko Ražnatović known by the name Arkan. The battle for Erdut quickly ended that summer as the entire Croatian population was expelled or killed along with other minorities, including Czechs, Germans, Hungarians, Ruthenians and Ukrainians in an act of ethnic cleansing. Arkan soon set up a training camp for his Serb Volunteer Guard in Erdut, which became his headquarters until the end of the war, when Croatian forces recaptured most of the land occupied by the Serb rebels.



“guilt” became even greater, because they “enjoyed themselves” in Belgrade and “pretended to be” students, while other young men shed blood to defend their homes in Croatia and Bosnia. Their lives weren’t worth much, so that if they survived the ill-treatment in Erdut, they were sent off to the worst battlefields possible, where many of them became unaccounted for. Being aware of all that, Marina and her family decided to save Stefan from this fate. While Marina and her mother advised him only to be extremely cautious and to leave the house as rarely as possible, Stefan decided on the safest but most radical strategy: to completely stop leaving the house. Marina talked about how she had discontinued studying journalism and how she, too, had enrolled in the Faculty of Mathematics, so that she could help her brother, who studied at home. She was his eyes and ears at lectures, doing her best to pass on everything in the professor’s lectures. In four years, Stefan only left the apartment to go, by taxi, to take his exams. Their inexpensive apartment in the attic proved to be suitable for this “detention” program: he had a spacious unfinished attic at his disposal, as well as a small roof terrace. By putting in a lot of effort and by using a minimum amount of material, Stefan rearranged the apartment space, so that he could work out there, as well as walk, enjoy the fresh air and even sunbathe in the summer. Marina B recounts how she eventually became his only connection with the university, and, in general, with the outside world. Stefan broke off all contact with his friends, which wasn’t an uncommon thing to do during the war. Young men were leaving and little was known about them, while many of them didn’t return. When asked about her brother, Marina worriedly and vaguely replied that he was “over there,” while pointing in the direction of Croatia, so that everyone understood that Stefan was fighting in the war somewhere. As it wasn’t considered good manners, outsiders didn’t ask too many questions at that time Marina B rarely talked about all the things she had to do at the faculty in order to lessen the interest of some curious professor in her brother, who even though he was studying part-time, and notwithstanding his total absence from classes, mastered the lessons extremely well, passed his exams with the highest possible grades and finally came to take his exams looking emaciated, tanned and sporting a short military haircut, as if he were fulfilling the image of someone coming “from the front.” How somebody fighting all year long managed to be the best student was a mystery to his mathematics professors. Marina B’s grades were lower than Stefan’s, because he studied all day long. She studied “for him” as well for herself and she also helped her mother to earn money for all of them (“the scariest thought to us was that we wouldn’t have the money for the rent, that we would have to move, and moving is seen by everyone, Stefan would be exposed for days, as you can’t move fast, and who knew where we would go then, as we would certainly

be unable to find an attic with the terrace that meant so much to him, because it helped him put up with being cooped up in the flat..."). Marina B always underlines Stefan's unfailing encouragement and his determination to cheer her up and endure the situation with her. He told her that they had to learn mathematics and foreign languages to the full extent of their abilities adding that they, as good students of mathematics, could certainly have jobs somewhere in the world where there was no war and where generations of Serbs didn't have to die as they did in the Balkans. "His determination saved his life, as well as mine," Marina B frequently stressed. During the 1999 NATO bombing, Marina B went to Budapest where, shortly after her arrival and thanks to her excellent command of English, she was hired as a translator by Reuters. As soon as she received her first salary, Stefan joined her, as the Hungarian-Serbian border was open during the war. The bombs were still falling on Serbia when Stefan passed the entrance exam for postgraduate studies in mathematics, gaining a scholarship to an American university as the highest scoring candidate in the exam. Two years later, Marina joined him at the same university, where she also passed the entrance exam and was in the group of top students who received scholarships.

2. Marina from Mostar<sup>6</sup> (hereinafter referred to as Marina M) is the daughter of a Yugoslav People's Army air force captain. Marina M says that her father cared only about his military commitments, as the army meant everything to him, while his family was only something extraneous. And before open hostilities began in Mostar ("We would just hear that a Serbian cafe, or a house, or a car was blown up, no one was ever charged with anything, no one ever looked for the person who had planted the bomb, no one even officially published this, but we heard it from our acquaintances, and fear became part of our everyday life, although, seemingly, everything was normal and calm"), Marina M's father began taking charge of the army equipment at the military airport. Know-

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<sup>6</sup> Mostar is the fifth-largest city in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In 18 November 1991, the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) branch in Bosnia and Herzegovina proclaimed the existence of the Croatian Republic of Herzeg-Bosnia and Mostar was divided into a western part, which was dominated by the Croat forces, and an eastern part, where the Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina was largely concentrated with most of the Bosniak population. Between 1992 and 1993, after Bosnia and Herzegovina declared independence from Yugoslavia, the town was subject to an eighteen-month siege. By 12 June 1992, the 4th Corps of the ARBiH and the Croatian Defense Council (HVO) in a joint action amassed enough strength to force the JNA (Yugoslav People's Army) out of Mostar. The Serbs of Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina, numbered about 24,000 (20%) at the outbreak of the Bosnian War in 1992, during which a majority of them left. With the city's post-war division into Croat and Bosniak (Bosnian Muslim) halves, very few Serbs have returned.

ing that the army was the most pressing matter to her husband and that he wouldn't deal with his family's security, Marina M's mother took matters into her own hands. With the help of army officers, she organized the departure of army officers' wives and children from Mostar to Niš. (Niš is the second largest city in Serbia, with more than 250.000 inhabitants. It is a university city and the political and industrial center of south-east Serbia. During the NATO air campaign in 1999, Niš was bombed more than 40 times). Marina's mother did a huge job under impossible circumstances. Her job involved administrative matters, seeking and finding personal connections with people willing to help. Her task was complicated by having to comply with the laws of a state that was disintegrating and the consequent bribery, fraud and trickery she encountered. The families that had accompanied Marina M's mother left the city while it was still possible to do so, while there were no immediate threats to life, carrying all their belongings, savings and movable property with them. They somehow managed even to get proper military flats in Niš, which only a few months later, with the influx of refugees, military personnel and their families, became impossible. "My mother saved us, while my father saved the airplanes," says Marina M with a laugh. Her mother was her everyday hero, whereas her father was her "faraway" hero. No one outside the army officers' families ever mentioned her mother, while her father was a public hero. He organized land convoys through which ammunition, weaponry and other equipment were pulled out of Mostar barracks. However the most dangerous operations involved the removal of airplanes and helicopters, when Serbian forces were fired upon by members of the Croat and Muslim forces, who naturally wanted the aircraft for themselves. The Serbs managed to save a great deal of military hardware. As soon as a load of stuff was brought to Niš, pilots would voluntarily return to the hell and chaos of Mostar to pull out more machines. Of course, not all of them returned, as every time there were fewer volunteers. It is reported that the last "Gazelle" (brand of military helicopter) to leave Mostar was flown by Marina's father. Although the helicopter was loaded three times more than its legal weight limit and had minimum fuel, it managed to make an emergency landing undamaged shortly before reaching Niš airport. Marina M still recognizes the spot, now located on the lawn near the airport building, where the last "Gazelle" from Mostar landed. This is the place where her father was physically restrained by his comrades to prevent him from returning to Mostar once again – he was finally forbidden to do so by one of the commanding generals. He calmed down only when he came to the realization that "everything went up in the air there," and that if he had gone back, he wouldn't have returned to Niš. Marina claims that her father died of heart failure in the middle of the first decade of 2000, in peace-time and, that he died defeated, with a feeling that "not

everyone in the Yugoslav Peoples' Army did their best to save Yugoslavia and yet it was their duty to do so." "Recently I have practically lived on my father's pension, because I was an unemployed child of a war hero," said Marina M. Even though she had a BA and a PhD in sociology, there were no jobs for her line of work. Marina M is now a journalist and a peace activist, and often wonders whether she is doing her best and whether she is worthy of the heroism of both her mother and father, who, each in their own way, had done a lot more under the most difficult circumstances, than she did in peacetime.

3. Marina from Zagreb (hereinafter referred to as Marina Z), arrived in Belgrade as a child, in the early 1990s. She tells the story of how her mother insisted on their moving or purchasing a flat in one of the blocks of flats in New Belgrade (an area of Belgrade build after the Second World War) "before it's too late," and of how her mother often said that "There is no life for Serbs outside Serbia," which her father didn't agree with, but tacitly opposed. Marina Z says that she wasn't too attached to Zagreb in the past. Identical blocks of flats built by the socialist regime existed everywhere in the former Yugoslavia. They moved from one such building to another several times and eventually settled down in New Belgrade. There was no need for her to check if Zagreb was still where they had left it, as they had actually left behind a dream. As she puts it, everything—the sounds, smells, blue sky, the trees, and the noise of children's playgrounds—is the same when you stand still, so what difference does it make whether your piece of the world is in Zagreb or Belgrade! Marina Z's dominant memory of the migrant 1990s is of the Serbian Literary Cooperative bookstore, where she used to spend most of her time. She remembers that Milan, a bookseller, helped her a lot. She would read all day long, without being obliged to buy anything, as long as she didn't damage the books she was reading. Marina Z stresses that you must

Bear in mind that it was 1993, which was a terrible year for all of us. On the other hand, there was a good opportunity to work, since you didn't have too many choices. That is how Nietzsche rushed into my life when I was 15. What attracted me to Nietzsche the most was his non-engagement with other people's opinions.

Marina Z is now a well-known Serbian painter. She graduated from the Art Academy when the NATO bombing campaign finished, during which she continued painting. She was painting pictures of monumental dimensions at a warehouse situated near the railroad tracks, when rumors began spreading that that part of the city would be the first to be bombed in the next attack. She called her father to help her pull the latest and largest picture out of the warehouse, which they struggled to put on top of the car, with the picture's face

turned to the sky. In order to stop it sliding off the roof of the car they had to drive slowly through the darkened city, bombs falling around them. They arrived home when the wave of NATO planes had passed, both crazily laughing at the thought of what the painting must have looked like to “those from above.” Her mother only noted with resignation, “You’re both crazy in the same way.”

Intellectual escapism was also frequently reported as being a survival strategy, particularly for younger women from the host country (Serbia) during the NATO air campaign. “To my friends and me it was fun during the bombing to translate Serbian classics into English. By doing this, we wanted to show that we have a culture that has existed for centuries; that we are not a nation without roots and spirit. So, it is written in my notebook that on April 24 we translated a poem by Djura Jaksic.” (This from a twenty year old unmarried and childless English language student, a Serb from Kragujevac studying in Belgrade).

## **Conclusion**

The feeling of injustice is especially pronounced in Serbia because of the strong socio-economic mechanisms that were used to put the blame for the (lost) wars on regular participants in the war. Simultaneously, war profiteers, who have become tycoons and who were Milosevic’s ministers and other close associates of his, were relieved of guilt thanks to the complicity of all political parties and the silence of a substantial part of civil society. Today, because the laxity of laws governing privatization, these profiteers are able to launder the money they stole during the 1990s and smuggled abroad. Moreover, the war is now blamed on those ordinary, working class people who participated in it. The blame isn’t only placed on the collective level (all participants in the war/workers/people), but it is also construed as something that was the responsibility of individuals, since it is still Serbia’s official policy that Serbs did not participate in the war either as a state, or as a society. This resulted in the complete collapse and fragmentation of society, and prevented veterans from banding together to organize any sort of campaign against corruption or to seek to improve their opportunities for employment and entrepreneurship.

In wartime it seems that it is too easy to lose a sense of perspective, it is too easy to find oneself in blind alleys and not see the way out, it is too easy to feel exhausted (Zajović 85-90). The Balkan wars and conflicts were for Balkan women painful paths of change and learning. But these were also times for women to show their capacity for survival. When mistrust and apathy were everywhere around them and when good was overlapping evil, these women proved themselves (“Saopštenja” 267-290). This was a time when many were

ready to stress the importance of rejecting violence, of holding on to the memories of that time in order to heal the wounds of war in the future when the whole community would want to adopt different value systems ("Network" 110-116). The healing of traumatized societies and those with personal trauma is directly connected with the social legitimation of various past and present memories. Experiences with violence, terror and pain can be erased by social anesthesia, but it is debatable whether such social healing is the best option for gaining sustainable peace. Therefore women's specific ways of articulating peace as eternal "others" becomes extremely significant, showing that problems cannot be solved through violence ("Antimilitarism" 283-309). When women are those who create peace, building civil society slowly but with hope, the simple truth becomes apparent: the costs of war are always higher than its benefits. In the name of life and in defense of human rights, it is a matter of principle to reject killing and the destruction of war ("Antimilitarizam" 265-314).

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