Hierarchical Sisterhood
For Ella & Denni

and

in loving memory of
Sadeta Vladavić (1959–1992)

Moje duboko ubedjenje je da su žene svih generacija, u svom vremenu sa svim njegovim i svojim vlastitim ograničenjima, uradile što je bilo moguće.

It is my deep conviction that women of all generations did what was possible, within their own limits and within the limits of their times.

Historian Neda Božinović
Hierarchical Sisterhood
Supporting Women’s Peacebuilding through Swedish Aid to Bosnia and Herzegovina 1993–2013
Abstract


This dissertation examines possibilities and challenges faced by international interveners in a post-socialist and violently divided area. The study object is the Swedish foundation Kvinna till Kvinna, formed in 1993 during the Bosnian war, originating from the peace movement and supported by the Swedish government aid agency Sida. The aim is to contextualize and analyze Kvinna till Kvinna’s two decades of engagement in peacebuilding in Bosnia. The encounter with domestic women’s NGOs is of particular interest. By focusing on rhetoric, practice and silences, the ambition has been to understand the international/local relationship from the perspective of both actors.

In terms of methodology, this study combines a hermeneutic approach with that of oral history. The empirical material utilized consists of both written and oral sources, the majority of which appear in research for the first time. To capture the complexity of the peacebuilding endeavor, critically scrutinize it and discern its benevolence, this research draws inspiration from postcolonial and semiperipherality theories, as well as influential theorizing on peacebuilding, sisterhood and solidarity.

This study shows that even well-intentioned, locally-focused external efforts, constrained by donor agendas and circumstances on the ground, contain problematic characteristics common in the era of liberal peace. While subscribing to the idea of transnational sisterhood, Kvinna till Kvinna also presented a belief in Swedish supremacy and demonstrated a lack of interest in local knowledge. It sought to educate and change its Bosnian counterparts by using soft methods. Further, the findings challenge idealized images of the ‘local’ as a peace-loving force for change and a powerless victim of Western domination. The hierarchical sisterhood that over time evolved between the two actors, founded on basic shared values related to women’s situation, was driven by mutual benefit. Acknowledging advantages of this type of transnational encounters in peacebuilding contexts, the study raises questions about dilemmas in them and underlines the importance of rhetorical listening.

Keywords: sisterhood, Kvinna till Kvinna, international intervention, women, peacebuilding, Sida, local NGOs, Bosnia.

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List of Abbreviations

AFW = Anti-Fascist Front of Women

BiH = Bosnia and Herzegovina (Bosna i Hercegovina)

CEDAW = Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against women

CONCORD = Confederation of Relief and Development NGOs

CPY = Communist Party of Yugoslavia

EU = European Union Force

EUFOR = European Unioun Force

FBIH = Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Federacija Bosne i Hercegovine)

GAP = Gender Action Plan

NGO = Non-governmental organization

IC = International community

ICTY = International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia

ICW = International Council of Women

IFOR = Implementation Force

IAW = International Alliance of Women

IWSA = International Woman Suffrage Alliance

NATO = North Atlantic Treaty Organization

NAWSA = National American Woman Suffrage Association
OECD = Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
OSCE = Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
RS = Republic of Srpska (Republika Srpska)
Sida = Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
SFOR = Stabilization Force
SNSD = Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (Stranka Nezavisnih Socijalnih Demokrata)
SSKF = Sweden’s Socialdemocratic Women’s Federation (Sveriges socialdemokratiska kvinoförbund, S-kvinnor)
SPAS = Swedish Peace and Arbitration Association
STAR = Strategy, Training and Advocacy for Reconciliation Network
UN = United Nations
UNHCR = United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNPROFOR = United Nations Protection Force
UNSCR = United Nations Security Council Resolution
USAID = United States Agency for International Development
WHO = World Health Organization
WILPF = Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom
Prologue

Within a minute, I understood that she was the wrong person for my study. However, the woman who sat across from me had already said ‘too much’. About the days in May 1992, the sudden loss of her husband and two young sons and the deportation from her hometown. From an ethical point of view, stopping the interview after this was not an option. Continuing, I learned that Tima Delić was one of the first returnees to Bratunac, a small town in eastern Bosnia and Herzegovina (hereafter Bosnia) located in the near vicinity of the better-known Srebrenica, where I had come to interview activists of a women’s organization. The organization Forum Žena (Women’s Forum), partly supported by the Swedish foundation Kvinna till Kvinna (Woman to Woman), had done remarkable efforts in countering ethnic segregation by helping Bosniak returnees to reintegrate into this now predominantly Serb community.

As Tima Delić was not an activist of Forum Žena but one of the women who had been receiving support from it, she was not suitable for my study. Nevertheless, she left a strong impression. Her neat appearance, welcoming smile and a sort of peacefulness made Delić stand out in a room full of women impatiently waiting to be interviewed. Hearing about the great loss she had suffered during the war, I was struck by the presence of a clear openness to interethnic dialogue in her narrative. It was a powerful reminder of the fact that it was precisely life stories like this one, including both painful experiences and a positive attitude towards reconciliation that motivated women around the world to solidarize with those in war-torn Bosnia in the early 1990s. Their outstretched hands were welcomed by local women who organized, eager to see a normalization of life in their communities.

Our meeting on that warm September day in 2012 was not the last one. The next two times we met, Tima Delić’s narrative revealed more of the complexity of life in a violently divided society. That desire for peace and integration often coexists with feelings of injustice and not belonging caused by the war. That navigation between the two is a difficult undertaking in itself, further aggravated by the inflamed political context in Bosnia.
CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

A commitment to peace and a desire to improve women’s situation have for a long time been leading to encounters between women from different corners of the world. Repeatedly from the nineteenth century onwards, women’s peace organizations have been calling for attention regarding the precarious situation of women in war. The sufferings of women during wartime has historically been seen as a natural consequence of war and thus treated as a non-issue.\(^1\) However, by the mid-1990s many years of advocacy work and a number of global conferences on women arranged by the United Nations (UN) between 1975 and 1995 started to bear fruit. The issue of women’s plight in wars was addressed at the Beijing Conference in 1995. The declaration that followed acknowledged women as victims and recognized them as key actors for peace, which was confirmed by the UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR 1325) on Women, Peace and Security five years later. Parallel to this, the role of civil society organizations in peacebuilding processes, which had been overlooked earlier, came into prominence.\(^2\)

International interventions undertaken from the 1990s have to a larger degree than before incorporated support for the empowerment of women in conflict-affected contexts. Sweden has been at the forefront of making gender equality a priority in its development cooperation. In 2015, the Swedish Government, led by the Minister for Foreign Affairs Margot Wallström,\(^3\) even adopted a declaration on feminist foreign policy “the goal of which is to combat discrimination of women, improve women’s conditions and contribute to peace and development”.\(^4\) Numerous Swedish organizations have taken part in international missions with the aim to build peace and transform conflict-ridden areas, not seldom by aiding civil society actors.\(^5\)

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\(^1\) Skjelsbæk 2012, 47-59. For a seminal work on the issue see Brownmiller 1976.

\(^2\) Barnes 2011, 15-19.

\(^3\) Margot Wallström is one of the most prominent female politicians within the Swedish Social Democratic Party. Wallström has also been internationally engaged within the European Commission, and between 2010 and 2012 served as the very first UN Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict.

\(^4\) Confederation of Relief and Development NGOs (CONCORD) Sverige 2017, 17.

\(^5\) Åkerlund 2005.
The overall aim of this thesis is to contextualize and analyze the possibilities and challenges faced by the Swedish foundation Kvinna till Kvinna during two decades of engagement in peacebuilding in Bosnia. Of particular interest is the encounter with Bosnian women’s organizations that Kvinna till Kvinna has supported. As much as the sources used allow, the ambition is to understand and illuminate this international/local relationship from the perspective of both actors.

Kvinna till Kvinna operates in several countries affected by conflict. The focus of this thesis is Bosnia. One of the main reasons for making this particular choice is that the very beginnings of the organization are directly tied to the Bosnian war. It is also where Kvinna till Kvinna has been active the longest period of time, which makes studying its engagement over time suitable. The period studied stretches between 1993, the year that Kvinna till Kvinna started to organize, and 2013. The study ends with the year when for the first time, in the history of the organization a native Bosnian was entrusted with the position of program manager in charge of Kvinna till Kvinna’s Sarajevo office, thus marking a possible shift in power relations. Also, at that time, the general situation in Bosnia changed radically by increased political instability followed by social unrest.

Another reason to focus on Bosnia is the international intervention, until then unprecedented, that followed the peace agreement signed in late 1995. At the same time as the Bosnia case represents “a positive story of international interest, commitment, and delivery”, it offers important lessons regarding both possibilities and limits of external peacebuilding in a war-shattered, divided country characterized by political instability. The time period covered in this thesis was also a particularly eventful one in Bosnian history. After centuries spent under foreign rule and almost 50 years in the Yugoslav federation, Bosnia became independent in 1992. The collapse of the socialist system in combination with the war turned this geographical space, previously well-known for its multiethnic character, into an impoverished, fragmented society facing triple ‘transition’.

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6 Hertić, Šapčanin and Woodward 2000, 315.
7 This triple ‘transition’ consists of transformation from war to peace, from socialism to democracy and from planned economy to a market-oriented one. Although extensively used, the word transition is problematic. As some scholars have remarked, it is ideologically loaded and implies that liberal democracy is a given outcome of ‘transition’ and the only possible path that a post-socialist and postwar state can take. They suggest the word “transformation” as more suitable to use in this context. See, for example, Einhorn 2000; Blagojević 2009.
Originating from the women’s peace movement, Kvinna till Kvinna has been one of the few foreign actors early and specifically interested in working with local women’s groups, viewing them as potential peacebuilding forces. As a newly created organization striving to link a feminist agenda with concrete aid work, the organization entered the field of development during the war in Bosnia. Already then, extensive work was initiated in order to raise funds for women in the area, which eventually turned into on-site assistance to domestic women’s groups in their efforts to improve the lives of women and advance their rights.

The greater part of the time period studied here is usually referred to as post-war or post-conflict, two terms which in this thesis are used interchangeably. Scholars, and feminist ones in particular, contend that:

> the moment that gun is silenced has something to be said for it. [...] a cease-fire, especially if a peace agreement follows, brings an opportunity worth examining in its specificity. [...] To those of us who have a concern with gender power relations it also seems a crucial moment, when social upheaval might open a door to the changes we hope for.9

Both conflict and post-conflict situations provide opportunities for women and open up a space for them to work actively on bringing about change. However, research conducted in diverse contexts also identifies a postwar backlash against women, manifested through different forms of violence, and the need to struggle for an inclusive peace.10 At the same time, there is no shortage of examples that women in conflict-affected societies, despite trauma and victimization, “grasp this window of opportunity that transitional democracies allow to further gender justice, equality and rights”.11 Women-friendly foreign actors are in a position which enables them to contribute to this process, and this makes Kvinna till Kvinna a suitable object of investigation that can throw light on the role such actors can play in international peacebuilding.

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8 Aware of the pitfalls with behind the term “local”, I use it when referring to Bosnian women and women’s organizations within the country. In this thesis, “local” and “domestic” are used interchangeably.


10 See Ćopić 2004; Pankhurst 2008; Kaufman and Williams 2015; Shekhawat 2015.

11 Porter 2007, 4. See also Arostegui 2013.
Introducing the actors

**Kvinna till Kvinna**

Kvinna till Kvinna was founded in early 1993 on the initiative of peace activists from two of Sweden’s oldest peace organizations, The Swedish Peace and Arbitration Association (SPAS) and the Swedish section of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF). Its formation was a reaction to the war in former Yugoslavia, especially the sexual violence against women in Bosnia. Initially a network of organizations and private citizens and a project within WILPF, Kvinna till Kvinna transformed into a fundraising foundation in 1995. The foundation remained tightly connected to the Swedish peace movement, and WILPF and SPAS have all along been in charge of appointing the Kvinna till Kvinna board. The unchangeable mandate of the foundation has been to help women in areas of conflict and war as well as to spread information about women’s lives in those areas.

Kvinna till Kvinna managed to attract both financial and moral support from a wide range of organizations, businesses and private persons in Sweden. As early as in 1994, it received the first grant from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), which over the years became its biggest donor. With Sida onboard, Kvinna till Kvinna eventually expanded and has become a more clear-cut development organization. At the outset, it had one full-time employee who divided her time between the field office in Split, Croatia, and the head office in Stockholm. Twenty years later, the number of employees was much higher. Approximately one third of them worked at field offices in the Balkans, the Caucasus, the Middle East as well as the DR Congo and Liberia on the African continent. In 2013, the organization supported well over a hundred women’s organizations around the world.\(^{12}\)

### Table 1. The expansion of Kvinna till Kvinna 1993-2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Countries</th>
<th>Full-time employees</th>
<th>Local NGOs supported</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
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</table>


\(^{12}\) Kvinna till Kvinna’s Annual report 2013, 11, 37.
While the first actions undertaken by the organization were of humanitarian character, its work with women’s non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in war-torn and conflict-affected areas has been its core activity. Instead of implementing own projects, Kvinna till Kvinna supports projects carried through by local women. During its twenty years of presence in Bosnia, the Swedish foundation has supported a wide circle of local women’s organizations. Both entities that make up postwar Bosnia, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (the Federation) and Republika Srpska (the RS), have been covered. While it is usual for donors to prioritize local NGOs from urban centers, it is noticeable that considerable support provided by Kvinna till Kvinna went to women’s organizations in small towns in rather remote parts of Bosnia.

Table 2. The number of Bosnian women’s NGOs supported by Kvinna till Kvinna 1994-2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>NGOs</th>
<th>Entity FBiH</th>
<th>Entity RS</th>
<th>City</th>
<th>Town</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
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<td>2002</td>
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<td>2006</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Kvinna till Kvinna’s Annual reports 1994-2013.

Kvinna till Kvinna is not the only international women’s organization formed as a reaction to the Bosnian war. Nonetheless, it has been one of few international actors focused on supporting women’s struggle to acquire an inclusive peace. The feminist outlook of the organization in combination with work in a

13 During the twenty years, Kvinna till Kvinna has been awarded several times for its aid work abroad. For instance, on its tenth anniversary in 2003, the organization was awarded The Right Livelihood Award (also called the Alternative Nobel Prize). See Annual report 2003, 41. In 2013 it was awarded by the Swedish Development Fund with the FuF Prize for “good development and aid work”. See Kvinna till Kvinna’s Annual report 2013, 31.

14 Other examples of international women-oriented NGOs formed during the war in Bosnia are Medica Mondiale from Germany and the US-supported Strategy, Training and Advocacy for Reconciliation (STAR) Network. For more examples of international solidarity manifested prior to and during the war in Bosnia see Kaldor 2007, 30, 44-45.
post-socialist, violently divided context is an additional component that makes Kvinna till Kvinna worth studying.

Kvinna till Kvinna has been active on different levels. Besides supporting domestic NGOs in war-torn areas around the world, informing the general public and influential actors in Sweden and beyond about the situation of women in conflict and war areas as well as promoting their participation in peace processes has been an important task over the years. Although all the activities performed by the organization deserve attention, all of them do not fit into the scope of this study. So, while a shred of attention is given to fragments of Kvinna till Kvinna’s engagement for Bosnia manifested through fundraising and advocacy work in Sweden, the primary focus here is its engagement in Bosnia.

**Bosnian women’s NGOs**

As elsewhere in the post-communist/socialist parts of Europe, there has been a sharp rise of NGOs in Bosnia. This phenomenon began in earnest after the war with the arrival of foreign donors. The massive presence of donors and a law that makes it easy to register NGOs contributed to the formation of thousands of local NGOs during the first postwar decade.\(^\text{15}\) While the dramatic increase of registered NGOs has been obvious, it has been difficult to determine the exact number of active organizations. In a survey by CURE foundation, 99 such were found.\(^\text{16}\) It is interesting to know that women have been an integral part, and even leaders, of the burgeoning non-governmental sector. The organizations they formed engage in a wide range of humanitarian, cultural, social and political issues such as human rights, gender equality and reconciliation. Organizations situated in cities tend to be more involved in activities beyond the immediate, local level and engage in campaigning and lobbying for legal changes and increased participation of women in public life. They are generally viewed as more progressive and open about their feminist orientation.

A number of women’s organizations in Bosnia have received support from Kvinna till Kvinna. In the source material used in the thesis a plethora of local voices from women active in of the Bosnian civil sector are presented. While several NGOs that have been sponsored by the Swedish foundation over the years are represented in written sources utilized in this study, there is a special focus on a selected group of four NGOs and interviews were conducted with representatives of these four. The four organizations are: Žene Ženama

\(^{\text{15}}\) For example, Sejfija refers to a number of 8000 NGOs registered between 1992 and 2001. See Sejfija 2006, 125. See also Belloni 2007, 110.

\(^{\text{16}}\) Fondacija/Zaklada CURE 2008.
(Women to Women) located in the Federation and Lara, the aforementioned Forum Žena, and Budućnost (Future) located in the RS. These organizations are representative of those found in written sources and will be introduced in more detail below.

All four of these NGOs have been involved in long-term cooperation with Kvinna till Kvinna. In fact, the Swedish foundation has been one of their very first donors. All were formed during the first years after the war, Budućnost in 1996, Žene Ženama in 1997, Lara in 1998 and Forum Žena in 1999. As numerous other women’s groups, they organized with the intention to participate actively in the normalization of life and interpersonal relations disrupted during the war years. Opening the doors to women from all ethnicities, each one of these organizations often functioned as one of few public meeting place for women in the town/city.

These NGOs have over the years realized a wide range of activities. What follows is a brief presentation of activities that have dominated the work of each NGO during their relatively short history. As many other women’s NGOs in Bosnia, Budućnost has combined the role of a service provider with advocacy work. One of the organization’s core activities, which made it recognizable in the local community, has been the women’s refuge that offers support services to battered women. It is one of four such institutions in the entity of RS, formed and run by Budućnost since 2000. Other prioritized activities have been prevention of domestic violence and support to women politicians. Besides providing psycho-social support to women in Sarajevo and organizing meeting places for women with different experiences of the war, Žene Ženama’s main and long-term activity has been strengthening the development of NGOs situated throughout Bosnia. It is also noteworthy to mention that the organization launched women’s studies in the country. Lara is probably best known for its engagement in battling trafficking. During a period of time, the organization even ran a shelter for victims of trafficking. Lara has made a significant contribution through establishing contacts between Serb and Bosniak women in the city of Bijeljina. Forum Žena has worked very actively on the integration of predominantly Bosniak returnees to Bratunac at the time when they were represented by local authorities, thus promoting reconciliation in a part of Bosnia extremely burdened by the recent war.
All four NGOs have been diligent advocates of law changes that would further gender equality in Bosnia. Since 1998, they have continuously demanded participation of women in public life.17

**Sida**

One actor of indisputable importance in the context of peacebuilding in Bosnia, including conditions surrounding the work of Kvinna till Kvinna and domestic NGOs as well as the relationship between the two, is the Swedish government aid agency Sida. Unlike decades of Swedish development aid efforts in for example Africa and Latin America, there was no such tradition in Yugoslavia. The first connections with regard to aid came during the wars in the 1990s. The emphasis was put on humanitarian assistance, but not exclusively. As the main facilitator of Swedish aid, Sida has been funding projects in Bosnia since 1994. Support to women’s centers in the divided city of Mostar was one of the first cooperation projects of Kvinna till Kvinna and Sida.

An extensive contribution of development aid started with the end of the war. It comprised of funds channeled via Swedish as well as international organizations, and Swedish expertise. Over the years, Sida has supported a wide range of projects. In the immediate postwar period the emphasis was on projects focused on trauma healing and on reconstruction of destroyed infrastructure needed for refugees to return to their pre-war homes. Contributions also went to the restoration of monuments and buildings of historical and cultural significance. Later, considerable efforts have been invested in aiding domestic institutions at different levels in order to modernize the system of public administration.18

A significant portion of Swedish aid has been directed towards the civil society working with human rights and democracy, both important objectives of the Swedish aid. Support to domestic civil society organizations was mainly channeled through three Swedish NGOs: Civil Rights Defenders (former Swedish Helsinki Committee), Olof Palme International Centre and Kvinna till Kvinna. The three organizations in turn supported independent media, youth projects and projects aimed at furthering gender equality and democracy. The explicit focus on civil society came in the late 1990s with the aim to build capacities in the domain of peacebuilding, democracy and human rights. Kvinna

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17 This presentation is based on information mainly obtained through interviews with active members of the four organizations. Fragments of information were also found in Kvinna till Kvinna’s Annual reports.

18 The Balkans on the Road to Peace and Democracy, Sida 2002, 3-5.
till Kvinna was among the NGOs identified as suitable implementing partners. Signing a framework agreement with Sida meant annual support to Kvinna till Kvinna’s country programs instead of project by project support.\(^\text{19}\)

In sum, during the period studied the Swedish support to Bosnia went from humanitarian aid and reconstruction to help with creating conditions for a future European Union accession. Sweden’s latest cooperation strategies for Bosnia demonstrate that democracy, human rights and gender equality remain prioritized.

**Previous research**

In this section, relevant research in a couple of identified research areas is presented. The ambition is to deliver an overview of and position this study in relation to earlier generated knowledge. It is noteworthy to mention that the majority of the research presented here has been conducted within other disciplines than history. Contemporary history, in particular, is a field for which historians share interest with social scientists, and therefore a great deal of research on contemporary history is produced by the latter.\(^\text{20}\) While it has been problematized, the tenacious belief that time distance equals objectivity has been a factor inhibiting historians from studying their own time.\(^\text{21}\) Turning to research done within the social sciences, especially in Conflict and Peace Studies, International Relations (IR) and Development Studies has thus been a necessity. In their book *Conflict, Peace, Security and Development*, Dubravka Zarkov and Helen Hintjens suggest that these fields are not disciplinary worlds apart.\(^\text{22}\) As will be shown in this thesis, especially Conflict and Peace Studies and Development Studies share both concepts and perspectives, and debates within these fields go along similar lines. I also rely on research from anthropology, ethnology, pedagogy and sociology. During the latest couple of decades, the borders of scientific disciplines have started to loosen and interdisciplinary research is nowadays a common occurrence. Although not completely unproblematic, it allows an enhanced possibility of creativity.

\(^\text{19}\) Sida Review by Nilsson, Anger and Newkirk 2010:20, 8.

\(^\text{20}\) Torstendahl 1999, 265-266. See also QvArsell and Sandin 2000.

\(^\text{21}\) Andersson and Zander 1997. See also Salomon 1999.

\(^\text{22}\) Hintjens and Zarkov 2015, 3-21.
**Women, gender, war and peace**

The wars of the 1990s prompted significant scholarly attention to issues of war and peace. Only on the Yugoslavia case, which showed to be one of the “key watersheds of theorizing and intervention (and of strategic nonintervention)”, an untold number of publications has been produced. These ‘new wars’ fought within weak states were according to Mary Kaldor who coined the term, qualitatively different from previous interstate ones. Besides demonstrating brutal violence and being hard to settle, ‘new wars’ were perceived as identity-based as opposed to ideology-based ‘old wars’. In her book, Kaldor actually used the war in Bosnia as an archetype of ‘new wars’. Although not entirely unchallenged, this theorizing of war has informed policy debates and served as a legitimation of international interventions during recent decades.

Others maintain that much of the new warfare is in fact consistent with the old one, particularly its gendered nature. According to the feminist scholar Cynthia Cockburn, it is rather the willingness to study and acknowledge armed conflict as a “gendered terrain” that has changed. Although some scholarly attention had previously been given to the role of gender stereotypes in the justification of wars, it was in the 1990s that analyzing war from a gender perspective gained momentum. Scholars inspired by feminist theory, especially in the field of IR, have been at the forefront of putting light on “what happens to women, what part masculinity plays, and how gender power relations are acted out in militarised society and war”. “Well, what is the feminist perspective on Bosnia?” was, as Marysia Zalewski lets us know, a frequently posed question to feminist scholars within IR during the Bosnian war.

Since then, volumes containing a wealth of empirical findings on women’s gender-specific needs and experiences in both past and present wars have been written. What feminist scholars have attempted to show is how notions about gender matter both prior to and during war as well as

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23 Hintjens and Zarkov 2015, 11.
25 See, for example, Chan 2011 and Zarkov 2015.
26 Cockburn 2013, 434.
27 See, for example, Elshtain 1987 and Enloe 1989.
28 Cockburn 2013, 435.
30 See, for example, Barstow 2000; Höglund 2001; Ericsson 2015.
throughout peace-making and postwar stages.\textsuperscript{31} Another characteristic of this feminist literature is a view on war violence as an extension of gender discrimination in peacetime and thus an emphasis on the interconnectedness of different forms of oppression and violence.\textsuperscript{32} As important as it has been to point out gender differences, also considering gender power relations has been and continues to be pivotal: “a gender analysis without an accompanying (informing) feminist analysis is to turn away from the workings of power.”\textsuperscript{33}

With the occurrences of sexual violence against women and its deliberate use in Bosnia and Rwanda, a great deal of attention has been paid to this particular type of violence. Thanks to joined forces of survivors, activists and academics, this issue has successfully been put on the international agenda, resulting in several UN resolutions and the recognition of wartime sexual violence as a global security problem. The strong focus on sexual violence is, however, not without downsides. It tends to overshadow other types of female victimization that affect many more women, and therefore life-threatening problems and needs of women in conflict-ridden societies are at risk of being overlooked by donors.\textsuperscript{34}

Women have been identified as the prime victims of war, especially in terms of being exposed to sexual violence. Adam Jones has been one of the early critics who already during the war in Bosnia, and later in Kosovo, wrote about the invisibility of men in the discourse on war victimization. He noted stereotypes of men “as enthusiastic participants in slaughter” even though thousands of them were systematically killed on the basis of their gender.\textsuperscript{35} When men did receive attention, it was rather their ethnicity/nationality that figured in the foreground.\textsuperscript{36} The emphasis on ethnicity as well as representations of women as victims and men as primitive perpetrators are in congruence with the balkanist discourse that reappeared during the wars in Yugoslavia. As Rada Drezgic and Dubravka Zarkov write in their article “Feminist troubles with the Balkans”, the Western feminist body of literature, assisted by some feminists from the former Yugoslav area, in a surge of feminist scholarship unleashed by wartime

\textsuperscript{31} See, for example, Zalewski 1995; Cockburn 2001, 2013; Kaufman and Williams 2017.

\textsuperscript{32} See, for example, Youngs 2004; Jansen 2006; Sjoberg 2013.

\textsuperscript{33} Enloe 2010, xii.

\textsuperscript{34} Jones, 2009, 62; Eriksson Baaz and Stern 2013, 6, 96-102; Crawford 2013.

\textsuperscript{35} Jones 2009, 65.

sexual violence in Bosnia, generally accepted and even produced the same discourse.\footnote{Drezgić and Žarkov 2005, 290-291.}

The number of studies on men’s vulnerability in war remains severely limited, which confirms that violence against men is overlooked and highlights the danger of viewing them as a singular entity.\footnote{For work focused on victimization of men in war see, for example, Zarkov 2001; Lewis 2009.} In a critical analysis of sexual violence in Congo where the focus was put on the perpetrator, Maria Eriksson Baaz and Maria Stern issue a warning that simplistic gendered distinctions between women as victims and men as perpetrators can have serious consequences for both genders. In their view, men’s invisibility as (non)survivors of violence does not only deprive men of their rights, but threatens to negatively affect efforts to end violence against women.\footnote{Eriksson Baaz and Stern 2010, 43-47.} At the same time, more scholars have dismissed the usage of gender as a synonym to women and begun to discuss the problems of applying a narrow gender lens.\footnote{See, for example, Jansen 2006; Romaniuk and Wasylciw 2010; Sjoberg 2017.} While some fear a risk of “reifying gender as innate rather than constructed”\footnote{Romaniuk and Wasylciw 2010, 24.} others admonish us to utilize a gender analysis that goes beyond the “simplistic assumption that focusing on women means looking for women’s differences from men and assuming that women have essential traits in common”.\footnote{Sjoberg 2017, 17.} In sum, critics express a need for a more inclusive and nuanced approach as well as empathy and help to all victims.

What about research on gender and peace then? Existing studies show that mostly feminist-oriented scholars have been interested in analyzing peace issues from a gender perspective. What can be traced back to women pioneers in peace research is a more holistic view on peace encompassing, among other things, human rights. Inspired by the concept of positive peace, developed by the peace theorist Johan Galtung in the 1960s, many of them saw peace as much more than the absence of war, where the latter is not understood as an event but a continuum. Today, we can surely say that the perception of what peace is has evolved over time. To political scientist Laura Sjoberg, “seeking true peace in the twenty-first century includes combating not only militarism and political violence but also social injustice and economic violence”.\footnote{Sjoberg 2017, 181.} Studies conducted
in different corners of the world show that an understanding of peace is both gendered and context-bound.\(^\text{44}\) Through research we also learn that women’s experience in conflict as well as post-conflict settings differs from men’s.\(^\text{45}\)

Drawing attention to women’s agency and highlighting their role as peace-builders has been an important task for feminist scholars. The sociologist and peace activist Elise Boulding was one of those who early spoke about women as agents of change and empowered peacemakers. She was also early with formulating ideas on transnational networks and the principle of thinking globally and acting locally.\(^\text{46}\) A growing number of studies show that women in conflict-affected societies perform remarkable deeds at the grassroots level, thus playing a decisive role in resolving conflicts and normalizing human relations in their communities.\(^\text{47}\) However, despite this and despite an increased emphasis on women in several UN resolutions, very few women participate in formal peace processes. This is not surprising if we take into consideration the fact that in over 100 peace agreements signed after the passing of UNSCR 1325 contain only few, if any, references to women and gender.\(^\text{48}\) As women’s peacebuilding efforts are seldom recognized by people in power or highlighted as significant by the women themselves, an important task of research has been to document them. For example, to throw light on the peacebuilding role of women in Bosnia gender researcher and activist Zilka Spahić-Šiljak uses a biographical approach. In her book, the stories of 11 women from different walks of life, including different ethnic origin and religion, are presented. The author deliberately strived to make visible the challenges and moral choices these women needed to handle on their peace journey.\(^\text{49}\)

This leads us to the ever-debated question regarding the relationship between women and peace. Discussions have often landed in how women more than

\(^{44}\) See, for example, De La Ray and McKay 2006; Moosa, Rahmani and Webster 2013.

\(^{45}\) See, for example, Coulter 2006; Pankhurst 2008; Kaufman and Williams 2017.

\(^{46}\) Even though Elise Boulding participated in founding numerous organizations, it is especially relevant for this study to mention that she was an active member of WILPF and its international president between 1968 and 1971. As Mary Lee Morrison writes “WILPF was to provide a major grounding for much Elise’s future work in peace research and education, including her theories on women and peace and her evolving ideas on the role of NGOs in peacemaking.” Morrison 2006, 178.


\(^{48}\) Aroussi 2015, 101-123.

\(^{49}\) Spahić-Šiljak 2014, xvii-xviii.
men value peace. Thus, some have as their point of departure that women are more peaceful, others express worries about gender essentialism, and no consensus seems to be on the horizon.\textsuperscript{50} Although women have often been associated with peacefulness, historically many have played an active role in supporting wars.\textsuperscript{51} Today we see all around us an abundance of proof that women participate actively in wars\textsuperscript{52} and there are indications that the number of women who take up arms has increased during the last decades.\textsuperscript{53} Despite these facts, scholars, feminists and people in general tend to have difficulties with understanding women who do not behave in a peace-loving manner. In their book \textit{Mothers, Monsters, Whores} focused on female perpetrators of war crimes, Laura Sjoberg and Caron E. Gentry discuss how these women have been constantly compared to idealized gender norms. Discredited as women, they were also denied agency in the sense that their deliberate choices and political goals were not seen.\textsuperscript{54}

It would perhaps be an overstatement to say that those who emphasize women’s active roles in peacebuilding view women as natural peacemakers in a simplistic way. If we look closely, we can see that even some of those criticized for essentializing women have refrained from producing artificial male-female dichotomies which Christine Sylvester decades ago identified as a threat to both women and peace.\textsuperscript{55} What some feminist scholars did do, however, was point out what they saw as favorable predispositions and valuable skills developed by women through motherhood and traditional work in the home. Caring for children and the elderly, women can be excellent peacemakers, because nurturing involves practices of mediating and negotiating.\textsuperscript{56} The idea that women are especially interested in creating and upholding peace in their communities due to their role as nurturers is still very much alive among scholars and activists. There are clear examples, not least from Bosnia, that women often use their identity as mothers, which seems to make them less threatening, when engaging in burning societal issues.\textsuperscript{57}

\textsuperscript{50} Sjoberg 2013, 176-178.
\textsuperscript{51} See Grant De Pauw 1998; Östberg 1999; Hammar 2004; Bokholm 2008.
\textsuperscript{52} See Alison 2009; Krupić 2010; MacKenzie 2011; Shekhawat 2015.
\textsuperscript{53} Sjoberg and Via 2010, 5.
\textsuperscript{54} Sjoberg and Gentry 2007, 2-3, 7, 12-14.
\textsuperscript{55} Sylvester 1987.
\textsuperscript{56} See Ruddick 1989; Boulding 1999.
\textsuperscript{57} See, for example, Helms 2013. See also Kaufman and Williams 2010.
This overview of previous research has shown that mostly feminist scholars have written on the issue of women and gender in relation to war and peace. The illumination of women’s vulnerability in wartime has contributed to the problem nowadays being taken more seriously. We also witness a growing awareness of women’s role in peacebuilding. There are, however, caveats in discussions on women’s relationship to war and peace. The perception of women as either victims or peacebuilders tends to reduce the complexity of gender roles in war and postwar societies. Some recent studies challenge this essentialist view by, for example, focusing on female combatants, or female perpetrators of war crimes, or by exposing “the multiple and contradictory subject positions taken up by women in conflict-affected settings” which are often “based on an intersection of various aspects of social identities”. The common denominator in this research is that women always have agency. It transcends the core questions posed by the feminist IR, ‘Where are the women?’ and ‘What happens to women?’ and adds a new dimension by also asking ‘Which women?’.

Also this thesis addresses essentialist roles assigned to women in conflict-affected areas. By looking at support to women’s organizations in Bosnia provided by Kvinna till Kvinna and local responses to it, the thesis seeks to understand the different positions that Bosnian NGO women, expected to work for peace, chose and why they did so. The gender analysis employed here focuses primarily on power relations between women. As Jane L. Parpart writes in her article “Who is the ‘Other’?”, the attention feminist scholars have paid to gender hierarchies has had a tendency to leave differences and hierarchies between women aside. The aim here is to problematize both the solidarity and the hierarchies that unfolded between female actors in the context of the international peacebuilding project in Bosnia.

**International intervention, ‘the international’ and ‘the local’**

In the 1990s, the preferred principle of non-intervention was abandoned. Humanitarian concerns such as protection of the human rights of civilian populations and vulnerable groups like women and children became valid motivations for interventions in other states, as did the use of military force in those states. The war in Bosnia “generate[d] the most heated public debate on humanitarian

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58 See, for example, Shekhawat 2015.
59 See, for example, Sjoberg and Gentry 2007 and Sjoberg 2016.
60 O’Reilly 2018, 125.
61 Hedström and Senarathna 2015, 12.
intervention” at the time.63 Few would disagree with Mary Kaldor when she writes that Bosnia also became “a laboratory for post-Cold War intervention”.64 Even fewer would dispute the fact that most peace missions have failed to deliver what was initially promised. The challenges that external actors involved in the process of aiding the transition from war to peace continue to meet are multiple and have in no way diminished since the 1990s.65 “What Have We Wrought?”, asks Patrice C. McMahon in the title of her article on international involvement in Bosnia, thus giving a fair indication of scholars’ preoccupation with identifying causes for failures and pondering solutions.66

The dominant vision and practice of how to stabilize war-shattered countries have been to introduce liberal democracy or, more precisely, democratization, marketization and human rights. At the same time, the importance of a vibrant civil society, a space between the state and the market, was recognized. In a politically sensitive context such as Bosnia, the civil sector was expected to act as opposition to the nationalists in power. Women’s organizations were seen to have a special role in this.67 However, as more and more peace missions failed, the liberal peace became the subject of serious critique for being top-down, Western and predominantly external. Some scholars, for instance Roland Paris, have argued that peacebuilding is “a modern version of the mission civilisatrice” and that we can see peace missions as “a new chapter in the history of relations between the developed and developing worlds”.68 Although in a more benign way than civilizing missions in the past, interveners into non-Western societies still operate from an ideological base seeking to set norms and change the behavior of host populations.69 Those who have studied the democratization processes in post-communist/socialist parts of Europe, as well as those interested in Western perceptions about them, have frequently described Western inputs as colonial. The critics remark on the imposition of projects created without

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63 Kaldor 2007, 43.
64 Kaldor 2007, 122. See also McMahon 2017.
65 See, for example, Aggestam and Björkdahl 2009.
66 McMahon 2002.
any or only limited involvement of local actors, and as a part of this presentation of Western values as universal and as such unproblematic.\textsuperscript{70} Further, as the political scientist Annika Björkdahl shows in her study on Bosnia, years of liberal peacebuilding have not resulted in a gender-just peace.\textsuperscript{71} Focusing on the same country, Vanessa Pupavac questions international gender policies promising to empower women. Her findings show that much of what is promised never reaches ordinary women, but an urban middle-class elite.\textsuperscript{72}

It has not been unusual among external peacebuilders to blame the slow progress on local culture, a lack of knowledge and the incapability of local people, as in the case of Bosnia, to leave the past behind them.\textsuperscript{73} Research has, however, identified the lack of local participation as one of the main causes for failure in the context of peacebuilding missions.\textsuperscript{74} And yet, ever since the early 1990s scholars-practitioners such as, for example, John Paul Lederach have emphasized the idea of a \textit{peace from below}. Paying careful attention to the local context and viewing local culture and knowledge as a resource is of paramount importance here.\textsuperscript{75} While research shows that Lederach’s work has significantly influenced the policy discourse and practice in terms of giving more attention to the local, it also exposes “very narrow and inflexible interpretations” of it.\textsuperscript{76} It has on the whole been concluded that the local has been used “as a rhetorical tool, implemented in practice to a limited extent”.\textsuperscript{77} Insights about the limits of liberal peace birthed a vision of hybrid peace which is about abandoning the liberal blueprint, expected to work across the globe, and tuning into local needs, behaviors and understandings of peace. As Roberto Belloni puts it, hybridity recognizes “the need to move beyond the ontological and methodological dominance of Western actors and approaches and to engage with bottom-up, local views of politics and society”.\textsuperscript{78}

\textsuperscript{70} See, for example, Deacon and Stubbs 1998; Ottaway and Carothers 2001; Wedel 2001; Ers 2006; Belloni 2007.
\textsuperscript{71} Björkdahl 2012.
\textsuperscript{72} Pupavac 2005.
\textsuperscript{73} See, for example, Chandler 2000; Coles 2007.
\textsuperscript{74} See, for example, Walsh 1998; Gizelis and Kosek 2005.
\textsuperscript{75} Lederach 1997.
\textsuperscript{76} Paffenholtz 2014, 25.
\textsuperscript{77} Leonardsson and Rudd 2015, 825.
\textsuperscript{78} Belloni 2012, 34.
Evidently, the local has also been depicted as a solution that can lead to sustainable peace. But, what and who is the local? What is the role of external actors in relation to the local? Research shows that ‘local turns’ in peacebuilding display different understandings of both the local and the international actor’s role. If we look at the local turn in the 1990s, based on conflict resolution theory from influential peace theorists, among others Johan Galtung and Adam Curle, local agency is appreciated for its peacebuilding potential. Collaboration between mid-level civil society actors, who hold the potential to influence both those above them and the grassroots, and international actors is stressed. The second local turn has a post-structuralist and postcolonial theoretical base and as such it engages in analyses of power and resistance. More emphasis than ever is put on the local context, local agency and relations with local actors. In a literature review of the latest local turn, Hanna Leonardsson and Gustav Rudd identify two directions within the second local turn, one that focuses on effective peacebuilding and one with pronounced emancipatory ambitions. The two approaches differ in their views of the local and the best way to create peace. While the effective approach favors the sub-national level actor, emphasizing concepts like capacity building and local ownership, the emancipatory approach focuses “on everyday events and the inclusion of local agencies in peacebuilding processes for varieties of peace”.

One of the main failures of liberal peace is that it has primarily been beneficial to the elite layer of society, thus leaving the everyday life of most of the population unchanged. A tendency to prioritize NGOs and then mainly groups which, at least nominally, sympathize with liberal ideology has been obvious. Emancipatory peacebuilding stresses everyday needs in conflict-affected societies and the recognition of a variety of actors who offer localized versions of peacebuilding. For example, focusing on Bosnia Oliver Richmond and Stefanie Kappler show that resistance to liberal peacebuilding is already at work as “the local beneath the civil society”, also called ‘the local local’, finds different culturally oriented ways and hidden spaces to protest from. The authors convey that a recognition of a wide variety of local agencies who offer versions of peace rooted in the local context may result in a lasting hybrid peace.

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79 Paffenholtz 2015.
80 Leonardsson and Rudd 2015, 834.
81 See, for example, Richmond 2009.
82 Richmond and Kappler 2011, 271.
83 Richmond and Kappler 2011.
evidence proving that it is beneficial for the majority of local populations, especially marginalized groups.84

While the move towards a post-liberal peace emphasizing more local agency tends to be generally welcomed, critics have issued warnings about romanticizing ‘the local’ by equating it a priori with the ‘good’.85 The question is, as Thania Paffenholz holds, if this can be avoided as long as ‘the international’ is uncritically tied to a monolithic West. According to her, the new local turn in peacebuilding is hampered by “a binary and essentialist understanding of the local and international”.86 This means that the international is usually equated with power and the local with resistance. Paffenholz suggests unpacking power as something solely exercised by Westerners and points to local elites as significant power holders within the realm of peacebuilding.87

Viewing the local and the international as binary opposites is problematic. There is a tendency in postcolonial literature to focus on the actor perceived as superior. A look at the fairly few studies published during the last decade on Swedish aid work abroad, give witness to an overwhelming interest in the donor side.88 While this approach certainly offers important insights about, for example, the self-image of Swedish aid workers, often unavoidably expressed in contrast to ‘an Other’ and how they justify their work, the one-sided focus on donors renders the other party invisible. Without consideration of local agency in the broad sense of the word, the local appears in the role of a victim. However, studies interested in both international and local actors, and illuminating the relationship between them, have the potential to expose complexities regarding power relations. Agnes Ers’ well-contextualized analysis of a Swedish aid project in Romania shows not only the Romanian staff’s subtle ways of resistance, but also how both the Swedish and the Romanian party were engaged in maintaining the hierarchical order.89

This thesis aims to provide a nuanced understanding of female actors involved in the peacebuilding project in Bosnia, showing sensitivity to all power relations. It means anticipating the inherent imbalance in local/international re-

84 See, for example, Paffenholz 2015.
85 See, for example, Thiessen 2011; Mac Ginty 2015.
86 Paffenholz 2015, 857.
87 Paffenholz 2015.
88 See, for example, Eriksson Baaz 2005; Berg 2007.
89 Ers 2006, 24.
lations, but also understanding the dynamic nature of such relations, the mutuality in them and how the context conditions them. In other words, notions of ‘the local victim’ and ‘the international ruler’ are challenged. Here, I deal with actors that have only been given meagre attention by researchers. When mentioned in research, both Bosnian women’s organizations and Kvinna till Kvinna have almost without exception received praise and have generally been seen as ‘do gooders’ in this troubled setting. Vanessa Pupavac has rightfully asked for critical examination of women’s NGOs in Bosnia which, unlike the rest of the civil sector, tend to be spared from it.90

I argue that the same tolerance applies to Kvinna till Kvinna, which is usually only mentioned briefly as a bright example of international presence in the area.91 Even in the only piece of systematic research on the work of the Swedish foundation in the Balkans, conducted by the communication researcher Stephanie Norander, Kvinna till Kvinna is presented as an obviously benevolent actor that manages to foster feminist principles in its practice. While successfully showing that international feminist organizations can have an important role to play in post-conflict settings and displaying some of the struggles they face, Norander’s study does not probe deeply into the dynamics of the local/international relationship as it manifested in a specific context over time. Given the empirical material she used, which consisted primarily of interviews and observations conducted during a limited period of time, and the ambition to cover a whole region rather than a specific country, such a goal was neither possible nor perhaps even desirable.92

Aims and research questions
Women’s peace efforts, which take different forms, are still unrecognized, generally undervalued and severely underresearched. At the same time, peacebuilding missions carried out by primarily Western actors under the international flag are continuously showing poor results in establishing stability and lasting peace in conflict-affected areas. The central question that has guided this research regards the process of supporting domestic female actors to create better prospects in their communities. In this thesis, the support delivered within the context of international peacebuilding in Bosnia is studied through a focus on the Swedish foundation Kvinna till Kvinna and its encounter with Bosnian

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90 Pupavac 2005. An exception is the work of Elissa Helms who has published extensively on women’s NGOs in Bosnia.
91 See, for example, Rees 2002; Funk 2006.
92 Norander 2008.
women’s groups between 1993 and 2013. As these actors have barely been exposed to critical scrutiny, the intention of this thesis is to make a contribution by contextualizing and analyzing the possibilities and challenges faced during the endeavor of supporting peace in this specific post-socialist and postwar setting. This means that I have no ambitions of evaluating the work either of the Swedish foundation or its Bosnian ‘partners’.

This study combines an interest in rhetoric, narratives and practice from the perspectives of both actors. Paying attention to silences is another important component. Silence is nowadays perceived as more than a passive form of agency. Rather it is looked upon as a “tacit form of communication in post-conflict social processes and everyday life”. 93 Silence can be viewed as an integral part of all relationships and, as research shows, it can be used in a constructive way to cultivate relationships in violently divided societies.94 The thesis also aims at uncovering both change over time and continuities.

The review of previous research provided earlier in this chapter has revealed some overall features. Essentialism is common in research as well as among practitioners. This essentialism regards both roles assigned to women in conflict-affected areas and the understanding of the international and the local as well as the relationship between them. Differences and hierarchies between women tend to be in focus to a lesser degree than those between men and women. The international is usually equated with power and the local with resistance. The overall research questions presented below, aimed at helping me to understand and illuminate the possibilities and challenges faced by Kvinna till Kvinna during its mission in Bosnia, have been formulated in consideration of these features.

- What characterized the role of Kvinna till Kvinna in the post-socialist, violently divided Bosnia?

- How can the cooperation between Kvinna till Kvinna and its main donor Sida be defined? Did the cooperation change over time, and if it did, how?

- How did the Swedish-Bosnian encounter unfold over time? What type of relationship developed between Kvinna till Kvinna and women’s NGOs within the context of peacebuilding in Bosnia?

93 Schierenbeck 2015, 1027-1028
94 Eastmond and Manner gren Selimovic 2012.
Contributions

Women have been glaringly absent from the writing of peacebuilding history. This work documents and analyzes support to women’s peace efforts given during a specific time and in a specific geographical area. Although the study deals with the Bosnian context, conclusions are not necessarily confined to it. I view it as a contribution to the literature that problematizes international interventions into non-western societies. It makes contributions to subfields of historical science such as Bosnian women’s history, Swedish development history as well as the history of transnational encounters and peacebuilding. In comparison with scholars in disciplines, historians generally participate to a much lesser degree in public debates, thus missing out on sharing knowledge and contributing to a better understanding of contemporary phenomena. The question is whether we, in a time when issues such as war and violence are pressing upon us and make discussions about peace a pure necessity, can afford this attitude.

There is, among researchers from divided societies in particular, an awareness about the educational function of academics as critics of dominant public discourses and providers of positive examples of peacebuilding and reconciliation within their own communities. The lengthy debate about the silence of the academic elite in Bosnia proves that many are still reluctant to take on such a role. There are, however, also those who find it meaningful to highlight the peaceful initiatives of local actors who “dared to imagine a life beyond the imposed boundaries of violence and fear”. Marie Smyth, who has done extensive work on the conflict in Northern Ireland, argues that “it is ethically difficult to justify the acquisition of knowledge for knowledge’s sake in situations where lives are being lost”. Thania Paffenholz speaks about “responsible peacebuilding scholarship” dedicated to a critical scrutiny of the link between peacebuilding theory and what is actually practiced on the ground with the goal to improve the latter.

Knowledge produced about violently divided societies informs interventions conducted in them. Therefore, I agree with Smyth that there is a real need for research that provides a careful contextualization of divided societies because it can lead to more context-adapted solutions. A thorough contextualization of

95 See, for example, Smyth 2001, 3-7. See also Spahić-Šiljak, 2014.
96 Spahić-Šiljak 2014, xiii.
98 Paffenholz 2014, 27.
human thinking and actions, and relations between people driven by an interest in understanding them, is an integral part of historical work. Approaching studies of human beings with humbleness and readiness to find the same diversity of living, thinking and acting that exists in all societies is another important component. With that said, lessons from history studies on peacebuilding efforts in conflict-affected areas exceed solely academic purposes. They hold a potential to bring about new insights which can be used to make encounters between subjects from different parts of the world smoother, and perhaps even interventions more effective.

**Structure of the study**

This introductory chapter is followed by a chapter presenting the theoretical perspectives utilized in the thesis. Chapter three gives information about the empirical material used and how the research was conducted. Thereafter, in chapter four, relevant historical contexts are covered.

Next come five empirical chapters which follow a thematic order. The first two, chapter five and six, aim to contextualize Kvinna till Kvinna as a women’s aid organization with roots in the Swedish peace movement, and outline some of the main conditions guiding its activities in Bosnia. So, while chapter five places the emphasis on the organization’s historical roots, the initial period of the formation and first encounters with organized women in Bosnia, the main focus of chapter six is Kvinna till Kvinna’s relations with Sida. With chapter seven, we turn to a more analytical content. By looking at actors and activities supported as well as those denied support, we attend to issues such as local ownership and partnership. Chapter eight is dedicated to methods used to empower local NGOs with an emphasis on the creation of meeting places and the transfer of knowledge. In chapter nine, we deal with the issue of fostering solidarity between women in violently divided societies and strategies employed by external actors.

In the concluding chapter, titled Hierarchical Sisterhood, the key findings are briefly recapitulated and discussed.

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101 See, for example, Fur 2013.
CHAPTER TWO

Theoretical perspectives

The involvement of Western actors in non-Western societies has, inside as well as outside of academia, been discussed for a good while. Both harsh criticism and celebration of international interventions have been voiced. A central objective of this thesis is that it seeks to go beyond “donor bashing”, as the anthropologist Steven Sampson once expressed it, and unproblematized descriptions of sisterhood between women.¹⁰² Without underestimating the power imbalance inherent in the relationship between ‘the West and the rest’, the accent is also put on the dynamic nature of encounters between Kvinna till Kvinna and Bosnian women’s NGOs at a specific time and in a postwar setting marked by strong international presence and domestic political tensions. No one lens is capable of bringing everything into focus, and thus this chapter, which presents theoretical perspectives utilized in the thesis, is organized into three different sections. It starts with a look into peacebuilding theory with a special reference to women. After that, a combination of postcolonial thought and semiperipherality theory is proposed for better understanding of Swedish-Bosnian encounter of two decades. The last section deals with sisterhood and solidarity between women engaged in transnational encounters as well as the ones between women in divided societies.

Women and peacebuilding

The simplest definition of peace is an absence of armed conflict. However, the idea that peace is more than the absence of wartime violence has been articulated in peace research for a long time. Johan Galtung introduced this idea in the 1960s, distinguishing between negative and positive peace.¹⁰³ The latter demands an elimination of all forms of violence, structural and cultural types included. In Galtung’s vision, scholarship on peace should go “far beyond the enterprise of war prevention to encompass […] the conditions for peaceful relations between the dominant and the exploited, rulers and ruled, men and women, western and non-western cultures” and look for positive peace “in the form of human empathy, solidarity and community”.¹⁰⁴ Other contemporaries, such as Adam Curle, cultivated a broad view on peace, connecting it to human

¹⁰³ Galtung 1975. See also Galtung 1975.
¹⁰⁴ Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall 2011, 44.
development. Since then, the conflict resolution field has included not only reflection concerning stopping wars but also building peace in war-affected areas. The very concept of peacebuilding emerged in the mid-1970s, but it was not until the 1990s that it found its place on the international agenda.

What is peacebuilding and what definition of the concept is useful for the purpose of this thesis? While there exist different understandings of the concept, it generally implies activity that goes beyond state-building and reconstruction, thus representing a wider and more comprehensive approach to conflict-ridden societies. Thania Paffenholz offers the following definition: “Peacebuilding is a long-term multi-track transformative contribution to social change, helping to create a just and sustainable peace beyond the narrow definition of a post-conflict period”. However, if one looks at formulations in the UN document “An Agenda for Peace”, issued by the UN Secretary Boutros Boutros-Ghali in 1992, as well as much scholarly work, peacebuilding has often been viewed as a phase that follows peacekeeping and peacemaking. As a part of peace processes, it is expected to take place after the guns have been silenced and be focused on reconstruction. Therefore, suggestions about broadening the idea of peacebuilding have been voiced, especially by those interested in women’s roles in peacebuilding. In order to make visible and value the work done at the grassroots level, where women are usually active, peacebuilding needs to be understood as a process that encompasses pre-conflict, conflict and post-conflict stages, and both formal and informal efforts.

Elisabeth Porter identifies three major dilemmas connected to limiting peacebuilding to the reconstruction stage. First, using the term post-conflict implies a male point of view, because the end of the war does not necessarily mean the end of other types of violence in society. As shown earlier, Porter is certainly not the only scholar to note the gender blindness in the dominant understandings of war and peace. The sociologist Cynthia Enloe, who has for decades written persuasively about the impact of militarism on women’s lives in what is traditionally seen as war and peace, contends that “the sorts of insecurity that many women experience in the midst of openly armed conflict are surprisingly akin to the forms of insecurity that women experience when the guns are silent:

105 Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall 2011, 53.
107 See, for example, Paris 2004.
108 Porter 2007, 5, 27. See also Lederach 1997.
the lack of those resources that can be used to insure their own physical integrity”. Porter’s second objection to restricting peacebuilding to postwar reconstruction is that it prevents us from seeing the informal work done by grassroots in their communities. Her last argument warns that narrow notions of the concept keep women involuntarily away from official peace processes, where they, when included, “initiate different issues related to human security and well-being, feeling safe and being inclusive and the practical needs of food, health, education or economic livelihood”. It is my belief that the work of Kvinna till Kvinna and its Bosnian ‘partners’ cannot be fully understood without employing a broad definition of both peace and peacebuilding, one that encompasses issues of gender justice and a variety of activities. With that said, it is also important to recognize that views on peace and peacebuilding as well as the forms the latter take varies from context to context.

In an overview of influential peacebuilding theories, Thania Paffenholz identifies five such theories. Depending on the preferred understanding of peace, different theories propose different approaches to peacebuilding. While some emphasize short-term management of conflict and the focus on the dominant structures of war-shattered societies, others favor long-term conflict resolution and conflict transformation through attending to root causes and operating through a wide range of local actors supported from the outside. The main contribution of the latter approach, especially peacebuilding theories oriented towards conflict transformation, which have been the most influential in recent decades, is the attention given to local actors. Of special relevance for this study is what has been called peacebuilding from below, a concept which gained influence in the 1990s. Actually, many of the insights regarding the importance of building peace from below were gained in former Yugoslavia. After seeing that external actors repeatedly failed to convince the warring sides to make peace, Adam Curle was one of those who put their hopes on local civil society groups willing to do peace work. These ‘islands of civility’, as Mary Kaldor has expressed it, were seen to take decisive steps in defeating nationalisms and building peaceful societies based on cosmopolitan values.

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110 Enloe 2002, 27.
111 Porter 2007, 30.
113 Paffenholz 2009, 3-5.
114 Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall 2011, 57, 235. See also Woodhouse 2010.
115 Kaldor 2000, 135-139.
One of the key characteristics of this peacebuilding model was thought to be cooperation between international and local actors in which the task of the former was to empower the latter to build peace in their communities. Western civil society organizations were seen as better equipped than governments to work at the society level in ‘new wars’. In reality it meant that NGOs, a tamed version of social movements, got an important role in interventions around the world. Leading figures within the conflict transformation school such as John Paul Lederach have stressed the importance of a context-sensitive approach and viewing local culture as a resource. A particularly emphasized prerequisite for reconciliation in divided societies, and greatly relevant for this thesis, is (re)building of relationships as the “relationship is the basis of both the conflict and its long-term solution”. Foreign actors can have a major role in this process, not least in the creation of opportunities for encounters, thus making space where visions of a shared future can hopefully develop. Of great importance is creating conditions for the parties to connect as human beings, which might involve meeting on a neutral ground and doing activities that stimulate them to connect.

While Lederach’s theory puts the local in the driver seat of peacebuilding, it also sees international reinforcement, for example in terms of training, as a necessity. Lederach pays no significant attention to the power dimension in this encounter or the fact that the local “is still at risk of being dominated by the soft power inherent in the international peace builder’s interventionist logic of training and peace infrastructures”. At the same time, critics point to Lederach’s rather uncritical stance towards the local who, as Paffenholz, holds is “‘good’ or ‘bad’ as society writ large”. Despite these blind spots, Lederach’s theory is of value for this thesis, not least due to the status it has had in the last two decades among practitioners.

The (re)building of civil society in conflict-affected areas became a key area of international intervention in the 1990s. Also, in Lederach’s pyramid of actors and approaches on three levels – top, middle-range and grassroots – civil society actors are of outmost importance for postwar societies. Middle-range actors such as academics, religious leaders and NGO leaders, especially valuable for peacebuilding, have access to the leadership at the top level as well as contact

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116 See, for example, Kaldor 2007, 59.
119 Paffenholz 2015, 860.
120 Paffenholz 2015, 860.
with grassroots leaders and ordinary people. While connection and cooperation between actors at different levels is a prerequisite for sustainable peace, middle-range level actors, often from civil society, are the link between the other two. In a way we can see them as message carriers from ordinary people to leaders at the top level. They are also the ones most prone to meet with their counterparts from ‘the other side’. However, although initially viewed as a cure for post-conflict transitional areas, there exists little empirical evidence that shows either that a vibrant civil society has been established or that it, to the extent that it exists, what of it exists has contributed to any significant societal transformation. Certainly, with the influx of foreign monies, NGOs mushroomed in those areas, but in hindsight we can see that external donors have mainly engaged in supporting urban NGOs that lack both connection and accountability in relation to the local population. For whatever reason they were formed, local NGOs (as well as international ones) found themselves soon entangled in an “NGO game” – constantly hunting donor funds, and in order to get them, being readily prepared to conform to donor’s agenda.

Any illusions about civil society or NGOs always working for the general good and in support of peace have by now been crushed. Along with those actually engaging in peace work, many anti-democratic, anti-liberal initiatives, often referred to as uncivil society, exist. Research shows that even civil society peace actors in ethnically polarized contexts have difficulties overcoming divides. Unsurprisingly then, the overwhelming focus on civil society that emerged in the 1990s has received critique. Many see the concept of civil society as Eurocentric and the concrete external efforts as done with little context-sensitivity. Others are more outright in questioning the acclaimed potential of civil society organizations to help the democratization of transitional states and bring about unity in divided ones. Given the variety of organizations and their diverse interests, some critics like, for instance, Sheri Berman argue that civil society activity “often serves to fragment rather than unite a society, accentuating and deepening already existing cleavages”. Women’s groups in Bosnia as

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122 MacMahon 2017, 12-16.
123 See, for example, Kopecký and Mudde 2003.
124 See, for example, Orjuela 2004.
125 Berman 2001, 35-36.
elsewhere seem to be an exception, however, as many of them successfully engage in societal issues and take part in cross-ethnic encounters.\textsuperscript{126}

In liberal peacebuilding, NGOs are seen as an instrument in the mission to transform post-socialist and post-conflict societies into liberal democracies. But they are also a problem in already unstable countries, because they come and go depending on access to donor funds.\textsuperscript{127} Again, while NGO-ization is a common phenomenon in this sector,\textsuperscript{128} there is some evidence of movementization among women’s NGOs in Bosnia, which managed to gather around common issues.\textsuperscript{129} Concerning international NGOs, the focus has to a large degree been put on changing the attitudes and behavior of host populations, thus often leaving only limited space for local ownership. The historian Jens Sörensen uses Foucault’s term biopolitics to explain this phenomenon of getting “the governed […] to think in line with governing power”.\textsuperscript{130} There is no doubt that Western NGOs have a role in spreading liberal values acting as dutiful intervenors in areas around the world and introducing ‘universal values’. Here, I do not study NGOs as social movements, but as professionalized organizations with a role in the peacebuilding project. While their dependence on large aid agencies, which implement the politics of their governments, needs to be taken into consideration, so does the possibility that some of them “bridge the international and local levels and are often at the cutting edge of developments in practice and thinking”.\textsuperscript{131}

**On Balkanism, postcolonial perspectives and the semiperiphery**

Part of the critique directed towards contemporary peace missions concerns the expectation of some kind of evolution in the host country and its people. As the anthropologists Emma Crewe and Elizabeth Harrison write, “evolutionism has rhetorically justified intervention in ‘backward’ countries since European civilization, through the presupposition that the influence of more advanced outsiders will enable traditional societies to catch up with them”.\textsuperscript{132} The notion of Eastern Europe as backward, in contrast to Western Europe, has been notable

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\textsuperscript{126} See, for example, McMahon 2017. See also Paffenholz 2014.
\textsuperscript{127} McMahon 2017, 2.
\textsuperscript{128} See, for example, Lang 1997.
\textsuperscript{129} Helms 2014.
\textsuperscript{130} Sörensen 2005, 81.
\textsuperscript{131} Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall 2011, 229.
\textsuperscript{132} Crewe and Harrison 1998, 28.
after 1989. The emphasis since then put on the transformation of this post-socialist space exposes a division within Europe which, according to this logic, separates developed, civilized countries and those striving to become that. Unsurprisingly then, the most prevalent role of international actors in Bosnia as elsewhere has been pedagogical.\textsuperscript{133}

The export of Western ideas and knowledge to non-Western societies is by no means a novelty, but used to be an integral part of civilizing missions conducted in former European colonies.\textsuperscript{134} Also, Western notions of Eastern Europe as inferior have a long history. This phenomenon dates back to the Enlightenment when the dichotomy West/East replaced the earlier North/South division. The historian Larry Wolff has found that Eastern Europe has been culturally constructed as semi-European, semi-developed and semi-civilized since the eighteenth century. Seen as an ‘Other within’, it has served as Western Europe’s first model for underdevelopment.\textsuperscript{135} The wars in former Yugoslavia revealed that the Balkans “remain Orientalized as extreme Eastern Europe”.\textsuperscript{136} Historically speaking, the Balkans reached audiences in the West primarily through travel literature which generally described it as a violent, rural and less civilized area on the outskirts of Europe.\textsuperscript{137} Even writers such as Rebecca West who, in her well-known \textit{Black Lamb and Grey Falcon: A Journey Through Yugoslavia}, first published in 1941, provides a somewhat nuanced image of the first Yugoslavia, judged what she saw there by norms defined elsewhere.\textsuperscript{138} With the wars in the 1990s, a surge of negative representations of the Balkans as tribal, violent, primitive and irredeemable re-emerged in Western media as well as political and scholarly circles. Images of the area found in books with telling titles such as Robert D. Kaplan’s \textit{Balkan Ghosts: A Journey Through History}, chosen for the New York Times Bestseller list in 1993, have dominated the discourse on the Balkans.\textsuperscript{139} As far as one can see, neither West’s nor Kaplan’s travelogue has lost

\textsuperscript{133} See, for example, Coles 2007, 269-270.
\textsuperscript{134} Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 2006, 1.
\textsuperscript{135} Wolff 1994, 1-16, 356-374.
\textsuperscript{136} Kovačević 2008, 10.
\textsuperscript{137} Todorova 1997/2009.
\textsuperscript{138} West 1941/2006. Otherwise, scholarly interpretations of Rebecca West’s work on Yugoslavia differ. While Allcock and Young put emphasis on West as a female traveller to the Balkans and interpret her work in a positive light, roughly twenty years later Seamus O’Malley is critical not only of West’s representation of the area, but also her tendency to speak for it advocating an imperial intervention. See Allcock and Young 1991; O’Malley 2014.
\textsuperscript{139} Kaplan 1993.
its topicality as both have been republished in the first decade of the new millennium.

The historian Maria Todorova traces the genealogy of the discourse of Balkan stereotypes in her book *Imagining the Balkans* first published in 1997. While some other scholars view it as a variant of Orientalism, Todorova calls it Balkanism, both acknowledging similarities with Edward Said’s Orientalism and underlining crucial differences between the two discourses. In addition to the fact that the Balkans has a “historical and geographical concreteness” that ‘the Orient’ lacks, its cultural otherness is one within Europe. Instead of imputed opposition, Todorova speaks of imputed ambiguity. Due to the in-betweenness of the Balkans, often perceived as a bridge and a crossroads between the West and the Orient, they are constructed as an incomplete self. Geographically in Europe, white and predominantly Christian, “the externalization of frustrations on them can circumvent the usual racial and religious bias allegations”. Another important difference is that the Orient is usually related to the feminine. In Balkanism, the female sex is marginally present, but it is the primitive maleness that is the center of attention. Having this in mind, it is no surprise that we find women depicted as prime victims of the wars in the 1990s.

As critics point out, these essentialist representations are “conveniently located outside historical time”. In other words, changes that over time had occurred over time in societies on the Balkan Peninsula, especially Yugoslavia which was once seen as a positive example in the socialist world, tend to be erased. Coupled with the ‘Othering’ of communism, the Balkanist discourse has elicited an interpretation of the wars in Yugoslavia as a natural consequence of events with regard to centuries of ethnic hatred among the peoples inhabiting the region. The knowledge produced on the area and its peoples that consequently informed the international intervention emphasized conflict based on

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140 See, for example, Bakić-Hayden and Hayden 1992.
142 Todorova 1997/2009, 17-18. Especially the bridge metaphor has been widely used. For example, the Old Bridge in Mostar is found on covers of popular as well as scientific publications. In addition to the Balkans being seen as ‘the west of the east’, the currently used terminology for former Yugoslavia as the Western Balkans implies a West-East hierarchy within the Balkans themselves.
143 Todorova 1997/2009, 188.
146 Drezgić and Žarkov 2005. See also Kovačević 2008.
identity politics rather than cooperation and long experience of living together.\footnote{Blagojević 2009, 190-191.} The task to educate, develop and civilize incorporated into international peacebuilding missions makes the link between power and knowledge apparent.

The relation between power and knowledge is a central theme within the field of postcolonial studies, which took off with the publication of Said’s seminal work \textit{Orientalism} in the late 1970s. This critical tradition, strongly influenced by poststructuralist thought, opposes the colonial division of the world.\footnote{Eriksson, Eriksson Baaz and Thörn 2002, 16.} A postcolonial perspective throws light on notions that Western actors construct about ‘the Other’ and distant places. Despite the original focus on images of the Orient and the former colonies, a critical examination of the way Europe has been within the European context has also been carried out with reference to postcolonial theory.\footnote{See, for example, Goldsworthy 1998; Bjelić and Savić 2002; Hammond 2004.} It is mainly during the last decade that scholars, including historians, have started to apply the analytical tools of postcolonial theory in connection to Eastern Europe. There is, however, still palpable reluctance towards placing the postsocialist space in a postcolonial context. While those more positive to that expansion of postcolonial discourse maintain that “post-communist revises and sharpens, not merely confirms, received postcolonial theory”,\footnote{Pucherová and Gáfrik 2015, 13.} others fear that “the tendency to employ the term ‘post-colonial’ to refer to any kind of marginality at all risk of denying its basis in the historical process of colonialism”.\footnote{Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 2006, 2.} In her critique of the universalism of post-colonial theory, the sociologist Marina Blagojević views it as “equally blind to the existence and difference of the semiperiphery, of ‘white’ postcommunist non-Europe”.\footnote{Blagojević 2009, 55.}

Blagojević herself has elaborated a theory of semiperipherality which deals with the geographic space focused on in the present study and is particularly applicable to countries going through ‘transition’. This space has its own specific characteristics that make it different both from the core and from the periphery. In comparison to the core it is “different, but not different enough” and in comparison to the periphery it is “different, and not similar enough”.\footnote{Blagojević 2009, 37.}
characteristic of the semiperiphery is experienced *de-development*. The formerly industrialized societies have deteriorated rather than developed during the ‘transition’, especially in terms of the social aspect of life. This means that the memories of better times and feelings of loss are still fresh. Blagojević sees the transformation of these societies as a part of the neoliberal agenda, contending that development did not necessarily have to be a goal of that agenda.\textsuperscript{154} Another characteristic of the semiperiphery is a sense of *lagging behind*. The semiperiphery is ‘lagging behind’ the core (the West) which not only views itself as more developed, but also has the privilege to establish norms. On top of that, the core constantly tries to improve the semiperiphery in a paternalistic, neocolonial way. The semiperiphery attempts, albeit unsuccessfully, to ‘catch up’, but is never able to close the gap. Borrowing thoughts on what Nataša Kovačević has termed the *self-colonizing tendency*, Blagojević is careful to point out that the notion of lagging behind and the need to catch up is not entirely imposed by the core but is internalized by the Balkaners themselves. According to Kovačević, the process of accepting Western influences has been “far smoother, more voluntary, and more urgently executed [in Eastern Europe] than in other colonial locales”.\textsuperscript{155} However, as much as the semiperiphery strives towards the core, it also resists the integration into it, wanting to preserve its own cultural characteristics.\textsuperscript{156}

A key assumption underpinning Blagojević’s work, of relevance for this thesis, is scepticism towards universal knowledge and its alleged ability to explain realities in different locations. She rejects the notion that knowledge created in the center can explain social realities in the semiperiphery, and sees locationality as a dimension of knowledge production.\textsuperscript{157} Context is an important concept in Blagojević’s work on the semiperiphery, which itself is seen as a context not taken seriously but supplied with theories, policies and knowledge from the core. She differentiates between contextual knowledge produced within the context and contextualized knowledge imported and adjusted to the context.\textsuperscript{158} While a great deal of literature in Peace and Conflict and Development puts emphasis on the context and local knowledge, research also shows us that, in

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{154} Blagojević 2009, 28-29.
\item \textsuperscript{155} Kovačević 2008, 4.
\item \textsuperscript{156} Blagojević 2009, 33-34.
\item \textsuperscript{157} Blagojević 2009, 17, 55.
\item \textsuperscript{158} Blagojević 2009, 48-51.
\end{itemize}
practice, this most often means importing knowledge via foreign experts. Hie-
erarchies of knowledge manifest in international interventions often undermine the knowledge, experiences and history of host societies. When this happens, then, as the subtitle of Blagojević’s book in the Serbian language says, rebellion of the context occurs which is exemplified with the imposition of gender policies upon Yugoslav successor states. Imported policies fail to take root partly because they are decontextualized and partly because this field lacks theory grounded in the experiences of people living in this region.

To my knowledge, few before Blagojević have given insight into lived experiences in the former Yugoslav area. In an article written two decades ago, Martha Walsh remarked on the simplistic images of Bosnian women that informed aid efforts pointed out that these images did not correspond to women’s lives in socialist Yugoslavia. Both Walsh and Blagojević convey that international actors had serious difficulties understanding this specific context. Above all, they did not seem to realize that they should treat it in a different way than contexts with a lesser degree of industrialization and less opportunities for women to educate themselves and attain employment. A consequence of this is that resources of local women often remain untapped. In reference to this thesis, I would like to show that contextual knowledge can help us understand experiences that local women bring into the encounter with international actors.

For the purposes of this thesis, fundamental thoughts that constitute the postcolonial perspective are combined with semiperipherality theory. I take the viewpoint of Blagojević who writes that an emphasis on the semiperiphery does not overlap with postcolonial criticism. In this study, the two are complementary to each other. A postcolonial reading captures constructs of ‘the Other within’ by tracing the Balkanist and Cold War discourses in the rhetoric and practice of the Swedish-Bosnian encounter. Semiperipherality theory, on the other hand, gives explicit attention to characteristics of the geographical area focused upon here and its rather ambivalent relation to the core.

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159 See, for example, Crewe and Harrison 1998; Parpart 2003; Crewe and Axelby 2011.
160 Hughson (Blagojević) 2015, 102-104.
161 Walsh 1998; Blagojević 2009.
162 Blagojević 2009, 18.
163 In her book in Serbian, Blagojević faces the critique of her work on the semiperiphery, which urged her to specify which countries belonged in the semiperiphery and list countries that did not fit her model. Her response was a shift from speaking about semiperiphery to semipherality. See Hughson 2015, 70.
postcolonial perspective focuses primarily on cultural aspects, the semiperiphery perspective also emphasizes the material dimension of the social context. Ahistoricity and the tendency to emphasize continuities have been listed as downsides of postcolonial analysis. Thorough contextualization can make change over time more visible. Examining and understanding contextual possibilities and challenges will provide a ‘less negative’ view and less predictable results. A nuanced and realistic interpretation requires both highlighting essentialisms and recognizing benevolence. Perhaps Steven Sampson’s expression “benevolent colonialism” can be used to interpret the encounter between the international and the local in conflict settings.164

Sweden has never been a great colonial power.165 Being unsuccessful in terms of acquiring new territories does not, however, imply the absence of a colonial worldview. During the last decade, some Swedish scholars have pointed out the importance of interpreting colonialism not only in territorial terms, but paying attention to its ideological side as well.166 Even though we cannot compare Sweden’s colonial past with that of, for example, Great Britain or France, there is empirical research that indeed bear witness to the existence of a colonial consciousness in Sweden during and after the time of European colonization.167 As for historical research, there remains work to be done on topics like Sweden’s colonial ambitions and treatment of indigenous peoples in as well as outside of Sweden.168 The previously lukewarm interest in postcolonial theory among Swedish scholars has shifted during the last decade.169 A growing number of people, especially younger generation of researchers, are utilizing postcolonial

164 Sampson 2002.
165 Sweden has had two colonies which lasted a rather short period of time, the American state of Delaware (1638-1655) and the Caribbean island of Saint-Barthélemy (1784-1805). However, some Swedish historians suggest viewing Sweden’s former relations with Finland and the minority of Laplanders (Saami) in colonial terms. See, for example, Fur 2006.
166 de los Reyes, Molina and Mulinari 2005, 18-19.
168 See, for example, Fur 1999.
theoretical perspective in studies that deal with Swedish missionary and development work conducted abroad. However, historical research on Swedish international development work from the second half of twentieth century and on is still very modest.

Sweden’s limited experience as a colonial power, its generous immigration policy and foreign policy based on solidarity have all contributed to an image of Sweden and Swedes as anti-imperialistic, neutral and more prone to respect formerly colonized people. A self-image reflecting these views on Swedish identity seems to be widespread among Swedish donors and development workers abroad. Yet, according to the scholar Maria Eriksson Baaz, it is also full of paradoxes. While Swedish development workers firmly differentiate themselves from former colonizers in order to define ‘Swedishness’, they also tend to use colonial stereotypes about, in the case discussed by Eriksson Baaz, the African Other. By participating in this way of thinking, marked by racism and eurocentrism, they acknowledge the importance of a European ‘we’. Sweden is thus placed into the Western European cultural sphere, particularly in comparison with more distant places.

Just like Sweden, Bosnia has not been particularly tied to a colonial context. While some scholars express skepticism about viewing the area of Southeastern Europe as former colonies, others remind us of the great political interest in the Balkans showed by Western powers ever since the Ottoman period and which intensified further during the Cold war. This interest is especially obvious in the case of Bosnia which has been subjected to massive international involvement and where attempts to transforming the country have been coupled with the provision of massive foreign expertise and close monitoring. The anthropologist Michael Herzfeldt calls this involvement an “intervention in the name of peace, rights, civil society, and economic development” with the objective to turn Bosnia (and the Balkans) into an object of Western knowledge as well as Western control.

How do we interpret the term postcolonial? Stuart Hall, active in the field of cultural studies, has explained the concept as

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170 See, for example, Eriksson Baaz 2005; Ers 2006; Berg 2007; Gregersen 2010; Lundström 2015; Lundqvist 2018.
172 See, for example, Fleming 2000.
not merely descriptive of ‘this’ society rather than ‘that’, or of ‘then’ and ‘now’. It re-reads ‘colonisation’ as part of an essentially transnational and transcultural ‘global’ process – and it produces a decentered, diasporic or ‘global’ rewriting of earlier, nation-centered imperial grand narratives.\(^\text{175}\)

Hall’s definition suggests that all societies can be described as postcolonial. Generally, scholars who find the postcolonial perspective fruitful are of the opinion that global processes such as colonization and decolonization have powerfully marked not only the colonizers and the colonized, but also societies without significant colonial experience.\(^\text{176}\) According to this line of thinking, colonialism proceeds to exist in a neocolonial form permeating the world both economically and culturally. Thus, the focus in postcolonial studies on European countries and its former colonies in Africa and Asia has been criticized and arguments made for viewing other parts of the world through a postcolonial lens.\(^\text{177}\) During the last decade, scholars from Eastern Europe have started to argue that “all of Europe is postcolonial, \textit{but in different ways}”.\(^\text{178}\)

In this thesis, references are made to the West and the East. The West and the Western world are used as synonyms. While I think that using these terms is congruent with the theoretical perspectives applied in this thesis, it is important to remember that both the West and the East are constructs impregnated by certain meanings. Both are problematic because they contain generalizations, erase differences and imply homogeneity between countries and peoples. By using these labels I do not dismiss historical, cultural and political differences between countries that belong to the Western and the Eastern world. As the West is generally less problematized and often used without any explanation, it makes it all the more important to clarify that I reject the notion of a monolithic West. In our efforts to expose various divisions of the world and the dynamics of power relations, we should be very careful so as not to participate in creating stereotypes in an uncritical manner. Concerning the West, I do not see it in a purely territorial sense, but use the term when referring to a self-defined cultural sphere and, to borrow the words of Stefan Jonsson, a “coherent political-economic network and a closed ideological community”.\(^\text{179}\)

\(^{175}\) Hall 1996, 247.

\(^{176}\) Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 2006, 3.

\(^{177}\) King 2000, 3.

\(^{178}\) Pucherová and Gáfrik 2015, 14. See also Kovačević 2008.

\(^{179}\) Jonsson 2005, 170.
Sisterhood, solidarity and transnational encounters

It is now generally established that the experiences of women around the world vastly differ. A questioning of the universality of women’s identity and women’s shared experiences started in earnest during the 1980s. The earlier essentialist position was countered by an anti-essentialist one claiming that women are not a homogenous group and that their experiences differ across time and space.\(^\text{180}\)

Since then, feminist debates have exposed an emphasis on how intersections of multiple social categories such as gender, race, ethnicity and class affect women’s lives. The most vocal criticism of the idea of women sharing identity and suffering from a common oppression came from black intellectuals and those from the former colonies who strongly rejected what they saw as a view forced onto them by Western, white, middle-class women.\(^\text{181}\) The critique has continued and in the 1990s feminists from the former communist/socialist space joined the debate on the hegemony of Western/Northern feminisms and feminist theory.\(^\text{182}\)

Discussions about essentialism versus context took place among Nordic historians as well. With her theory on the gender system, based on principles of separation and subordination, the historian Yvonne Hirdman has over the years inspired scholars interested in power relations between women and men.\(^\text{183}\) However, the general subordination of women that this theory suggests provoked reactions by historians who questioned the application of theories on a system level and who instead emphasized the need for contextualized analysis. The critics underlined the importance of viewing individuals of both genders as agents in often complex historical contexts and pointed out that historical situations nearly always present a degree of freedom of choice to every individual subject.\(^\text{184}\) Christina Carlsson Wetterberg pointed to other aspects especially relevant for this study, namely the variations within the collective of women and the need to consider other power categories than gender that lead to the unfavorable position of women.\(^\text{185}\) Interestingly, at the same time as the opposition against gender essentialism grew within Swedish gender research, immigrant women remained essentialized. They were often constructed as a problem to be

\(^{180}\) See, for example, Scott 1988; Parpart 1993; Sommestad 1997.

\(^{181}\) See, for example, hooks 1984; Mohanty 1984.

\(^{182}\) See, for example, Hughson 2015; Tlostanova, Thapar-Björkert and Koobak 2016.

\(^{183}\) Hirdman 1988.

\(^{184}\) See, for example, Carlsson Wetterberg 1992; Blom 1995.

\(^{185}\) Carlsson Wetterberg 1992.
Paulina de los Reyes confronted this problem head-on by pointing out the “Swedishness” of gender research in her seminal article, “The problematic sisterhood”, published towards the end of the 1990s. She called for a problematization of Swedishness as a norm and an incorporation of ethnicity as a category with the purpose to enrich historical analysis.

Despite the fact that many references are made to women throughout this thesis, I wish to stress that I do not see women as a monolithic collective. In fact, the empirical results presented further on dispute claims about the universality of women’s experience. However, this is also a study about women who chose to organize as women, holding a belief that women share some core needs that should be fought for collectively. In order to understand their thinking and actions, some generalization is not just inevitable, but in this case also desirable. Here, I lean on Laura Sjoberg who writes that a focus on women should be about “looking at women’s experiences without making gender essentialist assumptions about women’s commonality, but with an understanding of the gendered world that the women are living in and experiencing”.

Moreover, this thesis counters the notion that gender analysis is exclusively about power relations between men and women. Few men are visible in the source material used. When mentioned, they are essentialized and depicted in a stereotypical way. A critical analysis of relations between women demands consideration of other social categories than gender, in this case especially nationality, ethnicity and class as well as the intersection of them.

The dilemma regarding stressing commonalities or differences between women has for a long time been the focus of feminist debates. While treating women as an entity is problematic, the need for women’s collective actions around the globe has hardly diminished as we are still fighting an uphill battle for a gender-just peace. In this context, the concept of sisterhood has often served to indicate a unified struggle of women for common goals. It has, however, also proven to be a term with different meanings and it is surrounded by much controversy. The ethnologist Jenny Gunnarsson Payne sees sisterhood as an empty significant that does not have to be connected to a specific content, but is not totally contentless either. Such a significant can be filled with many different, even conflicting, demands. Thus, sisterhood contains promises of ending inequality, a goal that anyone can relate to. At the same time, sisterhood is paradoxical. While it has clear universal ambitions, all women are usually

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186 See, for example, Ålund 1991.
187 de los Reyes 1998.
188 Sjoberg 2017, 18.
not seen as sisters. Who should count as a sister is really a process of negotiation. Research done by the historian Marie Sundell on women’s international organizing during the first half of the twentieth century shows, among other things, that sisterhood at that time was built on stressing commonalities and on loyalty among a limited circle of women. What sisterhood meant at the end of the same century in the Swedish-Bosnian encounter and the significance it had then is a matter of empirical investigation here.

Universal sisterhood anticipates a sharp dichotomy between men and women and accentuates women’s shared experiences at the cost of recognizing differences between women around the world. A series of critical works towards this view was published in the 1980s. bell hooks was one of those who criticized the emphasis put on the idea of common oppression which she saw as “a false and corrupt platform disguising and mystifying the true nature of women’s varied and complex social reality”. This complied with the view of the discourse of sisterhood as a Western, white, middle-class construct that came from intellectuals originating in the ‘Third world’. The work of bell hooks is especially interesting as she, despite harsh critique, views sisterhood between women as a tool for ending sexist oppression. Instead of building companionship on the basis of shared victimization, which disempowers, political commitment is seen as the unifying factor. For political solidarity to be possible recognizing one’s own privilege is important as is respect of differences. The latter is, as Nira Yuval Davies contends in connection to transversal politics, pivotal in multiethnic settings.

One of the main points that hooks makes, which is also one of the key assumptions underpinning this thesis, is that solidarity cannot be assumed a priori, but is rather the result of a process. She differentiates solidarity from support, claiming that solidarity encompasses common interests, shared beliefs and goals while support can be occasional. In order to grow, diversity and even disagreement are seen as a necessity, not a problem. Several other scholars have

189 Gunnarsson Payne 2006, 113-114, 138. See also Florin 2006.
190 Sandell 2015, 7-9.
191 hooks 1984, 44.
192 See, for example, Mohanty 1984.
193 hooks 1984, 45-47.
194 hooks 1984, 55-57.
195 Yuval Davies 1997, 125-133.
196 hooks 1984, 57, 65.
built on bell hooks’ thoughts on political solidarity, developing them further. Aware of the fact political solidarity might not always be achievable, the political scientist Pauline Stoltz is of the opinion that “an emphasis on dialogue and on the goal of solidarity […] can still function as a reminder that ‘we together’ are stronger”. According to the philosopher Richard Rorty, in order to solidarize with somebody, a sense of ‘we-ness’ must exist.

Pondering chances for global solidarity a few decades after the publication of hooks’ work, Ann Ferguson confirms its relevance. “is it feasible”, asks Ferguson, “to suppose that women of different nations, classes, ethnicities, genders and sexualities can put aside their differences and find common cause to challenge global gender injustices, particularly when these may involve challenging the privileges and powers that each of these intersections give some in relation to others?”, once again bringing the important question regarding solidarity across differences to the fore. She criticizes Chandra Mohanty’s view on solidarity needing “a common context of struggles”, but sympathizes with hooks’ emphasis on bonding across differences based on dialogue. This includes and, as I understand it, even welcomes disagreements as a natural part of the “political processes of debate, discussion and action together [that] can allow participants to reconstruct their interests so as to make them compatible”. Groups unified by ethical and political projects such as, for instance, opposing injustice have the best prospects of achieving political solidarity, because they share a bigger goal than is found in group interest solidarity. In addition to engaging in dialogue, the next step is to be open to identify more generally with the collective good of all women. Because of the pivotal role of the transformational aspect, Ferguson calls this two-step process transformational solidarity.

Historical actors focused upon in this thesis engaged in a both transnational and cultural encounter. Interest in studying connections of transnational character has increased in recent times. In a nutshell, it means being attentive to contacts and exchanges that go beyond national borders. As the historian Pierre-Yves Saunier writes in an introductory volume about transnational history, those interested in pursuing a transnational interpretation of history have often done so with the goal to highlight connections between peoples of the

197 Stoltz 2000, 39.
199 Ferguson 2011, 245.
200 Ferguson 2011, 243.
201 Ferguson 2011, 244.
world rather than differences. The word transnational has more and more come to suggest a focus on non-state actors, even though in reality historians also study actors that do not entirely belong in this category. Even NGOs can have quite close connections with the state. Kvinna till Kvinna, itself originating from an old transnational organization which has for a century been connecting women across the world, is a good example of an NGO relying extensively on funds from the Swedish state. The organization can be classified as both international and transnational.

Relations developed during this kind of encounter are in more cases than not asymmetrical, although not in any total sense. However, it is clear that transnational actors such as Kvinna till Kvinna seek to influence objects of their attention. A significant part of this influence is accomplished through cultural transfer consisting of ideas and knowledge.

What, then, is an encounter? What characterizes a culture encounter? In their book *Culture, human, encounter: A humanistic perspective*, Ruth Illman and Peter Nynäs deal with these questions relying on the thoughts of the philosopher Martin Buber. According to Buber, the relationship people establish in situations when they meet is the basis of that experience. He identified two kinds of relationships: The I-It relationship which is about establishing boundaries in relation to those we meet, and I-Thou in which two subjects dare to be open and cross boundaries. Although different, both of these relationships are of value and can be found within a single conversation. When true encounters do happen, the individuals possess a feeling of community that does not necessarily mean the abolishment of differences. What is of outmost importance is the ability to open up and respect those we communicate with, which, as one can imagine, requires embracing a degree of vulnerability.

Illman and Nynäs are careful to point out that culture encounters are both dynamic and multidimensional. They always happen between individuals and are context-specific. How a person views somebody else depends on her/his pattern of boundaries. So, when studying this kind of encounter, it is important to consider the context in which it happens and understand the actor’s point to view. Further, people’s relations to each other are dynamic, they evolve and change in time and space. The possibility of boundary crossing is there for everyone, but does not ensure the occurrence of genuine encounters. Boundaries are not as rigid as one might think, but in constant motion. Likewise, ‘we’ and

202 Saunier 2013, 31-32.
203 Berlin 2007, 83.
204 Illman and Nynäs 2005, 48-50.
'them’ divisions might not always follow expected boundaries such as, for example, nationality and language. The way we view other people is “a comprehensive reaction formed by both knowledge and attitudes and personal emotions”. Interestingly, knowledge is just one of the dimensions that impact how we interpret and understand people we meet. The authors contend that our attitude is even more important for successful culture encounters. Finally, cultural differences do not automatically mean difficulties in communication between people from different parts of the world. Understanding and community are qualities to be created through interaction.

What is considered particularly important, not least in encounters happening within the context of peacebuilding, is listening. Adam Curle identified listening as a central part of non-violence and a premier mediation technique. To listen actively goes beyond simply hearing what has been uttered, but, it requires sensitivity to what is being said and paying attention to tone and body language. The rhetorician Krista Ratcliffe speaks of rhetorical listening which she sees as a code of cross-cultural conduct, “a stance of openness that a person may choose to assume in relation to any person, text, or culture”. Listening is, however, an act affected by different social categories such as gender, class, race and ethnicity/nationality. In other words, those in a privileged position can afford to care less about what their subordinates say. Rhetorical listening is empathic in character and except openness to understand experiences and viewpoint of others, it employs critical thinking about one’s own references of the world. Ratcliffe says that rhetorical listening is no quick fix solution but an ongoing process which, due to the very intent of bringing us closer to understanding each other better, can be paved with challenge and perhaps even occasional discomfort. The latter should not be feared, but welcomed.

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206 Illman and Nynäs 2005, 64.
207 Illman and Nynäs 2005, 60-63, 80-83.
208 Curle 1992, 103-105.
210 Ratcliffe 2005, 21-22, 34.
CHAPTER THREE

Empirical material and methodology

Throughout the thesis written as well as oral sources are used. The majority of these sources appear in research for the first time and represent a variety of voices. The chapter opens with a presentation of the source material including selection and critical review of the same. What follows is a section on methodological considerations. The chapter ends with ethical considerations and reflections on my own background and fieldwork.

Written sources

Not seldom, a historian’s work resembles detective work, especially when it comes to locating the source material. Collecting and creating sources has been a long but rewarding process. Kvinna till Kvinna was, during the time I worked on my thesis, still in the phase of creating its own archive thus filling it continuously with new materials. This meant that each time I had an opportunity to search through the archive additional material relevant for my study was found.

Most of the used written source material, consisting of different categories of sources, has been produced by Kvinna till Kvinna. It ranges from official documents such as reports and newsletters made for a wider public to internal ones such as minutes, weekly reports, educational materials used in Bosnia and some e-mail correspondence. Semi-official materials such as requests and reports to Sida have also been a valuable source of information as well as evaluation reports conducted by independent investigators on behalf of Sida. All of this material, along with articles from the Swedish daily and weekly press, primarily used to get an insight into the doings of the organization during the initial years, has either been located in Kvinna till Kvinna’s archive in Stockholm or on its website.

Different sources enable a fuller and a more nuanced picture of the organization’s engagement in Bosnia. In many respects, the sources used complement each other. The official and semi-official ones offer information on how Kvinna till Kvinna envisions and presents the mission in Bosnia, but also its view of local ‘partners’. Official sources are generally purified from information that could compromise the image of the organization, because their very purpose is to show the organization in a positive light and attract donors. A positive image of Kvinna till Kvinna appears also in the selected Swedish press contents. This material consists of interviews with the organization’s front figures and newspaper articles written by journalists. Judging by the content in the articles,
which do not contain any criticism of Kvinna till Kvinna and its work, it can be assumed that they were written for promotional purposes. With this said, I proceed from the assumption that the press material used in this study mirrors perceptions and opinions of Kvinna till Kvinna rather than the individual journalist. We have to bear in mind that journalists seldom have access to internal documents and it is obvious that they in this case relied on information from biased sources.

While some references to challenges encountered appear in the material sent to Sida, it is in Kvinna till Kvinna’s internal documents that we find descriptions of and deeper reflections on the mission in Bosnia. In this context, the weekly reports sent from the Sarajevo office to the main office in Stockholm have been of special significance. Informal in nature and close in time to the events and development they relate, they give a unique insight into the organization’s work on the ground uncovering not just the achievements, but the problems as well. The practice of reporting to Stockholm on a weekly basis began once the organization started to have representatives stationed in the area. Written by different persons who over the years worked as field representatives in Bosnia, this rich material covers the period between 1996 and 2009 and allows us to follow Kvinna till Kvinna’s activities in Bosnia chronologically, including contacts with local NGOs, Sida and other international actors. This material was brought to Stockholm a few years after I started working on my project.

When it comes to Bosnian NGOs, written material is much scarcer. As young organizations with small resources, they primarily invested time in implementing their activities and less in documenting the work. Some letters from Bosnian women were found in Kvinna till Kvinna’s archive as well as a small number of evaluations of activities arranged by the Swedish donor. Also, the aforementioned weekly reports contain substantial amounts of information about Bosnian NGOs, but the fact that these reports have been written from the perspective of the Swedish organization makes them problematic. Despite obvious reservations, in line with the historian Julia Hauser’s thinking about sources on cultural encounters, I suggest that “the voice of the Other is audible through distant echoes” even though it appears in documents created by Kvinna till Kvinna. This particular source (the weekly reports) affirms the compelling argument made by the historian Maria Ågren about the need to recognize visibility and importance as pivotal criterions of source criticism. Following Ågren, questions regarding what is visible in a source and the relevance of the

211 Hauser 2015, 10.
212 Ågren 2005, 253-259.
information for the research question decide the suitability of the source. Applied to the weekly reports, these principles yield the conclusion that they, unlike other written and oral sources available, provide us with a glimpse into the dealings of local NGOs in different situations over time displaying both compliance and opposition to with donor requirements. Finally, although the ambition has been to illuminate the encounters from the point of view of both parties, Kvinna till Kvinna is represented to a higher degree due to the uneven access to source material. Regarding the ‘local perspective’, I do not claim the existence of a single such source. Bosnian NGOs have their own opinions and agendas, but share the experience of being a ‘partner’ to the Swedish donor, and the same cultural references.

Oral sources
I initiated my research project with the expectation of needing to create part of the empirical material by conducting interviews. Since I was dealing with relatively young organizations, there was a risk of written sources being scarce. I was also well aware that sources of unofficial character might not be available to me. Both of these presumptions turned out to be true. The material that I initially could get hold of from Kvinna till Kvinna gave a fragmented picture of the organization’s work in Bosnia and seldom contained traces of introspection. On top of that, there was almost a total lack of written sources in the case of Bosnian NGOs. This made oral sources a necessity for gathering basic information, getting beyond adjusted accounts and attaining a deeper understanding of the content in the written source material. Oral sources can be considered especially rich sources because they “tell us not just what people did, but what they wanted to do, what they believe they were doing, and what they now think they did”.213 As the historian Yulia Gradskova shows in her work on the solidarity with Chile manifested in Sweden during the 1970s, oral sources also have a tendency to reveal emotions in a whole different way than written ones.214 Another advantage of oral sources is the possibility to study silences.215 Detecting silences and analyzing meaning of those will be further discussed in the section on methodological considerations.

There is in my view no given hierarchical order between the sources used in the thesis as their usage is tied to their relevance for the research questions. Oral

215 See, for example, Portelli 1991; Freund 2016.
sources have contributed with information that could not be retrieved from written ones. They have exposed potential problems and conflicts both between Kvinna till Kvinna and Bosnian NGOs as well as among the latter. Further, diverging opinions within the Swedish organization and ways in which Sida affected its work on the ground came to the fore. Interviews also turned out to be an opportunity for women within Kvinna till Kvinna to speak about intentions behind methods used by the organization, thus unavoidably reflecting on the issue of shared experiences and differences between women. Besides providing basic information about Bosnian women’s groups, oral sources give a glimpse into how women in these groups describe their experiences of activist work in Bosnia and their perception of the relationship with Kvinna till Kvinna.

The question whether oral sources are legitimate historical sources has been debated among historians. The main criticism towards the reliability and validity of oral sources regards the fact that they are based on memory. Oral historians have responded to this criticism by highlighting the distinctiveness of these sources and embracing the orality, their subjective nature and the narrative that is actively created in the interview situation, thus moving beyond the notion of oral sources as mere providers of factual information.216 While research has established that meaningful memories are fairly stable, oral historians see memory as an active process worth exploring in its own right. Oral documents are seen as a result of “a three-way dialogue: the respondent with him or herself, between the interviewer and the respondent and cultural discourses of the present and the past”.217 In other words, an oral source is always affected by the context in which it was created and by the purpose it was created for. As also this thesis demonstrates, oral sources are especially important when we look for information from actors rooted in non-Western cultures. In this context, the historian Gunlög Fur’s thoughts regarding the polemics about written versus oral sources being “central to the struggle of who has the authority to speak about the meaning of the past and its context” are quite telling.218 To Fur, who has studied the encounter between Native Americans and the European colonizers, this is about the valuation of cultures.

The practice of oral history is one of its most clear distinctive features.219 The creation of empiria is a dynamic process. Each encounter with interviewees pre-

219 Abrams 2010, 16.
sents an opportunity for new and deepened insights. It was during these encounters that I gained invaluable knowledge about the context in which both Kvinna till Kvinna and Bosnian NGOs operated. For example, understanding the complexity of the political context in Bosnia and dependency of domestic NGOs on foreign support enabled comprehension for the rhetoric and strategies NGO women used in order to be able to carry out their activities. It goes without saying that meetings with interviewees helped me continuously to sharpen the interview questions as well as research questions posed in the thesis. It was also on these occasions that valuable information about both written source material and potential interviewees appeared. For instance, during an interview with a Kvinna till Kvinna employee, I found out about the aforementioned weekly reports that turned out to be of paramount importance for this thesis. The women I encountered during my research trips to Bosnia, did not only generously share their opinions on whom I should meet, but sometimes even helped me to come into contact with that person.

**Emancipatory ambitions of oral history**

While the usage of oral sources is as old as history writing itself, the oral history field as we know it today started to develop after the Second World War. Up to that time, written documents had been the preferred historical sources. This changed with a general increase of interest in social history coinciding with decolonization and a severe critique of colonialism as a phenomenon, which reopened the door to oral sources and the method of oral history. Dedicated to writing ‘history from below’, historians have since then used oral history with the intention to bring suppressed groups into the light, “to give a voice to the voiceless, a narrative to the story-less and power to the marginalized”. In retrospect, there is no doubt that oral history has been immensely significant to

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220 Bajramovic Jusufbegovic 2014. See also Glaser 2015 for an instructive account of the dynamic process of source creation and the significance it has for the entire research process.

221 See, for example, Kjeldstadli 1998, 186.

222 One of the front figures of the oral history field, Paul Thompson, writes about oral history as “the first kind of history”. See Thompson 2000, 25.

223 For an overview of development of oral history field internationally see Perks and Thomson 2016. For an overview that includes development of oral history field in Sweden see Thor Tureby 2015.

224 Abrams 2010, 154.
women’s history research.\textsuperscript{225} I would argue that it remains essential for documenting women’s activism and peacebuilding efforts in societies around the globe, especially the ones beset by intractable conflict. Thus, considering the fact that little has been published on Bosnian women’s history and that women as peacebuilders in general still await recognition and entrance into history books, I embrace the emancipatory ambitions of oral history.

Thoughts presented in some of the pioneering works on oral history about its potential to empower people and to bring about change have, however, been challenged. A critical view that arose with time problematized, above all, the power imbalance in the researcher/researched relationship. This issue has been engaging oral historians for decades, generating a wealth of ideas about how to turn the unequal relationship into one where power is shared, which have in turn transformed the general view regarding both the purpose with oral history and its practice. The literary scholar Annika Olsson captures the shift within the field in the title of her contribution to a Swedish publication on oral history, “From giving voice to giving and taking place”.\textsuperscript{226}

One of the most intricate questions connected to the emancipatory ambitions of oral history for me as a researcher has been how to communicate with and represent women who accepted to participate in my research in a way that honors them. I went into the field inspired by thoughts about encounters in which two subjects meet and immerse in a dialogue.\textsuperscript{227} The interviewing was an enriching but demanding process, and Lynn Abrams is right about the interview being “fundamentally different from most encounters a historian will have with a historical source”.\textsuperscript{228} What is important to mention here is that each interview situation turned out to be a learning experience and a new opportunity to co-create conditions for a respectful meeting.

Feminist researchers have been at the forefront of striving to diminish the power gap mentioned above and calling for a more empathetic approach that can bring the two subjects involved in an interview situation closer to each other. However, not seldom guided by sisterhood thinking and assumed unity between women, in these efforts factual differences such as, for example, class and race have tended to be overlooked and hierarchies reproduced.\textsuperscript{229} Others, such as Alessandro Portelli, think along the lines that “Dialogue is not made

\textsuperscript{225} Armitage, Hart and Weathermon 2003, 3-5, 65-66.
\textsuperscript{226} Olsson 2015.
\textsuperscript{227} Thor 2001.
\textsuperscript{228} Abrams 2010, 10.
\textsuperscript{229} See Berger Gluck and Patai 1991.
possible by pretense of reciprocal identification, but by the foregrounding of difference in the context of seeking equality”.230 A good dialogue is not necessarily hindered by differences, and the ability to listen is considered to be of decisive importance for a successful dialogue.231

The role of research in ‘Othering’ and reinforcing inequalities has been recognized. Increased awareness about power imbalance in the researcher/researched relation as well as differences based on social categories such as class, gender and race/ethnicity has made scholars more attentive to the inequality issue.232 We have a huge responsibility for developing a critical approach to the representations that we produce and for considering possible consequences these may have for the represented. To begin with, who can represent whom? Although addressed before, this thought-provoking question still deserves some attention. Rejecting the essentialist position that researchers should only work with participants of similar background, I believe that there is a need for considering differences that we, in our endeavor to throw light on actors pursuing social change, sometimes fail to recognize. In other words, problematizing shared experiences is also needed.

To tackle these issues, some feminist researchers suggest that we abandon speaking for anyone else but ourselves. Others like Rannveig Traustadottir approach the problem of representation in a more nuanced way making strong arguments against speaking only for ourselves, which, she believes, would cause an even greater hegemony of white, middle-class feminists. Especially compelling is her argument that choosing not to speak for ‘Others’ can lead to indifference to issues they face, “a way out of dealing with the complexity and diversity of women’s experiences”.233 My interpretation of Traustadottir’s thoughts is that privilege is closely followed by responsibility which means that the dilemma related to speaking for ‘Others’ “must continually be juggled against the cost of silence”.234

**Interviews with Kvinna till Kvinna: selection and carrying through**

Interviews with nine former and current employees of Kvinna till Kvinna were carried out between 2009 and 2013. Apart from availability and ethical aspects,
the selection of sources depends on the information they can provide.\textsuperscript{235} Thus, with regard to my interest in the encounter between Kvinna till Kvinna and Bosnian women’s groups, I chose to focus primarily on persons with the experience of working at the Sarajevo office and those by the nature of their work assignments closely connected to it. Six of the interviewees had held the position of the field representative in Bosnia during a certain period of time between 1995 and 2013, meaning that practically the whole period studied has been covered. Others acquainted with the organization’s work on the ground were employees usually responsible for coordinating the activities from the head office. They stayed in contact with the field representatives and visited the Sarajevo office at regular intervals where they also had an opportunity to meet with local NGOs. Two of the interviewees occupied this position at the time we met. Conducting interviews with the group of women that founded Kvinna till Kvinna has also been one of the goals set. In the end, I managed to interview two of them who were still active in the organization. Finally, even though a question about the cooperation with Sida was posed to each person, I also interviewed a woman who was at the time working as aid director.

The interviewees were all women between 35 and 61 years of age. All had experience of higher education. Long-term engagement in citizen associations in Sweden and some work experience abroad were other common characteristics.

All the women were contacted either via e-mail or telephone. When they had receiving information about the research project, a verbal agreement was reached regarding their participation in it. I met a slight majority of them at the Kvinna till Kvinna head office in Stockholm where the interviews were conducted. The rest of the meetings took place elsewhere in Sweden and in Bosnia.

One of the interviews was a group interview, while the rest were one-to-one meetings. They lasted between one and a little over two hours. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. A great deal of what actually happens during an interview is usually lost in the process of transcribing. Tone, emotions and facial expressions are rarely documented and the focus is often solely on what is uttered. The reduction of a complex interaction that takes place during an interview to the spoken word represents the researcher’s interpretation, which might even make it difficult for the researched to recognize themselves in the transcription. A drawback of detailed transcriptions is that they can be hard to understand for readers. For the sake of readability, I have left out sounds such as throat clearing, murmur and coughing. It has, however,

\textsuperscript{235} Hartman 2004, 280.
been important to contextualize the interview situation by, for example, being transparent with what questions were posed.

**Interviews with NGOs in Bosnia: selection and carrying through**

Interested in women’s NGOs engaged in political issues with the intention to bring about change at the higher societal levels, I was initially focused on women’s organizations that operate in major urban areas. NGOs Žene Ženama from Sarajevo and Lara from the fast-growing city of Bijeljina, situated in the Federation and the RS respectively, were chosen among more than a dozen of local organizations supported by Kvinna till Kvinna. However, the more I learned about the Bosnian context the more I started to recognize the important role of women’s NGOs for their communities, especially in smaller, conservative towns which have proven to be fertile ground for nationalism. Knowing that, as well as taking into account the emphasis Kvinna till Kvinna itself put on small and rather isolated areas, I revised my initial focus. In practice it meant adding two NGOs active in small towns in the RS, Forum Žena from Bratunac and Budućnost situated in Modriča. Thus, the selection of NGOs was based on the following criteria: long-term support by Kvinna till Kvinna, representation of both entities that make up postwar Bosnia, geographical areas (cities and towns) particularly burdened by the wartime past, and political activity.

The second and third criteria listed above require a short explanation. Postwar Bosnia is a highly decentralized state comprised of semi-autonomous entities, the Croat-Bosniak Federation and the Serb-dominated RS, with their own parliaments, governments and judiciaries. These two entities are also political units whose institutions manifest divergence of opinion regarding both the past and the future of Bosnia. This situation entails both possibilities and limits for the work of NGOs. A focus on only one entity would neither give a representative picture of women’s organizing in the country nor capture the complexity of the context in which it takes place. In the context of the present study, moreover, a one-sided focus would not do justice to the mission of Kvinna till Kvinna, because it has intentionally and continually supported NGOs from both entities and encouraged meetings between them. When it comes to my choice to pay attention to NGOs from local contexts with a troubled wartime past and pronounced nationalist sentiments, it is reasonable to assume that they organized and developed under especially difficult conditions which makes them an interesting example of local agency.

The oral sources were created during three research trips to Bosnia. I contacted the organizations either through e-mail or telephone and in all cases the
answer came shortly, containing their consent to be interviewed. Communication regarding the planning the interviews went through the leaders, which has been very helpful because they assumed responsibility for recommending potential interviewees, contacting them and creating conditions so that the majority of the interviews could be conducted at their offices. Only in one case, I contacted a former member of an NGO who a few years earlier had moved on to another organization. During the first trip that took place in 2009, I conducted sixteen interviews with women engaged in Lara and Žene Ženama. Due to their precarious financial situation, local NGOs usually had only a few employees meaning that the vast majority of their active members had their ordinary jobs somewhere else.\textsuperscript{236} Therefore, interviews have in some cases been conducted at the interviewees’ workplaces as well as other public places. The chosen interviewees were women who had spent a period of time as active members of these local organizations, which also means that they had some contact with the donors. By not limiting the selection to currently active members, I wanted to open up for a possibility to speak also to women who had moved on to other projects, but who might provide valuable information about earlier stages of development in the organizations selected for my study.

I started out in the northeastern part of the country where Lara is located. During the days spent in Bijeljina, the second largest city in the RS, I interviewed six women who were at the time between 32 and 65 years old. Five of them belonged to the Serb ethnic group and one to the Bosniak one. Half of the interviewees were not originally from Bijeljina, but had relocated there during the war. All six had completed a university degree. Afterwards, I conducted interviews with nine women with connections to the Sarajevo-based Žene Ženama. Half of them were in their thirties, one was in her forties and four in their fifties. Contrary from Lara, this has since its inception been an ethnically mixed organization as Sarajevo, unlike Bijeljina, kept some of its pre-war ethnic diversity. One of the interviewees was a Philippine woman who moved to Sarajevo after marrying a Bosnian man. Otherwise, only two women were not originally from the capital. The interviewed women belonged to the educated elite as all held a university degree.

The encounter with women at Forum Žena, located in the small town of Bratunac in eastern Bosnia, took place in the early fall of 2012. On this occasion, I conducted one group interview (with two women) and three individual ones.

\textsuperscript{236} The interviewees who did not make their living by working at the NGO, were active in a wide array of professions. They were journalists, teachers, politicians, officials, academists etc.
Unfortunately, the recording of the group interview conducted failed, which resulted in another interview the following year but this time with only one of the women. Most of the interviewees were of Serb ethnicity and two were Bosniaks. Also this was a mixed-age group of women. While the youngest woman was in her mid-twenties, the oldest one was in her mid-sixties. They were all originally from the municipality of Bratunac. The majority of them had received higher education. On the 2012 research trip, I also made an interview with a representative of Budućnost residing in a town in the northern part of the country called Modriča. The interviewee was a Serb woman in her fifties. She was well-educated and had had a successful career prior to her engagement at Budućnost.

What applies to all four organizations is that they were started by well-educated women, a vast majority of whom had careers before the war working as journalists, economists and lawyers. The organizations continued to attract well-educated women. The founders of the organizations entered activism either during the war, through the Belgrade-based Women in Black and Medica Zenica, a women’s therapy center in central Bosnia, or shortly after it ended.

The interviews lasted between one and a little over two hours. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

**Methodological considerations**

The aim and research questions of this thesis have required a combination of different sources and methods. To enhance the reliability of the data used, I have used triangulation as a method, which means to extract information from sources independent from each other. The methodological tool of source criticism does not necessarily disqualify biased sources, because even biased ones can provide us with valuable information. Although the indispensability of source criticism in an age of rapid technological development is evident, its most essential contribution is nowadays less about establishing ‘the objective truth’ and more about enhancing the reliability of our research.\(^{237}\) Combining different sources and methods was also a matter of promoting the visibility of different actors and their perspectives as well as illuminating the studied phenomenon from different angles. I share the view held by the political scientist Ann-Sofie Lennqvist Lindén that triangulation can also be used to launch a “richness of perspectives”.\(^ {238}\)

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\(^{237}\) For more on the applicability of source criticism in peace research see Dulić 2011.  
\(^{238}\) Lennqvist Lindén 2010, 86.
In terms of methodology, in this study a hermeneutic approach meets that of oral history, which is more than a data collection method. Oral history has been utilized as a perspective guiding my ethical approach to sources, interpretations, and general perception of the researched. In my view, the two mentioned methods share some core principles. Both cultivate a genuine interest in learning about historical actors, thus promoting openness and curiosity when approaching sources. Viewing actors as subjects worth understanding on their own terms, having empathy for them, and taking into consideration the active role of the researcher throughout the research project are other main lines of thought in both hermeneutics and oral history.

Unlike natural sciences focused on explaining the phenomena studied, what is put center stage here is understanding. The purpose is to seek for meanings, which is reflected in the research questions where the emphasis is on how rather than what and why. In the humanities, one typically speaks of understanding from within. It is common for historians, in particular, to strive to understand an actor’s thinking and actions from her or his point of view. Entering into an actor’s perspective does not mean taking sides or necessarily portraying the studied in a positive light. It does, however, include approaching the empirical material with sensitivity. When dealing with two different although interconnected actors, it has been important to be considerate of the fact that what is favorable for one actor does not necessarily need to be so for the other.

This brings us to one of the main components of scholarly work, namely critical analysis. Striving for a critical but also empathetic view on the actors studied, I was helped by Paul Ricoeur’s hermeneutics of suspicion and hermeneutics of reconciliation. To Ricoeur, a text does not display the intentions of actors in a simple way, but needs a deeper probing. Using the hermeneutics of suspicion does not imply treating what the actors unfairly and with disrespect, which Erling Bjurström calls a hermeneutics of malice. The focus of a hermeneutics of suspicion is to expose structures of power and hidden power ambitions. However, it is not immune to the hermeneutics of malice. Therefore, the researcher needs to remain faithful to some of the most basic principles in hermeneutics such as the importance of listening and making a genuine effort to understand the source on its own terms.

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239 See, for example, Thor 2001.
240 Ödman 2006, 39.
242 Bjurström 2012, 45-56.
Hermeneutics is a “contextual philosophy”. Interpretation demands contextualization. The process of understanding consists of a constant movement between the small parts and the whole, also called the hermeneutic circle/spiral, and is heavily dependent on various types of context such as, for example, the historical and cultural ones. Another important component of how we understand the world around us is constituted by our own preunderstandings. While this matter is to some extent discussed in the next section on ethical considerations, it is of value to mention here that knowledge about the field of investigation varies between researchers. Some researchers interested in international development are former development workers, which can mean both advantages in terms of contextual knowledge and disadvantages such as blind spots. I had no such experience, a seemingly disadvantageous starting point that can have its positive sides too.

To understand the encounter between Kvinna till Kvinna and Bosnian NGOs, the object of analysis has been both the rhetoric used as well as what was actually practiced on the ground. As the feminist critical theorist Nancy Fraser conveys, practices too hold “tacit norms and implicit assumptions”. In a practice-oriented analysis suggested by Fraser, an emphasis on meanings is needed in order to see what is usually taken for granted; it is important to add that the meanings of practices are changeable and context-bound. I have followed an inductive approach, thus allowing the source material to function as a base guiding me towards specific research questions. Through careful and repetitive reading and listening, I was able to identify central themes. Theory has been used as a tool to understand information found in the sources. This working process implied consistently going back and forth between previous research, theory and empiria. Although different, all the materials have been worked through with the same analytical tools. I have found a content-focused text analysis suitable for studying the encounter between Kvinna till Kvinna and its Bosnian counterparts. It has been used with the intent to discern and describe patterns and frequencies.

Finally, a few words on paying attention to silences. Historians have so far not been particularly interested in the phenomenon, even though it has grown in recent decades. In her book Silences and Times: Conversation with History,

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244 Ödman 2006, 99.
245 Ödman 2006, 100-102.
246 See, for example, Berg 2007; Stenersen 2014.
247 Fraser 1989, 146.
248 Fraser 1989, 144-160.
Eva Österberg describes silence, however difficult to interpret, as “a crucial part of human communication”.\textsuperscript{249} It is common for researchers to perceive silence as a negative thing. Those who work with oral history can find it disturbing and even unpleasant. For them, it symbolizes a loss of information and even loss of trust previously established.\textsuperscript{250} Although usually perceived as emptiness, rhetoricians like Cheryl Glenn offer a different understanding of silence through viewing it as a form of communication that has been undervalued. She tells us that “Like the zero in mathematics, silence is an absence with a function, and a rhetorical one at that”.\textsuperscript{251} In other words, silence always has meaning and is used by people in order to fulfill whatever rhetorical purpose they might have at a particular moment in time, “whether it is to maintain their position of power, resist the domination of others, or submit to subordination”.\textsuperscript{252}

Also, historians and others acknowledge the existence of a multitude of different social meanings of silence. Both Eva Österberg and Peter Burke point to the need of taking the temporal and cultural context, the situation and the larger context in which silences occur, into account.\textsuperscript{253} Silence can signify everything from uncertainties and avoidance of conflict to resistance and agency. As studies on everyday life in postwar Bosnia indicate, silence can successfully be used in facilitating cross-ethnic encounters as well as speed up the normalization of life in such settings. According to this interpretation, silence is a possibility.\textsuperscript{254} In the same vein, writing about silences in an oral history context Alexander Freund suggests that we should see them as constructive, and something that could be openly talked about during the interview.\textsuperscript{255} While the practice of probing silences together with research participants has not been applied in this study, an objective has been to detect silences in both written and oral sources. In that process, I have been careful to mind and provide the context in which silences occurred and interpret them accordingly.

\textsuperscript{249} Österberg 2011, 33.
\textsuperscript{250} Freund 2016, 254.
\textsuperscript{251} Glenn 2004, 4.
\textsuperscript{252} Glenn 2004, 153.
\textsuperscript{253} Österberg 2011; Burke 1995.
\textsuperscript{254} Eastmond and Mannergren Selimovic 2012; Stefansson 2010; Mannergren Selimovic 2010.
\textsuperscript{255} Freund 2016, 262-264.
Ethical considerations and reflections

No matter what historical period, topic or whether we deal with dead or living human beings, it is hard to get around ethical challenges. While this is not new to historians whose interest lies in contemporary history and who use oral sources, it is important continuously to remind oneself to treat participants in our research with respect and to “be careful, not to offend”. Throughout the process of working on this thesis, I have encountered several ethically sensitive issues. A great deal of time was spent reflecting upon and discussing questions regarding the collection and creation of the source material, confidentiality, the researcher/researched relationship and my own position as a Swedish researcher of Bosnian descent.

Anonymization of the organizations studied and the individuals involved in them had not been in my initial plans. Knowing that Bosnian women’s history had not previously been a focus of historians’ attention drove my ambition to save both the individual actors and the organizations they worked for from omission. This ambition grew stronger during the interviewing process as the women spoke with pride about their organizations and accomplishments. Not a single one of them asked to be anonymous. However, with time I chose to reconsider my initial decision. In the words of the sociologist Carolyn Ellis, researchers need to “live in the world of those they write about” in order to anticipate the consequences that our work could cause them and make us more thoughtful.

The more access to different categories of sources I got, the more a fuller and more complicated image of actors dealt with in this thesis and the relations between them appeared. Moreover, as I got acquainted with the contexts in which the Swedish donor and its ‘partners’ worked, I realized that those involved could potentially suffer from different kinds of repercussions such as losing their jobs, missing project grants, and even risking reprisal from those with political power. This led me to the decision to protect the identities of individuals. Real names have been replaced by pseudonyms, except from those found in published sources. Explicitly naming Kvinna till Kvinna, Bosnian NGOs and Sida serves a point that would be lost in case of complete anonymization. When sensitive information is dealt with, I refrain from providing detailed information about the individuals and, in some cases, even names of Bosnian NGOs.

256 Ulvros 2007, 146. For more on ethics in historical research see Kylhammar 2007; Österberg 1990.
are withheld. Total anonymity is seldom possible and the risk of being recognized by others active in the same field cannot be excluded.

The relationship between the researcher and those she studies is far from symmetrical. The power imbalance is evident from the very beginning of the research project because the scholars are the ones that initiate the contact with an already set goal in mind and the ones who control the final product. Even if we manage to create equality in the interview situation itself, we as researchers are in power of the material starting from transcription and interpretation to publication. Nonetheless, my experience tells me that the researcher is not always in the superior position. During the collection and creation of source material, the scholar depends on the will of the organizations to allow her to get access to archives and the choice of individuals to accept to be interviewed. The more sensitive the research subject is perceived, the harder it can be to find research participants.\(^{258}\) Even during the interview itself and after, the interviewee still has a possibility to withdraw from the project. Whatever uneasiness and suspiciousness I encountered among my interviewees, blended with interest for my project, in the end only two persons chose not to participate. Another aggravating circumstance has been a lack of time due to the participants’ workload. Aware of this, I appreciate the time I was given and decided to refrain from additionally burdening them. Offering a transcript served as an attempt to handle the challenges of inequality, but not everyone is interested to be a part of this process.

The question regarding to what degree we let interviewees to influence our work once it entered the analysis phase has been a challenge. After I had completed an interview with a Kvinna till Kvinna staff member and informed her that she would soon receive a transcript of our conversation, she also expressed a wish to see my analysis of her narrative. Beset by this dilemma which I gave a

\(^{258}\) I became aware of this already during my undergraduate years while working on the theme of wartime sexual violence in Bosnia from the survivors’ perspective. Scholars have started to make the arduous process of localizing research participants more visible in their research presentations. See, for instance, Strollo 2013, 80-81; Glaser 2015. Further, inspired by Gudrun Dahl’s reflections regarding anthropologists’ dependence on the social benevolence of their informants, Agnes Ers writes about her own efforts to maintain satisfactory relations during months of daily contacts with her informants. Although I did not engage in the method of participant observation like Ers and had comparatively brief encounters with the interviewees, creating an atmosphere of respect and genuine interest in what was being conveyed to me has been of the outmost importance. See Ers 2006, 41.
great deal of thought, I still made the decision not to allow the interviewee access to what was still work in progress. There is no obvious correspondence between what the interviewee expects and the researcher’s understanding and interpretation of her narrative. While it may occur that interviewees feel misunderstood, a researcher’s responsibility does not necessarily equal agreeing with them.259

My position in this matter might be problematic if one takes into account Michael Frisch’s concept of shared authority.260 While Frisch was primarily referring to power sharing in the interview situation, which I have been careful to abide, for example by posing open-ended questions and encouraging interviewees to take place in our conversations, oral historians have been applying it on other parts of the research process as well. Erin Jessee has been one of the few oral historians to problematize sharing authority. Having dealt with “highly politicized research settings”, in which she includes Bosnia, Jessee asks whether sharing authority is possible and desirable in all situations.261 We should not exclude a possibility that interviewees legitimize their interpretation of events through their narratives, and that these can function as a part of “the ongoing political struggle on how history should be interpreted”.262 Both Kvinna till Kvinna and Bosnian NGOs are actors with their own interests to protect, which is the reason why the limit to sharing authority for me was set between the interview and the analysis stage of my study. However, my intention throughout this research project has been to approach the sources with a genuine interest and curiosity, striving to understand them in more than one way. It remains, however, a dilemma for oral historians how to diminish power imbalance without jeopardizing scholarly independence and freedom. In connection to these concerns, I have found Daphne Patai’s suggestion that “some measure of ‘objectification,’ or separation and distance, is not only inevitable but, indeed, desirable in most research situations” instructive.263

Scholars are obliged to reflect upon their own identities and positions and how these might have affected the research process and left trace on the final product. Being a Bosnian-Swedish scholar provided me with an in-between position in relation to the women I met. This in-betweenness spared me from be-

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259 Portelli 1997, 66.
260 Frisch 1990.
261 Jessee 2016, 678-681.
262 Waldemarsson 2015, 71.
263 Patai 1991, 146-147.
ing perceived as naturally belonging to either side, which is not an unusual experience of scholars who do research outside of their country of origin. As both Maria Eriksson Baaz and Agnes Ers have noted while conducting research in Tanzania and Romania respectively, it is almost impossible to avoid being seen as a privileged foreigner associated with donors.  

With the Bosnian interviewees, I shared the mother-tongue (for which we sometimes had different names). Although we in some cases differed in regard to ethnic affiliation and age, we shared basic knowledge about the cultural context of Bosnia as well as the experience of living in socialist Yugoslavia. At the same time, I believe that the fact that I lived in Sweden was an advantage. My belonging to another context than postwar Bosnia encouraged them perhaps to speak more freely about the situation in the country and contributed to not taking too much of the information for granted, which happens when people share experiences. Also with the Swedish informants, I shared a language and contextual knowledge about Sweden and Bosnia. Even though I myself do not have an activist past or the experience of a development worker, I generally solidarize with the work of both Kvinna till Kvinna and the Bosnian NGOs. However, this does not mean that there were no differences between us. On the whole, one could speak of a span of “feelings of ‘sameness’ to feelings of estrangement, from the recognition of togetherness to the recognition of disagreement and detachment”.  

Conducting research in divided societies has its special challenges. Yet, it was never an alternative for me to limit my research by focusing on one ethnic group and a specific geographical region within Bosnia. While it would probably have been convenient, the loss for the study as a whole would have been immeasurably great. This choice led me to places with an unpleasant war past, thus forcing me to cross some personal boundaries involuntary raised during the war. As researchers we are not free of preunderstandings formed by the media, our own experiences as well as those lived by our extended family and friends. My posi-

\[\text{264} \text{ See Eriksson Baaz 2005, 20-21. See also Ers 2006, 41-42.}
\[\text{265} \text{ Zilka Spahić-Šiljak shared with me her experience of interviewing fellow activists for her book } \textit{Shining Humanity: Life Stories of Women Peacebuilders in Bosnia and Herzegovina.} \text{ She described the process of getting the interviewees, whom she knew well and had previously done activist work with, to tell her their stories not relying too much on their mutual memories of events as very difficult. Personal communication September 29 2016.}
\[\text{266} \text{ Povrzanović Frykman 2005, 196.} \]
tion was somewhat different than it would have been for someone with no previous attachment to the area. As someone who fled the war in the 1990s, I have experienced doing research on and in Bosnia as emotionally demanding. Moving across the country, I was not spared from reliving uneasiness and “confront[ing] my own background” as the ethnologist Dragan Nikolić, who walked a similar path, has candidly written about. 267

While the emotional baggage of foreigners researching divided societies may be smaller, observations made by the social and political scientist Ionnais Armakolas during his ethnographic research among Bosnian Serbs bear witness to the importance of making sure that the informants believe that one sympathizes with them and not their enemy. For example, his Greek descent was taken as a guarantee that he was on ‘the Serb side’. 268 Ethnicity taken into account, I was both on ‘the right side’ and on ‘the wrong side’. Due to the fact that I was doing research among members of the civil sector, expected by their donors to cherish multiethnicity, during our meetings the ethnicity question was nowhere in the foreground. I presented myself and was referred to as the researcher from Sweden with Herzegovinian roots, meaning that the emphasis was put on national and regional rather than ethnic identity. The basic link between us was our gender identity supported by the underlying shared conviction that discrimination of and violence against women were unfair and needed to be uprooted.

At the same time, research has shown that narratives constructed during interviews are “dependent on different situations, contexts and interviewers”. 269 With this in mind, one should not eliminate the potential impact of our shared or different ethnic backgrounds on the narration. Something else to take into account here is the fact that the interviewees knew what organizations I had been or was planning to talk to. Inspired by Martin Buber, oral historians such as Malin Thor have stressed the fundamental importance of researcher/researched encounters in the sense that they do not only tend to influence us as scholars, but as human beings as well. 270 Beyond functioning as a source of information about both the activities of organizations studied and the contexts they operated in, the encounters were also a test of my commitment and ability to treat all interviewees with the same amount of respect and empathy.

267 Nikolić 2012, 29.
269 Dahl and Thor 2009, 2.
CHAPTER FOUR

Historical contexts

In the public eye as well as in scholarly work, Bosnia is primarily known for the war in the 1990s. Bosnians themselves not seldom view their life as divided between a life before and after the war. Perhaps this is a common thing in societies that have experienced a devastating war. This chapter, written with the objective to provide a contextual frame for the study, follows a simple chronological order of before, during and after the war. It goes without saying that it is not possible to do complete justice to the history of a country in a study like this, especially if there are controversies about it that not even scholars have succeeded to overcome. The chapter starts with a brief history of Bosnia during the socialist period, followed by sections on women’s situation and women’s activism during that period. Further on, it deals with the war in brief, and more in detail with the postwar period. In the latter section, the vast international intervention and the increased ethnical divisions after the war are accounted for. The chapter ends with an elaboration of contacts and relations between Sweden and Bosnia.

Brief history of Bosnia – the socialist period

Although its history can be traced back to the Middle Ages, Bosnia has for most of its existence not been an independent state. For the purpose of this study, the most relevant part of the country’s past starts with the Second World War when the historical borders of Bosnia and its status as a federal unit in Yugoslavia in the making were confirmed. For 47 years, Bosnia was one of the six republics that comprised the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia, an ethnically, linguistically, religiously and culturally diverse country. This particular period has been described both in positive and in negative terms. On the one hand, it was a period marked by peace and unprecedented progress, including a considerable improvement in the domain of women’s rights. On the other hand, even if Yugoslavia was known for its soft version of socialism and cultivated good relations with the rest of the world, it was firmly ruled by the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (CPY).

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271 See, for example, Ingrao and Emmert 2009.
People of different ethnicities and confessions have been coexisting for centuries in Bosnia, the only Yugoslav republic with no clear national majority. As such, it was led by hardline communists loyal to the idea of ‘Brotherhood and Unity’. To unify Yugoslavs, shared experiences of the People’s Liberation War and what they all could do for the new socialist state were stressed. This was effectively done through the educational system, but also through popular culture. The secular state schools, which replaced the ones run by ethnic/religious communities, became important meeting places for children of different backgrounds. In Bosnia where ethnic and religious communities lived intermixed on the whole territory, encounters between them occurred on a daily basis, in schools, workplaces, cultural societies as well as other public and private spaces. In urban areas, generally more secular than the rural ones, mixed marriages were common. The war in Bosnia has been described as the result of eternal hatred between three culturally different groups. Without denying the

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ethnic homogenization that started in the late 1980s, it must be noted that, apart from religious affiliation, differences between Bosnians were in fact minimal.\textsuperscript{273}

Aware of the ethnically mixed composition of Bosnia, the communist regime was especially repressive there. Signs of nationalist expressions were taken seriously and suppressed. Religious institutions and cultural organizations run by ethnic communities were looked at with suspicion.\textsuperscript{274} There was neither any significant popular opposition when the regime sanctioned rare nationalist manifestations nor signs of direct support of those actions. While the leading political structures promoted cosmopolitan values, securing ethnic equality when distributing political positions was important. It was done by the principle of the “national key” based on the proportion of each ethnic community. However, those selected represented the whole population.\textsuperscript{275}

Before the Second World War, Bosnia was predominantly rural with only a small percentage of the population living in towns and cities. After the war a process of urbanization and industrialization started. The economy began to improve during the 1970s resulting in a lower unemployment rate and a higher standard of living. Despite the intention of the state to create an egalitarian society, different classes existed but were not as divided as in Western societies.\textsuperscript{276} Positive transformation was apparent in the fields of industry, agriculture, education, infrastructure, tourism and, despite the hardline communist leadership, in the domain of culture.\textsuperscript{277} However, in a Yugoslav perspective, Bosnia still counted as one of the economically weak republics.

**Women in socialist Yugoslavia**

Out of six systems in which women in the former Yugoslav area lived during the past century, only the socialist one had gender equality on its agenda. Promises about fighting gender inequalities were given by the CPY already during the Second World War as a great many women joined the resistance movement. Women were indeed granted suffrage in 1946, and gender equality was inscribed in Yugoslavia’s first constitution.\textsuperscript{278} During this period women gained political and social rights that they never had before. Prior to that, except for

\begin{footnotes}
\item[273] Andjelic 2003, 6.
\item[276] Andjelic 2003, 29, 31-36.
\item[277] Bojić 2001, 246, 259-268.
\item[278] Ramet 1999, 5, 94.
\end{footnotes}
some who lived in urban areas, a majority of women were deprived of education. The level of illiteracy among the female population was very high, not least in Bosnia where in the early 1930s over 80 percent of women were illiterate.\(^{279}\) As Bosnian society was organized on a confessional basis, religious communities had a significant influence on people’s lives. Women were not only politically subordinate, but also totally economically dependent on their male family members.\(^{280}\)

After the war, the socialist government undertook extensive measures aimed at reducing inequalities in society. Some were explicitly directed towards securing conditions for women’s full participation in the building of the new country. Restricting the influence of powerful religious communities was one of the priorities. Religion was tolerated, but confined to the private sphere. For instance, in 1946 the courts of Islamic law were abolished and the jurisdiction over family matters, such as marriage, was transferred to civic authorities. Not long after that, Muslim women, many of them living in Bosnia, were prohibited to cover their faces in public.\(^{281}\) In the course of three decades, Yugoslav women obtained important social rights such as the right to divorce, full-paid maternity leave and a possibility of abortion, a process that was parallel to their, never greater, attendance in university studies and presence on the labor market.\(^{282}\)

Generally, industrialization and urbanization brought new possibilities for women. Work outside of the home meant earning their own money and being economically independent. However, the vast majority of women worked in typically female industrial sectors, education and health care with low salaries.\(^{283}\) Efforts of the state to promote equality between women and men were not completely accepted in society at large. Some women received more encouragement than others to pursue higher education and a career. On the family level, career progression was sometimes seen as a threat to women’s duties in the home.\(^{284}\) Research also shows that opportunities depended on economic resources.\(^{285}\) As illiteracy remained an issue in Bosnia throughout the socialist period, it is obvious that some young women from rural areas were never sent

\(^{279}\) Ramet 1999, 96. See also Božinović 1996, 96.


\(^{281}\) Bojić 2001, 234.

\(^{282}\) Ramet 1999, 96-97.

\(^{283}\) Denich 1977, 219-228.

\(^{284}\) Ramet 1999, 97-98.

\(^{285}\) Woodward, 1985, 255.
to school, because education was not seen as a necessity for a future wife and mother.286

While it is undeniable that formal emancipation of women took place in this period, it is also worth noting that it was incomplete. Women gained opportunities to educate themselves and become more economically independent, but gender roles in the private sphere were left untouched, meaning that the state did not stimulate equal division of responsibility for housework and childcare.287 It also failed to counter traditional gender roles in public institutions such as schools. Paradoxically, at the same time when Yugoslavia set an example, even in comparison with Western countries, in opening well-paid traditionally male professions for women, textbooks used in schools reproduced traditional gender roles.288

The political participation of women increased during this period. Some of the women who had fought in the Second World War entered politics, and held government positions over the following decades. At the same time as the presence of women on the labor market and in higher education steadily increased, however, their representation in positions of power on all levels continuously declined. Only a small number of women reached the position of political and economic leaders.289 Nevertheless, as the Yugoslav system of self-management delegated all relevant decision-making regarding the workplace to the employees themselves, it ensured, as Bette Denich wrote in the late 1970s, ”one of the broadest bases of access into the sphere of public power to be found in contemporary industrial societies”.290 The principle of participatory democracy was crucial to this system, which demanded active participation of workers in managing their work organizations. While all workers were obligated to attend self-management meetings, they also had an opportunity to engage in the worker’s council where female representation as a rule was higher than in the CPY and the governing bodies of the state.291


287 Denich 1977, 228-231.

288 Ramet 1999, 104.


290 Denich 1977, 236.

291 Denich 1977, 235-239.
Histories of women’s activism

Development of civil society, including women’s organizing, in Bosnia has been presented as a novelty and more or less attributed to the international influence that followed the war in the 1990s. The fact is, though, that women’s activism has a long history in Bosnia as it does elsewhere in the former Yugoslav area. The phenomenon of organizing in predominantly ethnically/religiously homogenous associations commenced on Bosnian soil during the rule of the Habsburg Monarchy (1878-1914). While a minor number of them had only female membership, women often participated along with their husbands in a variety of humanitarian, cultural and educational activities. Engagement in these kinds of activities legitimized women’s work outside of home, thus opening a discussion on their contribution in other spheres.292

A significantly larger number of women’s groups is found in the period between the two world wars, when also the first women’s movement in the area emerged. Ideologically, there was a range of bourgeois, left-oriented and traditional (even pro-patriarchal) organizations. Although the participation of Muslim women remains questionable, multiethnic organizations became more common.293 The idea of improving the unfavorable position of women took root and each organization worked with the issue in its own domain. At the same time, the interwar period was characterized by the ability of women’s groups to come together and form alliances. Ties with international women’s organizations were cultivated and it is reasonable to assume that these contacts had an inspiring effect and encouraged cooperation within the Yugoslav area. As elsewhere, women’s franchise was one of the issues that engaged many organizations and different methods were used to mobilize public opinion. From the mid-1920s there was a number of joint campaigns, and the biggest one in 1939 succeeded in getting women from different walks of life to gather around the issue of women’s suffrage.294

The next wave of women’s activism occurred during the Second World War. It is estimated that 2 million women took part in the National Liberation Movement organized into the Anti-Fascist Front of Women (AFW) that was formed in 1942. Communist women, many of whom had been active in the interwar feminist movement, were in charge of developing the organization and mobilizing women for the partisan cause. As the historian Jelena Batinić writes in her

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292 Popov-Momčinović 2013a, 62-63.
293 Popov-Momčinović 2013a, 67-75.
book *Women and Yugoslav Partisans*, AFW “was an original and unique wartime creation, which thrived on a surprising blend of communist ideology, peasant mores, and feminist organizational experience”. While around ten percent of women who participated in the movement served as soldiers, the majority of them were preoccupied with supplying necessities to partisans, taking care of the wounded and conducting social and humanitarian work. The second task of the organization was to educate women politically and prepare them for the new socialist society. In practice, this meant conducting literacy courses for masses of illiterate peasant women, some of whom were also given courses with more political content. With all its activities, the AFW was an advocate of women’s rights which highlighted women’s contributions and gave political significance to them.

The AFW has been described as “a fascinating experiment in what happens when women, organized for one purpose and under one sponsorship, inject their own needs and goals into the operation”. Already during the war, it became clear that the AFW had become more autonomous than the CPY planned. The first reactions and accusations came as early as in 1944. The organization was blamed for elitism and attempts to create a women’s organization distanced from the socialist cause. Pressures in different forms continued after the war. While there was desire among some leading activists to go beyond the humanitarian work and continue with advocating and aiding a higher involvement of women in all spheres of the new society, the CPY understood tendencies towards special treatment of women’s issues as a threat. Obstructed from the top, the AFW was gradually deprived of its earlier autonomy and abolished in 1953. Even though women partisans had a special place in the socialist Yugoslav myth about the People’s Liberation War, the leading structures of Yugoslavia believed that they had solved the “Woman Question” with the socialist revolution; Hence the abolition of the AFW and suspicion towards the autonomous organizing of women.

A new feminist movement emerged in Yugoslavia in the mid-1970s. It was started in academic circles by women acquainted with contemporary feminist ideas who in 1978 arranged an international feminist conference in Belgrade.

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295 Batinić 2015, 77.
296 Batinić 2015, 76-102, 105-108.
297 Jancar Webster 1999, 78.
298 Jancar Webster 1999, 81-82. See also Batinić 2015, 115-122.
299 Popov-Momčinović 2013a, 78-80.
touching upon gender inequality through a wide range of themes. 300 Although the centers of feminist thought in socialist Yugoslavia were the capitals of Croatia, Slovenia and Serbia, individual women from Bosnia took active part in the new movement and three of them, Nada Sofronić Ler, Žarana Papić and Dunja Blažević had a major role in the organization of this conference. 301 While it never became a mass movement, feminist ideas spread and several women’s groups formed. It is noteworthy that those women active in such groups overwhelmingly came from the intellectual elite that had little contact with working-class women. 302 However, some of them also “lived the theory” as they, for example, engaged in creating a protection system for victims of domestic violence. 303

The feminist movement in Yugoslavia was the only one in the socialist parts of Europe. As the accusations of importing foreign ideology that separated women from class issues did not fail to come, the significance of the long tradition of women’s activism in the area and international contacts should not be underestimated. The exchange of information between Yugoslav feminists and those in the West proved to be beneficial for both sides. While the latter got an insight in women’s lives under socialist rule, the former used a comparative approach when raising attention to women’s issues in Yugoslavia. 304 While feminist organizing never really came to life in Bosnia like it did in Croatia, Serbia and Slovenia, Bosnian women did engage in societies with charity and cultural profiles as well as women’s actives organized through the CPY. 305

From the late 1980s, civil society activity in Bosnia, which was an elitist phenomenon confined to the capital, increased. As in other parts of Yugoslavia students initiated the process in 1987 by marching the streets of Sarajevo. In the course of a few years some youth organizations formed which addressed political issues such as human rights. Eventually, they managed to influence the mainstream media and despite its weakness challenge “the system” that had already begun to fall apart. 306 A greater involvement of women in civil initiatives came with the forebodings of war. Generally, women played an important role in the Yugoslav peace movement that arose in the early 1990s. For example,

300 Bonfiglioli 2008, 125-130.
301 Popov-Momčinović 2013a, 89.
302 Jancar 1988, 23.
303 Popov-Momčinović 2013a, 92.
305 Sklevicky 1989.
women organized the first anti-war demonstrations. With the beginning of the war, mothers, especially the ones from Croatia and Bosnia whose sons were still in the Yugoslav People’s Army, made demands about their release. They were not pacifists, but did not want to see their sons at war with their own people. Based on a comparison between prewar peace movements in Yugoslavia some argue that the one in Bosnia was initially the strongest. Witnessing the outbreak of violence as Slovenia and Croatia left the Yugoslav federation, hundreds of thousands of Bosnians participated in public protests against the war. The massiveness of this movement, in which a great many women were involved, was however relatively quickly lost.307

Women during the 1992–95 war

The war in Bosnia started in the spring of 1992. As it counts as one of the best documented armed conflicts in history, its characteristics are well-known. The global media focused especially on the siege of Sarajevo, 1425 days long, during which its inhabitants lacked basic life necessities and were on a constant basis exposed to sniper shootings and shelling.308 The agony of the capital, as well as many other towns, was increased further by the influx of refugees pouring in from different parts of the country. Serious violations of human rights including different types of torture such as imprisonment, physical and sexual violence took place across Bosnia. At the outset of 1993, the war intensified as new front-lines, in southern and central Bosnia, emerged. From then on, all three major ethnic groups fought officially against each other. Before the peace agreement was signed at the end of 1995, there was another wave of violence resulting in mass killings of civilians in Sarajevo and Tuzla as well as the genocide in Srebrenica.

Women were specifically targeted groups during the war years. In the wider context of Yugoslavia, a retraditionalization of gender roles had occurred with the decline of the socialist regime and the weakening of values which it promoted. Women’s presence in the public sphere drastically decreased while misogyny grew.309 With mobilization of gender in different discourses, women became “a mere tool in the claws of ethno-politics”.310 During the Kosovo crisis in the late 1980s, false stories about mass rapes of women started to spread

307 Licht and Drakulić 1996.

308 The siege of Sarajevo is often referred to as the longest siege in European modern history. For an excellent account of everyday life under the siege see Maček 2000.

309 See Blagoević 2002.

310 Popov-Momčinović 2013a, 100.
through the media. Sexual violence, however, became a very efficient strategy in the Bosnian war.311 Primarily women were subjected to different kinds of sexual violence while held either in camps or in private homes. Already in January 1993, Amnesty International noted manipulation with numbers and “all sides minimizing or denying the abuses committed by their own forces and maximizing those of their opponents”312. There are still no reliable statistics on how many women suffered this crime, which remains a powerful manipulation weapon to this very day.313

Women made up a great part of the civilian population that was driven out of their homes. It often meant separation from male family members and a refugee life. Left with children, and sometimes even senior members of the family to care for, women not seldom took on the whole responsibility for the household. An anthropological study conducted during and immediately after the war in one of the Sarajevo suburbs bears witness to local women’s role in its civil defense. The study shows that they had a decisive role in the creation of living conditions when there was a general dearth of everything, something that demanded both competence as well as a considerable amount of creativity.314 There are countless examples of female doctors, nurses, teachers, cultural workers and many others who made valuable contributions during this troublesome time. With international help some of them organized in the midst of the war in order to treat especially traumatized categories of women.315 However, women play different roles in wars. Not a small number of women participated actively on the front lines as soldiers.316 As elsewhere, we find women also among the perpetrators of war crimes, the most famous case being that of Biljana Plavšić who was convicted for crimes against humanity by the International Criminal Tribunal for former Yugoslavia (ICTY).317

311 Popov-Momčinović 2013a, 107.
312 Amnesty International 1993, 3.
313 The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe estimated that 20,000 women were sexually abused during the war in Bosnia. See Amnesty International 2009, 5.
316 Omanić, Serdarević, Ovčina, Omanić and Omanić 2010.
317 See Krupić 2010.
Postwar Bosnia

International intervention
The Dayton Peace Agreement, signed in late 1995, has been described as “one of the most comprehensive peace agreements negotiated in recent history.”\textsuperscript{318} Besides stopping the actual war, civilian aspects needed in order for the new state to function were also addressed in this peace treaty. The war was followed by large international military and civilian efforts with the mission of keeping watch over the implementation of the peace agreement. While the military aspect of maintaining Bosnia peaceful was entrusted to international peacekeeping troops, a foreign High Representative was appointed to monitor local political elites, as well as to coordinate the work of major international organizations such as United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) responsible for the return of refugees and supervision of elections and democratization. However, over two decades after the war ended it is clear that the peace agreement left numerous unresolved questions and has become a target of serious criticism.

\textsuperscript{318} Kostić 2009, 36.
Map 2: Bosnia-Herzegovina after Dayton Agreement, 1995-
While recognizing and emphasizing the integrity of the outer borders of Bosnia, the peace settlement practically legalized wartime rearrangements within the state. Thus, the country was divided into two entities, the Serb-dominated RS and the Bosniak-Croat FBiH. In 1999, Brčko, a strategically important and thereby disputed town in northern Bosnia, was turned into a separate district initially supervised by the international community which in 2012 left the governing of the Brčko District to its elected body. The postwar Bosnian state is decentralized with rather weak institutions operating at the state level. The emphasis on power-sharing between Croats, Serbs and Bosniaks in the Constitution demands representation of all three peoples at all levels of administration which has resulted in the creation of a huge and expensive state administration. A combination of a strong presence of the international community and strict rules on group representation and governance has made Bosnia one of the most complex countries in the world with a multilayered system of governance, several constitutions and extensive veto rights on all levels. The discrepancy between the structures of the entities, the RS being a centralized republic and the Federation split into ten decentralized cantons, puts additional strains on this already loose state formation.

More international organizations and aid agencies than anywhere else in Eastern Europe have passed through Bosnia during the postwar period. Because of the massive international presence and its leading role, the country is by many seen as a protectorate. Having had little success in convincing the local politicians to start implementing what was settled in Dayton, western governments have turned to the civil sector, funding projects run by international and local NGOs. In practice, foreign donors have been interested in supporting NGOs that subscribe to multiethnicity, work on reconciliation and aid the return of displaced people to their prewar homes. All of these elements are vital for the restoration of an integrated Bosnia and the commitments included in the peace agreement. It is noteworthy that donors were initially reluctant to aiding the RS due to the political its establishment. Likewise, it is important to add that there was even considerable animosity among the population of the RS towards Western countries. In particular, this was towards the United States that had played an important role in forcing the belligerent sides in Bosnia to settle peace.

320 Gagnon Jr. mentions a figure of 250 international NGOs. See Gagnon Jr. 2002, 207.
**Divisions on the basis of ethnicity**

The wars that followed the dissolution of Yugoslavia had far-reaching consequences for Bosnia. Years of devastating war changed the demographic picture of the country. Killings and expulsions during the war as well as massive relocations of people that took place after the peace agreement was signed, resulted in an ethnically divided society. Despite resources and efforts invested by the international community (IC), the segregation seems to have been cemented. Critics of the peace agreement argue that acknowledging the division of the country into two autonomous entities actually enabled further ethnic homogenization. Already in 1996, after winning the general elections, nationalist forces obstructed the realization of Annex 7 of the peace agreement which obliged the authorities to facilitate the return of refugees. They did not only try to prevent people from returning to their prewar homes, but engaged into convincing those who stayed to leave for the entity where their ethnic group was a majority.\(^{321}\)

Evidently, previously expressed goals to create ethnically pure territories have neither vanished nor significantly diminished after the war. Even though the mobility of people has successively improved and a number of refugees returned to their homes, important spheres of public life, such as for instance media and education, remain segregated. Each entity has its own broadcasting system,\(^ {322}\) and there are three educational systems within Bosnia.\(^ {323}\) These different systems are consequently used as means of spreading ethno-national ideology and put the emphasis on ethnic identity. Since education is placed on lower levels of governance, entity and canton authorities were given the possibility to form the schooling system freely, and even create “two schools under one roof”, thus enabling physical separation of children of different nationalities.\(^ {324}\) Besides hampering the reconciliation process, the policy that gives the majority the right to determine all aspects of education has contributed to discrimination

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321 Bieber 2006, 1, 30-31. See also Sell 1999.

322 In the Federation the existence of only one broadcasting system is questioned. Political representatives of a considerable part of Croats in Bosnia have for years been demanding their own channel, stating that the current, *Federalna televizija*, does not satisfy the need of the Croat people.

323 The formerly unified school system in Bosnia disintegrated during the war years. Bosnian Serbs and Bosnian Croats leaned on the curricula as well as textbooks from Serbia and Croatia respectively. On the territory controlled by the Bosnian army, new textbooks were issued that presented the “story of an integral and civic Bosnia and Herzegovina”. See Magaš 1998, 5.

324 Torsti 2003, 156.
of other groups as has particularly been the case with the returnees.\textsuperscript{325} The fact that all efforts to reform the education system have so far led only to minor improvements confirms its pivotal role for the reproduction of ethno-national identity and the spread of nationalist ideology that follows with it.\textsuperscript{326} Controlling the education system allows each group to ensure that the ‘right’ memories of the past and visions of the future of the country’s reach younger generations.

While resistance to ethno-nationalism is not totally absent, research clearly shows that the majority of ordinary people support the nationalist political elites in their treatment of education as one of the “national vital interests” that should be protected.\textsuperscript{327} Roland Kostić argues that the continued dominance of ethno-national identity depends on still present perceptions of threats “internalized and externalized by members of respective groups, thus becoming a part of the general cognitive pattern”.\textsuperscript{328} Where a group’s reproduction is perceived as threatened, there is also an extensive use of culture with the mission to reinforce the cohesiveness and uniqueness of the group. Bearing this logic in mind, it is understandable why all attempts to push for a uniform education system have been firmly rejected, especially in the case of what is called “group of national subjects” such as religion, language, geography and history. The resistance to educational equivalence has been strong from the Croat and the Serb side, both fearing domination by the Bosniak majority.\textsuperscript{329}

Differences between members of the three major ethnic groups in Bosnia being minimal, the above alleged distinctiveness of ethnic groups had to be created. Hence, for instance, the partition of the linguistically identical language into three languages,\textsuperscript{330} the destruction of historical and cultural heritage,\textsuperscript{331} and the rewriting of history textbooks. The deliberate destruction of the ‘wrong’

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Bieber, 112, 118.
\item Bieber, 118-119; Torsti, 154-156.
\item Kostić 2007, 107-116, 296-298.
\item Kostić 2007, 95.
\item Kostić 2007, 95, 155-165.
\item Magaš 1998, 45-49. Prior to the war the official language in Bosnia was Serbo-Croatian also called Croato-Serbian. After the war this language was split into three official standard languages, Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian, connected to the three major ethnic groups. For an excellent study on language and nationalism see Kordić 2010.
\item See Riedlmayer 2002.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
cultural heritage in wartime continued after the war through a successive elimination of traces of a shared past. In such a polarized setting, the cultural heritage sites are, as the ethnologist Dragan Nikolić observed, “used in order to imprint past injustices in people’s memories and maintain a victim-perspective in the collective ethno-national memory.” Selective remembering and forgetting the war of the 1990s have been parallel processes within ethnic communities in Bosnia. So far, an agreement on the causes and character of the recent war has not been reached. In order to handle different understandings of the past ordinary people often keep silent about it. As research shows, different views on the war still constitute “identity marker” which make a distinction between the three peoples.

Contacts and relations between Sweden and Bosnia

Reactions to the Bosnian war within Sweden
The official recognition of the Bosnian state by Sweden came in May 1992, a month after a group of Western powers acknowledged it. The fact that the recognition of the new state happened only a day before it was admitted as a member state of the UN indicates that Sweden, in congruence with earlier practice, leaned on the UN’s standpoint on the issue. At that moment, the armed conflict had started to spread across Bosnia. When the humanitarian crisis became a fact and the UN began organizing humanitarian actions in former Yugoslavia, Sweden generously aided humanitarian efforts of the UNHCR as well as Swedish NGOs in the war zone. It also contributed with expertise and manpower as the case was, for instance, with the Swedish Rescue Service Agency which engaged in improving living conditions of civilians both during and after the war.

When the Security Council in 1993 widened the mandate of the UN in the area, asking for a greater number of peacekeeping forces, Swedish politicians

332 Lovrenović 2002.
333 Nikolić 2012, 291.
334 Miller 2006.
335 Mannergren Selimovic 2010, 185-189. See also Stefansson 2010.
337 By May 1993 the sum of money donated for humanitarian aid was about 450 million Swedish crowns. See Government Bill 1992/93:254, 2.
were in agreement regarding the participation of Swedish troops in actions under the UN flag. The first Nordic battalion left for Bosnia in the fall of 1993. Being a part of the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR), it was deployed in the Tuzla region. Until 2008, when the last Swedish troops were brought home, several Swedish battalions took part in different peacekeeping formations such as Implementation Force (IFOR), Stabilization Force (SFOR) and European Unioun Force (EUFOR). A total of 15,000 soldiers participated in one of Sweden’s largest international missions. Their main task was to secure the provision of humanitarian aid to the region and to protect the civilian population from the effects of combat. While the view on the contribution of Swedish troops is generally positive, research as well as soldier’s own stories published so far tell us that the soldiers often felt rather powerless and hindered to execute their duties. A combination of the complexity of the situation in Bosnia and restrictions set by the UN is seen as main reasons for this.

The IC has been criticized for its indifferent attitude towards the war in Bosnia, particularly for failing to push promptly and resolutely for a political solution that would end the armed conflict. Also in Sweden, both among ruling political elites and in society at large, interest in the conflict in former Yugoslavia was quite limited. Apart from the fact that the situation in the Balkans was confusing for the Swedish public, it also competed with a number of serious domestic issues such as the economic downturn and the refugee crisis. However, in the early summer 1995 the former Swedish Prime Minister, Carl Bildt, became one of the leading figures in international efforts to bring the warring parties to the negotiation table. The European members of the Contact Group entrusted Bildt with the task of functioning as the EU Special Envoy in Former Yugoslavia. He not only participated in the preparations for the peace negotiations in Dayton, but also formally co-chaired the Dayton Peace Conference. After the peace agreement was reached, Bildt served as the first High Representative in Bosnia. His actions during the Bosnian conflict as well as the activities undertaken in the role of the High Representative have been subjected to extensive criticism both within Sweden and internationally. The critics blame Bildt for overlooking atrocities committed against civilians by the Serb forces and

339 Sweden has sent its troops on overseas missions since 1956 and thus has a 60 years long tradition of participating in UN operations around the world. See Swedish Armed Forces, Avslutade truppinsatser [Completed troop efforts].


being too closely affiliated with that side. In addition, the critics also remark on his poor knowledge about the region.342

Diplomatic and transnational relations after the war

Within Scandinavia, Sweden has historically counted as the one with the most liberal immigration policy. Despite an unfavourable political climate due to deep recession and a right-wing populist party holding seats in the Swedish Parliament, in 1993 the Swedish then conservative coalition government granted circa 42 000 Bosnians residence on humanitarian grounds.343 This decision stuck out when compared to the practice elsewhere in Europe, and it also surpassed recommendations of the UN’s refugee agency which, in order to motivate European countries to accept refugees from former Yugoslavia, advocated temporary residence permits. At the same time, the quota of refugees from former Yugoslavia was increased. In total, Sweden gave protection and permanent settlement to over 58 000 refugees fleeing the war in Bosnia and is the third largest recipient country in the EU.344 While many expressed a desire to return upon signing of the peace agreement,345 it is a fact that a vast majority of Bosnians who came to Sweden during the war acquired Swedish citizenship and stayed in Sweden.346 Recent studies focused on employment,347 enrolment in universities348 and active participation in Swedish political life by individuals of Bosnian descent indicate that Bosnians are generally well-integrated into Swedish society.

There is now a tradition of good diplomatic relations between Sweden and Bosnia. Becoming a new member of the EU in 1995, Sweden participated actively in the peace intervention in Bosnia and has over the years contributed immensely to the same. Besides sending troops to Bosnia, the support of the civilian part of the intervention has been even greater and bears witness to a

343 Södergran 1999, 28-34. This decision did not include around 5000 Bosnians who entered Sweden with Croatian passports, because the situation in Croatia was assessed as stable. See Slavnić 2000.
344 Valenta and Ramet 2011, 3-4.
345 Medić 1996, 81-91.
347 Ekberg and Hammarstedt 2002, 343-353. See also Ekberg 2016.
strong engagement in the area. Sweden has been one of the largest bilateral donors to Bosnia. The sum of funds donated has constantly increased, from around 13 million SEK in 1992 to over 260 million SEK in 2003.\textsuperscript{349} A number of bilateral agreements have been reached, one of them being the agreement on dual citizenship which entered into force in 2006. Sweden was the first country to sign such an agreement with Bosnia.\textsuperscript{350} This act in itself indicates an encouragement for transnational contacts.

As much as research shows that Bosnians have adapted well in Sweden, it also proves strong ties with the homeland. Either as members of national associations, ethnic and religious organizations or private persons, Bosnians with permanent residence in Sweden engage in a wide range of transnational activities. Keeping oneself informed about the situation in Bosnia, staying in touch with and helping relatives and friends, as well as visiting the country on regular basis seem to be of importance. Common transitional practices include political activities, such as voting in national elections, and economic ones like sending remittances.\textsuperscript{351} Bosnia is thus one of the largest recipients of remittances in the world, which has been an important part of its postwar economy.\textsuperscript{352} While frequent transnational activities indicate a fairly successful integration of Bosnian migrants in the host country,\textsuperscript{353} they also prove a willingness to aid the peace-building process in their country of origin.\textsuperscript{354}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[349] Sida, Sweden and Bosnia and Herzegovina 2004.
\item[350] See Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Sveriges intenationella överenskommelse: Avtal med Bosnien-Hercegovina om dubbelt medborgarskap [Sweden's international agreement: Agreement with Bosnia-Herzegovina on dual citizenship].
\item[351] See, for example, Valenta and Ramet 2011. See also Kostić 2016.
\item[352] Jakobsen 2011, 185-206.
\item[353] Povrzanović Frykman 2011, 241-259.
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CHAPTER FIVE

The beginnings and first encounters

Between 1993 and 1995 Kvinna till Kvinna went from being a loose network of private persons and organizations to becoming a foundation. During this time, the ideological basis of the organization was formulated and its working methods started to develop. It is also the period when the first encounters with women’s groups in Bosnia took place, and when Kvinna till Kvinna began to gain credibility as an aid organization both within Sweden and in the former Yugoslav area. This chapter aims at contextualizing the Swedish foundation by tracing its historical roots. Starting from the assumption that the foundations laid in the initial period were significant for the future activities of the organization, the aim is also to analyze Kvinna till Kvinna’s early aid work in Bosnia, which has not been the object of research before.

While the remaining empirical chapters deal exclusively with the work of the organization in Bosnia after the war, a good part of this chapter covers the engagement for Bosnia manifested in Sweden during the war. It relies heavily on material from the Swedish press, the richest contemporary source found that offers information about early actions of the foundation as well as its perceptions. Articles used here are based on interviews with activists from Kvinna till Kvinna and are therefore seen as representative of the perceptions and opinions of the foundation rather than the individual journalists who wrote them.

A set of empirical questions dealt with here are: How did Kvinna till Kvinna form? How did Kvinna till Kvinna define its role? How did the organization appeal to Swedish people to solidarize with those affected by the ongoing war in Bosnia? How meaningful were the initial encounters with local women? Which ‘sisters’ were worthy of support? What potential threats to its mission did the organization articulate during the initial period of its involvement in Bosnia? Were there other potential threats that it failed to consider?

The historical roots of Kvinna till Kvinna

During its two initial years, Kvinna till Kvinna was run as a project within WILPF, one of the two peace organizations that founded it. Even after Kvinna till Kvinna turned into an independent foundation with own mandate in 1995, the founding organizations retained the right to appoint its board.355 In order to understand the ideology and activities of Kvinna till Kvinna, it is of value to

355 It is noteworthy to mention that also Kvinna till Kvinna has one of its own members on the board of the Swedish section of WILPF. See Swedberg 2005, 16.
relate the organization to the Swedish women’s peace movement as well as its wider international context. What follows is a presentation of the development of the Swedish peace movement and its positions on peace and women’s role in peacebuilding. The focus is, for good reasons, predominantly on the twentieth century and WILPF.

Decades before organizing for peace started on Swedish soil, there were individual anti-war efforts such as those of the famous Swedish author Fredrika Bremer. In 1854, during the Crimean war, she did not only make calls for peace, but also suggested forming a women-only international alliance dedicated to peace. This radical vision had little chance to gain support in the age of the strong nation-state when issues related to war and peace were supposed to be handled by men. Several other prominent Swedish women followed in the footsteps of Bremer thus stressing women’s peacebuilding potential and actively engaging in peace-related issues both on the national and international level.\textsuperscript{356} SPAS, formed in the 1880s and one of the initiators of Kvinna till Kvinna, is the oldest Swedish peace organization. It was formed by men, but had a mixed male/female membership. All-female organizing for peace started in 1898 with Sweden’s Women’s Peace Association, which strived to counter the culture of militarism cultivated in schools and elsewhere in society. After the organization dissolved a few years before the First World War, some of its members eventually became active in WILPF.\textsuperscript{357}

WILPF emerged out of the International Woman Suffrage Alliance (IWSA), the first political union of women on the international level with women’s suffrage as its top priority.\textsuperscript{358} Established in 1915 after the Women’s International Peace Congress at The Hague, which gathered over a thousand women from twelve countries and one hundred and fifty organizations, WILPF became the first international women’s peace organization.\textsuperscript{359} A resolution adopted by the participants of The Hague congress, among whom were 16 women from Sweden, “foreshadowed UN Security Council Resolution 1325 […] in calling for the inclusion of women’s voices in the peace settlement”.\textsuperscript{360} The Swedish section of WILPF was founded in 1919 with the teacher Matilda Widegren as its chairwoman. Even if WILPF was never interested in becoming a mass movement, it

\textsuperscript{356} Höglund 2000, 13-19.
\textsuperscript{357} Melin 1999, 80-112.
\textsuperscript{358} In 1946 the name of the alliance was changed to International Alliance of Women (IAW).
\textsuperscript{359} Swedberg 2005, 11, 21.
\textsuperscript{360} Cockburn 2007, 134. See also Swedberg, 11, 21-22, 112, 130-131.
has over the years been the largest women’s peace organization in Sweden. In comparison with its predecessors, the International Council of Women (ICW) and IAW, WILPF was more politically radical. It took a firm stance against imperialism, fascism, Nazism and racism. The organization itself suffered from serious ideological tensions for a good part of the twentieth century. During the Cold War it was stigmatized as being pro-Soviet and this stigma was strongly felt within its Swedish section as well.

It is relevant for the purposes of the present study to view the relationship of WILPF to feminism. As it came out of the suffrage movement, it was de facto a feminist organization from the outset. It emphasized a special connection between women and peacemaking and regarded women’s political rights as a prerequisite for a peaceful world. Also in Sweden the general issue of including women politically and the specific issue of women involved in peacemaking were intertwined. In this context the Women’s Citizens’ school at Fogelstad, started in the early 1920s by a number of prominent women’s rights and peace activists, is worth mentioning. After women’s suffrage was obtained, social justice became a priority alongside peace. It was not until 1975, the beginning of the UN Decade on women, that WILPF seriously started to address its relationship to feminism. While not necessarily making their feminist views public, nowadays all sections, which exist in over thirty countries, emphasize the interconnectedness between peace work and women as well as the importance of full emancipation of women.

361 Hensley 2006, 154.
365 See, for example, Eskilsson 1991.
The history of the Swedish women’s peace movement includes records of numerous actions for peace from the early twentieth century and on. While the engagement in peace activism was particularly strong in the 1970s and 1980s, it was as early as the outbreak of the First World War that peace became an important issue preoccupying prominent female intellectuals. Already then, Swedish women took part in international delegations of women who in the middle of the war visited leaders of the belligerent countries and urged them to seek peaceful solutions. Internationally oriented actions for peace happened later as well. In collaboration with Women for Peace and the Christian peace movement in Sweden, the Swedish section of WILPF carried through the Great Peace Journey in the mid-1980s. The purpose of this undertaking was to meet with state officials around the world and ask them questions about nuclear weapons, arms export, human rights and conflict resolution. One of the countries visited was Yugoslavia. The answers received were put together and delivered to the UN and the Great Peace Journey ended with a UN summit in 1988. WILPF has a long history of ties with both the UN and its predecessor the League of Nations. Even before and especially after it was granted consultative status to the UN in 1948, WILPF has been closely monitoring and influencing the work of these international organizations. Its significant role in connection to the UN conferences on women, especially the ones in Nairobi (1985) and Beijing (1995), as well as in the process of drafting and lobbying for the adoption of the UNSCR 1325 has also been noted.

Both WILPF in general and its Swedish section have a long tradition of aiding and connecting people living in areas affected by war and conflict. For example, WILPF was present in Palestine as early as the 1920s. In 1931, the Swedish writer and peace activist Elisabeth Waern-Bugge was sent to the area to investigate the possibilities of cooperation between Jewish and Arab women for the sake of peace.

368 See, for example, Melin 1999.
369 See, for example, Salomon 1985.
374 Foster 1989, 28-29.
375 Småberg 2005.
Initial organizing: who, when, why?
The idea of forming Kvinna till Kvinna is usually linked to a lecture by Christina Doctare, held at Kulturhuset in Stockholm early in 1993. This Swedish physician was at the time working for the World Health Organization (WHO) in Croatia. Her lecture “Violence as a contagious disease” contained information about the sufferings of civilians, especially women as victims of rape, which, as one of the founders of Kvinna till Kvinna later remembered, was “enormously strong and excruciating to listen to”. In the book Doctare wrote after returning from the Balkans, she describes the encounter with Bosnian refugee women from whom she learned about sexual violence as a horrible and life-changing moment:

What I did not know at that moment was that I would soon hear stories about the wickedness of war that would change not only my attitude towards the war but also, deep down, my attitude towards my own life. […] When they stopped talking it was absolutely quiet. The twilight had fallen, but no one had thought to turn on the lights. I sat in the dark with tears running down my cheeks. Everything was so quiet, so silent, and so infinitely dark. These were stories of the utmost evil.

Doctare also recalls the women telling her of their unsuccessful attempts to forward the information to the UN organs in the area and the dismissal of it by some other organizations that they approached. After checking the information and presenting it to the WHO personnel at the Copenhagen office, who showed modest interest in it, she alerted the Swedish media in November 1992. The lecture Doctare gave two months later is seen as the moment when the idea of a network, later named Kvinna till Kvinna, came about. Information delivered at the lecture evoked anger, described as an important factor that led to

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377 Farmacifacket no. 3 1994.
379 Doctare 1995, 117-126, 142-146.
380 Alternativet no. 20 May 21 1993; Farmacifacket no. 3 1994; Fred och Frihet no. 2 2001; Interview with Susanna Lennartsson, July 2 2009.
action and motivated the idea of coordinating the help in order to make it more effective.381

A week later both individual and collective actors from the Swedish women’s and peace movement came together at the office of the Swedish section of WILPF for a second meeting. The result of the meeting was an agreement on a joint action called Kvinna till Kvinna.382 The impression is that the organizing of this first action was incredibly effective. In a short period of time contacts were made with anyone who could help. Christina Doctare was one of those whose experiences from the field were valued. Contacts were also made with Save the Children in Sweden which agreed to administrate the collected funds. Kerstin Grebäck and Eva Zillén, association secretaries at the Swedish WILPF and SPAS respectively, and Gunvor Ngarambe from United Nations Association of Sweden took on the task of representing the network.383 One day after the action became official, a working group was formed consisting of the three women mentioned above, together with Lena Ag, the Secretary General of Kvinna till Kvinna between 2007 and 2018, who back in 1993 was affiliated with the Social Democratic Party and the Swedish section of the youth organization PeaceQuest.384 Another driving force was Anna Lidén, at the time one of the chairs of WILPF. She was in charge of the finances of Kvinna till Kvinna from its inception and throughout the next twenty years.385 It is important to add, however, that many more individuals as well as organizations were active participants in the network and worked on its establishment during this initial period.

**Ideological principles and the vision of the mission**

“I cried in front of the TV and I was told to turn it off, but how does that help. I know that the war continues all the time.”386 Indeed, the women who started Kvinna till Kvinna felt deeply distressed by the situation in former Yugoslavia. When I asked them why they organized during that particular war, I was told that

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381 Alternativet no. 20 May 21 1993; Zillén, 1997, 35; Dagens Nyheter April 21 1999.
382 Fred och frihet no. 2 2001; Interview with Susanna Lennartsson, July 2 2009.
383 A letter to the editorial office of Sweden’s Television April 6 1993.
384 Minutes, April 19 1993.
385 Swedberg 2005, 17, 155.
In all honesty, it was the first war that came close to us. That touched us in the way that others might have been touched by other wars. Sure, we demonstrated against the Vietnam War, but that was something else entirely. This came incredibly close to us. It was a matter of course. It was an awakening. Here in Europe – even though we knew so much, even though we were so able, even though we worked so much – this happened. We had to. There was nothing else that could be done. We had to really try to do something about [it], in a focused effort, so that it would not happen again.387

While disappointment with the fact that efforts made after the Second World War were insufficient for preventing the recrudescence of war on European soil and the sufferings of innocent people trapped in the war zone triggered the need to act, the idea of forming an organization specifically focused on women in war-affected societies was older. As Kerstin Grebäck, the first chairwoman of Kvinna till Kvinna, lets us know, the idea had been present within the Swedish section of WILPF at least from the mid-1980s. Discussions about ways in which women could help each other to alleviate the effects of war started during the UN conference on women held in Nairobi in 1985.388 This particular conference, officially named “Equality, Development and Peace”, is usually mentioned as an enlightening event for WILPF due to important connections with women from the non-Western parts of the world.389 Through the encounter with women from conflict-ridden societies, Grebäck was one of those who learned first-hand about how lack of equality, development and peace affected their everyday lives. Prior to the Nairobi conference, which was to evaluate achievements regarding the integration of women in development, research showing poor results was published. The commitment to ensure that aid benefits both men and women was not followed up on, either by the UN or by individual states.390 Thus, the discussion about women in relation to war and peace that culminated in the early 1990s, and was given prominence during the Fourth


388 Dagens Nyheter October 10 2002.

389 Foster 1989, 94-98; Swedberg 2005, 52.

390 See, for example, Hannan Anderson 1984.
UN conference on women in Beijing, started much earlier. As we have seen, within WILPF itself the issue had really been there since the very beginning.

Kvinna till Kvinna emerged out of the need to perform activities that peace organizations such as WILPF and SPAS did not do. They were the ones supposed to “build theories”, they had a much wider mandate, and their primary activity was lobby work.391 Forming Kvinna till Kvinna “we thought that should we be able at least to scratch on the surface or influence something […] we would have to be focused”.392 In this case being focused meant defining a narrow mandate focused on women in war and conflict areas and ensuring that it would not be possible to change. The latter was done by choosing to form a foundation which as a rule is non-membership based. Organizations based on active membership risk a potential threat of instability, because the reasons members join as well as their visions of the organization differ and change over time.393 ‘Locking’ the mandate was thus a conscious choice.394 An article in Norrskensflamman, based on an interview with Eva Zillén, exposes that Kvinna till Kvinna already in 1994 had a vision of helping women in different countries of the world.395

The time period during which Kvinna till Kvinna organized was marked by a pronounced will throughout the Western world to ease the sufferings of the civilian population. Aware or not that they were on “the threshold of a significant breakthrough in the international politics of violence against women”, women from the Yugoslav region and those living elsewhere were documenting the abuses and with joint efforts pushing for a political analysis of them.396 Even though calls for dealing with the phenomenon of wartime rape had been voiced by women’s organizations since at least the beginning of the twentieth century, the attention created around the issue during the Bosnian war represented, as Inger Skjelsbaek notes, “a new momentum for talking about, analyzing, and helping the sufferers of wartime rape”.397 Besides Kvinna till Kvinna, a number

391 ”bygger teorier” Swedberg 2005, 155.
392 “Vi trodde att skulle man överhuvudtaget kunna skrapa på ytan eller förändra något- ting eller påverka någonting […] så gäller det att vara koncentrerad.” Interview with Mia Sund, July 2 2009.
394 Interview with Susanna Lennartsson, July 2 2009.
397 Skjelsbæk 2006, 5.
of international organizations, primarily concerned with women, formed during 1993 and 1994 in Europe and North America. However, what is unique about the Swedish foundation is its background in the Swedish and international peace movement. How was this legacy manifested in the ideology and objective of the organization related to its role in Bosnia?

An appeal was published in Dagens Nyheter, one of the leading daily newspapers in Sweden, on April 18 1993 which introduced Kvinna till Kvinna to the Swedish public. The appeal provides a glimpse of its ideological base and vision of what this initiative could offer to women in the war-torn former Yugoslavia:

Picture 1: The appeal published in Dagens Nyheter in April 1993

All efforts must be made now to put an end to the war.

War never solves problems, it just creates new ones. Efforts must be put in at all levels now to assist the victims. [...] It will be a gigantic task to provide assistance for all victims of the war. Despite insufficient resources, there is already extensive and competent relief work going on at the grassroots level. [...] The action is on the one hand about getting resources [...] for rehabilitation of the women and children who suffered from violence in Bosnia, and in different refugee
camps in former Yugoslavia, and on the other hand it is about supporting different women’s groups in Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia and Kosovo in their work to bring about peace and reconciliation [Emphasis added].

At first glance it may seem that the appeal does not stand out from the ones formulated by ordinary humanitarian organizations. After all, the action was conducted in cooperation with Save the Children Sweden. We see a call for help to the civilian population caught in the midst of the war. However, the shortsightedness that often characterizes humanitarian efforts is absent here. On the contrary, a long-term perspective on support to the war-torn area is presented. The importance of “show[ing] that Kvinna till Kvinna plans to stay” was repeated many times afterwards. Thus, rather than limiting itself to alleviating the humanitarian catastrophe, the idea was to support the long and laborious process of creating peace. Purely humanitarian actions have been few over the twenty years since the organization was formed, and were practically all carried out between 1993 and 1995.

Kvinna till Kvinna articulated a woman-friendly perspective on aid. Remembering the beginnings, Kerstin Grebäck, one of the initiators, conveyed that the goal had been to create a different aid organization which would answer to the needs of women. It is a fact that in the 1990s regular aid packages still did not provide basic necessities for women: “With all due deference to tents and food parcels, but sanitary towels and underwear are also needed.” Also, women’s physical and mental health was identified as important to support. Thus, one of the first ideas of the network was to get mobile gynecology

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399 Cooperation with humanitarian organizations such as Save the Children, The Red Cross, but also The Church of Sweden has a long tradition in WILPF. See Swedberg 2005, 124-126.

400 “att visa att Kvinna till Kvinna tänker stanna” Newsletter no. 1, 1995.

401 Fred och Frihet no. 2 2001.


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Sanela Bajramović Hierarchical Sisterhood
clinics into Bosnia and Croatia. Its very first local projects supported in Bosnia were women’s centers where local women could receive psychosocial help.  

There were, of course, other donors that considered healing of trauma of importance and in this respect Kvinna till Kvinna was not unique. Supporting the rehabilitation of women and children has, especially right after the war, has been common among donors. However, what seems to be unique is Kvinna till Kvinna’s view of these types of activity and the work done by local women as an integrative part of peacebuilding. Interestingly, this acknowledgment of and belief in the peacemaking potential of local women came before the concept of peacebuilding from below had gained influence.

The complexity of the situation in former Yugoslavia prompted, some researchers, for instance Adam Curle, who worked with a peace center in the Croatian city of Osijek founded in 1992, to realize that rather than bringing in outsiders to resolve the situation the emphasis should be put on empowering local peacemakers. If Kvinna till Kvinna was one of the foreign actors that recognized the need to support the goodwill of grassroots in their efforts to build peace at an early stage, it was even earlier with acknowledging women as peacebuilders. Women were described as those who uphold society in difficult times, willing to solidarize and cooperate with each other. As we have seen, a connection between women and peace work was cultivated within WILPF and even promoted by some scholarly work, it had not yet reached leading centers of power, including the UN.

Two important principles set in the initial years, the principle of helping women from different sides of the front and the principle of not having stationed personnel on the ground, give an insight into how the role of the organization in the war-affected area was envisioned. The first principle coincides with the tradition of working within the women’s peace movement, where gathering women from all belligerent sides is essential. As will be shown further on, this principle became a pillar of Kvinna till Kvinna’s work on the ground. The second principle exudes confidence in the capability of local women to trans-

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403 Newsletter Special March 1994.
405 See also interview with Eva Zillén where she mentioned peace from below, Norrskenflamman March 3 1994.
406 Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall 2011, 57, 235. See also Woodhouse 2010.
407 Fred och Frihet no. 4 1993; Kvällsposten March 28 1996.
form their communities. While the principle of not stationing their own representatives in Bosnia was eventually reconsidered, initially the network saw its primary role as collecting funds for activities conducted by local women.\(^{408}\)

I will now turn to methods used to mobilize Swedish people to lend a helping hand in supporting women in former Yugoslavia. How did the network go about attracting potential donors and how successful was it in drawing attention to women’s situation?

**Building opinion and fundraising in Sweden**

Titled “Women’s front for war victims”, the aim of the appeal published in *Dagens Nyheter* was to motivate Swedish women to donate at least SEK 5 for the war-torn former Yugoslavia.\(^{409}\) The appeal was signed by 25 women, many of whom were well-established members of Swedish society, hence the wording “Women’s front”.\(^{410}\) Unlike later, when Sida became its main donor, during the first years Kvinna till Kvinna mostly relied on funds from public collections. This type of fundraising was dominant between 1993 and 1995 meaning that the activities of Kvinna till Kvinna were dependent on the will of Swedish people to donate money. What characterized Kvinna till Kvinna’s calls for solidarity?

A picture extensively used by Kvinna till Kvinna during fundraising in the early 1990s shows two women hugging each other. As the face of only one woman is caught by the camera one cannot see the facial expression of the other woman. But the woman one does see is, without a doubt, in pain. Eyes closed she seems to be crying convulsively. She appears older than the other woman, with a touch of grey in her hair showing under the headscarf. We find this picture on the front page of a brochure used in a campaign that Body Shop stores in Sweden ran in April of 1994 in favor of Kvinna till Kvinna. Together with the slogan “Doing nothing is giving up”, the purpose of the picture was to draw attention to the war and inspire Swedish people to make a donation.\(^{411}\) The

\(^{408}\) *Norrskensflammman* March 3 1994.

\(^{409}\) “Kvinnofront för krigets offer” *Dagens Nyheter* April 18 1993.

\(^{410}\) The signatories of the appeal were for example: Bibi Andersson (actress), Kerstin Ekman (writer), Elisabeth Gerle (priest), Marta Henricson–Cullberg (psychologist), Caroline Krook (cathedral dean), Sara Lidman (writer), Eva Moberg (writer), Suzanne Osten (director), Karin Söder (chairperson at Save the Children, former leader of the Centre Party), Britt Edwall (editor) etc.

\(^{411}\) “Att inte göra något är att ge upp” Newsletter no. 2, January 1994. See also Newsletter no. 4, May 1994.
brochure certainly resembles an abundance of similar materials produced during the war years by the media and aid donors. Out of the best intentions, women were often shown as the ultimate victims of the war in former Yugoslavia. Nonetheless, using pictures like this one had an important function in fundraising for the support of women in the area.

According to the philosopher Richard Rorty, in order to solidarize with somebody, a sense of ‘we-ness’ must exist. Our solidarity is always directed towards those people with whom we think we have something in common. Commonality based on being human is thus not enough. There seems to be a demand for greater identification with another person or a group in order to awaken a feeling of solidarity in us. This also means that chances are great that some people will be excluded.412 As a women-focused initiative, Kvinna till Kvinna called for solidarity based on gender. While it is unlikely that donations from men would have been turned down, it is clear that the network primarily counted on support from women. How can we understand the reasoning behind this standpoint?

There is, indeed, an underlying presumption that women of the world share a set of experiences, and sometimes even a pronounced view regarding a certain type of ‘women’s thinking’ that is generally peace-oriented. As Kerstin Grebäck said in an interview, being mothers and nurturers, women “look into the future in a different way compared to men, the one that is close to the children gets a more human view of life”.413 Another commonality between women is the victim role. Urging readers of the journal Fred & Frihet, published by the Swedish section of WILPF, to make a contribution to women in former Yugoslavia, Eva Zillén tells them to do it for “all women who have been forced out of their homes by patriarchal power politics!”414 Women share the experience of being victims of oppression by men, which is the very reason why they should support each other.415

War rape as the extreme form of oppression and the painful realization that women in Bosnia were subjected to it received a great deal of attention. News about massive use of sexual violence in the Bosnian war reached Swedish people

413 “ser in i framtiden på ett annat sätt än männen, den som är nära barnen får en mer mänsklig syn på livet.” Dagens Nyheter April 21 1999. See also Alternativet no. 20 May 21 1993.
414 “alla kvinnor som har tvingats från sina hem av patriarkal maktpolitik!” Fred & Frihet no. 4 1993.
415 Dagens Nyheter April 21 1999.
through a report broadcasted during prime time on Swedish Television on November 27 1992. In Kvinna till Kvinna’s first appeal, words such as rape and raped women appear no less than seven times. When activists from Kvinna till Kvinna went on fundraising tours in Sweden or appeared in the press, the plight of civilians tended to be illustrated by the sufferings of raped women. It seems to have been an inevitable subject at the time. Together with engaging prominent Swedish women to promote the work of the organization, this was a powerful method of mobilizing women for a common cause.

Picture 2: Renata Schäffer campaigning on the behalf of Kvinna till Kvinna at the sport event Tjejmilen in 1993 in Stockholm. The sign reads “Support your by violence affected sisters in the former Yugoslavia”.

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416 Doctare 1995, 146.


418 Aftonbladet August 31 1993; Gotlands Allehanda October , 1993; Newsletter no. 1 1993; Expressen January 14 1994; Svenska Dagbladet September 21 1995.
In the light of history, it was a reliable strategy that had previously been tested. On several occasions during the course of the twentieth century, women did not only raise their voices against sexual war violence, but also used information about it to motivate women to organize. For example, the announcement of the Hague Congress of Women in 1915 referred to “the moral and physical sufferings of women.” News about widespread rape in wars in Bosnia, Rwanda and Kosovo was used as a motivational method in the 1990s across the Western world. In concrete terms, the message to Swedish women was that had they been trapped in a war zone, it would probably happen to them too because they were women.

420 Rupp 1997, 86.
421 Similar actions with the goal to help women in former Yugoslavia were carried out in different European countries, e.g. Germany, Great Britain and Norway.
However, we also see that other references were used with the hope to foster solidarity and, in turn, attract donations. Staying with a Bosnian family in Sarajevo during the war, Lena Ag writes in the Swedish newspaper *Expressen*:

> I walk around the apartment. In one corner there is a computer, in another a video player and on the shelf there is a video cassette – the movie is ‘Thelma and Louise’. In the bathroom is a washing machine. The apartment could have belonged to any Swedish family. The difference is that none of these electronic appliances or gadgets work because there is no electricity. There is also no water and no gas.422

Here we see an attempt to point out similarities that Swedish people can have with those in the war-affected Bosnia. The more commonalities, the greater the chances that people will contribute. The choice to use technology to exemplify similarity between Swedes and Bosnians is interesting in itself, given that technological development has historically been equated with the West and exported to ‘the underdeveloped Rest’.423 At the same time as this choice confirms technology as a symbol of modern life, thus flirting with the colonial discourse, technical devices are depicted as a natural part of Bosnian everyday life. The quote above is written in line with Rorty’s conclusion that the feeling of solidarity depends heavily on identifying clear commonalities. However, yet another dimension can also be discerned here. In his book *To see oneself in others. On Solidarity*, the Swedish historian of ideas Sven-Eric Liedman speaks about seeing similarities between human beings on a basic level. He refers to a poem by Gunnar Ekelöf who writes about being “social in the heart” instead of being “social in the head” and the ability to see one’s own shortcomings, weaknesses and humanity in others. Interestingly enough, this poem, written around 1960, was inspired by Ekelöf’s short stay in the small, impoverished town of Otočac in what was then Yugoslavia (now Croatia) where he was reminded of the vulnerability that all people share.424 Recently, Bréné Brown who has done research focused on shame and vulnerability has presented similar findings confirming that people connect through weaknesses rather than through strengths.425

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423 Crewe and Axelby 2011.

424 Liedman 1999, 84-87.

425 See, for example, Brown 2012.
is how references made to a life without essentials such as water, electricity and gas, as was the case in the besieged Bosnian capital, can be interpreted. Perhaps that is also how we can understand Eva Zillén’s message to Swedish women: “We are all responsible for each other, next time it might be you and me that need help, who can we turn to then if we have not responded now?”

**Broad support within Sweden**

Kvinna till Kvinna aimed to attract support from as many women as possible. In this respect, the choice of a neutral name for the network, one that any woman could easily relate to, is telling. It was important to show that Kvinna till Kvinna was an action that women in general could support and which dealt with issues that transcended differences between women. A determination to participate in every possible event that could aid reaching the goal is apparent. One example were the weekly protest meetings at Norrmalmstorg in Stockholm, organized between 1992 and 1995 by the women’s and youth associations of the Christian Democrats. According to Susanna Lennartsson, this was an especially good place for Kvinna till Kvinna to be seen because it was an opportunity to counter the image of the Swedish peace movement as predominantly left-wing. Countering that label meant that more women would find it appropriate to support the network.

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427 Interview with Susanna Lennartsson, July 2 2009.
The focus of Kvinna till Kvinna was thus rather on the goal to collect as much funds as possible than the means used to reach it. How successful was it? The climate that prevailed in Swedish society in the early 1990s did not work to Kvinna till Kvinna’s advantage. What was written in the chapter covering historical contexts is therefore worth repeating here. During 1993–1995 there was generally a limited interest from both the Swedish government as well as the Swedish people in the situation in former Yugoslavia. One the one hand, the country was in a deep economic crisis and unprepared for the large wave of refugees coming from the Balkans. On the other hand, the complexity of the war in former Yugoslavia added to a general confusion about why people fought each other. In her book, Christina Doctare reflects upon her own lack of knowledge about what was happening in Yugoslavia and the prevailing attitude in Sweden towards early signs of trouble:

Now I think my ignorance was embarrassing, but I think I knew neither more nor less than most Swedes. The ignorance was great when it began to rumble down in the Balkans. Certainly, I had read that it was tense down in Kosovo.
Certainly, Sweden had received nearly 70,000 Kosovo-Albanian refugees. I remember how the discussion went. They came here because life was so good in Sweden and no doubt they coveted our prosperity. That our own Minister of Culture publicly said that they were in fact a people of thieves was a political low-water mark. We did not want to understand why people suddenly left.428

Nine days after the action officially started, the press informed about a notable increase of will to donate money for former Yugoslavia. Apparently, the launch of the action coincided with a more intensive reporting on the sufferings of civilians, including pictures of severely injured children. Various humanitarian organizations noticed a greater influx of funds.429 Kvinna till Kvinna itself managed to collect SEK 100,000 within the first month.430 By July 1993 SEK 1 million was collected, SEK 19 million below the goal of the organization. Norwegian women from Norsk Folkehjelp were consulted. The latter had been very successful in running a similar campaign in Norway, and in a few months they had collected NOK 17 million. In Norway there was a more generous attitude both from the government and from the Norwegian people in general.431 Strong reactions and significant donations, particularly for rape victims, were also noted in Germany, which had had a similar experience during the Second World War.432 In 1994, the sum collected by Kvinna till Kvinna was SEK 4 million and a year later, when more grants from Sida started to come, it increased to SEK 11.4 million.433

However, despite difficulties, there was a great deal of activity among women throughout Sweden. They organized dances, sold homemade bread and stood in public places with collecting boxes.434 Local sections, such as the one

429 Dagens Nyheter April 27 1993
430 Alternativet no. 20 May 21 1993.
431 Expressen July 28 1993; List of activities from the meeting with Norsk Folkehjelp.
432 Doctare 1995, 147.
433 Dala-Demokraten September 5 1994; Barnen & vi no. 3 1995.
in Örebro, cooperated with the Church of Sweden which organized a mass for the benefit of Kvinna till Kvinna.\textsuperscript{435} Both private persons and a large number of various organizations gave support. It got a unique support from women’s associations of all the political parties active in the Swedish Parliament. The cooperation between them was especially visible on the local level where women crossed the borders of political parties and organized collections of money.\textsuperscript{436} As both Kjell Östberg and Irene Andersson have shown, there have been moments in history when Swedish women were able to surmount ideological differences. Women tended to organize for protests against the horrors of the war and the threat it posed to people’s lives.\textsuperscript{437} That otherwise important differences could, at least temporarily, be transcended even when it came to aid to other countries, was proved by Swedish women at the end of the 1930s during the Spanish Civil war when they agreed to send aid to orphanages on both sides.\textsuperscript{438}

Although some disliked this separatist way of organizing and particularly criticized the name of the organization, which was found provocative and not welcoming to men,\textsuperscript{439} for many involved it “felt like a breath of fresh air” compared to male-dominated environments.\textsuperscript{440} It is indeed interesting that Kvinna till Kvinna formed when the emphasis on differences between women was strong in theoretical discussions. However, it is at the same time a fact that women organized extensively \textit{as} women in Sweden during the 1990s. They directed their demands into a wide range of activities, thus challenging traditional political institutions.\textsuperscript{441} It is also a fact that only women came to Christina Doctare’s lecture at Kulturhuset when the idea of a joint action came about, another reason why the chosen name was not changed.\textsuperscript{442} The example of Kvinna till Kvinna indicates that those who organize as women, as Cynthia Cockburn once wrote, might have “no doubt that gender is a social construction, they may well

\textsuperscript{435} Nerikes Allehanda March 8 1996.
\textsuperscript{436} Vimmerby Tidning December 15 1993; Kristianstadsbladet March 7 1995.
\textsuperscript{437} Östberg 1999, 34-43; Andersson 2002, 163-168.
\textsuperscript{438} Östberg, 40-41.
\textsuperscript{439} Dala-Demokraten September 5 1994.
\textsuperscript{440} ”kändes som en frisk fläkt” Doctare 1995, 218.
\textsuperscript{441} See Gustafsson, Eduards and Rönnblom 1997, 7.
\textsuperscript{442} Dala-Demokraten September 5 1994.
understand gender to be lived in a variety of different ways, [...] but pragmatically they find women-only organizing to be politically effective and productive” and perhaps even “more comfortable”.443

**First encounters and trust building**

“As women we take sides with women and children. Our solidarity goes straight from woman to woman. We say; We hear your crying, we listen to your words – and we reach out to you”.444 There is no doubt that women and children were the focus of Kvinna till Kvinna’s attention. It strived to attend to the difficult humanitarian situation and extend moral support to women who lived in the midst of it. One way of showing solidarity was through concrete material help. Listening to the women concerned and taking their opinions into consideration was another.

After Kvinna till Kvinna started to travel to the former Yugoslav area, its activists were in a constant dialogue with local women regarding their needs.445 Judging from both the rhetoric and the practical work of Kvinna till Kvinna during 1993–1995, there are clear implications that genuine efforts were made to listen to local women’s opinions about the aid delivered to Bosnia. Back in Sweden, some of this information was forwarded to the media and we understand that the relief consignment to Bosnia was perceived as both inappropriate and insulting as it, not infrequently, consisted of products past their expiration date and old clothing; in addition, it generally lacked sanitary necessities for women.446

The dialogue with local women enabled Kvinna till Kvinna to provide the help that was desired. In 1994, when the organization organized the humanitarian action called “Send a woman’s package”, an idea that originated from women in Bosnia, the emphasis was put on providing underwear, sanitary pads, contraceptives, and even seemingly trivial items such as jewelry and make-up. It was important that the products sent had not been used before, and Swedish

443 Cockburn 2007, 222.
444 ”Som kvinnor tar vi ställning för kvinnor och barn. Vår solidaritet riktas rakt från kvinna till kvinna. Vi säger; Vi hör er gråt, vi lyssnar på era ord – och vi sträcker ut våra händer mot er.” Farmacifacket no. 3 1994, 7.
446 Blekinge Läns Tidning December 18 1993; Farmacifacket no. 3 1994, 8; Arbetet December 7 1994;
women who participated in the action got distinct instructions about what to put in the packages.\footnote{Aftonbladet October 12 1994; Aftonbladet November 23 1994; Newsletter no. 6, November 1994; Arbetet December 7 1994.}

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{image1.png}
\caption{Picture 5 & 6: “Send a woman’s package” campaign in 1994.}
\end{figure}
The packages shipped to Bosnia on two occasions, in 1994 and 1995, were much appreciated.448 Reporters from the Swedish newspaper Aftonbladet, who covered the reception of the shipment in the city of Tuzla, wrote about Esma Kadribašić and her reaction to gifts she received:

She had already seen the shampoo, the toothbrushes, the underwear, the absorbent cotton, and she had let the tears run down her cheeks quietly. She had thanked, she had talked, laughed, been struck dumb. Then she saw the necklace. And the earrings. She burst [into tears]. She went out of the kitchen. When she came back she had wiped the tears away and she asked for help to put the necklace on. Esma Kadribašić was happy. There is no other word.449

The contents of this package, sent by Maria Othelius, Eva Sääf and Eva Regnér from Uppsala, prove that the three Swedish women had packed it with the instructions given on their mind. All the sanitary necessities were there, but also “a small attractive Christmas gift” that had been recommended.450 While thankful for the whole donation, it was obviously the most ‘unnecessary’ gift that made Kadribašić happy. It might seem odd that an aid organization engaged in shipping make-up and jewelry to a war zone, but it is evident that exactly these items were longed for and appreciated by local women, because it gave them a sense of normalcy.

Receiving a package carefully prepared by women living in Sweden, who even took the time to write a letter about their own life, had a special significance in the fourth year of war. Due to the lack of a powerful international intervention to end the war, a sense of having fallen into oblivion was widely spread among the civilian population in Bosnia. In letters that women from Tuzla wrote to their Swedish donors, they expressed gratitude for the contributions, but most of all for remembering them at all.451 From these letters we learn that the value of a ‘Woman’s package’ from Sweden was not only material, but

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451 A collection of six letters from Bosnian women; Allers March 6-12 1995.
also symbolic. The recipients felt that somebody thought about their needs and considered them worthy of help. The feelings of abandonment were conveyed by Kvinna till Kvinna to the wider public at home.452

Humanitarian actions like these turned out to be excellent opportunities to build trust on the ground. Although pure humanitarian actions have been rare in the history of the organization, they have been significant for its establishment in Bosnia. At Kvinna till Kvinna, distributing vain items such as jewelry and make-up along with other measures such as supporting meeting places for women, were seen as modes to build up the self-esteem of women in Bosnia and give them a sense of ordinary life.453 The items that Kvinna till Kvinna brought with them were a somewhat unexpectedly effective means of building relationships with local women:

We became incredibly famous because when we came to Mostar for the first time. We had received lots of items from the Body Shop. It was liquid soap, but it was also make-up. I believe that us getting the money for the [women’s] centers to be open did not have the same impact really. I think that it also had to do with the fact that the items were new. […] We were very much appreciated for it. We were also much appreciated for the way we made ourselves trustworthy in Bosnia […] You always took photos and we made sure that the photos got there. Back to them. Because very few [donors] did that and very many [local women] were displaced persons and something that you did not have with you were photos.454

This is how Susanna Lennartsson remembered Kvinna till Kvinna’s first humanitarian donation to Mostar. Her colleague Mia Sund, who was interviewed

on the same occasion, added that the spontaneous manner in which the organization did aid work in the early 1990s behaving “as human beings in relation to other human beings, or women in relation to other women” proved that it was a newcomer in this field.\footnote{“som människa till människa eller som kvinna till kvinna” Interview with Mia Sund, July 2 2009} Emphasizing that they no longer worked in the same way, she believed that this approach was fundamentally significant during the initial period of Kvinna till Kvinna as it enabled them to “to establish ourselves and prove ourselves trustworthy”.\footnote{“att etablera oss och bygga förtroende” Interview with Mia Sund, July 2 2009.} The first encounters with Bosnia demonstrate that the Swedish organization approached this context with an open attitude, which, as Ruth Illman and Peter Nynäs argue, is of decisive importance. Even more important than knowledge about others, genuine curiosity is the key for successful cultural encounters.\footnote{Illman and Nynäs 2005, 60-63.}

Even later, when the organization started identifying women’s groups to support, we can discern a dedication to building relations with them. Not infrequently, personal approaches and untraditional methods in the aid sphere were used to create ties with women’s groups. It was thus not unusual that representatives of Kvinna till Kvinna who travelled to Bosnia stayed at the homes of local activists. There were, of course, economic reasons for choosing this type of accommodation. However, there was also a willingness among the Kvinna till Kvinna representatives to put themselves in the situation of local activists, because “to share their shortage of water, electricity and heat means not only a better understanding of the situation in the country but also creates a different and a closer relationship with them”.\footnote{“Att dela deras vatten-, el- och värmebrist innebär inte bara en ökad förståelse för situationen i landet utan att man också skapar en annan och en mer nära relation till dem.” Final report to Sida September 30 1996, 3.} This way of working can be linked to attention in peace organizations devoted to creating close relations based on friendship, which both Eva Swedberg and Catherine Foster mention in their accounts on WILPF.\footnote{Swedberg 2005, 113-114; Foster 1989.}

A sense of care about the well-being of local activists is apparent:

The woman from one of the relief organizations who met us was wondering if we were tired. “But what about you?”, I wondered. “Are you not tired?” […]

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\footnote{455 “som människa till människa eller som kvinna till kvinna” Interview with Mia Sund, July 2 2009.}
\footnote{456 “att etablera oss och bygga förtroende” Interview with Mia Sund, July 2 2009.}
\footnote{457 Illman and Nynäs 2005, 60-63.}
\footnote{458 “Att dela deras vatten-, el- och värmebrist innebär inte bara en ökad förståelse för situationen i landet utan att man också skapar en annan och en mer nära relation till dem.” Final report to Sida September 30 1996, 3.}
\footnote{459 Swedberg 2005, 113-114; Foster 1989.}
they need our help to cope and to gain new energy. We must go there, we need to keep in touch and we have to invite them [to come] here.460

Kvinna till Kvinna continued to travel to former Yugoslavia and keep in touch with local activists. Providing opportunities for activists to gain new energy and inspiration was also important. Almost exactly a month after the first trip, three women from the area visited Sweden. During their stay in Sweden in October 1993, they travelled around and spoke about refugee camps in the region.461 Another group of these “strong people who work hard for a future”, from the Bosnian umbrella organization ŽAR, came to Sweden in 1995, but for slightly different reasons.462 Although the war was still going on, this visit was of a study character. Study visits to Sweden, a common practice in the work of Kvinna till Kvinna, will be analyzed in depth in chapter eight. Here, suffice it to say that the majority of sources covering the first years show the good intentions of the organization and its efforts to create relationships based on care and friendship. If we add the terminology used to address local activists as sisters, friends and partners we can discern a pronounced desire for equality between the two parties.463

Which women?

Via available communication channels, Kvinna till Kvinna repeatedly urged its loyal supporters to continue “show[ing] that women in Sweden hold out their hands to their sisters in former Yugoslavia”.464 Who were these “sisters” then? How were they portrayed? Were all women equally worthy of support?

461 Jönköpings-Posten October 21 1993.
463 Newsletter no. 2, January 1994; Newsletter no. 3, June 1995; Newsletter no. 4, August-September 1995; Newsletter no. 5, October 1995.
464 ”visa att kvinnor i Sverige sträcker ut sina händer mot sina systrar i det forna Jugoslavién” Newsletter no. 2, January 1994.
(Bosnian) women as (rape) victims

In 1993, when Kvinna till Kvinna started, “rape in Bosnia was the hottest story of the year”. The immense focus it received helped throw light on the issue of war rape, and attract donations. While these value of contributions cannot be denied, the attention also had negative consequences in the form of constructed stereotypes that perpetuated an image of women as passive victims. The global media along with scholars, including some feminist ones, are seen as responsible for the construction of “mute and humiliated Muslim women”. War rapes opened a space for Balkanist discourse, produced both by Western authors and others with origins in Former Yugoslavia who viewed the area through “male primitivism and female victimization”.

The organization presented women and children as the true victims of the war. Seen as innocent and traumatized victims, they needed others to help them. Sources do not offer many detailed descriptions of the victims and their presumably difficult situation. An explanation could be that there was probably not a great need for these sorts of descriptions due to the fact that the news coverage of the Bosnian war was extensive. There were some exceptions, though. Occasionally, the grievances of the victims were underscored and even reinforced. References to encounters with “sad eyes” and using pictures of crying women occurred at times when Kvinna till Kvinna turned to the public asking for support. Contrary to this, references to men’s vulnerability and victimization are nowhere to be found. In fact, men are very seldom mentioned explicitly, which is, as Thomas Johansson notes, typical in feminist literature where the man usually is ‘the Other’. Despite the absence of explicit references to men, there is no doubt that they were generally perceived as initiators of wars and prime perpetrators of war crimes. These implications are constantly present in texts describing women’s suffering. The female victim is indirectly compared to the male perpetrator. Not only is violence against men overlooked here, but these simplistic distinctions between women and men perpetuate gender stereotypes about both genders.

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465 Carpenter 2010, 196.
466 Žarkov 2007, 130-132, 144-147; Weitsman 2007; Carpenter 2010.
467 Žarkov 2007, 144.
468 Drezgić and Žarkov 2005, 302.
469 Dagens Nyheter April 18 1993; Smålands Folkblad May 14 1993; Fred och Frihet no. 4 1993; Kristianstadsbladet March 7 1995 etc.
470 “sorgsna ögon” Gotlands Allehanda October 5 1993.
Those usually portrayed as “passive actors in men’s wars” are the raped women. Even at Kvinna till Kvinna, the raped woman was the symbol of female suffering in Bosnia. In fact, Kvinna till Kvinna started its first appeal to the Swedish public by referring to prevalent sexual violence:

In the war in Bosnia and earlier in Croatia rape and torture have been used as a central element of warfare. The aim of rape is also to desecrate the Muslim women as well as Muslim culture by destroying its foundation - the woman in the family. [...] Through aid projects for children we have an opportunity to reach the women who have been victims of rape but do not want to be singled out

In conformity with the current descriptions of the rape victim from Bosnia, Kvinna till Kvinna portrayed her as a Muslim woman who had been tortured, raped and sometimes even “double raped” as in places like Mostar. Afraid of being stigmatized, she was expected to be unwilling to talk about the violence she had been subjected to. Portrayals like these deprived the raped women of agency, but in reality many of them, Muslim women in particular, had been very active in demanding justice. As Dubravka Žarkov has written “in the process of politicizing the plight of all women, the raped Muslim women from Bosnia and Croatia were delegitimized politically, and the rape victim identity was produced to represent them”.

Judging from some pictures, used for the purpose of swaying people’s opinions and attracting donors, the rape victim from Bosnia was also a woman from the countryside. As such, she was wearing a headscarf, was supposedly uneducated and had led a traditional lifestyle before the war. Rapes were perceived as a mode of violating both the individual woman and Muslim culture.

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474 Kvällsposten March 28 1996.
475 Dagens Nyheter April 18 1993; Gotlands Allehanda October 5 1993; Dagens Nyheter October 23 1993; Dala-Demokraten October 27 1993.
476 Žarkov 2007, 147.
477 The brochure “Doing nothing is giving up”, April 1994.
478 Dagens Nyheter April 18 1993; Smålands Folkblad May 14 1993.
While it is likely that a great part of this information was drawn from the media, it is very important to bear in mind that it was also acquired during encounters with women from the Yugoslav region. The role as distributors of information of individual women and women’s groups, active at the time in Bosnia and particularly in Croatia, should by no means be underestimated in this context, nor should the fact that they actively contributed to the balkanist discourse which had already gained momentum. The focus on Muslim women led to the exclusion of victims belonging to other ethnic communities. It suggested that if they were raped, their suffering was not of the same degree as the one experienced by Muslim women.479 That this assumption was far from the truth is exposed in my own earlier research focused on narratives of Serb and Muslim women who had been subjected to sexual violence during the Bosnian war. The similarities between their experiences and concerns about the future were striking.480

Generally, trips to the war-torn area played an important role for Kvinna till Kvinna’s understanding of the situation as well as its view on Bosnian women and their needs. Being on site contributed to insights that would have been hard to gain through the media.481 Coming back to Sweden, it was important to correct the images ordinary Swedes got by watching the news.482 Not only did Kvinna till Kvinna criticize the media representation of the war, but its activists also spoke openly about their own previous prejudices about refugee women. The image of “a crouching, poor refugee woman wearing a head-scarf”, that the Swedish women tended to have in mind when they went to Croatia for the first time in the fall of 1993, was challenged by the women that they actually met.483 Even in the midst of the war, some local women turned out to be well aware of the distorted representation of themselves: “We went from being well off to having nothing. The world sees me as a refugee woman, as a Muslim

479 Žarkov 2007, 149-153.
480 Bajramovic 2005.
481 Bergslagsposten December 8 1993.
482 Katrineholms Kuriren March 16 1995.
483 ”den hukande, fattiga flyktingkvinnan klädd i hukle” LT March 7 1994.
refugee woman – and not only that: as a Muslim refugee woman who has probably been raped”. When an opportunity arose, some openly protested. Consider the following from a letter written by Zehra Ganibegović after receiving a ‘Woman’s package’ from Sweden:

You […] give us hope to believe in the existence of humane and objective people who understand this suffering and this war better than politicians who represent us as uncivilized and illiterate tribe members. With this letter, I personally want to thank you as one woman to another for understanding. This package shows your encouragement, it shows that you see us as civilized human beings and that you sense what a woman lacks and needs in these unfortunate times. […] We are a degraded people, all gestures like this one delight us and bring back the belief that somebody understands and respects us.

While expressing gratitude for the thoughtful donation, Ganibegović seized the opportunity to address the then widespread image of the ‘backward Balkans’. She found representations of the people from the area to be both false and deeply humiliating.

Representation of Bosnian women as victims (passive, raped, rural, and bound to tradition) occurred mainly during Kvinna till Kvinna’s first year. Still, one cannot but acknowledge that there was a real concern for those women in the organization. Although the concern for the raped women dominated the rhetoric of the organization during the initial period, it also sent a clear message that the help would be directed towards women in general. A glance at local projects supported by the Swedish organization shows that the principle of not


485 “Dajete nam nadu da vjerujemo u postojanje humanih i objektivnih ljudi koji ovu patnju i ovaj rat razumiju bolje od političara koji nas predstavljaju kao necivilizovane i nepismene plemenske pripadnike. Ovim pismom želim lično da vam se zahvalim i kao žena ženi na razumijevanju. Ovim paketom vi nas bodrite i smatrate civilizovanim bićima, osjećate šta jednoj ženi nedostaje, a prijeko je potrebno u ovim nemilim događajima. […] Mi smo ponižen narod, svaki ovakav gest nas raduje, vraća uvjerenje da nas neko razumije i poštuje.” Letter from Zehra Ganibegović.

486 Dagens Nyheter April 18 1993; Kvinnosyn/Värmland May 1993; Dagens Nyheter September 13 1993; Gotlands Allehanda October 5 1993; Dagens Nyheter October 23 1993; Newsletter no. 5, November 1993.
singling out victims of sexual violence had indeed been followed.\textsuperscript{487} The fact that Kvinna till Kvinna decided not to focus exclusively on the issue of sexual violence, which has since the early 1990s become the ‘hot stuff’ and priority of many international donors, proves that it was also able to recognize other burning questions that affected the lives of many more women.\textsuperscript{488}

**Women as peacebuilders**

While the official rhetoric of Kvinna till Kvinna gives the impression that its work is about aiding all women in the war-affected area, there were nevertheless groups of women who were of special interest for the organization. Its main interest was supporting the “extensive and competent relief work” that was already being done.\textsuperscript{489} True, there were at this point women’s groups that had organized for different reasons. Some were involved in purely humanitarian projects, while others protested openly against the war, demanded accountability for war crimes and at this early stage even promoted reconciliation.

Kvinna till Kvinna presented local activists as “fantastic women”, capable and qualified for the work they set out to do.\textsuperscript{490} There was a general admiration for their strength and determination to act in such a difficult situation. Previously made contacts by the Swedish section of WILPF and SPAS with women from the Yugoslav peace movement, among whom there were very few women from Bosnia, were significant. They played an important role as sources of different kinds of information, not at least about active women’s groups in the area.\textsuperscript{491} However, my conclusion is that the process of identifying ‘good partners’ started in earnest during Kvinna till Kvinna’s own visits to former Yugoslavia. Women’s groups encountered in the former Yugoslav area during the

\textsuperscript{487} Despite the fact that the source material comprises diverse sources, I have identified only one project supported by Kvinna till Kvinna that was focused solely on victims of sexual violence. In 1994 Kvinna till Kvinna decided to support the organization Biser which was situated in Zagreb, Croatia, and run by refugee women from Bosnia. The organization planned to give psychotherapeutic care and sheltered accommodation to dozen of victims of sexual violence and their family members. Newsletter Special, March 1994; Newsletter no. 4, May 1994.

\textsuperscript{488} Eriksson Baaz and Stern 2013.

\textsuperscript{489} “omfattande och kompetent hjälparbete” Dagens Nyheter April 18 1993.

\textsuperscript{490} “fantastiska kvinnor” Fred och Frihet no. 4 1993. See also Dagens Nyheter October 23 1993; Bergslagsposten December 8 1993.

\textsuperscript{491} Dagens Nyheter September 13 1993; Bergslagsposten December 8 1993; Fred och Frihet no. 2 2001, 22; Interview with Susanna Lennartsson, July 2 2009; Interview with Mia Sund, July 2 2009.
first trips left quite an impression and were, for example, called “good forces”, a “tough core of people” working with “ardor and anger”. What was required of an organization or an individual so it/she could be viewed in this light? In other words, who was, according to Kvinna till Kvinn, worthy of its support?

The strong people and good forces were the ones that, besides having adequate professional competence, did not want “a new Lebanon”. They viewed the war as unnecessary and pointless, and were strictly against an ethnically motivated partition of Bosnia. They had not given in to war propaganda, but preferred a peaceful resolution of the conflict and ultimately reconciliation across ethnic boundaries. Despite the fact that they themselves had endured great losses, they participated actively in helping others, still finding the strength to work for peace and for communication with ‘the other side’. A trained teacher working at a woman’s center is an illustrative example. Although she had lost several immediate family members, “she seems to be extremely open – they will not succeed to make me hate – she says, and it does not sound like a cliché”. The three organizations that Kvinna till Kvinn identified as potential local partners after its first trip to Croatia, Center for Women War Victims, Biser and Center for Peace, Non-violence and Human Rights (co-founded by Adam Curle), all fit the aforementioned description. The idea that they “fought for reconciliation, dialogue and communication” was at least as important as the fact that they “felt very little hatred”.

In June 1994, after another trip to the area which also included visits to partner organizations situated in southern part of Bosnia, Kvinna till Kvinn reported:

> We met many people who all wanted a united Bosnia-Herzegovina, they could not see any other solution for a lasting peace. […] During this trip we felt that we have found the right [partners]. The projects that Kvinna till Kvinn supports

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494 Travel report from a trip to Croatia and Bosnia, June 5-13 1994.

495 Dagens Nyheter October 23 1993; Fred & Frihet no. 4 1993; Travel report from a trip to Croatia, September 20-27 1993.

496 “Hon verkar vara oerhört öppen – they will not succeed to make me hate – säger hon, och det låter inte som en klysha!” Internal travel report from a trip to Split and Mostar, April 18-25 1995, 12.

are good and important projects that are of great importance for everyone that they reach. Our partners are very good, and it is easy to feel proud of the strong women we know.498

Connecting women in conflict-ridden settings has been a long-standing goal within the international peace movement. Kvinna till Kvinna devoted a considerable amount of time to locating potential ‘islands of civility’, to use the terminology of Mary Kaldor.499 The urgency expressed regarding the search for partners that “still worked across ethnic lines”, expected to weave together this multiethnic society and bring it back to its prewar state, exposes a rather essentialist view on women.500 Men, on the other hand, were never mentioned in this context. It is likely that they were mainly associated with war and hardly seen as peacemakers. Research shows that Bosnian women were indeed targeted as natural agents of reconciliation and peace by international interveners, and that local women themselves supported this line of thinking by using essentialist arguments in connection to their role in this postwar society.501 During this initial period, there was a firm belief at Kvinna till Kvinna that: “We actually have a clear vested interest in preserving the Bosnian lifestyle”.502 The fact that the earlier mentioned ‘woman’s packages’ went to Tuzla, which counted as one of the few still multiethnic cities, was thus not a coincidence, but can be interpreted as an active choice to support a community that managed to resist nationalism and disintegration.503 Kvinna till Kvinna’s vision of a united Bosnia corresponded to that of the IC even though it poorly matched the factual situation on the ground.504


500 ”som fortfarande arbetar över de etniska gränserna” Fred och Frihet no. 4 1993, 3.

501 See, for example, Helms 2003.


504 Kostić 2013.
The early encounter problematized

A focus on sources intended for public use with the goal to attract support, which seldom contain detailed and controversial information, gives us an un-problematized picture of the Swedish-Bosnian encounter. Internal source material for 1993–1995 is scarce, but what is available shows clear indications that Kvinna till Kvinna ran into more complications than it ever expressed in public. In other words, supporting peacebuilding in a war-torn area turned out to be challenging. What potential threats to its mission did the organization articulate during the initial period of its involvement in Bosnia?

Despite the emphasis that the organization put on the ‘good forces’, its representatives knew that there was little reason for optimism. The more access Kvinna till Kvinna got to various parts of Bosnia, the clearer it became that the country was severely damaged, and that the damage was not only material. A trip to central and northern Bosnia in October 1994 led to the conclusion that the antagonism between the ethnic groups was so great that “reconciliation would take a very long time”.505 After a few years of fighting and living separately, a wide-spread distrust between the three major ethnic groups had become a fact. However, it seems that insight into this reality did not have any discouraging effects on Kvinna till Kvinna. On the contrary, it motivated the organization to continue supporting activities that cut across ethnic lines because “everybody down there lives in their ‘truth’, therefore it is important that they hear other people’s ‘truths’”.506

Nationalism was viewed as one of the most destructive phenomena in former Yugoslavia and the biggest threat to a successful peacebuilding. Safeguarding the supported activities from the influence of nationalism was important, which a glance at Kvinna till Kvinna’s very first application to Sida from early 1994 confirms:

In the current political situation it is important to monitor and meet with local organizations constantly to see how they develop. Since the ambition of Kvinna

505 “försoningsarbetet kommer att ta mycket lång tid” Internal travel report from a trip to Bosnia-Herzegovina, October 7-15 1994, 8.

till Kvinna is to help all women and children who are in need of help, regardless of ethnicity, it is essential that the groups maintain an anti-nationalist attitude.\textsuperscript{507}

What needs to be added is that the wars in Yugoslavia had not bypassed the women’s movement in the area, but had caused a serious rift in it. While some feminists remained convinced pacifists condemning all warring sides, others took a more nationalist stance as the wars evolved, claiming the right of their nation to defend itself.\textsuperscript{508} Although Kvinna till Kvinna never explicitly commented on this development, it certainly made implicit references to its consequences, one of which was that numerous women’s groups reserved their help for those who had the ‘right’ ethnic affiliation.\textsuperscript{509} As the guiding principle of the Swedish organization was the very opposite, its conclusion that it needed to spend more time in the field finding suitable ‘partners’ and basically checking on them signals awareness of the complexities of the situation.

Concerning women who used the services provided by supported NGOs, we learn that a group of grieving mothers, who used to meet at one of the women’s centers in Mostar, was problematic. This “closed group with many problems” whose “whole identity [was] built on the fact that they [had] lost a son in the war” refused to accept non-Croat women.\textsuperscript{510} By denying access to women of other ethnicities, they were an unwanted nationalist factor in a setting that claimed to be non-nationalist. That was by no means the only reason why they were considered to be problematic. They were also unable to look beyond their own grief and anger, thus displaying weakness rather than strength. Women’s centers were certainly planned to function, and did so, as places where women could express their sorrow and get adequate psychosocial treatment for it. However, it is obvious that donors saw them primarily as meeting spots where

\textsuperscript{507} “I dagens politiska läge är det viktigt att ständigt kontrollera och sammanträffa med organisationerna på plats för att se hur de utvecklas. Eftersom Kvinna till Kvinna’s ambition är att hjälpa alla kvinnor och barn som är i behov av hjälp, oavsett etnisk tillhörighet, är det av största vikt att grupperna behåller en antinationalistisk inställning.” Application to Sida February (posted in March) 1994, 1.

\textsuperscript{508} Benderly 1997, 201-203.

\textsuperscript{509} See also Fred & Frihet no. 4 1993, 3.

\textsuperscript{510} “stängd grupp med många problem”, “hela identitet byggd på att de har förlorat en son i kriget” Internal travel report from a trip to Split and Mostar, April 18-25 1995, 5.
constructive discussions about the future would take precedence over those about the past.511

While a photograph of the grieving mothers all dressed in black and holding small white coffee cups is compared with Lorca’s Blood Wedding, another group of women attending the same meeting place is portrayed in a significantly more compassionate manner.512 The group consisted of women who lived in mixed marriages and was

a large – but wonderful group. A great deal of talk and laughter. This is obviously a group used to difficult times. [...] Although there is much laughter in the group, the tears are never far away. It was difficult to leave them.513

Those who lived in mixed marriages were indeed one of the most exposed groups during the war because they represented the multi-ethnic Bosnia that many at that point wished to dissociate themselves from. Understanding the grievances of the women who suffered due to ethnic homogenization of their society was a matter of course for Kvinna till Kvinna. In comparison with the grieving mothers mentioned above, they symbolized and practiced openness towards people of all ethnicities, were most likely in favor of reconciliation, and to Kvinna till Kvinna they represented the future.

My findings indicate that while the Swedish organization intended to support women from all sides of the front, “women with an open mind; who can see the conflict from many different perspectives and who are open for constructive action” were seen as the true ‘islands of civility’ and the ones to count on.514 Kvinna till Kvinna’s feelings of solidarity and concrete financial support were reserved for them. Interestingly and paradoxically, despite its critique of nationalism and efforts to tone down the importance of women’s ethnical origin, the organization also stressed ethnicity on many occasions. In all the written source materials covering 1993–1995, especially the texts intended for public purposes, the ethnic origin of local women gets mentioned mainly as proof that women of different ethnicities communicated and even cooperated.

511 Internal travel report from a trip to Split and Mostar, April 18-25 1995, 9. See also Application to Sida November 15 1994, 2.
512 Internal travel report from a trip to Split and Mostar, April 18-25 1995, 5.
514 “kvinnor med öppna sinnen; som kan se konflikten från flera håll och som är öppna för konstruktiva handlingar” Application to Sida November 15 1994, 3.
Another potential threat seems to have been the communist legacy. A member of Kvinna till Kvinna’s management team wrote the following upon her return from a trip to Sarajevo conducted in the early fall of 1993:

Not only is the war going on in Bosnia and Sarajevo, at the same time the people there are trying, with poor results of course, to build a new post-communist society. The communist mentality still obviously puts its mark on many organizations and initiatives. Therefore, one should so far aim for diversity in terms of projects and initiatives to support.\footnote{Report from a trip to Sarajevo, September 10-16 1993, 4.}

The goal of the trip was to identify appropriate local initiatives to support. Nowhere in this internal report do we get a clear definition of the communist mentality. However, a rhetorical question and a statement attached to it provide some clues: “Who the f**k has heard of an old Communist who knows anything about ecology and feminism????? But they know Western progressive words”.\footnote{Report from a trip to Sarajevo, September 10-16 1993, 4.} The portrayal of those who sympathized with communist ideology as authoritarian, anti-feminist, and greedy for money from the West, as well as the lack of any kind of explanation, imply that this kind of Cold War reasoning perhaps was not a novelty at Kvinna till Kvinna. Viewing communism as a threat and equating it with the Soviet Union has deep historical roots in Sweden. Most pronounced during the Cold War, the anti-communist critique came both from conservatives and Social Democrats alike.\footnote{Peterson 1992, 38-41.} At the end of the report mentioned above, cautiousness was recommended when donating funds to local projects. Despite this warning, Kvinna till Kvinna did not seem to have problems with finding suitable local organizations to support. Its focus on new women’s groups exclusively could perhaps be interpreted as a means of keeping unwanted values associated with the old system at distance; it is noteworthy that the only case of a disagreement found in the records covering 1993–1995, that actually led to cancellation of planned support, concerned a Tuzla-based...
women’s group which to a large extent was “a remnant of an old women’s organization”.

Insights reached through early encounters with the local population in Bosnia had implications on Kvinna till Kvinna’s further activity there. While the organization in its second application to Sida in November 1994, applying for funds that would cover travel expenses to the Balkans, assured that this did not mean abandonment of the principle to support local women from a distance, later contacts with Sida show that “The importance of being present in the area has become increasingly apparent to us”. By early fall 1995, Kvinna till Kvinna had secured funds from Sida and was preparing to send its first representative to the area. With this step, a new phase in the relationship between Kvinna till Kvinna and Bosnian NGOs started.

**Concluding remarks**

This chapter sought to address the formation of Kvinna till Kvinna at a particular moment, the impact of its historical roots in the women’s peace movement on its ideology and working methods, and shed light on the first encounters with women in the war-affected Yugoslav area. In Sweden, Kvinna till Kvinna has been remembered for its humanitarian action “Send a woman’s package”, but it really had much bigger ambitions already from the outset. True, it was a result of a spontaneous action seeking to alleviate the suffering of civilians in the Bosnian war. However, it was run by experienced peace activists who emphasized long-term and comprehensive peacebuilding efforts performed by women living in the war-torn area. The idea about the need to rely on and support local actors closely aligned with the concept of peace from below which had just started to gain influence in the early 1990s. So is the view on actors from civil society willing to work across ethnic lines as the best solution to reach peace.

The specific focus on women, both as victims and actors, proves that Kvinna till Kvinna was cutting edge regarding the view on women’s roles in war and conflict. It is important to remember that this was prior to the Beijing Conference and the recognition of women’s plight in war and their role as key actors for peace by the UN. The interconnectedness between women and peace,

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519 “Vi har mer och mer insett vikten av att vara närvarande i området.”, Application to Sida November 15 1994, 7.
stressed by Kvinna till Kvinna, is another legacy of the women’s peace movement. The analysis shows that women that the Swedish organization was interested in were put into two categories. We find either victims or peacebuilders, the latter especially being worthy of support. Victims, often symbolized by the raped Muslim woman from Bosnia, were usually brought forward in connection to fundraising campaigns, an important source of income between 1993 and 1995. Wanting to awaken feelings of solidarity among Swedish people, or more specifically Swedish women, a mix of essentialist thinking about commonalities between women of the world on the one hand, and colonial and balkanist discourse on the other, was utilized with relative success. Essentialist arguments were also used when speaking about women’s role as peacebuilders seen as having the impetus to mend destroyed relations in the multiethnic Bosnia. While vulnerability is a legitimate trait attached to victims, in depictions of peacebuilders strength and openness towards ‘the other side’ are emphasized.

The first trips to the Balkans show that Kvinna till Kvinna approached women in Bosnia with an open attitude, curiosity and genuine care. Through dialogue with local women, their needs were identified and attended to. We see a willingness to correct one’s own prejudices and a dedication to building a closer relationship with local activists, which is interpreted as striving for equality. At this early stage, having an open attitude to what was encountered might have been even more important than substantial knowledge about the local context. This approach certainly had an important role in the process of trust building and Kvinna till Kvinna’s establishment in the area.

The first encounters also demonstrated that women were not easily put into the essentialist positions of the victim and the peacebuilder, which will also be evident further ahead. The unflattering image of the passive, raped, Muslim woman living in the ‘backward Balkans’ that circulated at the time was not one that these women identified with. Internal sources reveal a hierarchy between local women in the eyes of Kvinna till Kvinna. Women who put their ethnicity before their gender identity and/or exposed a nationalist stance were perceived as a burden rather than a resource for peace. They were a disturbing element at activities supported by Kvinna till Kvinna. This leads us to threats to peacebuilding in Bosnia perceived by the organization during its initial phase. Except nationalism, there are indications that the communist legacy was seen as problematic. Through a rhetoric where a Cold War discourse is displayed, we learn that the organization worried about possible traces that communism had left on people’s thinking.

Apparently, just as the solution was seen in the local context, the latter was also blamed for potential problems in the future. Perhaps we should also ask
what possible problems were omitted. Nowhere in the sources do we find Kvinna till Kvinna speaking about its own shortcomings that could hamper its mission in Bosnia. Even if we take into consideration that it intended to support local actors from a distance, an intention which was then reconsidered and abandoned in late 1995, there was no sign of fears about entering an area which Kvinna till Kvinna activists had little, if any, knowledge about. As the following chapters will show, however, the lack of knowledge, in terms of culture, language and history, became an aggravating circumstance as soon as the organization increased its presence on the ground.
CHAPTER SIX

Newcomer in development aid

As a newly formed organization with the aim to operate in conflict-affected areas, Kvinna till Kvinna entered the sphere of development aid. Already in 1994, during its network phase, it started to receive support from the Swedish national aid agency Sida. Over the next few years, Sida became the major donor of Kvinna till Kvinna, whose grants at times constituted as much as 95 percent of the total budget of the organization, and remained to hold this position throughout the period studied. Understanding the work of Kvinna till Kvinna in Bosnia involves scrutinizing the conditions related to its main source of material resources, and how the organization itself perceived and handled them.

This chapter seeks to put Kvinna till Kvinna into the historical context of Swedish development work, which, as we may assume, constitutes another part of the historical roots of the organization. However, Sweden’s engagement in development also needs to be related to the influence of the wider international context in which it evolved. Therefore some attention is devoted to international trends and their reflection in Swedish aid policy, especially from the early 1990s and on. Another goal with this chapter is to show the dynamics of the Sida/Kvinna till Kvinna relationship as it evolved on the ground. The investigation is, with few small exceptions, based upon source material produced by the latter, and it is primarily the perspective of Kvinna till Kvinna that is considered here.

Empirical questions that fall within the scope of this chapter are: How did Kvinna till Kvinna envision the cooperation with Sida and what strategies and methods did it use to create the desired connection? Were there differences in views on aid work and peacebuilding in this particular postwar setting? Did the cooperation between the two Sarajevo offices change over time?

Swedish aid work abroad – a brief historical overview

Initial activities and becoming ‘the conscience of the world’

If we take into account missionary work, the beginnings of Swedish aid work abroad can be traced to the second half of the nineteenth century when Swedish mission was established in parts of Africa. Indeed, some of the activities pursued by missionaries such as providing health care and education bear a strong resemblance to development aid projects of our time. Research shows that both missionary experiences and the ties created during missions have been widely
used in later state-run aid work. However, neither the missionary work nor emergency relief efforts carried out directly after the First World War and during the Second World War by humanitarian organizations were financially supported by the state, but their sympathizers.

The change in the position of the state towards aid actions outside of Sweden took place after the Second World War. The humanitarian catastrophe created by the war induced the state to support voluntary organizations such as The Red Cross and Save the Children Fund, which realized relief actions in several European countries. As Jörg Linder has shown, Swedish aid to West Germany was especially extensive. Up to the mid-1960s when Sida was formed, Swedish aid consisted of efforts made by non-government organizations with limited financial support from the state. Restricted financial contributions were also made to different UN programs, focused on technical assistance to countries on the ‘periphery’, and this has occasionally been described as a starting-point of Swedish development aid.

The establishment of the United Nations right after the Second World War as well as Sweden’s early involvement in this international organization greatly influenced the Swedish development aid policy. From late the 1940s, decolonization and development were foregrounded on the UN agenda. Development aid was seen as a mode of combating poverty and preventing potential turmoil, not least in former colonies. As one of the minor actors on the international scene, Sweden used the UN as a platform for calling on international solidarity as well as bringing up issues of global significance. From the 1960s, Sweden became even more active in international politics by criticizing superpowers, increasing foreign aid and engaging in the matters of the Third World. Swedish aid efforts were not solely motivated by a sense of solidarity, but also sought to diminish tensions in a highly polarized world. In relation to its resistance to

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520 Engh 2009, 66.
521 Nehlin 2009, 125-129.
523 Odén 2006, 52. See also Hydén 2010, 68.
524 The election of Dag Hammarskjöld as the Secretary General of the UN in 1953 has been described as an important factor for enhancing generally small interest of Swedish people for engagement abroad. As an internationalist Hammarskjöld was deeply interested in the decolonization process and believed in sharing responsibilities not least through development aid.
superpowers, especially during Olof Palme’s time as Prime Minister, Sweden profiled itself as a mediator in international disputes.  

**From popular enthusiasm to political strategy**

According to the political scientist Göran Hydén, the history of Swedish development aid can be divided into three phases. The first one, by Hydén called the popular phase, stretches from 1949 to 1966 and has partly been touched upon above. This phase was primarily characterized by aid efforts of various popular movements and NGOs and rather small state contributions to the UN’s aid programs. During this period, the Swedish state also started supporting aid projects in selected countries outside of Europe. The driving forces behind the aid work during its initial phase were popular movements and free churches, what has become a part of Swedish collective memory. They participated actively in the state-organized joint forums where principles of Swedish aid were formulated. Some of the most important guiding principles stressed, for example, the right of the recipient party to identify its needs and donors’ non-interference in the politics of the recipient countries. These principles were consolidated in the first Government Bill on aid adopted in 1962, a document which also pointed out economic growth and social equality along with democratization as the objectives of Swedish aid.

The second phase, the bureaucratic one, occurred between 1966 and 1990. From the mid-1960s, the interest in foreign aid was rising both among the general public and the political elite and it peaked throughout the next decade. The guiding idea was to provide assistance on the recipients’ terms. Sida, formed in 1965, had an important role in framing aid projects primarily sup-

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527 Ethiopia was Sweden’s very first recipient outside of Europe. The choice of it was based the on long presence of and ties created by Swedish missionaries in this African country. See Hydén 2010, 67-69.
528 These were the Central Committee (Centalkommittén, CK) and the Committee for International Aid (Nämnden för internationellt stöd, NIB) which count as predecessors of Sida.
529 Hydén 2010, 69-70. On the significance of the popular movements for the early aid work abroad see also Odén 2006, 52.
531 An important element of Swedish aid in the 1970s was strong support to liberation movements in Africa. See Odén 2006, 85-86.
porting state actors in recipient countries, but Sweden was also one of the largest providers of direct aid to liberation movements in southern parts of Africa. As a state authority practically in charge of foreign aid, Sida also enjoyed independence in relation to political organs but this changed during the next phase.532

The political phase is the third one identified by Hydén, and the phase of Swedish aid which is, for obvious reasons, the most relevant for this thesis. The influence of politics on development significantly increased from the 1990s and on. Keeping an eye on the global agenda of development cooperation, the government sets the political framework for foreign aid which all actors working with public funds are obliged to obey. Previously fairly independent, Sida is today more closely connected to The Ministry of Foreign Affairs.533 Since the fall of the Berlin wall, politicization is a general phenomenon in the sphere of development. Even though it has always existed, the link between development policy and foreign policy is perhaps more pronounced than ever.534 In practice, it means that donors dictate the terms of cooperation by conditioning the aid with political reforms in recipient countries. Foreign aid has been reserved for states willing to practice good governance. Democratization of non-Western societies as well as conflict resolution and reconstruction of conflict-ridden societies have been prioritized.535 Channelling funds via NGOs has become a common mode of delivering aid.

Scholars seem to agree that the special features of Swedish development work have gradually been reduced since the new liberal wave in the 1980s.536 Given the focus internationally on coordination between donors, Swedish aid today bears a strong resemblance, both in content and form, to that of other member countries of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). In recent decades, the emphasis has indeed been on democratization, good governance, human rights, peace and conflict.537 Sweden has a long tradition of supporting projects directed towards women, but during the recent decades an even greater focus has also been put on women in conflict

532 Hydén 2010, 73-75; See also Odén and Stålgren 2007, 171-172.
533 Hydén 2010, 94.
534 Odén and Stålgren 2007, 170-172.
536 Odén 2006, 101-106. See also Hydén 2010, 67.
537 Odén 2006, 121-124.
areas. In 1995, the same year as the UN Fourth conference on women took place in Beijing, gender equality was adopted as one of the objectives of Swedish aid.

**Sida and Kvinna till Kvinna – a conditioned cooperation**

Cooperation between state agencies such as Sida and intermediary NGOs such as Kvinna till Kvinna is as a rule conditioned. The missions of organizations interested in funding from Sida cannot differ substantially from the goals of the donor. Thus, a prerequisite for cooperation is a certain matching of donor/recipient objectives. As a representative of the Swedish Government and a donor, Sida chooses organizations which will implement its goals in the field and is generally in a position to dictate the terms of cooperation. A glance at an agreement, signed in the early period of Kvinna till Kvinna and Sida cooperation, tells of extensive obligations imposed on the recipient. As an implementing partner of Sida, the organization was expected to do all the planning, implementing, monitoring and reporting of the project. It was also the task of Kvinna till Kvinna to make sure that no deviations from either the content or implementation of the project, as it was specified in the application, occurred. Sida had the right to do audits and pay visits to the project “when Sida finds it necessary”. It was clarified that withdrawal of the funds would be a consequence of not obliging by these rules was clarified. Concerning reporting, Sida sent a message that reports were to be result-oriented and thus contain information about implemented activities and their effects.

The difficulties of measuring work done within the field of human rights and democracy, as it usually demands long-term efforts, have been acknowledged by the Swedish Government and Sida. Nevertheless, the requirement to show concrete results remained. Further developments in working relations between

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538 Scandinavian aid agencies, primarily Sida and the Norwegian equivalent Norad, showed an early interest in women’s situation in developing countries. Some of the projects directed specifically towards women supported from the 1960s and on concerned, for example, health, family planning and education. See, for example, Engh 2008; Berg 2009.

539 ”Då Sida finner det nödvändigt” Agreement on Swedish support to Kvinna till Kvinna regarding regional project coordination in Bosnien-Herzegovina and Croatia 1997, 2.

540 Agreement on Swedish support to Kvinna till Kvinna regarding regional project coordination in Bosnien-Herzegovina and Croatia 1997.

Sida and Kvinna till Kvinna, as well as those in the field of development aid, did not reduce the emphasis on results. A glance at Sida’s documents focused on selection criteria for framework organizations, which Kvinna till Kvinna became in 1999, reveals that such an agreement brings both opportunities and challenges to NGOs. On the one hand, it allows the implementing partner to plan for long-term activities and reallocate funds more freely. On the other hand, entering framework cooperation with Sida means intensified control measures. Apart from the fact that both the government and taxpayers expect results, the signing of the international agreement, the Paris Declaration, on aid effectiveness in 2005 by major aid actors and several recipient countries only confirmed an already strong focus on results. For example, by 2010, when I spoke with Kvinna till Kvinna’s aid director, frequent and extensive evaluations of the work of the organization in different conflict zones had become the norm. Next we turn to investigating how the possibilities and challenges of this cooperation manifested themselves once Kvinna till Kvinna increased its presence in Bosnia.

Via Split to Sarajevo – establishing the office in Bosnia

As indicated in the previous chapter, Kvinna till Kvinna’s initial principle of not having a representative stationed in former Yugoslavia was reconsidered and definitely abandoned in the fall of 1995. It opened an office in Split, Croatia, meant to cover both Croatia and Bosnia. Placing the office in Split seemed most practical at the time. Besides its advantageous geographical position and the fact that it was the safest way of reaching destinations in Bosnia, Split also had an operational airport which had been widely used for delivering aid to Bosnia. The grant from Sida financed a half-time post on the ground, meaning that at the time the only full-time employee at Kvinna till Kvinna divided her time between the new office and the head office in Stockholm. Periods of time in the Balkans were spent on the move, visiting domestic organizations located in different parts of Bosnia and Croatia, but also connecting with Sida and other international actors in the area.

The work on the ground turned out to be full of challenges, not least practical ones. First, Kvinna till Kvinna lacked experience in dealing with postwar settings. Second, the organization had limited economic resources as well as

542 Criteria for the selection of frame organisations, Sida 2005.
544 Interview with Wilhelmina Karlsson, October 13 2010.
545 Newsletter no. 5, October 1995.
limited knowledge about the local context. Its field representative’s knowledge of local language was at the time non-existent which was a clear disadvantage. She was, for instance, unable to follow the media, and communication with domestic activists was quite difficult at times. For economic reasons, interpreters were seldom used. As a small organization with limited resources, Kvinna till Kvinna put a considerable amount of energy on searching for cheap means of transportation and accommodation, which was a time-consuming endeavor. Travelling by local bus was a frequently used way of getting to a destination, untypical for international aid workers who usually had access to their own cars or buses. While taking the local bus was the most economical way of travelling, it took a tremendous amount of time.

Early on, there were complaints about lack of time. Numerous reports bear witness to a constant worry about not being able to complete all the tasks that had been planned. The fatigue caused by the huge workload was thus evident already within the first six months. In a report to the Foundation Board, the representative poses a question about a possible extension of the field post. By October 1996 the time issue had made it into the regular quarterly report to Sida where Kvinna till Kvinna noted that there was a “need for continued, and

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546 Information about the political situation in the former Yugoslav region usually came via Swedish newspapers sent to Bosnia (see Weekly report January 24, May 21 1996; Weekly report September 17 1997) and during sporadic visits to Tuzla, the city where the Swedish Battalion (SWEBAT) in the UN mission was stationed as were many other Swedish organizations (see Weekly report February 6, 7 1996; Weekly report November 19 1996). The Swedish embassy and domestic activists were other important providers of information. See Weekly report March 13 1998.

547 Weekly report February 2, November 6, 7 1996; Weekly report April 1, May 20, June 4, December 15 1998.

548 For a good illustration of the enormous infrastructure that international interveners in Bosnia had created for themselves, which separated them from the local population, see Coles 2007.


551 Report to the Board of Kvinna till Kvinna May 28 1996.
increased, presence [in Bosnia] ”. 552 As the same challenges continued, an application for extended presence on the ground was sent to Sida in 1997, but got a negative answer. 553 The rejection of the proposal was motivated by a capacity evaluation of Kvinna till Kvinna that Sida planned to do in the near future. 554

The first thoughts about moving the field office to Sarajevo could be observed in November 1996. 555 Most of the projects that Kvinna till Kvinna supported were inside Bosnia and the main purpose of relocating to Sarajevo was to shorten the travel time between the projects. Further, the Bosnian capital was the regional base of the international community which made it even more attractive to Kvinna till Kvinna as it was interested in making contacts with other international actors. At the same time, due to the international presence, living and working in Sarajevo was enormously expensive. After lengthy and careful consideration, the organization decided in 1997 to move its office to Sarajevo. 556 A desk was rented from the US-supported STAR Network. However, after a year of sharing premises, STAR was forced to close down in Sarajevo thus allowing Kvinna till Kvinna to take over the office. 557 The Sarajevo office covered both Bosnia and Croatia until 2000 when its equivalent was opened in Zagreb.

Moving to Sarajevo did not mean fewer tasks for the Kvinna till Kvinna field representative, but rather the opposite. Besides regular paperwork and visits to domestic NGOs, the number of meetings with various international actors increased. It is also important to add that the organization was increasingly contacted by domestic activists in search of support. 558 Commuting between Stockholm and Sarajevo was a rather overwhelming endeavor. Longer time periods spent in Bosnia and more staff, both at the Stockholm office and on the ground,

554 Letter from Sida to Kvinna till Kvinna May 7 1997. See also letter from Sida to Kvinna till Kvinna May 30 1997.
were identified as prime necessities as were interpreting services essential for often demanding contacts with local authorities.\footnote{Quarterly report to Sida January-April 1998; Fax from the head office in Stockholm to the Sarajevo office May 26 1998; Weekly report June 1 1998.}

Sida was initially reserved towards financing an extension of Kvinna till Kvinna’s presence in Bosnia, still awaiting the capacity evaluation which finally started in late summer 1998.\footnote{Letter from Sida to Kvinna till Kvinna July 13 1998.} However, we see that Kvinna till Kvinna reinforced the Sarajevo office with additional personnel already during the fall. In October 1998 there were two representatives in Sarajevo.\footnote{Weekly report October 5 1998.} From November, a Bosnian woman was occasionally called in to help out with interpreting and running errands on the behalf of Kvinna till Kvinna, a practice that remained throughout the period studied.\footnote{Weekly report November 4, 5, 26 1998; Weekly report February 8, April 21, 22, June 15, 17 September 8 1999; Weekly report February 22, May 3, 9, June 8 2000; Weekly report February 2, September 10, November 28, 29 2001; Weekly report January 8, May 16, 21, 24 2002; Weekly report January 18, August 6, 7, October 6 2003; Weekly report January 12, 13 2004; Weekly report week 47-51 2007; Weekly report February 4-24 2008; Interview with Linnéa Sjölander, September 21 2009; Interview with Alva Magnusson, July 23 2013.}

**Changing working conditions**

The outcome of the capacity evaluation ordered by Sida (which had, as Kvinna till Kvinna wrote in a letter to the aid agency, “almost strangled us, because all decisions must await the outcome”) was positive.\footnote{“nästan har strypt oss, eftersom alla beslut skall avvakta utgången” Letter from Kvinna till Kvinna to Sida July 22 1998.} It opened the door to the framework agreement signed in 1999.\footnote{Newsletter no. 1, February 1999.} As mentioned earlier, becoming one of Sida’s frame organizations brought such possibilities that NGOs like Kvinna till Kvinna would otherwise hardly have had an access to. First, it was an official recognition of the Swedish foundation and its working methods. Second, it meant an enhanced multiannual financial support for the activities of the organization in Bosnia. Indeed, in comparison with 1998, one can see that funds for projects more than doubled as well as there were considerable sums intended for administration.\footnote{Annual report 1999, 54.}
Because of this development, Kvinna till Kvinna was able to assign additional resources to work done on the ground. Over the next eight years, the number of field posts in Bosnia remained two, the representatives worked closely with coordinators placed at the Stockholm office. Even if the workload was still described as high, there was someone to share it with. In 2007, however, Sida decided to reduce grants to Kvinna till Kvinna by almost 25 percent. One of the reasons for cutting the budget was Sida’s intention to redirect some of its support to civil society to the development of state institutions. Consequently, as Swedish personnel stationed abroad was incredibly expensive, one of the Kvinna till Kvinna posts in Bosnia was removed. With the exception of few periods, between late 2007 and 2013 the Sarajevo office was, with occasional help from domestic labor, again run by one person. When interviewed, the representatives stationed in Bosnia during this period told me that fulfilling the mission of the organization was a real challenge. They struggled with combining one of the main priorities of Kvinna till Kvinna, which is staying in close contact with domestic NGOs, and at the same time coping with loads of administrative tasks. One of them linked the increasing administrative work to Sida’s requirements and its bureaucracy, stating that it forced them to “become administrators […] and that is not good. That aspect is necessary, but it should not take over”. She also said that this kind of workload would be manageable if only there were more representatives to share it.

Budget cuts made by Sida were not the only factor that contributed to the understaffing of the Sarajevo office, according to another representative. She underlined that a share of the responsibility for this development belonged to Kvinna till Kvinna itself. A few years earlier, the organization formulated a regional strategy for the Western Balkans, which, in her opinion, was disadvantageous for Bosnia because the gravity of the situation in Bosnia demanded a separate strategy as well as more resources to the Sarajevo office. At the time of our conversation, which took place in 2013, there were two employees at all Kvinna till Kvinna’s field offices in the Balkans, except in Sarajevo.

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566 Annual request to Sida 2007. Until 2006 95 percent of Kvinna till Kvinna’s total budget came from Sida. Between 2007 and 2009 it went down to 76 percent.
567 Interview with Linnéa Sjölander, September 21 2009; Interview with Alva Magnusson, July 23 2013.
568 “Vi blir administratörer […] och det är inte bra. Det måste ju också finnas men det ska inte ta över.” Interview with Linnéa Sjölander, September 21 2009.
569 Interview with Linnéa Sjölander, September 21 2009.
570 Interview with Alva Magnusson, July 23 2013.
Interactions between the two Sarajevo offices

Sida opened its office in Sarajevo at the end of November 1995, right after the peace agreement was reached. As elsewhere, the work of the Swedish aid agency in Bosnia was integrated with the Swedish embassy established in late June 1995. Part of Sida’s mission was keeping in touch with and monitoring the work of its implementing partners.

In interviews conducted with some of Kvinna till Kvinna’s former field representatives in Bosnia, it is pointed out that difficult discussions about priorities as well as important decisions regarding cooperation between Kvinna till Kvinna and Sida took place in Stockholm. While there is no reason to question these statements, it is a fact that there had been numerous encounters over the years on the ground as well. There are clear indications that the contacts and relations created between the two offices were not insignificant. Interactions on the ground provide valuable insights concerning Kvinna till Kvinna’s vision of desired cooperation with Sida as well as how the relation actually unfolded. Different understandings regarding aid efforts, peace work and women’s role in it, appear as well as Kvinna till Kvinna’s attempts to influence its donor.

Creating an arena for influence

In order to fulfil its ambitions regarding long-term support to organized women in conflict-ridden societies, Kvinna till Kvinna needed economic resources. Few donors other than Sida would have been able to provide a stable influx of large amounts of funds, which makes it is reasonable to assume that establishing and maintaining good relations with this powerful donor must have been a priority. It is also likely that this was especially urgent prior to the signing of the framework agreement. Until 1999, Kvinna till Kvinna received rather small grants from Sida and had to rely on short-term contracts which had to be renewed often. However, already then it was dependent on funding from Sida, because only small sums of money were secured via other sources of income such as public money collections. Therefore, the first years we see a frenetic activity by Kvinna till Kvinna as it aimed to prove itself to Sida. The main strategy used in convincing Sida to continue with its support consisted of taking every opportunity possible to promote the work of the organization. In practice, it meant

571 Interview with Beatrice Lindström, September 7 2009; Interview with Alva Magnusson, July 23 2013.
moving in the same circles as Sida’s personnel and inviting them to visit local
NGOs supported by Kvinna till Kvinna.572

NGOs use different strategies and methods to influence state actors. In terms
of strategies, there are outsider and insider ones. While the former usually con-
sist of media campaigns and open protests, the latter are more about lobby-
ing.573 Originating from peace organizations with extensive experience of lobby
work, Kvinna till Kvinna preferred the strategy of lobbying to introduce its own
views and, in turn, to influence Sida. During the first few years the contacts
between the two offices were indeed frequent. After a year of establishing first
contacts and achieving rather good relations, during 1997 the contacts signifi-
cantly intensified.574 Encounters occurred in work-related contexts such as
Sida’s information meetings and visits by Sida to local NGOs, and at semi-for-
mal events such as celebrations of national holidays arranged by the Swedish
embassy.575 However, for those belonging to the small Swedish community in
Bosnia, there were meetings in informal settings as well which is a natural part
of insider strategies. In fact, during this time Kvinna till Kvinna’s field repre-
sentative socialized extensively with other Swedes engaged in the peacebuilding
project in Bosnia, many of whom were employees of the Swedish embassy and
Sida.576 Being a newcomer with limited resources, Kvinna till Kvinna wisely
made use of its contacts created on the ground. For example, by staying at her
Swedish acquaintances’ and friends’ apartments during visits to Bosnia, the re-
presentative avoided to burden the already strained budget of the organization.
Another advantage of these contacts was the sharing of information. The or-
ganization got access to information important for its current work and future
development and, in return, shared its expertise from the work with the grass-
roots which Sida and the embassy officials generally lacked. Needless to say,
socializing with them presented an opportunity to gain insight into the work of
the mentioned institutions.577

574 Weekly report April 17, November 18 1996.
575 Weekly report June 6, August 26, September 11, 12, October 2, 8, December 13, 16
576 Weekly report February 6, May 13, November 18 1996; Weekly report April 8, 9, 14,
June 6, September 6, 10, 12, 15, 20, 22, October 9, 11, 12, December 2, 13 1997.
While the quality of the relations between the representatives of Kvinna till Kvinna and the Sida personnel on duty in Bosnia shifted over the years, it is interesting to note the persistent strivings of the Swedish NGO to be on good terms with its donor. We can assume that the Sida staff’s opinion of Kvinna till Kvinna also at the higher level of the government agency. The amount of energy invested in acquiring good relations, is evidence that there was a great awareness about this at Kvinna till Kvinna: “It is a shame that X will leave because we have a very good connection”. 578 Accordingly, when one Sida employee was replaced with another, the organization found that: “One of the main tasks this month must be to establish a very good contact with him/her […] He/She is new and wants to see things – we must keep up!!!!!!”. 579 The push for regular and close contacts that can be discerned here need not be understood as only a desire to become a “part of the general picture of what is happening in Bosnia”, even though that aim was also articulated within the organization. 580 In the case of Kvinna till Kvinna, we need to go beyond viewing this as a simple cultivation of relations with its main donor for the sake of self-interest. In order to understand its intentions, it is important to consider two facts. Not only was Kvinna till Kvinna a new and therefore unknown actor in the aid sphere, but, with its focus on women’s contribution to peacebuilding, it was breaking new ground within it.

In addition to proposing meetings with the contact person at Sida, significant effort was put into making continuous invitations to visit activities supported by Kvinna till Kvinna. The willingness at Sida to do so shifted over the years. What we see is that invitations were, with the exception of the years 1996/1997 and 2006/2007, very often turned down: “[X] said that X was interested in coming along on visits [to local NGOs] (which Y and Z also said but never did…)”. 581 However, even during some of the periods when contacts were frequent and when Kvinna till Kvinna enjoyed a good reputation at Sida, the in-

terest for its projects is not described as overwhelming. Only after stubborn attempts to get a representative of Sida to visit some of the projects run by local NGOs did the visits realize.582

During the site visits, it was important that Sida got a good impression of the activities.583 Whether a visit was a success depended largely on the behavior of domestic NGOs. What kind of activities they showed and the capability of local activists to answer questions posed by Sida was important, and sometimes even discussed prior to the visit.584 After a visit to a few women’s centers in Mostar in April 1997 which had gone very well, Kvinna till Kvinna’s representative reported that the local activists had “answered correctly all the time!”585 It meant that they could motivate their focus on women, articulate the problems in their communities and show awareness about their own shortcomings as well as the need to become more self-sufficient. This success indirectly also proved to Sida that Kvinna till Kvinna was doing a good job in Bosnia. Therefore, when local NGOs took the liberty of directly contacting Sida, Kvinna till Kvinna reacted with annoyance and rebuke.586 “This indicates that the organization preferred to handle all the contacts with Sida and was clearly worried about the potential signals that such unsanctioned actions sent to its main donor. Direct connection between Sida and local NGOs, especially if the latter brought up problems, could signal a lack of control and thus endanger the reputation of Kvinna till Kvinna. While emphasizing contributions to the local ‘partners’, the need for Kvinna till Kvinna to prove its own capability to watch over the work they perform is obvious.587 Kvinna till Kvinna stressed its role as a dialogue partner to local NGOs, and at the same wished to assure its major donor that it had control of its projects.

Wanting to ‘do the right thing’ and make decisions that do not collide too much with Sida’s values and goals is obvious. Sometimes the input about the preferences of the donor came from Sida’s staff.588 In cases of close and friendly relations, which developed during both formal and informal meetings, it was not unusual for Kvinna till Kvinna to receive recommendations and advice

582 Weekly report August 26, 29, September 6, 10 1997.
583 Weekly report September 26 1996.
587 Application to Sida April 23 1997.
about suitable future activities, how to present the organization and what aspects to emphasize. For example, in 1997 women and women’s issues were particularly emphasized, because gender equality had just become a priority of Swedish development after a bill was passed by the Swedish Parliament in 1996.\textsuperscript{589} When the interests of the two organizations coincided, Kvinna till Kvinna itself realized the importance of underlining that: “One thing that we need to emphasize in the application is that we engage more in the RS, plus the fact that most towns are small. At one point […] Sida wrote that they prioritize projects in ‘rural areas’”.\textsuperscript{590} Kvinna till Kvinna had from the outset sought ways to work with women’s NGOs in the RS, but it was a tough process because of the animosity against the West that prevailed there and donors’ reluctance to support this part of Bosnia. In 1997, however, we see that Sida is positive towards aiding both entities, well in accordance with the goals of Kvinna till Kvinna to support women from all sides of the conflict.\textsuperscript{591}

What type of project that was of special interest to Sida and deserved a visit seems to have depended to a great degree on the personal interest and previous experiences of Sida’s staff. While the very first contact person, who left Bosnia already during 1996, was apparently generally fond of activities supported by Kvinna till Kvinna, we can see later on that those who came after were interested in some activities more than others.\textsuperscript{592} Kvinna till Kvinna, which practiced a holistic approach to women’s empowerment, was of the opinion that all the projects it supported complemented each other and were equally important.\textsuperscript{593} Also, the work approaches of different Sida representatives differed as did their understanding of development aid and how they perceived their own role.\textsuperscript{594} Reminders of the fact that the Kvinna till Kvinna/Sida relationship was a power relationship came in different shapes and at different occasions. Difficulties with booking meetings and visits to local NGOs can be interpreted as signs of inequality. Frustrations were felt within Kvinna till Kvinna, but were ventilated

\textsuperscript{589} Weekly report September 13 1997.


\textsuperscript{591} Weekly report September 23, October 2 1997.

\textsuperscript{592} Weekly report May 9, 13, 29 1996; Weekly report April 10, September 14, October 8 1997; Weekly report June 1 1998.

\textsuperscript{593} See Norander 2008, 131-148

\textsuperscript{594} Weekly report June 12 1998.
exclusively in internal reports. After a seminar organized by a domestic NGO, which Kvinna till Kvinna and Sida attended as visitors, and where the latter happened to take a more active role, Kvinna till Kvinna’s representative noticed:

She/He finds it a bit difficult to keep to her/his role as a Sida person and therefore not really the one who sought out these organizations and supported them. And that is very tough. The situation is further exacerbated by the fact that he/she still has some power with regard to us so you cannot say too much but should of course maintain a good relation with her/him. I try to remain fairly neutral towards him/her.

This was a person Kvinna till Kvinna would be on good terms with, because this person’s opinion could determine whether a project should be granted funds or not. At best, this was a person that could also put in a good word for Kvinna till Kvinna, which also happened at the end of the year when women’s centers in Mostar had almost run out of funds and were near closing down. It goes without saying that having “another person who already knows we are good” whether it was on the ground or in Stockholm, preferably both, was very advantageous for the Swedish NGO. However, as the quotation above implies, this person was also stepping into the territory of the intermediary. She tended to engage too much with local NGOs without realizing that identifying and supporting them was one of the things that made Kvinna till Kvinna necessary and which it used to market itself to donors.

Differing perspectives on aid, peace and women

When asked about their experiences of cooperation with Sida, the interviewees usually answered in a positive manner. Looking back on many years of cooperation with the Swedish aid agency, Mia Sund assessed it as generally satisfying. She had the opportunity to follow the development of this cooperation for many years. Taking into consideration that neither Kvinna till Kvinna nor Sida had

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595 Weekly report December 4, 12, 14 1997.
597 Weekly report December 4, 12, 14 1997.
599 See, for example, Ebrahim 2007, 147.
any previous experience of working in former Yugoslav area, Sund emphasized that it was a unique situation which often meant testing various working methods. In that sense, both organizations, as she put it, “developed together”.

The long tradition at Sida of channeling funds via popular movements was listed, by her colleague, as one of the advantages.

While Sida was well-experienced in channeling funds through NGOs, this by no means implies that it automatically and fully shared their perceptions of their mission in a certain setting. An inkling of differences in opinion regarding Kvinna till Kvinna’s mission in Bosnia emerged while interviewing Susanna Lennartsson who mentioned that much effort had been put into explaining the purpose with and the importance of the work of the organization. As a former representative in Bosnia, she was, along with her colleagues on the ground, often the first one to detect perceptions about Kvinna till Kvinna that did not correspond to their own. They were also the ones, who through contacts with Sida’s personnel in Sarajevo, actively worked on changing these perceptions. What Lennartsson told me in 2009 is in line with the information obtained from written sources. “[I] do not know if we have the same thoughts regarding development aid and Kvinna till Kvinna’s role”, a field representative wrote to her colleagues at the Stockholm office in 1998 after a meeting with Sida.

It is important to keep in mind that Kvinna till Kvinna was breaking new ground as it entered the field of aid work in the 1990s. The organization had a different perspective on peace and women’s roles in achieving it, relying on ideas that have been articulated within the women’s peace movements for over a century. While it is a fact that during the last two decades a great deal has happened regarding the recognition of women’s precarious situation in war and conflict and women’s potential as peacebuilders, at the time when Kvinna till Kvinna was formed this was, not least in development, a rather new way of thinking. Certainly, governments had since the UN Decade for women (1975-1985) been committing to make development more women-friendly, but research done during the UN Decade showed that the commitment was mostly declarative as aid agencies such as Sida rarely managed to implement what was inscribed in their programs.

600 “växt tillsammans” Interview with Mia Sund, July 2 2009.
601 Interview with Susanna Lennartsson, July 2 2009.
602 Interview with Susanna Lennartsson, July 2 2009.
604 Hannan Anderson 1984.
not necessarily mean understanding their experiences, needs and the context they lived in. Although Scandinavian aid agencies count as the most progressive ones, by the early 1990s a gender-oriented approach to women’s development was still largely missing.605

Remembering twenty years of cooperation with Sida, Lennartsson admitted that

it took a very long time to educate Sida to support women’s organizations in this way, [convey] that it is also a part of peace work […] but that is something we often have to struggle with that people cannot grasp [the connection] and it is a little strange because…well, the Swedish women’s movement basically started with women’s health care issues, children’s health care issues since they are somehow essential for people to be able to take active part in society.606

Throughout the 1990s, Kvinna till Kvinna was perceived as a humanitarian organization by Sida. This view collided with the belief of the organization itself that it was doing long-term aid work. The intention of health projects realized during the immediate postwar years was not just to provide help in the form of smear tests or therapy, but also to strengthen and prepare local women through continuous education for the laborious process of building up a postwar society.607 Because of the target group they worked with, Kvinna till Kvinna was also usually understood as dealing exclusively with areas such as health, “and we tried to say that we would like for our work to be categorized as democracy work because we thought that […] everything we did was there”.608 Towards the end of the 1990s, Sida also started giving attention to projects dealing with increasing political representation of women, awakening hopes at Kvinna till Kvinna that “finally we are not only psychosocial!!!!!”.609

605 See, for example, Parpart 1993, 447-451.

606 “det tog väldigt lång tid att utbilda Sida i att stödja kvinnoorganisationer på det här sättet, att det också är en del i fredsarbete […] det är något som vi ofta får slåss med, att man inte ser…och det är lite konstigt eftersom…ja men, svensk kvinnorörelse i stort började med frågor kring kvinnohälsövård, barnhälsovård därför att det är på något vis A och O för att man ska kunna komma ut i samhället.” Interview with Susanna Lennartsson, July 2 2009.


608 “Och vi försökte säga att vi låg gärna på demokrati eftersom vi tyckte att […] allt vi gjorde var där.” Interview with Susanna Lennatsson, July 2 2009.

Picture 7: The mobile gynecology clinic, supported by Kvinna till Kvinna, on the road in central Bosnia.
While the labelling as “psychosocial” slowly disappeared, what it manifested was a view on women primarily as victims. Sida’s personnel struggled with grasping how the activities the Swedish NGO supported actually led to reconciliation and peacebuilding. In a harsh political environment, few of the supported local NGOs openly declared that they did peace work. Their outwardly neutral activities stimulated cross-ethnic meetings, but the organizations missed, as the independent evaluators hired by Sida concluded in 2006, to integrate a conflict analysis into their reporting to the Swedish aid agency. So, a more narrow view of peace work as something necessarily publicly displayed and consisting of more traditional peace activities remained at Sida well into the 2000’s. A significant sign of the need to motivate the work of the foundation is Kvinna till Kvinna’s report To make room for changes – Peace strategies from women’s organisations in Bosnia and Herzegovina published in 2006, “because we once again felt that we needed to show that it is peace work and democracy work that we deal with”. The report explains that health-oriented activities and meeting places for women, which “also deal with matters of hatred and distrust between the ethnic groups”, were about “basic peacebuilding”.

According to the political scientist Daniel Berlin, it is hard to measure how much NGOs influence state actors like Sida. The potential influence occurs on different levels and can, for example, be visible in the content of this actor’s agenda and its priorities. It is, then, interesting to note the emphasis that Sida has come to put on strengthening women in conflict-ridden areas in their role as peace actors. While, little attention is given to women’s situation in general, as the political scientist Ann-Catrin Andersson observed in the country strategy for West Bank and Gaza, their potential as peacebuilders is recognized. This indicates that when Kvinna till Kvinna as the implementing partner focused exclusively on the connection between women and peace, it influenced Sida’s thinking around the issue. As we have seen, Kvinna till Kvinna did so by using so-called soft methods such as convincing and arguing to achieve the desired result. It happened through encounters between the representatives of the

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612 “för att vi ånyo kände […] att vi behövde visa att det är fredsarbete och demokratiar- bete som vi håller på med” Interview with Susanna Lennatsson, July 2 2009.
613 Thomasson 2006, 8.
615 Andersson 2009, 75.
616 For more on hard and soft methods NGOs use see Berlin 2007, 88-90.
two organizations in informal and formal settings, but also, as one interviewee mentioned, through a degree of staff circulation between them.\textsuperscript{617}

This indicates that when Kvinna till Kvinna, as the implementing partner, focused exclusively on the connection between women and peace. It influenced Sida’s thinking regarding the issue. As we have seen, Kvinna till Kvinna did so by using so-called soft methods, such as convincing and arguing to achieve the

Another difference between Kvinna till Kvinna as a new and vigorous actor dedicated to supporting the building of a lasting peace and an experienced aid agency like Sida seems to have been the time frame regarding both how long such a process should be aided, especially via an intermediary, and how fast the results of aid efforts should be possible to see. The philosophy of Kvinna till Kvinna to be of service to local NGOs until they get stronger influenced its thinking about how long it should be present in Bosnia and the ways it perceived the length of its so-called phasing-out period. Led by other parameters, the thinking at Sida was that this period was too long.\textsuperscript{618} Clearly, there were divergent views on how long an intermediary organization such as Kvinna till Kvinna was needed in the area. Already in 2000, we see tendencies at Sida to question the work and achievements of the Swedish foundation prompting its field representatives to conclude that “it does not feel very reassuring for the future”.\textsuperscript{619} Needless to say, the organization was experiencing the rules of the development field which demand fast and measurable results. Its reports were criticized for being too descriptive, lacking information on the development of local NGOs and achieved goals in general.\textsuperscript{620} In fact, the evaluation done in 2006 found that “KtK is not very good at showing what it has actually achieved”.\textsuperscript{621}

Indications that Sida had started to consider redirecting some of its support from the grassroots towards state institutions can be observed already at the beginning of 2001.\textsuperscript{622} Moreover, discussions about direct cooperation between Sida and domestic NGOs can be noticed, an idea had it been realized would practically have made intermediaries redundant:

\textsuperscript{617} Interview with Kari Svensson, March 15 2011.
\textsuperscript{618} Weekly report November 21 2000.
\textsuperscript{619} “det känns ju inte särskilt betryggande inför framtiden” Weekly report April 27 2000.
\textsuperscript{622} Weekly report January 30 2001.
How can we make a bid that is attractive from an economic point of view, when we expect that a great part of the results cannot be discerned in many years? How can we show that a large part of our work aims for long-term and lasting change? To allow aid increasingly to imitate the market in general, will simply lead to more short-term thinking where easily measured goals will be rewarded. I think there is a risk that the work will be done slovenly.623

Eventually, Sida did reduce the funds earlier donated to the grassroots, which was, as mentioned previously, felt by Kvinna till Kvinna and its ‘partners’ from 2007 and on. Also, discussions about completely ending the channeling of funds via intermediaries continued, all in the search of most effective ways to push for faster and more visible progress in Bosnia. In order to survive and continue providing support to its local NGOs, we see that Kvinna till Kvinna responded and successively adapted to ‘the rules of the game’ in aid work. From the early 2000s there is more focus on reporting results, often stressing quantity.624 At the same time, the organization worked on developing models in order to the measure impact of its work.625 However, it remained a critic of “short-term ways in which many democracy and peace activities are carried out by the international community”.626

A closer cooperation?
So far the focus has mostly been on problematic features manifested during encounters between the two Sarajevo offices. However, there are clear indications that Kvinna till Kvinna enjoyed a good reputation at Sida for the most part of the time. From the initial years of the Swedish organization in Bosnia, it was considered to have the best information about the situation in the country.627 Due to this, but perhaps also due to the valuable lobby work of its representative, Kvinna till Kvinna was granted access to events when prominent guests

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624 Final report to Sida 2002.

625 Annual request to Sida 2004; Final report to Sida 2005.

626 Thomasson 2006, 7.

from Sweden visited Bosnia.\textsuperscript{628} Generally, Kvinna till Kvinna seems to have been the implementing partner that Sida considered worth showing to visiting delegations from Sweden, which also often visited local NGOs supported by Kvinna till Kvinna.\textsuperscript{629}

While conditionality based on funds certainly plays role in relationships between NGOs and donors, information also seems to hold a pivotal role in the exchanges between the two. As the research of Alnoor Ebrahim suggests, the two parties have “strongly inter-dependent relations – and they are constantly engaged in struggles for control over and access to financial and symbolic resources”.\textsuperscript{630} Leaning on Pierre Bourdieu, Ebrahim sees information as an important part in gaining symbolic capital such as status, prestige and reputation. Simply put, funds get exchanged for information, which, in turn, provides the funder with a certain reputation.\textsuperscript{631} So, while Sida provided Kvinna till Kvinna with funding, the latter “has in the Western Balkans especially, but also in some other places, been turned into an alibi that one [Sida] does something related to gender”.\textsuperscript{632} Needless to say, the more successful an NGO is, the more credit for its success can a funder take to build a good reputation for itself. The same practice of exchanging funds for information happened between Kvinna till Kvinna and the local NGOs. However, intermediaries can be seen as having the most difficult role in this whole process as they are dependent on how well they balance between the other two actors.

We have seen that Kvinna till Kvinna strived for frequent meetings with its contact persons at Sida and that it was not always met with sympathy. In addition to aims to establish itself as Sida’s unquestionable partner in Bosnia, it is obvious that Kvinna till Kvinna also sought to awaken a greater interest for local NGOs. The numerous international actors in the country practically did not count on local women as actors. As Kvinna till Kvinna writes in one of its reports, the international community constantly bypassed them.\textsuperscript{633} The Swedish foundation worked on getting Bosnian women’s groups involved in meetings

\textsuperscript{628} Weekly report August 23 1997.
\textsuperscript{629} Weekly report September 8, 23, October 2 1997; Weekly report March 9 2004.
\textsuperscript{630} Ebrahim 2007, 143.
\textsuperscript{631} Ebrahim 2007, 143-145.
\textsuperscript{632} “Vi har ju på Västra Balkan speciellt, men också på en del andra ställen, så har vi ju ibland blivit alibi att man gör något med gender.” Interview with Susanna Lennartsson, July 2 2009.
\textsuperscript{633} Thomasson 2006, 7.
organized by Sida. However, even here there seems to have been limited interest in what they had to say:

Someone looked the other way, sent text messages or talked with the person sitting next to them or at best looked at W [activist from a local NGO] with a disinterested gaze. [...] Moreover, and unfortunately, it seemed as though X [Sida personnel] and Y from the Embassy did not take Z [local NGO] as seriously as they did IOM, KtK and OSCE. When the latter spoke there was a great deal of note-taking but when W said something they just listened. I did my best to back up what W and Z said.634

While it persisted in lobbying international actors, and in particular Sida, Kvinna till Kvinna did not seem to expect much change in their attitude.635 However, starting in the first half of 2006 different signals came from Sida that opened up a possibility for closer cooperation. As written sources inform us, the change occurred at the time when there was a transfer of staff at Sida’s office in Sarajevo. The new Sida person invited Kvinna till Kvinna to aid Sida in the process of promoting cooperation between local NGOs and the Bosnian state Gender Agency. After a period of tensions between the two Sarajevo offices, the invitation was unexpected: “I was speechless after the call, such good news!”636

It soon proved that this invitation was not accidental. The new Sida representative viewed local women’s NGOs as important actors that should have access to all fora where the present and the future of their country was discussed. What was new was that the person did what many international actors neglected, namely shared information about important events that the person as the representative of Sida had but local NGOs did not, arranged encounters between them and donors, and suggested women’s NGOs to the latter when they needed a partner.637 Furthermore, there was a will to meet with local activists and engage in a dialogue with them.638 From the perspective of Kvinna till Kvinna, this was the most obvious, if not only, example when the potential of


635 Weekly report May 12 2006.


local women’s NGOs was truly realized by the Swedish aid agency and conveyed to both domestic authorities and other international actors. Oral sources say nothing about the kind of good cooperation moments as the one described above, which leads to the conclusion that they were rare. With a few exceptions, most of the interviewees briefly commented on the cooperation and relations with Sida demonstrating an understandable hesitation about speaking of this and possibly risking to bite the hand that feeds the organization. However, an evaluation of Sida’s support to civil society in the Western Balkans from 2010 declared that Sida and the Swedish embassies in the region “could make better use of FOs [Framework Organizations] and their networks and experiences” because that “could make them recognise the potential for dialogue and joint advocacy work in relation to key stakeholders”.640

Due to a changed attitude at Sida in Bosnia, which created an opportunity for Kvinna till Kvinnna to influence its donor, a closer cooperation was possible during 2006 and 2007. A successful example of this cooperation was joint lobbying of foreign donors to demand of the Gender Agency as a state-level institution to give access to local NGOs to the first Bosnian Gender Action Plan (GAP) and allow them to comment on it. This process had several steps, from arranging the meetings between local activists and foreign donors who were to finance the implementation of the GAP to countering the unwillingness of the Gender Agency to let the civil society actors in.641 It can be assumed that had not this cooperation occurred, local women’s groups would probably been excluded from this important process.

Concluding remarks

As Eva Zillén said in a speech, the women who founded Kvinna till Kvinnna had been “peace activists for a long time […] [but were] new in the 'aid-business'”.642 In other words, the organization entered an unknown territory with its own rules. This chapter has been about placing Kvinna till Kvinnna in the context of Swedish development work. The history of Swedish development aid has been significantly influenced by popular movements and permeated by thoughts about international solidarity with an emphasis on delivering aid on the terms

642 Zillén 1997, 36.
of the recipient. From the 1990s and on, a politicization of the development sphere has occurred internationally. Since then, aid has been widely used in conflict resolution and the transformation of conflict-affected countries. Donors such as Sida, which during the same period became more closely tied to The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, are more inclined to dictate the terms of the cooperation.

By 1995 Kvinna till Kvinna had developed into a somewhat untraditional, women-oriented aid organization with a peace perspective. In this chapter, the cooperation with Sida has been studied from the perspective of the Swedish NGO. This cooperation brought both unique possibilities and challenges, thus both enabling Kvinna till Kvinna’s mission to support women’s peacebuilding in Bosnia and conditioning it. Empirical findings show that the Swedish NGO actively sought to develop a close relationship with its donor by using insider strategies and soft methods. Pushing for frequent encounters between the two Sarajevo offices and invitations to site visits have been interpreted as attempts to create an arena for influence over Sida. Throughout the period examined, we see Kvinna till Kvinna striving to strengthen its position as implementing partner, but we can also detect a genuine intention to promote local women’s NGOs as an important peacebuilding factor.

We learn that the two actors had differing perspectives on aid, peace work and women. As a national aid agency obliged to justify the donations made, Sida showed tendencies of demanding measurable results faster than Kvinna till Kvinna was able to provide them, since it was devoted to long-term efforts of a kind difficult to measure. As civil society did not yield the desired results fast enough, with the start of the second postwar decade some of the support previously given to it was redirected towards state institutions. Budget cuts also meant fewer staff at the Sarajevo office. There is a nearly total silence about the fact that having field representatives from Sweden was extremely expensive, which seems to have been an issue to Sida. Only one interviewee critically reflected on this, emphasizing that it is unreasonable that 40 percent of the aid to Bosnia goes back to Sweden. In some scholarship from the region, Kvinna till Kvinna is mentioned as an example of a foreign intermediary which spends money intended for the development of civil society in Bosnia.643

At Sida, Kvinna till Kvinna was, perhaps due to the fact that it worked with women’s groups performing types of activities not usually seen as peace work, for a long time seen as an organization engaged in humanitarian issues and women’s health rather than democracy and peace. With its holistic view on

643 Sali-Terzić 2001, 158.
women’s empowerment and strong focus on women as peace actors, however, the Swedish NGO was indeed breaking new ground in the field of development. Via the activities it supported, the organization introduced a broader understanding of peace work. Even though Kvinna till Kvinna itself describes ‘educating Sida’ as a long and quite thorny path, traces of influence are visible, for example in the fact that Sida nowadays emphasizes the importance of strengthening women in their role as peacebuilders.

The quality of the relations created on the ground shifted over the years and were to a great degree dependent on the attitude of individual persons who served as Sida officials in Bosnia. Instances of truly satisfying cooperation were, from the perspective of Kvinna till Kvinna, rare and appear most clearly during 2006 and 2007, when the two actors jointly facilitated communication between local activists, donors and Bosnian authorities. However, it is not difficult to observe a general appreciation of Kvinna till Kvinna at Sida as it was often showed off to delegations from Sweden. This is a good example of the interdependence between the two. Sida exchanged funds for information and reputation that it could gain from the success of the Swedish NGO. Although the organizations were interdependent, it was nonetheless a power relationship in which Kvinna till Kvinna was the one in need to prove itself worthy of Sida’s support. The ways in which conditions set by its main donor reflected on Kvinna till Kvinna’s work and relations with local NGOs will be illuminated in the remaining empirical chapters.
CHAPTER SEVEN

Between benevolence and control

From late 1995, aided by Sida grants, Kvinna till Kvinna increased its presence in Bosnia. Staying for longer periods of time there opened up possibilities for regular and more intense contacts with domestic women’s NGOs. It also meant a greater insight into their activities and the context in which they worked. The previous two chapters provided a glimpse of the beginnings of the Swedish-Bosnian encounter, also outlining some potential difficulties awaiting in the future, and highlighted Kvinna till Kvinna’s relationship with the Swedish aid agency Sida. With this chapter, we turn to critical analysis of the engagement of the Swedish foundation in Bosnia through a local ownership lens.

Found in both development and peacebuilding, the core idea of local ownership, as with a number of other concepts like partnership and empowerment, is to solve the seemingly never-ceasing issue of power imbalance in encounters between external and domestic actors. While it is nowadays a natural part of the peacebuilding discourse, local ownership remains a vaguely defined concept difficult to implement in practice, but nonetheless a discursively important legitimizing tool of peace missions. Critics say that this vagueness serves the purpose of avoiding accountability for international actors and transferring responsibility to host populations, without allocating the autonomy and control to the latter as it might imply. It is wise to avoid idealizing the discourse of local ownership, but we should also beware of dismissing it as empty rhetoric. Perhaps it is more productive, as Timothy Donais argues, to focus on nuancing our understanding of the interaction between external and domestic actors in post-conflict settings and studying tensions between external imposition and local ownership.

Generally, little attention has so far been devoted to the practice of local ownership. Due to the strong involvement of the IC, Bosnia has indeed been referred to as “a textbook example of this gap between rhetoric and practice”. Looking at an external organization with ambitions to pursue peacebuilding from below in this postwar setting can give deepened insights about the complexity of this endeavor, especially when also taking account to the motivations

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644 Wilén 2009.
645 See, for example, Hughes and Pupavac 2005; Dahl 2008; Wilén 2009.
646 Donais 2012, 2.
647 Donais 2012, 1.
and views of domestic actors. A consideration of presumed interdependency in the relation between the two parties also demands illuminating power relations from different angles. With a focus on activities supported by Kvinna till Kvinna, my intention is not to measure the degree of local ownership allowed by the Swedish foundation, but to point to dilemmas related to local ownership in a peacebuilding context. As far as possible, I strive to approach this issue unconditionally thus making it a subject of empirical investigation. The following questions have been formulated for this purpose: What space for action did domestic women’s NGOs have regarding choice of activities? What norms can be discerned in the expectations of the Swedish foundation? How did the relationship between Kvinna till Kvinna and Bosnian NGOs evolve over time? What power dynamic can be discerned in the encounter?

**Benevolent ‘partner’ with preferences**

In the mid-1990s, the concept of partnership became the rhetorical alternative to the previously well-established idea of solidarity in Swedish aid discourse, counted as outdated with the advent of neoliberalism. Consistent with this development, sources produced for public use and reports written for Sida reveal that Kvinna till Kvinna from the early stages of its increased involvement in Bosnia referred to domestic women’s groups as its partners who optimistically continued “to work in the right direction”. After the first international conference that took place in Sarajevo in 1996, Kvinna till Kvinna was even more certain that it had found “the right partners in the region”. Their attendance at the conference was interpreted and presented as readiness to “share experiences and learn from each other’s work”, which had made the Swedish organization “very proud to count them as our friends!” Informative texts intended for the public do not only contain features of ‘romanticizing the local’, but also give the impression that Kvinna till Kvinna provided unconditional support. True, the benevolence of the organization is obvious, and a simple proof of this is the dedication to create much appreciated meeting spaces for women across Bosnia. While stressing that activities were run by local NGOs, thus implying minimal involvement in their work, internal sources show that

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649 “att arbeta i rätt riktning” Newsletter no. 2, March 1996.


651 “utbyta erfarenheter och ta lärdom av varandras arbete”, ”mycket stolta över att kunna räkna dem till våra vänner!” Newsletter no. 4, August 1996.
the organization had quite a clear vision of what type of activities was to be arranged at supported women’s centers.

Domestic NGOs that wanted support from Kvinna till Kvinna were, among other things, judged by their ability to reach large numbers of women, especially refugees. There are indications that Sida in particular had quite explicit requirements that activities performed must benefit a large number of women. This emphasis on quantity collided with Kvinna till Kvinna’s views on constructive gatherings of women. Massive seminars were, for instance, not seen as suitable for discussing important issues. Women’s centers without structured activities, functioning as places where women, often bringing their children along, would come to socialize were not seen as fully meaningful. While this was a space where women could engage in conversations about their everyday lives, the idea was to offer more in terms of structure and support. How long it was acceptable for a women’s center to serve primarily as a meeting place depended on the severity of the situation in that specific locality. In deeply segregated places, just meeting was an acceptable goal, but in other places, this was considered outdated a few years after the war.

Psychosocial help was combined with education. Early on, the centers had started with courses in sewing, knitting and hairdressing. Reading about these activities, the impression is that they were quite popular among local women. In some cases, they even led to employment. However, at Kvinna till Kvinna these types of activities were considered ‘a necessary evil’. While it is evident that the organization initially supported “almost anything that would get the women out of their home”, already in 1996 the representative on the ground sent the message to Sweden that the centers in Mostar “should invest less in yarn and more education”. Desirable alternatives to handicraft, a phase that

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656 Quarterly report to Sida January-March 1996.
658 “nästan vad som helst som får kvinnorna att gå hemifrån” Interview with Mia Sund, July 2 2009.
659 “borde satsa på mindre garn och mer utbildning” Weekly report April 17 1996.
women’s centers needed to grow out of, were, for example, teaching young women how to work at a radio station, or about things like ecology and poetry. In other words, a steady development of the activities offered at the centers was expected.

Project proposals sent in during the first postwar years, from in rule newly formed local NGOs, reveal that they were taking every opportunity to bring about a normalization of life. Except hairdressing, there were also ideas about fitness centers, courses in aerobics, schools for models and beauty salons. Clearly, they had recognized the donor’s focus on the advancement of women’s living conditions, but had not yet figured out the preferred direction of it. So, we find an NGO stating that a course in aerobics “promotes women’s development”. Another one wrote that by “attending […] counselling office for body and face care women will care much about their look, their self-confidence will be stronger”. While the Swedish NGO “would not even touch this project with a ten-foot pole”, it is interesting to note that this very NGO eventually became one of Kvinna till Kvinna’s well-appreciated ‘partners’ and a significant actor for reconciliation in a particularly nationalist belt of Bosnia.

By the end of the 1990s, Kvinna till Kvinna was turning down activities it deemed lacked emancipatory potential even when they came from NGOs in parts of the country that it found of special interest. Local NGOs had also learned to adjust better to the preferences of donors, which is common in post-conflict, impoverished settings where the civil sector usually depends on donor funds. Not seldom, domestic NGOs are forced to come up with creative solutions to the dilemma of pleasing both women in their community and the donor. Consider the following coming from an NGO situated in eastern Bosnia:

I could not keep myself from laughing when I heard it and they also laughed because they said they had hoped never to have to go back to what they had

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666 See, for example, Andersson 2009, 77.
many years ago. But the difference this time would be that the women who receive training will also be trained in women’s rights.\textsuperscript{667}

Hearing about a project proposal to give a course in hairdressing surprised Kvinna till Kvinna’s field representative. Her reaction prompted the NGO women to reassure her hastily that a segment about women’s rights would be added. This is an example of strategic thinking, not just in relation to the donor, but also in terms of how to reach and bring together women from Serb and Bosniak villages. Lack of trust between the groups was a big problem, especially in that part of the country marked by severe and massive war crimes, and the NGO searched for ways to bridge differences created during the war. Therefore, it responded to the potential interests of local women, not many of whom would come to a seminar on women’s rights.

Kvinna till Kvinna seems to have struggled to understand some other strategies used by local NGOs. An NGO used interviews with famous women from the region and even put a horoscope function on its website in order to attract local women attention. The field representatives of Kvinna till Kvinna regarded these strategies as shallow, which implies unfamiliarity with the cultural context and even more so a predetermined way in which a women’s organization should think and act.\textsuperscript{668}

After all, the Swedish foundation was in Bosnia to support NGOs which wanted to “further the role of women in democracy-building, to increase gender equality, and to further human rights”.\textsuperscript{669} We have seen that it was legitimate to engage in projects focused on meeting places, psychosocial treatment and vocational training, but domestic NGOs were expected to develop and pursue activities with more political weight. Actually, the Swedish foundation saw its investment in women’s health, education and meetings as preparing ground for more engagement in political issues. As Thomas Carothers writes, Western donors have tended to prioritize advocacy NGOs, viewing them as the true civil society. These NGOs, in particular, were believed to have an important role in the democratization of post-socialist and post-conflict societies by representing

\textsuperscript{667} “Jag kunde inte hålla mig för skratt när jag hörde det och de skrattade gott de också för de menade att de hade hoppats att aldrig behöva gå tillbaka till det som de haft för många år sedan. Men skillnaden denna gång skulle alltså vara att kvinnorna som får utbildningen också ska bli utbildade i kvinnors rättigheter” Weekly report August 15 2003.

\textsuperscript{668} Weekly report April 27 1999.

\textsuperscript{669} Progress report 1997, 11.
citizens’ interests and demanding accountability from the state. With time, the vast majority of Kvinna till Kvinna’s ‘partners’ started to engage in advocacy work, but not without resistance:

And maybe X [local activist] is right that their strength lies in performing basic work more than being charismatic and powerful lobbyists, which is obviously important for us as well to keep in mind. That is, that people and organizations can have somewhat different roles. It is clear that it is easier for us to get a handle on activities that we can understand, such as non-legal and explicitly public lobbying.

There were, of course, Sida’s requirements on the development of local organizations into professionalized NGOs and their visibility in public. However, there is no doubt that Kvinna till Kvinna itself with its background in the Western peace movement preferred to see Bosnian NGOs do advocacy work which included influencing authorities and running public campaigns. The quote above demonstrates an acknowledgement of difference by the Swedish NGO and even shows a glimpse of self-reflection on its part. As much as it implies how decisive donor’s ability, and willingness to understand domestic NGOs point of view (about what they should do and how) can be, it also shows that open conversation about the issue was possible.

The problem with men and grieving mothers
Despite benevolence and glimpses of understanding in relation to difference, we see that Kvinna till Kvinna also had specific opinions about eligible participants in activities supported by the foundation. Two groups, in particular, were seen as problematic. One of them was men, often young men, who wanted access to some of the activities offered at women’s centers. After repeated cases of young men attending computing courses in Mostar, the subject merited discussion.

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672 Annual request to Sida 2001; Quarterly report to Sida April-August 2003.
The opinion of the Swedish foundation was that the centers should be reserved for women who, unlike men, did not have as many meeting places.673

There was a concern that men’s presence at the centers would distract women away from their own training as “most of time and energy would certainly in any case be spent on flirting”.674 Judging from the fact that several centers in the Mostar area allowed men to take part in computing courses throughout the second half of the 1990s, we can assume that denying young men to participate was not a matter of course for local activists. From their perspective, these were youngsters living at the outskirts of Mostar, where there was not much to do for young people in general.675 An evaluation done for Kvinna till Kvinna by a woman from the region revealed that also female visitors had difficulties grasping why young men were not allowed to come to the centers.676 While Kvinna till Kvinna pondered how to “bring this up without looking like man-haters”,677 the official explanation was that the pressure was coming from families in the community and local authorities.678

Mostar was, however, not the only place where men were allowed to attend activities. A ‘partner’ NGO in Zenica, specialized in providing legal aid, accepted some male clients and were reminded that “we support WOMEN’S ACTIVITIES and that is something they must not lose sight of”.679 Others let men use their fitness center, and considered hiring male lecturers and lawyers.680 The answer from Kvinna till Kvinna, having to assure Sida that this was “a limited

673 Weekly report April 17, September 26, October 1 1996. In May 1996 Kvinna till Kvinna had a discussion with a Sida staff about possible centers for men, but Sida was afraid that it could be perceived as a political act. See Weekly report May 29 1996. Statements given to the Swedish media a year later indicate that any intention, if there ever was one, at Kvinna till Kvinna related to helping men in Bosnia was abandoned. See Göteborgs-Posten January 14 1997; Nya Dagen August 19 1997.
674 “den mesta av tiden och energin gick åt att flirta i alla fall” Weekly report October 1 1996.
676 Weekly report October 2 2000.
problem”, was to keep looking for suitable women who could do the same job.

Putting the well-meaning aim to secure space for women aside, the practice of banning all men from supported activities displays an ‘Othering’ of men, thus marking men as potential perpetrators, which is consistent with a general invisibility of male war victimization as well as the representation of men in the balkanist discourse. However, it also constructs women as helpless victims. In chapter five, we have seen that women in Bosnia were well aware of and disliked this image. Here, the reactions of local NGOs to remarks by Kvinna till Kvinna show that while they gladly engaged in aiding women, they did not necessarily see the suffering of women as worthier of support than that of men. Having experienced the war marked by significant victimization of men on the basis of their gender as well as ethnicity, and the worsened socio-economic situation during the ‘transition’, they had obvious difficulties understanding why men would not be eligible participants in their activities. This corresponds to some research from the former Yugoslav region, which challenges simplified dichotomous approaches, and argues that, generally speaking, both women and men living at the semiperiphery have been negatively affected by the ‘transition’. It also contends that many men were victims of the whole situation in the area while some women profited from it.

The ‘men problem’ also exposes a classical dilemma that has been a focus of feminist debates, namely whether inequality on the basis of gender precedes other power categories. Non-Western feminists have diligently confuted such suggestions, often stating that oppression on other grounds brings them closer to non-Western men than women in the West. While the latter have often tended to organize separately from men, women in the Third World as well as in Eastern Europe have been more prone to make coalitions with men, seeing them, as Kornelia Slavova expresses it, as “comrades in struggle”. It is then interesting to know that the main point of disagreement between Italian feminists and their counterparts in Yugoslavia at the famous feminist conference

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684 See, for example, Drezgić and Žarkov 2005; Blagojević 2009.
685 See, for example, hooks 1984, Blagojević 2009.
686 Slavova 2006, 255.
held in 1978 in Belgrade was about cooperation with men.\textsuperscript{687} Although the animosity of the communist regime towards treating women’s issues separately should not be dismissed as irrelevant in this context, the wave of women’s activism that happened in Yugoslavia during the Second World War signifies a desire to serve not just women, but the whole society.

Considering their dependence on foreign donors, the freedom of women’s NGOs created in Bosnia after the war in the 1990s to decide whom to serve has been limited. However, the fact that the ‘men problem’ emerged sporadically well into the 2000s implies on the one hand that Kvinna till Kvinna approached the problem carefully, not pushing too hard for a solution, and on the other hand that local NGOs often turned a deaf ear to whatever requests were made for solution to the problem. Ten years after this problem first arose, an awareness among domestic NGOs about the need to consult with the donor could be observed. From then on the problem does not appear in the sources material, which leads to a conclusion that local NGOs either learned to comply with the donor’s requests or hid their non-compliance well. It is noteworthy, though, that by the time I commenced interviewing them in 2009, their identity as exclusively women’s organizations was unquestionable.

The second group of problematic visitors was a group of mothers who had lost their sons during the war. They had been coming to a women’s center in Mostar for a couple of years, did handicraft and socialized with each other. The group had been problematic for Kvinna till Kvinna from the very beginning as they were against cross-ethnic meetings and had a tendency to dwell on the past. By 1996 their attitude had not changed and they were still negative towards non-Croats working at the center. As Kvinna till Kvinna saw it, the grieving mothers “had been coddled too long” and should not be allowed to use the resources of the center.\textsuperscript{688} “The subject was brought up and discussed with the leader of the center at a couple of occasions during 1996, one time even during a Sida visit. The ideas presented both by Kvinna to Kvinna and by Sida were listened to, but no solution was reached.”\textsuperscript{689} Two years later after another site-visit, the Sida person was “very disturbed” by this group and demanded that the problem be solved:

Perhaps it was not the smartest move to bring a Sida delegation there but they [local NGO] did anyway. X [Sida personnel] claimed that this group has been

\textsuperscript{687} Bonfiglioli 2008.  
\textsuperscript{688} “daltat för mycket med dem” Weekly report September 27 1996.  
\textsuperscript{689} Weekly report May 30, September 27 1996.
describe them as a kind and nice group which grieved a lot, but I cannot really understand that – this group has never been kind and good-natured. Now she says that it is simply impossible to use Sida money for this kind of nationalist group [...] and that there must be a strategy for how to remove them.690

While worries about repercussions from Sida should not be underestimated, there is no doubt that Kvinna till Kvinna also favored exclusion of this particular group. To the Swedish NGO, the grieving mothers represented an obstacle to peacebuilding in Bosnia. They were intolerant of other ethnicities and openly displayed nationalist feelings. Their grief symbolized weakness, a trait that is, as researchers have noted, often deeply despised.691 Vulnerability and weakness, the very impetus for solidarity in the initial stages of the Swedish-Bosnian encounter, very soon became problematic. Parallel to the desire to support peacebuilding, which required both the ability to act as well as an openness towards others, a contempt for weakness appears. So, for example, at a time when the war had just ended, not feeling sorry for oneself and not getting stuck in a victim role was seen as a virtue.692 Negative comments about other ethnic groups and nationalist sentiments expressed openly were observed with caution.693

As touched upon in chapter five, which covers the first two years of Kvinna till Kvinna’s activity in Bosnia, nationalism and communism were perceived early on as major threats to a peaceful newly created Bosnian state. In liberal peacebuilding, as discussed earlier, NGOs are seen as a driving force when it comes to transforming post-socialist and post-conflict countries into liberal democracies, a path that has not proved to be optional. The ideal local actor in the eyes of Kvinna till Kvinna cherished multiethnicity, welcomed liberal values and was future-oriented. It is apparent that the organization entered the encounter with its Bosnian ‘partners’ with this ideal in mind. Tensions in this post-war society were acknowledged, but Kvinna till Kvinna struggled with comprehending why local activists could not see things more objectively and why they


691 See, for example, Ofstad 1987. See also Stenqvist 2005.

692 Weekly report September 17 1996; Report from the trip to Bosnia-Herzegovina/Croatia July 3-17 1996.

693 Weekly report January 20, February 2 April 10, May 16, 17, 30, September 27 1996.
had animosity towards the other sides of the conflict.\textsuperscript{694} Frequent meetings once
the presence on the ground was increased did not only show that the war an-
tagonomisms were hard to overcome, but also that the new situation brought by
the ‘transition’ was not necessarily eagerly embraced.

As in other similar contexts, mourning the prewar lifestyle was not unusual. In
daily contact with Bosnian NGO women, Kvinna till Kvinna’s field repre-
sentative was exposed to a fair share of complaints about the current living sit-
uation.\textsuperscript{695} Listening to them was hard and trying: “Of course I understand that
it is difficult, but there are not many of my friends who can afford to buy an
apartment, a car or a summer house either, and we have not had any wars
lately”.\textsuperscript{696} Certainly, difficult working conditions and limited progress in this
postwar setting were by 1997, when this was written, wearing down on the rep-
resentative who had held this position since 1995. This might be a way to un-
derstand the evident absence here of an open attitude, a willingness to listen
actively and even to put oneself ‘in the shoes of the Other’, pivotal in culture
encounters. However, the quotation above also exposes an assumption that fi-
nancial hardship was a natural thing in postwar transitional countries, possibly
also deemed as poor even prior to the conflict, which only confirms a lack of
knowledge about the life in socialist Yugoslavia. While the field representative
tried to understand the complaints in terms of her own life circumstances in
Sweden, local NGO women were reacting to what Marina Blagojević calls de-
development of the semiperiphery, a deterioration of the socio-economic situa-
tion in these formerly industrialized societies.\textsuperscript{697}

As shown in the chapter on historical contexts, Bosnia experienced an un-
precedented development during the socialist era. Memories of a peaceful and
rather pleasant life, filled with activities and items no longer affordable, that
the majority of the NGO women had enjoyed were still fresh. Narratives they
sometimes told about the advantages of the old system were, as we learn, some-
thing Kvinna till Kvinna “also [had] to accept”, but clearly did not approve of.\textsuperscript{698}
Positive sentiments for Yugoslavia, which, due to the war and the reemergence

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{694} Weekly report February 21, October 10, 21; December 2, 10 1997.
\item \textsuperscript{695} Weekly report January 20, 28 1997; Weekly report September 25 1998; Weekly report
March 14, May 16 2002.
\item \textsuperscript{696} “Visst förstår jag att det är svårt, men det är inte många av mina vänner som har råd
att köpa lägenhet, bil och sommarhus heller, och vi har inte haft något krig på sistone.” Weekly
\item \textsuperscript{697} Blagojević 2009, 28-29
\item \textsuperscript{698} ”får man också ta” Weekly report May 14 1996.
\end{itemize}
of Balkanism was no longer seen as a positive example of the socialist world, were hard to understand. It is, then, valuable in this context to mention that Bosnians have generally been strongly attached to Yugoslavia, which, as the anthropologist Andrej Grubačić writes, was “never just a country – it was an idea. Like the Balkans itself, it was a project of interethnic coexistence, a transethnic and pluricultural space of many diverse worlds.”

This idea had a firm foothold in Bosnia which was the only Yugoslav republic without a clear ethnic majority. A sign of the resilience of this idea is the fact that the hope of preserving Yugoslavia intact was alive among the majority of Bosnians well into 1991.

Although never displayed in official documents and despite the fact that different persons served as representatives at the Sarajevo office, the aversion towards legacies of state socialism tends to appear now and then. ‘Othering’ with references to the communist past did occasionally happen, not seldom as a result of “the daily shoulder-rubbing” with the local population, as also Kimberly Coles discovered in her study on the creation of difference by international interveners in Bosnia. Thus, for example, when an NGO woman proved to be dominant she was described as “an old-style communist who does not care in the least about women’s issues and the question is whether she really thinks that democracy is that important if it is to include everyone”. Still, the sources bear little witness to Kvinna till Kvinna’s interest in the historical context in which the organization operated, including women’s history in the region. While unconcern for the latter and the consequences of it will be treated in the next chapter, here we may conclude that the lack of historical knowledge, not insignificant for understanding the ideas and activities of domestic NGOs, is consistent with the goal of liberal peacebuilding to change this former socialist space into a liberal democracy. In this endeavor, the socialist past seems to have been of little value.

699 Grubačić 2010, 12.
Local initiatives and foreign suggestions

The rhetoric of Kvinna till Kvinna has consistently over time demonstrated its ambitions to support peacebuilding from below, a peacebuilding model that started to gain influence at the same time as the organization was formed. We can see this in the emphasis put on local actors considered to be the true peacebuilding forces with relevant contextual knowledge needed for the creation of a long-lasting peace. The Swedish NGO consciously highlighted the competencies of women in former Yugoslavia, expressing both compassion and willingness to aid their work. Especially in communication with Swedish and international audiences, it has been stressed that the organization supports authentic local initiatives. My findings strongly indicate that the aforementioned was not only a matter of empty rhetoric, but something that Kvinna till Kvinna sincerely attempted to put into practice.

For Bosnian NGO women, cooperation with Kvinna till Kvinna, unavoidably viewed in relation to other foreign donors, is a predominantly positive experience. They are genuinely appreciative of the long-term support received, which is understandable given the trend among international donors to fund short-term projects. Many spoke warmly about the initial financial support including coverage of basic expenses which proved to be of crucial importance for the development of the organizations, an intentional investment on the part of Kvinna till Kvinna. Others stressed the freedom to decide what issues to engage in. It was conveyed that the Swedish foundation never controlled what they should do, again unusual behavior among donors who typically set their priorities first and then chose a local NGO to realize the project. Within the framework of such cooperation, there were few opportunities for local NGOs to cater to the needs of their local communities. Cooperation with Kvinna till Kvinna, on the other hand, was established only after a process of defining one’s needs. As Vesna Ivanović put it, Kvinna till Kvinna never told

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703 Other research supports this finding. See Popov-Momčinović 2013b, 224.
704 See, for example, Gagnon 2002; Belloni 2007; Howard 2011.
705 Interview with Angelina Branković, September 1 2009; Interview with Alma Miljanović, September 9 2009; Interview with Vera Jovanović, September 18 2013.
706 Interview with Julia Samuelsson, October 13 2010.
707 Interview with Vesna Ivanović, September 17 2009; Interview with Meliha Selimotić, September 6 2009; Interview with Velenka Lazović, September 1 2009; Interview with Vera Jovanović, September 18 2013.
708 Interview with Vera Jovanović, September 18 2013.
you what to do, but handed over pen and paper and asked you to come up with ideas.\textsuperscript{709} Velenka Lazović said that:

They were the only donors who allowed us to create our own projects as we believed it was best. Usually all donators who gave a lot of money […] laid down conditions for funds allocation and our way of work in general. However, Kvinna till Kvinna has always followed our desires and our sense about the needs of our local community which is very important. That is how this women’s center came about. At that time in Bijeljina there was a huge segregation between people. The war just ended. On one side we had Serb women and on the other Bosniak women. Although they lived in the same city they did not communicate. The Bosniak women were totally isolated, regardless of whether they had stayed in Bijeljina throughout the war or were returnees. They were totally isolated. […] Then we organized this women’s center, and to the first gathering I invited all the Bosniak women that I got to know, but I invited Serb women as well.\textsuperscript{710}

During the interview, Lazović did not only praise Kvinna till Kvinna for respecting their knowledge about the needs in this specific locality and providing a possibility for them to work on normalizing relations between women there, but also for coming to the entity of RS at all when it was “bypassed by foreigners and when it was dangerous for any foreigner to come to Republika Srpska”.\textsuperscript{711} An NGO operating in another difficult local context recounted that the invaluable support from the Swedish foundation meant that it did not have to take grants from local authorities. Cooperation with the nationalists in

\textsuperscript{709} Interview with Vesna Ivanović, September 17 2009.

\textsuperscript{710} “Oni su bili jedini donatori koji su nama dozvoljavali da osmišljavamo naše projekte onako kako mi smatramo kako je najbolje. Obično su svi donatori koji su davali velike pare, bar u to vrijeme, uslovljavali čime treba da se bavi nevladina organizacija. Međutim, Kvinna till Kvinna je uvijek slijedila naše želje i naš nekakav osjećaj šta u jednoj sredini treba da se radi, šta je važno, šta je bitno. Tako je nastao ovaj ženski centar, upravo zbog toga. Mi smo imali tad situaciju u Bijeljini da smo imali jako veliku podjeljenost među narodom. Rat je tek bio zavšen. Imali smo na jednoj strani žene Srpskinje i na drugoj strani žene Bošnjakinje. One bez obzira što su živjele u istom gradu nisu kontaktirale međusobno, nisu govorile. Žene Bošnjakinje su bile totalno izolovane bilo da su provele čitav rat u Bijeljini, bilo da su vratile nakon rata. Bile su totalno izolovane. […] Onda smo organizovali ovdje ovaj ženski centar i na prvo druženje ovdje ja sam pozvala sve te moje Bošnjakinje koje sam već upoznala, a pozvala sam i žene Srpskinje.” Interview with Velenka Lazović, September 1 2009.

\textsuperscript{711} “stranci zaobilazili i kada je bilo opasno doći u Republiku Srpsku bilo kom strancu” Interview with Velenka Lazović, September 1 2009.
power was a threat to an NGO with multiethnic membership. Internal turbulence and a potential break-up of the organization were avoided, as I was told, in great part due to the support received from Kvinna till Kvinna.712 This very organization later became an important factor in its local community.

Several NGO women pointed out that the fact that Kvinna till Kvinna was a donor focused on women was meaningful for them because it understood the problems that women face on a daily basis. When asked about the Swedish foundation as a donor, they were careful to explain that they never perceived it as a donor, but instead as a true partner and even a friend.713 Sources confirm a generally close relationship based on shared values and readiness for dialogue. Written sources which allow us to follow this relationship over time suggest that Bosnian NGOs felt rather free to contact the Swedish foundation for help and advice whenever they needed it. Spontaneous visits to Kvinna till Kvinna’s Sarajevo office were rather common. It is also clear that domestic NGOs received help asked for, not least in situations when they were abandoned by other donors and sometimes even risked having to close down.714

Cooperation between international and local actors is viewed as a key component of peacebuilding from below with its focus on the strengthening of local actors. Leading scholars within the conflict transformation school such as John Paul Lederach, who has greatly impacted the work of numerous practitioners, have paid little attention to the power dimension of this relationship. Critics point out that the emphasis on cooperation does not solve the problem of power imbalance between the two parties and that there is still a risk of the local being dominated by the international.715 Here, I want to show that Kvinna till Kvinna’s practice in Bosnia is an illustrative example of the soft power exercised by an external NGO genuinely dedicated to supporting peace from below. My findings suggest that the Swedish foundation, apart from providing much appreciated financial and moral support, also actively strived to influence its Bosnian counterparts using soft methods instead of ruthless imposition of desired values.

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712 Interview with Vera Jovanović, September 18 2013.
713 Interview with Nermina Rudan September 14 2009; Interview with Meliha Selimotić, September 6 2009; Interview with Alma Miljanović, September 9 2009; Interview with Vesna Ivanović, September 17 2009; Interview with Vera Jovanović, September 18 2013.
715 Paffenholz 2015, 860.
From late 1995 and on, the field representative on site in Bosnia came to play a very significant role in cultivating contacts with ‘partner’ organizations. Precisely as it initially wanted to do more than distribute parcels, Kvinna till Kvinna did not want to function as a mere fund distributor either, but envisioned a more active role for itself. Both its rhetoric and practice reflect a desire to be “more than ‘just a donor’”.716 The preferred role was that of a conversation partner so domestic NGOs could “better formulate what they want, and how they will reach the goals”.717 In reports to Sida, words such as “discussion, dialogue and suggestion” are used when describing the character of meetings with the ‘partners’: “we help them to identify issues and find solutions by asking questions and sharing knowledge and experiences rather than imposing our view”.718 Nevertheless, in internal sources a will to influence local NGOs in certain directions appears clearly. When considered in terms of Blagojević theoretical insights, despite their competencies Bosnian activists apparently still needed fixing. Besides via Swedish experts and study visits in Sweden that will be analyzed in the following chapter, a transfer of knowledge was also supposed to happen through one-on-one contact on-site.

Bosnian NGO women’s will to learn was valued at Kvinna till Kvinna: “As always meeting with them went well. They listen, comment and take notes all the time and seem […] to really want to understand”.719 Easiest to handle were those who knew how to balance between “wanting to learn and coming up with their own proposals”.720 We see that patient persuasion through physical meetings paid off as ‘partner’ organizations changed their project ideas after conversations with Kvinna till Kvinna.721 Often, the changes concerned were activities that the latter assessed as having a small emancipatory potential. We also learn that Kvinna till Kvinna during its ordinary visits made ‘suggestions’ on matters ranging from the opening hours of a center and the selection of activities to the incorporation of a feminist perspective into activities.722 It seriously needs to be

716 Annual request to Sida 2003, B.8.
717 Annual request to Sida 2004, 3.
considered that also this approach led NGOs to adjust. For example, after hearing the donor’s disapproval, the leaders would dismiss the whole thing as a ‘misunderstanding’.\textsuperscript{723}

With time, local NGO women learned what Kvinna till Kvinna preferred and pulled that card whenever they feared losing its support. Thus, it happened that just as the representatives were about to offer suggestions, the other side of the table produced ‘the right answer’:

We had been thinking that we should focus a little extra on organizational development and gender awareness with them so I wanted to steer the conversation in that direction, but before I had barely started talking, they said that it feels so good that the reconstruction (of buildings) and such has progressed so far by now that women […] can start concentrating on ‘more important things’ […] such as women’s rights.\textsuperscript{724}

The fact that ‘the right answer’ in this case came from an NGO that later stole the grant money proves that knowing what the donor wanted did not always mean genuine interest in gender issues. Moreover, not every NGO accepted interference by the Swedish donor. For example, an organization in Tuzla did not show interest in the advisory services of Kvinna till Kvinna. After a few years, the support was terminated: “The reason for this is not that we are not satisfied with the organization, or its activities, but it is due the fact that we have not been able to establish a satisfying model for communication and co-operation”.\textsuperscript{725}

There is substantial empirical evidence that the vast majority of domestic NGO women generally appreciated the opportunity to bandy ideas and test some of them.\textsuperscript{726} The attention from Kvinna till Kvinna was seen as a privilege and a token of care. Moreover, as regards gender equality and women’s activism some expressed that

\textsuperscript{723} Weekly report October 10 2001; Weekly report October 22 2003.


\textsuperscript{725} Final report to Sida 2002, B.15. See also Quarterly report to Sida October-December 2002; Annual request to Sida 2003; Weekly report March 4 2003.

\textsuperscript{726} Weekly report October 9, 23 1997; Weekly report February 17 2000.
women working for Kvinna till Kvinna were our first teachers of women’s activism and they taught us about societies where equality exists. They were the ones informing us of the achievements of women around the world and where we lag behind [zaostajemo in Bosnian], what rights we need to fight for, how and what we can use in that struggle.727

While full of praise for the Swedish NGO, this statement is also a good example of what Natasa Kovacevic has termed the self-colonizing tendency. It exposes an internalized belief in the need to catch up with the developed world. So, Bosnia had not only yet to achieve the gender equality existing in Nordic countries, but also to express its own lack of progress, for which the Bosnian verb equivalent to lagging behind is used. Better than any other verb, zaostajemo strongly indicates a lower level of development.728 The fact that it is used in the plural form alludes to the underdevelopment of Bosnian society in general. Other words chosen for this statement like our first teachers and they taught us in combination with zaostajemo construct local activists as students rather than partners. This also implies that ideas about gender equality and women’s activism were a novelty introduced in Bosnia upon the arrival of internationals in the 1990s, which does not only contradict historical facts, but, as will be shown further on, is also a rather delicate question about which there is no consensus among NGO women in the country.

Descriptions of the relationship that unfolded in this Swedish-Bosnian encounter leave the impression of a teacher/student relationship, which is not unusual, historically speaking, in transnational encounters between women.729 This kind of relationship comes to the fore especially when one looks at the often arduous process of writing project proposals and reports. Sources are abundant with information about Bosnian NGOs struggling to produce these

727 “Kvinne su bile naše prve učiteljice o modelu ženskog aktivizma i o modelu društva u kojem se približavamo nečem što se zove društvo jednakih mogućnosti. Bile su te koje su nam prenosile šta su to žene u svijetu već postigle i gdje mi ustvari zaostajemo, koja su to prava koja mi još treba da osvajamo, na koji način, šta je to što nam može biti alat u toj borbi.” Interview with Angelina Branković, September 1 2009.

728 In the Bosnian context, this word has not seldom been used for children in need of special care, but are also used in descriptions of people who hold traditional values, not least those from rural areas.

729 See, for example, Sandell 2015.
documents with Sida as their final destination. A great deal of frustration on both parts was created by this process as what was written “never passed at the first attempt” but was several times returned by Kvinna till Kvinna to local NGOs for revision. It is clear that the main interest of local NGOs was their activist work. One can indeed notice a general aversion and sometimes even resistance towards this kind of bureaucratization that tended to increase with time, both due to reporting requirements from Sida and Kvinna till Kvinna’s endeavor to get local NGOs to improve in this area.

In order to make them learn and conform to the ‘rules of the game’ in development which are defined by Western donors, the Swedish foundation approached this situation by engaging in conversations about these documents, subtly asking for clarifications and delivering suggestions. Despite a deep dissatisfaction with the quality of documents produced by Bosnian NGOs, one former field representative told me “we always try to do it in a nice and polite way. Not like God, this is so bad!, but well, perhaps you can think about this or we would like you to change this. One still tries to be polite and explain”. Appreciated by local NGOs, well aware of the importance of this particular knowledge for their future, a less authoritarian approach does not necessarily diminish the power inequality of the relationship. In fact, pedagogical research shows that this type of soft method is extensively used by teachers when rebuking and setting limits for pre/school children. As shown by different examples in this section, it is about getting ‘partners’ to internalize desired values and norms. Although in a superior position, however, Kvinna till Kvinna was

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731 “nikad nije od prve išlo” Interview with Alma Miljanović, September 9 2009.

732 Interview with Beatrice Lindström, September 7 2009; Interview with Julia Samuelsson, October 13 2010; Interview with Alva Magnusson, July 23 2013.

733 See, for example, Wallin 2000,


735 Interview with Alma Miljanović, September 9 2009.

736 See, for example, Hellman 2010, 130-131.
also dependent on well-thought-out project proposals and good reporting which were not only sources of reputation and status, but also its main contribution as an intermediary.737

**Control – domination for the purpose of peacebuilding?**

For the most part of the period between 1995 and 2013, Kvinna till Kvinna had a well-developed practice of visiting organizations at a regular basis and even participating in some of their activities. Sources abound with descriptions of travel through Bosnia, a pleasurable but, as mentioned in chapter six, also time-consuming work assignment. With the variety of sources consulted in this thesis, a deeper insight into this practice and its power dimension is achievable. The willingness of the field representatives to travel has been much appreciated by local NGOs, especially the ones outside the capital. It did not only save them time and resources, but also gave them a sense of significance. What appears clearly is that these visits also functioned as a control method. Interestingly enough, the handling of funds was neither the only nor the main reason for control. It was rather the development of activities and the organizations themselves that were closely followed during the visits. As a former representative said: “My job was just to see what happened, so in the end they actually forgot about me. When you are around an office a whole day, they forget about you and then you can find out a little bit about who is working, who is not”.738

In order to make sense of this reasoning, we must put it within appropriate context. The worsened socio-economic situation left Bosnians in general with small prospects of finding employment. A retraditionalization of the Bosnian society contributed to women being marginalized in the public and private sector. Many of those with higher education turned to the emerging civil sector. Within this space, they found ways to, as Popov-Momčinović writes, “integrate their often hindered creative potential in the framework of civil activism”.739 However, they also earned their income there, and were sometimes the sole breadwinners of the family. Simultaneously, the projectization of assistance contributed to an understanding that one should get paid for activism.740 In such

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739 Popov-Momčinović 2013b, 215-216.

740 Popov-Momčinović 2013b, 226.
conditions, voluntary work was mildly interesting. Coming from the Swedish context, known for its living associationism, Kvinna till Kvinna looked with amazement at the fact that “Working for free is not for these women”. Sources reveal that long discussions and negotiations about how much of the budget would be spent on salaries were not unusual. Engagement in NGOs was not infrequently something done on the side of an ordinary job. There was early on an awareness that the priority of some NGO women might not be the mission of the organization but the salary. We can also early on see traces of what tends to be a common line of thinking among external actors, namely that a high donor density spoils people in host societies. These are neoliberal thoughts also found in the critique of welfare states. Bosnians, previously ‘taken care of’ by the socialist state, were believed to be in the danger zone of remaining passive due to donor money poured into the country.

There is a discrepancy between the oral narratives of former representatives and written sources produced during the actual time they spent in Bosnia regarding how well they knew their ‘partners’. A source like the weekly reports shows that getting a good insight into the doings of ‘partner’ organizations was very difficult. It usually took many visits before problems were discovered. Taken seriously, this information demands that we also, despite the inherent power imbalance in relations between international and local actors, view the latter as agents instead of purely powerless objects of external domination. Peace researchers such as Thania Paffenholz question viewing the international and the local as binary opposites and equating them solely either with power or resistance, suggested by some recent peacebuilding literature. When done unadvisedly, there is a risk of missing the power that the local actually manages to exert in this relationship. In line with a growing body of research on women in war and conflict-affected societies, my findings suggest that women always have agency, no matter how subtle, limited or controversial it may seem.

747 Paffenholz 2015, 857.
748 See Sjoberg and Gentry 2007; Shekhawat 2015; Sjoberg 2016; O’Reilly 2018.
As mentioned above, it was difficult to gain insights into activities of local NGOs. The main reasons were the language, the field representatives’ lack of knowledge about the local context, and NGO women’s ability to withhold information about things such as their activities, the situation in their local community and taxes.\textsuperscript{749} Kvinna till Kvinna had difficulties at times reaching its ‘partners’. Telephone calls would not be answered and leaders would be busy elsewhere when the donor came to visit.\textsuperscript{750} There is a pattern in the way some local NGOs acted during the visits that could be interpreted as diversion strategies. Some organized parties with plenty of food and even Christmas gifts in connection to meetings.\textsuperscript{751} One NGO, with which the cooperation was eventually terminated due to fraud, filled its office with women from the village when the donor visited, thus minimizing chances for in-depth discussion about its activities.\textsuperscript{752} As hosts, local NGOs had the power to determine the terms and arrangements of meetings. The Swedish foundation left these meetings full of uncertainty:

\begin{quote}
The problem with W [local NGO] is that we always meet only X and Y [activists]. We do not know if there are very many others that are active. They have a nice office, but we do not really know what they do there (asked but got no real answer) […] When Z [field representative] was there the first time a year ago there were plenty of women in the organization. […] We also do not think that there are many visions and ideas about what they will do.\textsuperscript{753}
\end{quote}

Barely five months later, Kvinna till Kvinna learned that the organization had received a grant for the same project from another donor as well. The two leaders had full-time jobs elsewhere and were not doing much at the NGO.\textsuperscript{754} The disappointment of the representatives, who truly believed that they found a

\textsuperscript{749} Weekly report February 9 1999; Quarterly report to Sida October-December 2000.


\textsuperscript{752} Weekly report September 18, October 24 2000; Weekly report March 13 2002; Weekly report October 2 2003.

\textsuperscript{753} “Problemet med W är att vi alltid bara möter X och Y. Vi vet inte om det finns många andra som är aktiva. De har ett fint kontor, men vi vet egentligen inte vad de gör där (frågade men fick väl inget direkt svar) […] När Z var där första gången för ett år sedan så var det en mängd kvinnor som var med i organisationen. Vi tycker inte heller att det finns så mycket visioner och tankar om vad de ska göra.” Weekly report June 16 1999.

\textsuperscript{754} Weekly report November 9 1999.
good NGO in a small impoverished town in the RS, is hard to miss. The feeling of having been misled cannot be missed either. So, besides terminating the cooperation, Kvinna till Kvinna also forwarded information about irregularities to other international organizations. As the anthropologists Emma Crewe and Richard Axelby point out, this sharing of information about untrustworthy local ‘partners’ among Scandinavian donors has been noted elsewhere too. They interpret it as yet another way to increase the control over local NGOs and to consolidate an already clear hierarchy.\textsuperscript{755}

One can certainly view this practice as a demonstration of power. However, taking into the account the benevolent intentions of Kvinna till Kvinna to aid this process and the emphasis it de facto put on local ownership, the manifestations of control can also be interpreted as signs of lack of information and insecurity about ‘partner’ NGOs. No matter how close the relationship with local NGOs became - and there is solid proof that it in many cases was a connection built on cordiality and a sense of a common mission - the representatives rarely escaped being treated as donors. The information they received was not always exact, but adjusted to the need of local NGOs.\textsuperscript{756} By the early 2000s, we see sudden, unannounced visits take place: “We decided to come a little earlier than we had announced. A bit of foul play but we really wanted to come before 12, because they receive clients until then, and see what is going on”.\textsuperscript{757} Interestingly enough, just as the historian Anna Jansdotter discovered in her research covering a similar type of power relationship between women, which took place in another time and space, it was the very closeness in the relationship with ‘partners’ that made this kind of control possible.\textsuperscript{758}

As the Swedish foundation grew and stricter reporting requirements from Sida followed, control via economic revisions and spontaneous visits intensified. Stephanie Norander, who has examined Kvinna till Kvinna’s views on the process of bureaucratization, found that narratives of women working at the Swedish foundation revealed mixed opinions within Kvinna till Kvinna regarding this development as well as an awareness of that the bureaucracy neverthe-
less enables their activist work. There were also hints that it affected the relationship with ‘partner’ NGOs. This issue was brought to my attention when I commenced interviewing local activists. Amidst all the praise they had for Kvinna till Kvinna as a donor that set itself apart from other internationals in Bosnia, they also spoke of the time when requirements became stricter.

Some said that this shift initially scared them, but that they in hindsight saw demands to shape up regarding auditing and defining priorities as a learning process and a necessity on their unavoidable path to becoming professional organizations. Others deemed the control practiced by the Swedish foundation to have impacted the relationship in a negative way:

The women who founded Kvinna till Kvinna had a deep sensibility, understanding for women of the world. Younger women that came into Kvinna till Kvinna did not have the same feeling. They were not interested in getting to know us. They came and went through our lives. I will remember them by the demands I never understood and the way they treated us as their subjects […] They did not even make an effort to read what KtK supported before they came. We had to tell them over and over about our activities, who we are, which was weird. Moreover, the way they tried to control the NGOs. It is truly discriminating, but we talked about that.

The positive emphasis Bosnian NGO women put on the initial years of cooperation with Kvinna till Kvinna stands out in interviews made with them. The narratives expose a view of a relationship based on friendship and substantiated

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760 Interview with Angelina Branković, September 1 2009; Interview with Danijela Pižula, September 1 2009.
762 The Sida evaluation from 2010 also found that the local women mostly spoke about the cooperation as it was until 2005 “remembering personalities and interventions during that time. It has been difficult to limit discussions to the time after 2005 only.” Sida Review 2010:10 by Nilsson, Anger and Newkirk, 21.
by a common ideological base. Research done by Aida Bagić confirms the general appreciation among activists in the post-Yugoslav area for the initial support by feminist organizations from abroad precisely because it was built on friendship. However, it also shows that the friendship with time usually turned into a contractual relationship. Balancing between friendship and a more professional relation was a challenge for Kvinna till Kvinna, which went into aiding peacebuilding in Bosnia with a vision of closeness with its ‘partners’. That the notion of friendship eventually became problematic was something former representatives talked openly about with me stressing that “The most important thing for us is to be entirely aware of the fact that we are donors, that we mean money.”

Kvinna till Kvinna’s activist history have not been insignificant for the relationship with local NGOs. Its founders were charismatic women who spent a great deal of time in Bosnia in the first decade of engagement there. It was during this ‘friend phase’ that the cooperation with most of the supported NGOs was established. Indeed, the younger women who served at Kvinna till Kvinna’s Sarajevo office over the years did not have the same attachment to the beginnings of the organization or the same type of activist past. They also usually spent shorter periods of time working in Bosnia, sometimes only a year. However, the sources consulted for this study do not support the notion that the quality of connection with local NGOs necessarily depended on generational aspects. Also among younger women, there was a sense of community with women of the world and a dedication to support Bosnian NGOs in their work for an inclusive peace. No crystal clear difference in terms of their view of the area or knowledge about it could be discerned between the women who started Kvinna till Kvinna and those who joined later. The former also pushed for a preferred kind of development in Bosnia and controlled the ‘partners’. The increased bureaucratization and stronger demands for results in combination with circumstances such as cases of fraud and an ever-sharper struggle for donor grants among domestic NGOs induced the more intense control mechanisms implemented by later representatives.

How can we then understand the critique expressed in the quotation above? Writing about culture encounters, Ruth Illman and Peter Nynäs say that a person’s view of someone else depends on her/his pattern of boundaries. While they

763 Bagić 2004.

764 “Det allra viktigaste är för oss att vara klara med att vi är givare, att vi betyder pengar.” Interview with Susanna Lennartsson, July 2 2009. See also Interview with Julia Samuelsson, October 13 2010.
stress that these types of encounters always happen between individuals, I suggest that, when contextualized properly, the point of view voiced above goes beyond the discontent of an individual. While this kind of forthright critique of the Swedish donor is extremely rare, Bosnian women’s narratives contain both blunt and latent statements about themselves as conscious societal actors working for the well-being of their communities. It is also noteworthy that many of them de facto were, and presented themselves as, successful women in terms of education and career before the war. In this context, censure, control and even advice coming from sometimes much younger women with little knowledge of the area and limited work experience in similar settings could have been perceived as an insult by women who considered themselves accomplished. Nevertheless, they had to cope with this for the sake of further cooperation. Advantages with the physical presence of Kvinna till Kvinna’s representatives on the ground have been thoroughly illuminated in Norander’s study. However, we should not underestimate the power these persons actually possessed in relation to Bosnian women’s groups. Nevertheless, during the entire period covered here, it only happened on one occasion that a local NGO ended the cooperation with Kvinna till Kvinna, and this happened after “several concerns arose and KtK decided to request a system-based audit [...] [X] decided to refuse the audit and discontinued financial cooperation with Kvinna till Kvinna”.

Too much local ownership?
The role of control as a means of dominance is unquestionable. However, putting control in relation to local ownership within the context of peacebuilding gives it another meaning too. Despite its appeal, the idea of placing full responsibility for peacebuilding in the hands of local actors is not unproblematic. This especially applies to settings like Bosnia where there are competing views of the past as well as visions of the future. In his insightful elaboration of local ownership, Timothy Donais underlines that aside from the general shortage of practice of local ownership, there is also a risk of taking it too far. Especially the communitarian vision of peacebuilding, which includes peace from below, implies the idea that ‘the local’ is dedicated to peace and promotes great local ownership. According to Donais, the dilemma of many external actors is often about how to give real local ownership without compromising the creation of

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765 Illman and Nynäs 2005, 51-54.
767 Annual report to Sida 2012, 15.
lasting peace. Kvinna till Kvinna’s ambition regarding the encouragement of local ownership is an illustrative example of the complexity this endeavour presents to external actors engaged in an intractable postwar context.

In Bosnia, Kvinna till Kvinna has been especially interested in making a difference in places where ethnic communities were segregated. Much effort was devoted to searching both cities and small, isolated areas for women’s groups that were willing to work on bridging ethnic differences. In fact, a willingness to communicate with all sides was “one of the basic prerequisites for Kvinna till Kvinna when choosing to apply for support for projects.” The Swedish foundation was not unique regarding this request for a multietnic focus. It was a common practice among foreign donors in Bosnia to prioritize NGOs with multietnic membership and openly demand that they get involved in activities across ethnic borders. From the perspective of local NGOs, learning about donors’ priorities was a matter of survival. Sources indicate a great awareness of donors’ priorities among local NGOs which used different strategies to enhance their chances to attract grants. This involved, for example, sending in grand and unrealistic project ideas, sometimes even based on fictive close cooperation with other local organizations which had not even been consulted first. It also meant taking on too large projects without having the capacity to implement them.

Civil society actors, not least women’s groups, have usually been designated as more committed to peace, and in the Bosnian context also as advocates of multiculturalism and a unification of the country. Critics who object to idealization of ‘the local’ say that we cannot take it for granted that local actors will always have either the will or the capacity to contribute to lasting peace. Empirical evidence found in my research on Bosnia shows that the complexity of the situation in terms of damaged human relations is a particularly aggravating factor that affects the work of women’s NGOs in postwar societies. This was especially the case in segregated communities. Following donor priorities, organizations which managed to form in such environments promised a great deal

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768 Donais 2012, 10-11.
770 Helms 2003, 30.
773 Donais 2012, 11. See also Paffenholz 2015.
regarding the rebuilding of relationships between local women, but it was hard for them to deliver any significant results. For example, an organization in Gornji Vakuf, a small town inhabited by Croats and Bosniaks, did not succeed to motivate women in their locality to meet across ethnic lines. To keep the interest of the donor, they gave false information about their activities.\footnote{Weekly report June 13, September 2000.}

The clearest example of the failure to meet the expectations of the donor and long-standing denial of it comes from Mostar, a divided city that has in many respects been ‘the problem child’ of post-Dayton Bosnia. This was where Kvinna till Kvinna found its first ‘partner’ in Bosnia and where it from 1994 and on supported a number of women’s centres dispersed throughout the city. The purpose of these centres was to serve as meeting places and offer training opportunities for women. The main idea was that women’s centres, despite the tangible division of the city, would cooperate closely and in that way symbolize the possibility of peaceful coexistence and reintegration. The Swedish foundation showed great understanding of obstacles caused by the tension in the city, thus relying on the judgement of local NGO women regarding the possible degree of cooperation between the centres on the Bosniak-dominated East side with those on the Croat-dominated West side. In 2003, after nearly a decade of support, the field representative found out that the visits between the centers from different sides only recently began while the centers had been existing for years:

I must say I was very surprised – I definitely thought that these visits take place much more often and that at least all the centers by now have visited each other! The explanation for why they do not visit each other so often is that they have problems with transportation (!?) and that it was not possible earlier. And “earlier” turned out to be 3-4 years ago, which makes it all even stranger. The transport issue is odd too because X [local organization] has 3 cars […] It is a bit alarming that this activity – which in fact should be the strength of X – does not happen more often.\footnote{“Jag måste säga att jag blev mycket förvånat – jag har definitivt trott att dessa möten sker mycket oftare och att åtminstone alla center vid det här laget har besökt varandra! Förlageningen till varför de inte besöker varandra så ofta är att de har problem med transport (!?) och att det inte gått tidigare. Och tidigare visade sig vara 3-4 år sedan, vilket ju gör det hela ännu märkligare. Transportfrågan är också märklig eftersom X [lokal organisation] ju faktiskt har 3 bilar […] Det är ju lite alarmerande att denna aktivitet – som ju borde vara X styrka – inte sker oftare.” Weekly report March 19 2003.}
The intention here is not to discover the true reasons for the above described situation. What this example shows is that despite all the good this NGO did for some women in their community, it could not function in a vacuum but mirrored the society at large. Not only did the employees of the women’s centres avoid meeting, but the situation was similar at the individual centers. While visitors might come from different sides of the Neretva River, they were however of the same ethnicity, which was not the intention according to the agreement.\textsuperscript{776} The fact that women from one side of Mostar came all the way to the other side, where the ethnic group they belonged to was in majority, indicated the severity of the situation and distrust between people. A quick walk through Mostar with the interpreter, originally from the city, gave a glimpse into the fear that still existed among its inhabitants:

\begin{quote}
X wanted to leave before it got too dark. She did not feel safe in west Mostar and I have never walked so fast from one place to another as I did from Panjevina to downtown and the east side...Strange experience to be so close to fear. Often we just hear about it [...] but to walk with X who is a Muslim through west Mostar was indeed quite enlightening.\textsuperscript{777}
\end{quote}

Nevertheless, the representative fails to use her experiences from this particular situation to connect the rare visits between the centers with the obvious unwillingness to meet and socialize with ‘the other side’. This again exposes a notion that NGO women should somehow be above the intolerance, antagonism and even fear that was all around them. Even if they were, as individuals, which should by the way not be assumed a priori, they had a local community of people that they had toplease.

There is a dilemma here between the level of local ownership that Kvinna till Kvinna wanted to pursue and the concrete results it sought to acquire in this particular setting. Apparently, the supported activities did not yield improved and renewed relations between women in Mostar, which was considered the imperative precondition for the creation of lasting peace. Kvinna till Kvinna’s general attentiveness to desires and opinions of its ‘partners’ was problematized in the 2010 Sida evaluation. While recognized, the local ownership sparked by this approach is also said to lead to activities not fully in line with priorities

\textsuperscript{776} Weekly report March 20 2003.
defined on higher levels, including Sida. It is also said to hamper effectiveness. The underlying message tends to be that the Swedish foundation should take a more (pro)active role in steering the development towards desired results. This corresponds to the idea that local ownership can be taken too far, and therefore needs to be somewhat limited, which makes it worth pondering in relation to ‘the Mostar case’.

While the need to work effectively for lasting peace is indisputable, decreasing the possibilities of those living in the area of intervention to participate actively and even lead that process is more problematic. What ‘the Mostar case’ shows is that as much as Kvinna till Kvinna struggled with lack of access to accurate information about supported projects and with missing results, the local NGO was also in a less than favorable position. The latter had to deal both with circumstances in its local community as well as expectations and conditions set by the donor. The failure by local NGO women to cooperate prove that this was an unrealistic expectation in a segregated postwar area. While the staff working for the Kvinna till Kvinna was competent in issues regarding gender equality and women’s activism in general, it is evident that it had a hard time relating to war experiences. Neither the absence of knowledge about nor lack of experience in dealing with postwar societies are unimportant for a deeper understanding of the ‘partner’s’ position and actions. My interpretation is that the preconceived vision of a unified Bosnia, held by international actors but that had little support among a most local people, and donors’ pronounced preference for multicultural projects might actually have prevented open conversations where doubts, fears and challenges could have been vented, and proper support identified and mobilized.

**Concluding remarks**

Is local ownership applicable and even desirable in societies recovering from war? Kvinna till Kvinna’s engagement in Bosnia shows that this is not an either/or question but ”a delicate, complex, and often shifting balancing act”. After a look into the first phase of the Swedish-Bosnian encounter provided in chapter five, the objective here has been to analyze this encounter as it unfolded once the Swedish foundation increased its presence in Bosnia. This is done through a focus on local ownership and then especially on activities of Bosnian NGOs with the goal to explore Kvinna till Kvinna’s rhetoric about them and

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779 Donais 2012, 18.
practice connected to them. Voices of Bosnian NGOs and their experiences are an integral part of the analysis.

As a pioneer in peacebuilding from below, Kvinna till Kvinna entered the post-Yugoslav area benevolently, slightly ‘romanticizing the local’. We see sincere intentions regarding the provision of space for women to meet and empower themselves through activity. The support was, however, not unconditional as the Swedish foundation had clear preferences regarding both what women’s organizations should do and about eligible beneficiaries of services provided by them. For example, a development of activities towards public political work was expected. What Kvinna till Kvinna preferred did not necessarily correspond to opinions held by women’s NGOs in Bosnia, because what women’s groups do and how they do it is inevitably influenced by the historical, cultural and political context in which they work. This chapter reveals tensions between norms about women’s organizing brought to Bosnia and what was encountered on the ground. Yet, the Swedish foundation made true efforts to take local women’s ideas seriously. Narratives of Bosnian NGO women, in which the freedom to decide about one’s own activities is emphasized, confirm this.

The findings point to the power dimension in this international/local relationship, which is often overlooked by advocates of peacebuilding from below. While it refrained from authoritarian approaches, I suggest that the Swedish foundation exercised soft power over its ‘partners’ using soft methods to influence them. The fact that international actors truly are in a position to dictate the conditions of the cooperation and that its local counterparts have limited space for action has proven to be the case here as well. The field representatives played an important role in the endeavour of ‘fixing’ local activists and persuading them to make changes in their activities, which they eventually usually did, but not without resistance. In more or less subtle ways, Bosnian NGOs found creative ways to counter the control exercised by Kvinna till Kvinna. I argue that the latter did not possess total power, and despite relative closeness to its ‘partners’ often lacked insight into their doings. As a matter of fact, domestic NGOs played an active role in retaining information from the Swedish donor insofar as it was harmful to them.

A teacher/student relationship between Kvinna till Kvinna and Bosnian women’s NGOs manifesting the notion of lagging behind, the self-colonizing tendency, and, in the case of resistance offered by domestic NGOs, ambivalence towards what was coming from the core have been discerned. However, the relationship between the two parties, has undergone an apparent change over time. Firstly, there had been a movement from wanting to give support from a distance (from Sweden) to intense, active presence on the ground. Secondly, we
see also a redefinition regarding the kind of relationship Kvinna till Kvinna wished to have with women’s groups in Bosnia. In the initial phase, thoughts about closeness based on an open attitude and friendship were dominant. With time and its professionalization, which made it more bureaucratic, the relationship turned into a contractual one and the friendship became problematic. And thirdly, the conclusion made from what has been presented in this chapter is that the aforementioned development along with donor dependency and competition among local NGOs did not only burden the relationship between the Swedish foundation and its ‘partners’ in Bosnia, but also potentially caused serious damage to it.

Giving full local ownership is not unproblematic in a peacebuilding context. It can be particularly difficult when external and domestic actors do not share the same norms and not even necessarily the same visions of the future they are involved in creating. Some scholars, such as for instance Donais state that too much local ownership can be as dangerous as too little local ownership.780 This is a dilemma for external actors who subscribe to the idea of global solidarity and who are focused on giving support to local people, viewing them as main peace actors in their settings. The ‘Mostar case’ has been used in this chapter to illustrate the naïve expectations of Kvinna till Kvinna concerning interethnic cooperation between NGO women in this segregated city. The conclusion to be drawn from this case is that the willingness of local actors to cooperate and unite should not be taken for granted in violently divided societies. By setting the agenda for the peace process, donors themselves do not provide much room for difficulties to be unpacked and locally negotiated solutions articulated. What this case also conveys is the importance of knowledge about and a deeper understanding of the context in which one operates, which Kvinna till Kvinna lacked.

780 Donais 2012, 19.
CHAPTER EIGHT

Empowering for an inclusive peace?

Kvinna till Kvinna’s focus on support to women’s organisations in conflict areas makes us efficient and specialised. Thanks to our ideological base we are much more than just aid distributors. As a peace organisation with a feminist perspective, our ways of thinking are often, from a Bosnian point of view, new and radical. By challenging existing patterns of thought we help initiating new thinking.781

This excerpt from a programme proposal to Sida for 2008-2011, found under the subtitle “comparative advantages”, illustrates the way Kvinna till Kvinna legitimized its presence in Bosnia. It also exhibits, as previously discussed, the ambition to be more than a regular donor and make a more significant impact on its ‘partners’. Clearly, the Swedish foundation believed that it was contributing with necessary knowledge, uncommon and even controversial in the host country. This chapter dives deeper into Kvinna till Kvinna’s role in Bosnia by examining the main methods used with the intention of supporting women’s NGOs. The focus is on the creation of meeting places and the provision of education. Departing from the fact that the organization itself sees the support given as a means intended to empower women in conflict-affected areas, the concept of empowerment is utilized at an overall level in the analysis.

Empowerment is a buzzword frequently used in the field of development, which entered the mainstream development discourse in the 1990s. Following the definition of Nelly P. Stromquist, empowerment consists of four dimensions: the cognitive (critical understanding of one’s reality), the psychological (feeling of self-esteem), the political (awareness of power inequalities and the ability to organize and mobilize) and the economic (capacity to generate independent income). Stromquist also says that these are “each equally important but none sufficient by itself to enable women to act on their own behalf”.782 If we look closer, the idea of empowerment is compatible with the peacebuilding from below model where the support of ‘the local’ by external actors is strongly emphasized. The support can be given in a multitude of ways, money and education being only a few examples. Although resources are important, their empowerment potential tends to be taken for granted. It needs to be mentioned that empowerment is yet another morally loaded and vaguely defined term call-

781 Annual request to Sida for 2008-2011, 29.
782 Stromquist 2002, 23.
ing for enhanced responsibility of ‘the local’ that is, as Gudrun Dahl says, “entangled in a neo-liberal overvaluation of individual choice and agency which opens for ‘blaming the victim’”. Others who have reflected upon this phenomenon in the development context have foregrounded the need for a more critical gaze on efforts aimed at empowerment.

The analysis follows two different lines of interpretation. Both can be discerned in the quote which started this chapter. On the one hand, there is a notion of Western/Swedish supremacy when compared to Bosnia as less developed. It can be seen as an expression of neocolonialist thinking about the unenlightened ‘Other’ in the semiperiphery which ‘lags behind’ and therefore needs to be informed about and taught universal values. On the other hand, there is goodwill in the intention to encourage cooperation and equip women to work actively on creating an inclusive peace in Bosnia. Existing scholarship underlines both the key role that empowerment has on the road to gender equality, and the great potential of women’s organizations to provide “alternative social spaces for the discussion of gender issues”.

Empirical questions posed in this chapter are: What did Kvinna till Kvinna expect that the support it provided would lead to? What knowledge was transferred to Bosnia? How did local NGOs respond to the methods used? What does the encounter between the two say about the possibilities and difficulties of empowering women in divided postwar areas?

Creating meeting places

Kvinna till Kvinna builds peace. [...] Kvinna till Kvinna has been working strategically to create meetings and collaborations between the organisations that we support. We are actively working for the organisations to have the opportunity to meet, even when they work on opposite sides of the border conflict. We know that separation is the best war strategy and that it is the main reason why
peace initiatives are not successful. But when people meet, talk and have the opportunity to discuss things, reconciliation and understanding may follow. It takes time, and time must be allotted [emphasis added].\textsuperscript{787}

This section of the chapter aims to show that Kvinna till Kvinna strategically and with sincerity approached providing meeting space for women who chose to organize, a top priority from the commencement of its engagement in Bosnia. Sources bear witness to Kvinna till Kvinna’s involvement in the very first conferences on women that took place after the war. We see the chairwoman Kerstin Grebäck and Ulrica Messing, at the time Minister of Equality and Labor in Sweden, give a word of encouragement to the assembled women at the international conference in Sarajevo in the early summer of 1996.\textsuperscript{788} The Swedish foundation had an active role in not just co-financing but also in planning the first seminars that gathered women from both the Federation and the RS in three contested cities.\textsuperscript{789} That these “emotionally important”\textsuperscript{790} meetings were realized despite the tense political situation was interpreted as a sign of sound communication and an embryo for cooperation.\textsuperscript{791}

The work of John Paul Lederach, the leading scholar within the conflict transformation school, stresses the importance of relationship (re)building in post-conflict, divided societies. Lederach sees human relationships as the core of most conflicts, and at the same time the foundation and guarantee of lasting solutions. Thus, provision of space where people can meet and envision a shared future is pivotal.\textsuperscript{792} Except in Bosnia, meetings were occasionally organized in one of the countries in the region and sometimes even in Sweden. We


\textsuperscript{788} Report from the women’s conference in Sarajevo, June 28-30 1996.

\textsuperscript{789} The seminars that went under the name Room for Conversation summoned between 50 and just over 70 women who met in Zenica, Banja Luka and Mostar in 1996 and 1997. See Progress report 1996; Weekly report October 28 1996; Quarterly report to Sida January-April 1997; Progress report 1997.

\textsuperscript{790} Progress report 1996, 11.


\textsuperscript{792} Lederach 1997, 23-35.
can trace this method to 1980s when the peace movement in Northern and Western Europe facilitated meetings between civil groups from Eastern Europe, because such connections would have put them at risk in their countries of origin.793 Given that Kvinna till Kvinna had its roots in two old peace organizations and that its founders had some experience of working with dissidents from Eastern Europe, setting up meetings in neutral places was a well-tried method. The intention of bringing Bosnian women to Sweden was, except for educational purposes, to provide a safe environment for discussing politically sensitive issues. There is no doubt that Kvinna till Kvinna also hoped that a common position and plan for joint action could be achieved on such occasions.794 What women were invited to come to Sweden? In the context of planning study visits, we can observe a careful selection of women who were brought to Sweden. Deliberately, Kvinna till Kvinna invited women from both entities thus creating ethnically mixed groups.795 We can also see a determination to invite not only leaders but also other women who often worked in their shadow, which was sometimes met with discontent from the leaders.796

When arranging seminars in Bosnia, the organization made sure that they took place in both entities, in larger urban centers as well as small towns. The aim was to counter both ethnic and urban/rural divides. It was about giving the women a reason to move around the country, especially important during the immediate postwar years when the RS in particular was avoided by donors as well as by Bosnians from the Bosniak-Croat dominated Federation. When the Swedish journalist Maria-Pia Boëthius visited the country in 1998, Kvinna till Kvinna wrote: “it is almost like a statement that she will visit Republika Srpska because almost everything happens on the other side and this is also something that can get women from the Federation to shuffle off to Republika Srpska”.797 This approach urged women from both entities to find ways to attend events where they could meet, in spite of fear and the fact that they were discouraged

793 Kaldor 2003, 69.
794 Minutes from a Board meeting on Kvinna till Kvinna’s strategy in BiH, January 11 2005.

204 SANELA BAJRAMOVIĆ Hierarchical Sisterhood
from crossing the entity border. Moreover, by placing some of its own network meetings in small places, Kvinna till Kvinna challenged the notion of cities as venues for all events. Bringing NGOs from different corners of Bosnia to provincial places was also an attempt to make NGOs, which often emphasized difficulties in their own localities, to see even more demanding local contexts.

Besides creating the conditions for encounters and functioning as a facilitator of communication, connecting women’s groups in Bosnia with each other and with groups in the region became with time one of the main parts of Kvinna till Kvinna’s mission. In fact, the aim of carving out this niche for the foundation is found in an application submitted to Sida as early as in November 1994. At that time, the need for an organization working with aid directed towards women that could pull it all together was large. Even after the war stopped, travelling across the country was still not an option for the majority of local people. Besides the fact that it was expensive and time-consuming, one should not forget the distrust that had built up during the war years. As an external actor, Kvinna till Kvinna had the resources and was able to move more easily between different ethnic communities. The fact that it was a Swedish foundation was a mitigating circumstance as there were no controversies connected to Sweden’s role in the war and thus no special animosity towards Sweden among the local population. Collecting information about women’s NGOs was something Kvinna till Kvinna could capitalize on both in relation to Sida and in relation to local NGOs. As a contact facilitator, the foundation used the information collected to connect NGOs, wanting them to learn from each other’s work.

With time, Kvinna till Kvinna started to arrange its own network meetings. The first one was realized in May the same year. These were two-day seminar-like meetings led by Kvinna till Kvinna’s field representatives. The content and the structure of the meetings tell that they had several functions. Rather than simply being a meeting place, these were occasions when specific themes


\[800\] Project proposal to Sida November 1994.


intended to help local NGOs in their work were covered. Studying empowerment from an educational perspective, Nelly P. Stromquist has found that it has better prospects of developing in alternative learning spaces arranged by autonomous organizations than within formal schooling. She refers especially to women’s NGOs operating in development countries which, by working with small groups within a women-only environment, manage to strengthen women both as individuals and as collective actors.  

Group work, including discussions, was a natural component of Kvinna till Kvinna’s seminars. The occasion was used as an opportunity to draw attention to topics which tended to be avoided by the local activists themselves and to engage in collective searching for constructive solutions that could be implemented by joint forces. The working materials prepared by the Swedish organization reveal the intention to foster cooperation. In addition, and not unimportant in the context, the network meetings were also an arena where the Swedish donor and its Bosnian ‘partners’ could learn about each other’s priorities.

The network meetings were appreciated by local activists. The process of making local NGOs feel as a “Kvinna till Kvinna group in Bosnia” resulted in an initiative to continue seeing each other even between the network meetings arranged by the donor. An informal network, called The KtK network, was formed. Local NGOs I interviewed mentioned The KtK Network as a good example of cooperation between women’s organizations. Kvinna till Kvinna itself never planned to create and coordinate such a network, but rather to inspire local organizations to form their own. Susanna Lennartsson explained:

They call themselves the network. We have never done that actually. However, we started, and we do this more or less everywhere now, but the very first network meeting we had with all the partners…it was in May 1999 or something. […] Then we saw the strength of them feeling enormously empowered. […] What everyone said after that, which made us to continue doing it, was that they felt immensely strengthened by feeling like a part of something…that all of us

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804 Working materials from the seminar in Bijeljina, December 6-7 1999; Quarterly report to Sida October-December 2000; Agenda seminar in May 6-7 2006.
805 Quarterly report to Sida April-June 1999; Evaluation of the network meeting in Mostar by field representatives, June 4 1999. See also, evaluations of the seminar in Bijeljina in December 6-7 1999 by Bosnian activists.
806 Quarterly report to Sida April-June 1999.
807 Interview with Alma Miljanović, September 9 2009; Interview with Danijela Pižula, September 1 2009; Interview with Velenka Lazović, September 1 2009.
who sat there together, we are women’s organizations and that you got in touch with people you did not know.  

Also, Lennartsson’s colleague Julia Samuelsson remembers the first network meeting as an exciting and important happening. According to her, these meetings were also sobering moments for some NGOs as they found out that there were competent NGOs in other places as well: “Somehow, they believed, several of those that we are like no others, we are the best”.  

As much as Kvinna till Kvinna expected these meetings to be more than ‘coffee drinking’, they were intentionally followed by informal socializing which included “dinner with singing and fun”. Occasions like these allowed activists to relax and provided them with a possibility to connect to each other on a different level. Lederach speaks of the importance of enabling people in divided societies to connect as human beings, which he sees as an important part of (re)building relationships. We learn that the music played during the informal gatherings were old Yugoslav songs. This indicates both nostalgia for the pre-war life, but also a will to create a common ground for further bonding. Providing opportunities for informal encounters can also be interpreted as a method used to stimulate the creation of a sense of community between them. In her research on women and reconciliation in Bosnia, Elissa Helms has found that “the coffee-drinking relationship” among women was a symbol of close and trustworthy relations. Stephanie Norander observed “a strong and unique sense of appreciation for self and other enacted at Kvinna till Kvinna through small acts of celebration and expressions of care for each other as women and

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809 “De trodde på något sätt, flera av de här, att vi som inga andra och vi som bäst.” Interview with Julia Samuelsson, October 13 2010.
810 “middag med sång och glädje” Seminar in Bijeljina December 6-7 1999. See also Weekly report September 4 1997; Weekly report March 5 2002; Weekly report May 6-7 2006.
813 Helms 2010, 24-25.
as human beings”. After studying the Swedish foundation over time, I consider caring for the local activists’ well-being to be a constant priority throughout its engagement in Bosnia. When resources allowed, support was provided to handle issues such as stress and burnout. Otherwise, relaxed socializing with music and dance was seen as an effective way of regaining energy as well as an incentive for future work. Needless to say, these acts of care were much appreciated by local NGOs which, in turn, arranged farewell parties in honor of Kvinna till Kvinna’s field representatives upon their departure from Bosnia.

Resistance encountered?

It is, indeed, an impressive fact that the cross-ethnic meetings between women in Bosnia started so soon after the war. What has been accounted for so far in this section might give the impression of an undivided readiness to “meet and jointly discuss strategies and plan for the future”, as Kvinna till Kvinna wrote in its very first progress report. It is time to give some attention to the following questions as well: Did the efforts to connect and initiate cooperation between local NGOs meet any resistance? If so, how was it understood by the Swedish foundation? In the elaboration of this issue, the focus is on the immediate postwar period.

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814 Norander 2008, 213.
815 For example in June 1999, the psychologist Marta Cullberg Weston, at the time a member of Kvinna till Kvinna’s board, visited some of the ‘partner’ organizations. She contributed with psychological support, including relaxation techniques to the employees of these NGOs who worked with traumatized persons. Cullberg Weston found the women to be stressed out and wanting to leave the country, at least for a short period. See Report from the trip to Bosnia June 2-6 1999; Weekly report June 15 1999; Quarterly report to Sida April-June 1999. Two years later, Cullberg Weston returned to Bosnia with the aim to conduct interviews with NGOs who had been offering psychosocial support to women in their communities in order to strengthen them. The interview material was used in a report written by Cullberg Weston on the behalf of Kvinna till Kvinna, “War is not over with the last bullet. Overcoming Obstacles in the Healing Process for Women in Bosnia-Herzegovina” published in 2002.
It could quite easily be argued that the incentive for interethnic encounters came largely from international actors.\textsuperscript{819} They did not only bring financial resources, but also ideas regarding women’s role in building a democratic post-war society. Women’s potential in regard to reconciliation and unity among Bosnian women were stressed by numerous, primarily Western, feminists who engaged in Bosnia. Certainly, this did not happen without the involvement of local NGO women who themselves emphasized the role of women as mothers and peacebuilders.\textsuperscript{820} For example, the conference invitation sent for the 1996 international Sarajevo conference on women did not only paint women as guarantees of a peaceful future but also urged that “female and maternal interests are above all other interests”.\textsuperscript{821} Out of the over 400 women who attended that conference, 70 participants came from outside the former Yugoslav region.\textsuperscript{822} Although two domestic NGOs counted as official organizers, the international presence is visible both in terms of funding, especially “a lot of American money”,\textsuperscript{823} and in terms of speakers.\textsuperscript{824}

While the emphasis on women’s agency echoes the conclusions made at the Beijing UN conference on women, which had taken place not long before, calls for unity among women in Bosnia were more controversial. Implications of Bosnian women as a collective, for instance in the title of the Sarajevo conference named “The first conference of women of Bosnia and Herzegovina” were at this point in time without any empirical grounding. The fact that the invitation to the conference was sent to “Dear women from Republika Srpska” by its Federation-based organizers just over a month before the conference indicates that their involvement in its preparation was minimal.\textsuperscript{825} This leads to the con-

\textsuperscript{819} The majority of women’s NGOs in Bosnia were started with substantial international help, some even as pure international projects. See Bagić 2004, 204. I would like to add that this fact does not diminish the efforts and engagement of domestic NGOs, but points to the scale and the impact of the international factor in postwar Bosnia.

\textsuperscript{820} See also Helms 2013.

\textsuperscript{821} “ženski i materinski interesi iznad svih drugih interesa” Conference invitation May 7 1996.

\textsuperscript{822} Ten of them, one man and nine women, were from Sweden. Among them was the Minister of Equality and Labor Ulrika Messing.

\textsuperscript{823} “väldigt mycket amerikanska pengar” Interview with Susanna Lennartsson, July 2 2009.

\textsuperscript{824} The conference agenda.

\textsuperscript{825} “Drage žene iz Republike Srpske” Conference invitation May 7 1996.
clusion that much of the initial pushing for interethnic meetings was an internationally driven project, supported by a limited number of women’s groups from well-known multicultural urban centers such as Sarajevo and Tuzla. In other words, it says little about the readiness of women in Bosnia to cooperate with each other.

In its search for ‘islands of civility’, in Mary Kaldor’s view the political forces for change in societies hit by identity-based ‘new wars’, Kvinna till Kvinna was quite successful in finding women’s NGO that accepted to participate in interethnic meetings. However, not openly rejecting invitations to meet the other side, especially when they came from a donor, did not necessarily mean embracing them whole-heartedly:

I asked them if everything was ready for Maria-Pia’s visit and got a bit tired of them not calling the women they had invited to check if they are coming or not so we can see how many people are coming from the Federation, and the rest of the RS. X said that she tried really hard to call to the Federation without success, but when we tried to check with a few, all our calls came through. Maybe not the first try but still.

Obviously disappointed, the field representative interpreted the reluctance to assure the attendance of NGOs from both entities as a problem of organization. Albeit subtle, this can also be seen as resistance. As shown in the previous chapter, poor phone lines were used as an excuse by local NGOs to avoid control. The situation above can be read as a way to protest against the imposition of donor priorities. Why inviting guests from the other side was avoided in this particular case is hard to answer with certainty. However, both written and oral sources tell of NGOs from the RS fearing repercussions. Favored by international actors, contacts and cooperation across entity lines had, not least for women from the RS, been a risky venture. The situation was especially precarious during the first postwar decade when interethnic connections were strongly

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826 Kaldor 2000.
discouraged by the authorities and looked with suspicion by the majority of the population.\textsuperscript{828}

Despite the responsiveness and understanding that Kvinna till Kvinna in many respects displayed in the encounter with women’s groups in Bosnia, we can also see expectations that those groups would be able to rise above the circumstances surrounding them and solidarize with each other. There are signs that the foundation not only expected their ‘partners’ to want to cooperate, but took it for granted. During 1997, it even applied for funds from Sida with the intention to give small donations for travelling expenses to local NGOs who expressed a desire to meet.\textsuperscript{829} Sida granted the funds, but the interest among local NGOs was initially non-existent:

I thought it would be good if X and she could talk about what they had in common etc and what they could do together […] I told them that we have this travel money if they do not have the money to go and visit each other, or others, to exchange experiences etc. Do not know if anyone will ask for this money unless one sends out a special call for it. I have told so many, but nobody comes back to ask for a grant.\textsuperscript{830}

To Kvinna till Kvinna it was a matter of course that two NGOs working with the issue of domestic violence on each side of the entity border should meet, learn from one another and even cooperate. We see the field representative push for this by encouraging them to focus on commonalities, and by offering financial support for potential future meetings. This attempt was not met with great enthusiasm. The fact that the many Bosnian NGOs Kvinna till Kvinna encountered showed no interest in money earmarked for the purpose of direct cooperation is quite telling, as NGOs generally need and welcome donor funds. Their rhetoric and participation in meetings arranged by donors might have, not least

\textsuperscript{828} Interview with Velenka Lazović, September 1 2009; Interview with Danijela Pižula, September 1 2009; Interview with Ana Marković, May 30 2012; Interview with Vera Jovanović, September 18 2013.

\textsuperscript{829} Application to Sida October 28/29 1997, 3.

\textsuperscript{830} “Sedan så tyckte jag att det var bra om X och hon kunde prata lite om vad de hade gemensamt etc och vad de skulle kunna göra gemensamt […] Berättade om att vi har dessa respengar om det är så att de inte har pengar för att åka och hälsa på varandra, och andra, för att utbyta erfarenheter etc. Vet inte om jag tror om någon kommer att fråga efter dessa pengar om man inte skickar ut ett speciellt upprop om detta. Har nu sagt det till så många men ingen kommer tillbaks och frågar om de kan få ett bidrag.” Weekly report October 1 1998.
due to dependence on donor funds, signaled commitment to women’s solidarity, reconciliation and multiethnic Bosnia. However, the resistance demonstrated here shows that the main interest in this initial postwar period, despite the expectations of donors, was first and foremost to work within one’s own ethnic community.

There are many examples, both past and present, of Western women trying to encourage and facilitate meetings and cooperation in conflict areas around the world. As earlier mentioned, as a transnational women’s peace organization WILPF has a long tradition of this type of work. In a text on Western efforts to create meeting spaces for Jewish and Arab women in Palestine, the historian Maria Småberg reminds us that the Swedish writer and peace activist Elisabeth Waern-Bugge was sent to the area in 1931 to investigate the possibilities of cooperation between them. We learn that Waern-Bugge failed with her mission as many others who engage in divided societies do. They often tend to underestimate the severity of the situation, which deeply affects women’s lives, and overestimate the ability and will of women to cast aside differences among them and gather on the basis of their gender identity. What characterizes Kvinna till Kvinna’s twenty years in Bosnia is endurance regarding the creation of meeting opportunities. But what could the Swedish foundation contribute in terms of knowledge?

Providing education and enabling transfer of knowledge

Among other findings, scholarship on post-Cold War international interventions points to colonial tendencies. An apparent resemblance between European colonization and today’s peacebuilding missions is their ideological part. As Roland Paris has argued, both have demonstrated an intent to “convey norms of acceptable or civilized behaviour into the domestic affairs of less-developed states”. Host populations are thus expected to acquire new knowledge crucial for their inclusion in the category of ‘the civilized’, which scholars such as Marina Blagojevic deem a Sisyphean task as attempts at ‘catching up with the core’ are usually unsuccessful. While a rhetoric of evolutionism has been diligently used to legitimate interventions in ‘backward’ societies, another common characteristic found in colonial times as well as in modern development and peace

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832 Småberg 2005.
834 Blagojević 2009. See also Coles 2007.
operation contexts is deliberate work on the evolution of ‘the Other’. Some argue that international interventions are pedagogical projects considering the role education, in different forms, plays in them. For example, it is a common practice among donors who encourage advocacy work to provide, besides funding, mainly technical support consisting of training, advice and information. Trainers, usually called experts, are mostly imported from the donors’ countries of origin and local ‘partners’ are occasionally sent on study visits to those countries. In this way, knowledge is transferred from the core, the West, to countries on the semiperiphery and periphery.

The practice of foreign interveners in Bosnia has not significantly differed from the one described above. From the mid-1990s, Bosnia was the most donor-dense country in Eastern Europe. The number of educational events and international experts who conducted them was so large that even Kvinna till Kvinna, as a member of the donor community, at some point questioned the actual need of them. However, education, often referred to by donors as capacity-building, constituted a significant part of Kvinna till Kvinna’s mission as well. It was, I would argue, perhaps the most valued method of empowerment. The organization was not just favorably disposed towards projects with the objective to educate local women, but considered further education of NGO women who implemented those projects a necessity. Two modes of delivering education have been study visits to Sweden and classes taught by experts appointed from outside of Bosnia.

**Going to Sweden for knowledge**

Inviting local activists to Sweden was an early practice that continued throughout the first decade of Kvinna till Kvinna’s mission in Bosnia. Women’s activists from Bosnia made study visits to Sweden on six different occasions in: 1995, twice in 1996, 1998, 2002 and 2005. What was a study visit to Sweden supposed to offer them? The first study visit took place while the war was still going on. Nevertheless, a group of “strong people who work hard for a future” came to “form a picture of Swedish organizations and democracy-building”. The Bosnian guests were portrayed as actors already working for peace and Kvinna till

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835 Crewe and Harrison 1998, 28.
836 See, for example, Coles 2007, 269-270.
837 Carothers 2006, 213.
838 Weekly report September 1, October 7 1997.
839 ”starka människor som arbetar hårt för en framtid”, ”för att skapa sig en bild av svenskt föreningsliv och demokratiuppbyggnad” Newsletter no. 3, June 1995.
Kvinna expressed willingness to aid them on that path. A glance at the goals and agendas of the study visits realized after the war, tells us of an emphasis on three major areas: human rights, gender equality and organizational development. Considerable focus has been on women and politics. Different aspects of it such as legislation, the creation of public opinion and lobbying but also the history of Swedish women’s way into party politics, were included in the program.\textsuperscript{840} Once in Sweden, the invited women met with female politicians and female academics, and visited organizations, schools, authorities and the media.\textsuperscript{841}

The manner in which study visits are depicted in applications and reports to Sida, The Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Swedish Institute, who funded them, differs from the one found in publications distributed to a wider public. While the emphasis in documents written for donors is put on the need of Bosnian activists to learn about gender equality, human rights and organizing, Kvinna till Kvinna’s newsletters display a slightly different tone. The study visits were to contribute with “facts, impulses and inspiration from our Swedish work with increased representation of women and increased gender equality [emphasis added]”.\textsuperscript{842} Today’s official organizational discourse is generally purified from a language reminiscent of colonial rhetoric. As Gudrun Dahl notes, the current discourse does not work by “simply exoticising the ‘others’ but by defining them as exceptions to the universal rules that govern human history”.\textsuperscript{843} Despite different choice of words, and what could be interpreted as a milder tone in public sources, in both cases a Swedish ‘we’ and a Bosnian ‘they’ are noticeable. The underlying message, adapted for the two different audiences, was that ‘we’ (Swedes) possess valuable knowledge that ‘they’ (Bosnians)

\textsuperscript{840} Quarterly report to Sida January-March 1996; Quarterly report to Sida April-June 1996; Application to the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1997; Application to the Swedish Institute 1997.

\textsuperscript{841} Some of the points on the program have been: Women’s Folk High School, women’s business fair arranged by the NGO Kvinnor Kan, Equal Opportunities Ombudsman (JämO), Division for (Gender) Equality at the Ministry of Employment, Sida, political women’s associations, Aftonbladet, Operation Kvinnofrid, women’s shelter in Nacka, Manscentrum, meetings with female members of the Swedish Parliament. See Progress report 1996; Application to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1997; Application to the Swedish Institute 1997; Evaluations of the 1998 study visit by local activists; Annual report 2002.

\textsuperscript{842} “fakta, impulser och inspiration från vårt svenska arbete för ökad kvinnorepresenta-

\textsuperscript{843} Dahl 2008, 2.
lack, thus indicating a lagging behind of the latter in the domain of gender equality, human rights and civil society organizing which are viewed as an integral part of Western liberal democracies and often presented as universal.

The evident change in the rhetoric of international actors does not exclude reasoning based on an idea of a general Western supremacy borrowed directly from the colonial library. My findings suggest that the rhetoric and practice of Kvinna till Kvinna bear witness to lines of thought about Swedish supremacy not only in relation to Bosnia but in relation to other donor countries too, and about Sweden’s particular suitability as a source of inspiration for Bosnia. A sense of Swedish identity was, for example, explicitly constructed through comparison with US actors in Bosnia. Thus, a report from the international women’s conference in Sarajevo lets us know that the American diplomat Swanee Hunt “sauntered in” and held a long propaganda speech in favor of the Clinton administration while “Our Ulrica Messing gave an exemplary short ‘good luck appeal’ and received warm applause”. ‘Othering’ of Americans continues in a description of another conference where a USAID member of staff was absolutely horrible and which just confirms my prejudice that Americans are hardly there to support local initiatives but rather to get the Bosnians to do what the Americans want. She presented a model for how they would go ahead and influence their politicians – the model was not easy to grasp – but from what I understood one representative would be the voice of the entire women’s movement [...] It was received with compact silence from the assembly. And rightly so.

As some respectable local women’s activists were actually content with the conference, however, Kvinna till Kvinna’s representative concluded that she perhaps was ”too Swedish in my assessment”. Through differentiation from know-it-all American women, who like to stand in the spotlight, an image of the Swedish peacebuilder/aid worker as humble, less paternalistic and more

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844 Eriksson Baaz 2005.
context-sensitive is created. Also at Kvinna till Kvinna, Sweden is placed outside of colonial history, which corresponds to the Swedish self-image of the anti-imperialist, neutral actor especially respectful of the local context.\textsuperscript{848}

However, approaching post-conflict societies as clean slates has been more of a rule that an exception among external interveners.\textsuperscript{849} When it comes to civil society, Bosnia was, despite its relatively high number of various civic associations during the socialist era, treated as a tabula rasa. Identifying NGOs primarily with civil society, Western donors bypassed what had been there before their arrival.\textsuperscript{850} Kvinna till Kvinna was no exception here, as it de facto only supported new NGOs which it openly sought to influence. Concerning study visits to Sweden, they seem to have been an undebated subject within the organization. There was also an opinion that study visits in some other Western countries could not possibly be as good as the ones conducted in Sweden.\textsuperscript{851} Among other things, we find that Sweden “has a lot to give to the newly established third sector in Bosnia-Herzegovina”.\textsuperscript{852} While the wording used here implies a total absence of associationism in Bosnia, a well-developed Swedish third sector is not only presupposed but also presented as a model of democratic organizing of the kind just being created in Bosnia.

Gender equality was another main area of specifically Swedish expertise.\textsuperscript{853} While confirming Sweden’s reputation internationally and the Swedish self-image as the forerunner of gender equality, the latter is, however, not described as fully realized:

Since Sweden in many ways is a role model for most countries in terms of gender equality efforts, we should take advantage of that and for instance convey our

\textsuperscript{848} Eriksson Baaz 2001; Berg 2007. See also Öhman 2008.
\textsuperscript{849} See, for example, Richmond 2009; Donais 2012.
\textsuperscript{850} See Sali-Terzić 2001.
\textsuperscript{851} Weekly report March 6 1998.
\textsuperscript{852} “har mycket att ge till det nystartade föreningslivet i Bosnien-Hercegovina” Application to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1997.
\textsuperscript{853} Application to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1997; Annual request to Sida 2002; Annual request to Sida for 2008–2011.
history, how we have gone and go about things, what pitfalls there are and what objectives remain to achieve.  

Coming to Sweden was an opportunity for Bosnian activists to get an insight into the approaches utilized there in advancing gender equality. In an effort to benefit them, sharing both positive and negative experiences of gender equality work was important. Still remaining challenges such as, for example, high frequency of domestic violence cases were discussed along with the positive examples. This was an effective way of pointing to the universality of some gender-related problems and signaling that the best prospect of success in coming to terms with them was to work together. There is evidence that study visits were used to ignite interest in collective action. The visits were also an energy injection for NGO women who were often overworked: “X was changed almost beyond recognition! She was so incredibly excited and incredibly happy with the visit and incredibly happy that we had sent her [to Sweden]. And…most importantly: she really seemed to have been inspired”.  

The euphoric tone in the quote above indicates that a visit to Sweden was intended not only to give inspiration regarding specific activities, but also potentially to inspire a deeper personal transformation. Comments about wishing to “sponsor some of the young girls that we meet and who want to change their lives – that is, not do exactly what their moms did” expose a view of Bosnian women in general as oppressed by gender and as a rather gender-blind collective. Descriptions of women in non-Western parts of the world as oppressed and unenlightened are not new among Western feminists. Neither is the notion of the so-called “White woman’s burden” which gives women from the West a role as saviors of their less fortunate sisters. Some claim that this idea

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855 See Newsletter no. 1, April 2005.
858 See also Weekly report October 11 1997.
859 See, for example, Mohanty 1988; Parpart 1993.
lives on in modern interventionist projects.\footnote{Syed and Ali 2011. See also Eriksson Baaz 2005.} Traces of such thinking are found at Kvinna till Kvinna too, for instance in comments like the one made after the 1998 visit from Bosnian NGO women: “who are also trying to convince Bosnian women that now is the time for them to take part in the construction of their country. Traditionally, men have taken care of society while women have taken care of the home”.\footnote{“som också försöker övertyga Bosniens kvinnor att det nu är dags för dem att ta del av uppbyggnaden av sitt land. Traditionellt har ju männen skött samhället medan kvinnorna tagit hand om hemmen” Newsletter no. 1 February 1998.} The statement made in the second part of this quote is not only a generalization that presents Bosnian women as passive victims of patriarchy, but also a contradiction of historical evidence regarding their role as societal actors.\footnote{See Walsh 1998; Blagojević 2009.} As Kvinna till Kvinna writes in a request to Sida, its own task in Bosnia was “initiating new thinking” which was “from a Bosnian point of view, new and radical”.\footnote{Annual request to Sida for 2008-2011, 29.}

From this perspective, sending NGO women on a study visit to Sweden was a tempting thought: “They thought it would be a good idea if we invited them to Sweden to learn more about equality. Although it was more or less a joke, I also think it would be a good idea. They are hardly feminists and could learn a lot.”\footnote{“De tyckte att det var en bra idé om vi skulle bjuda in dem? Till Sverige för att lära sig mer om jämlikhet. Även om det var mest på skoj så tycker nog jag också att det vore en bra idé. De är knappast några feminister och skulle kunna lära sig mycket.” Weekly report February 17 1997.} There is no doubt here that a visit to Sweden was believed to help these Bosnian women to widen their views regarding gender equality, which has, as some critics contend, come to be perceived in Sweden as a specifically Swedish value.\footnote{Mulinari 2009. See also Eduards 2002, 122.} In her insightful analysis of the partnership discourse, which she deems contradictory, Maria Eriksson Baaz says that the emphasis on supporting local initiatives and requiring them to exhibit their own contributions, is fertile soil for stereotyping.\footnote{Eriksson Baaz 2001, 166-167.} Thus at Kvinna till Kvinna, we find the idea of transnational sisterhood side by side with the notion of Swedish superiority. Descriptions of Bosnia as a “pastoral hobbit-country [...] very beautiful (on the outside) [emphasis added]” reveals thoughts about its lagging behind not only in terms of
economy and politics, but culturally too. The Bosnian ‘Other’ is presented as culturally different, in need of education in subjects ranging from democratic organizing, gender equality and feminism to critical thinking and also public speaking, as reading from the manuscript was “pretty common here [in Bosnia]”. Sweden and Swedish women (represented by Kvinna till Kvinna employees), on the other hand, provided a point of reference for democracy, emancipation, feminist consciousness and even morality.

In addition to education in form of seminars and workshops, example-setting by women who worked at Kvinna till Kvinna was also meant to be educational. Some of the representatives I interviewed spoke about modelling certain behaviors in encounters with ‘partners’ as well as Bosnian society in general. Thus, a study visit to Sweden, conducted in 1998, showed “how we live our private lives – in cohousing – in apartments in urban areas and the houses by the sea [in the archipelago]. This particular opportunity to […] find out […] how we combine private and professional lives was very much appreciated”. While this study visit was clearly a pleasant experience for both parties, there is also an obvious normative side to the way in which Kvinna till Kvinna describes it.

Given the above, the fact that exclusively Swedish citizens served as Kvinna till Kvinna’s representatives in Bosnia is not irrelevant. It is common among foreign donors to employ members of host populations, not least due to economic reasons. In 2010 a Sida evaluation concluded that “the same (or even better) quality of relationship and results, at a lower cost, [could have been yielded] by engaging and building capacity of more senior local staff to represent KtK in the field office”. While Sida three years later forced this trend to be broken, until then one of the arguments for Kvinna till Kvinna using field representatives from Sweden was that it did not want to “drain the human re-

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869 Interview with Julia Samuelsson, October 13 2010; Interview with Alva Magnusson, July 23 2013.
870 “ hur vi lever privat – i kollektivhus – i stadslägenhet och i hus i skärgården. Just den här möjligheten att […] se […] hur vi förenar privatliv och arbetsliv blev mycket uppskattad” Newsletter no. 1, February 1998.
sources from the very same women’s movement that we are trying to support”, a sound reasoning as international organizations usually absorb many of the highly qualified local people. Another major argument has been that the Swedish field representatives have “extensive experience from working with gender equality and women’s empowerment in Sweden and abroad”.

This is hardly a question of general competence in the field of gender equality, but of a specific view on it. What is not revealed here is that a small minority of the women who worked as field representatives in Bosnia towards the end of the period studied did not have Swedish roots. However, even they had spent most of their lives well-integrated in Swedish society. Reflecting on the scant contacts between organized Bosnian women in Sweden and women’s movements in the country, including Kvinna till Kvinna, the historian Branka Likić-Brborić argues that the latter “is a good example of the immigrant women’s exclusion from Swedish aid organizations”. Likić-Brborić, as others have done before her, admonishes that immigrant women as well as women in developing countries need to be invited to participate more equally in discussions on gender equality. A former field representative, when talking about the benefits of hiring Swedish staff, told me, however, “as regards gender equality, we also generally have a good insight into what we think it should be [emphasis added]”. This statement suggests that there was limited space for discussions of this kind. On the basis of all that has been discussed so far in this section, it is my interpretation that employing staff from Sweden had the function of ensuring that the desired view of gender equality and feminism reached Bosnian women.

It is important to mention that Bosnian NGO women were not constructed as an undifferentiated ‘Other’. Some possessed a satisfying level of gender-awareness and analytical thinking. Others showed potential that could be developed, especially during a study visit to Sweden:

it was a bit of a pity that she did not join us in Stockholm. She has very good views, but it takes a little while before she dares to formulate them. Like everyone

872 Annual request to Sida 2007, 9.
873 See, for example, Wilén 2009.
874 Annual request to Sida 2007, 9.
875 Likić-Brborić 2006, 27.
876 See also de los Reyes 1998 and Ålund 1991.
877 “vad gäller jämställdhet så har vi också generellt god insikt om vad vi tycker det ska vara” Interview with Julia Samuelsson, October 13 2010.
There has been resistance among Bosnian women’s organizations as well as individual Bosnian women towards declaring oneself feminist. This does not by any means imply, as this quote confirms, an absence of awareness regarding gender inequality. The rejection of the term “feminist” tends to depend on the social stigma such a label still evokes in Bosnia (and, to a lesser extent in Sweden). While clearly feminist in terms of the work they do, many women’s NGOs refrain from using the word “feminism” due to its political connotations in order to avoid an unwanted reputation. Research conducted around 2011 shows that only three NGOs at that time openly identified themselves as feminist; interestingly, all three have been supported by Kvinna till Kvinna for many years.

One of the NGO women I interviewed addressed the fact that many educated women in Bosnia feel uncomfortable using the term:

I explain [feminism] to women and say “I am a feminist because I cook, raise my children, clean up my home, educate myself, work […] and] oppose discrimination”. So they say, “Is that feminism?” “It is, because I want to give myself a life without violence.” And they say, “I am a feminist.” […] each of us has the right to choose what type of feminism to embrace.

Notice that her definition of feminism, apparently acceptable to local women, incorporates traditional women’s work along with education and work outside of home, which are usually seen as signs of emancipation. A multitude of definitions and forms of feminism has always existed as the direction in which feminism develops depends on different political and social contexts. However, Western interpretations of the priorities and proper ways of feminist action, which have also been different in different Western countries, have tended to

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879 See Helms 2013, 185-187.

880 Popov-Momčinović 2013b, 268-269.

Differences in opinion regarding the activities of Bosnian women’s organizations showed in chapter seven constitute an example of collision between diverging views on women’s priorities. Although Kvinna till Kvinna did not ask local activists to declare themselves feminists, a feminist consciousness was desirable from the beginning. There was frustration about a perceived lack of gender-awareness in some women’s groups in Bosnia. When looking for “some intellectual stimulation”, the field representatives turned to Serbia and Croatia where women’s NGOs were generally more vocal and used methods of work known to Western donors. Elissa Helms, who has researched extensively on women’s activism in Bosnia, has found that Bosnian NGOs, due to the more conservative context they operated in, preferred working behind the scenes, thus “pursu[ing]feminism ‘the Bosnian way’.”

Swedish actors have been more than willing to export gender equality to the post-communist/socialist countries. In previous chapters, allusions have been made to thoughts at Kvinna till Kvinna about the incompatibility between feminism and communist ideology. This assumption meant seeing women’s agency under a communist/socialist regime as strongly limited as well as viewing those who subscribed to communist ideology as not real advocates of women’s rights. We have to be mindful of the fact that qualifications of the socialist period as not women-friendly were probably more than it has been registered, uttered by local activists. Cold War discourse has also been actively produced and reproduced by some feminists from the former Yugoslav region who fed into the notions about the Balkans that prevailed in the West. Perhaps this

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882 Hannam, 2013.
883 Weekly report February 13, March 27, September 28 1996.
886 Helms 2013, 115.
887 See, for example, Blomberg et al 2017.
888 For scholarly debate on women’s agency and feminism in Eastern European state socialism see, for example, Funk 2014 ; Ghodsee 2015.
890 Rada Drezgić and Dubravka Žarkov have looked specifically at the work of the well-known journalist and writer Slavenka Drakulić noting “gradual but obvious change” in her description of people and the former Yugoslav society. This is especially the case in works aimed at audiences in the West, which are rich on both Balkanism and Cold War discourse. See Drezgić and Žarkov 2005, This information is not unimportant as Drakulić has been published and read extensively in Sweden.
can help us even better understand Kvinna till Kvinna’s view of Bosnia as a blank slate in terms of gender equality in a broad sense.

As I have written elsewhere, sources indicate limited interest at Kvinna till Kvinna in the history of the area, including the histories of women’s activism and feminism.\textsuperscript{891} Considering the fact that Kvinna till Kvinna presented knowledge about the local context as one of its distinguishing qualities, this silence is puzzling. I have found it to be a way of legitimizing the role of the foundation in Bosnia, but also a token of poor knowledge of basic facts about Bosnian/Yugoslav women’s history and disinterest in the subject as a whole. I had not foreseen that a women’s organization with Kvinna till Kvinna’s record would fail to ensure that basic historical knowledge was procured by its employees before their departure to Bosnia. But it did. Thus, we encounter a field representative who, a few years into serving in the area, in a conversation with local activists finds out that the right to abortion had existed there as long as in Sweden.\textsuperscript{892} Despite the fact that this right had remained intact throughout the post-socialist period, two other field representatives chose the topic for a lecture held in 2006 at a conference that summoned female leaders of trade unions from Central, Eastern and Southeastern Europe:

We spoke a lot about abortion and a woman’s right to her body and counted on getting some opposition, but it was unusually quiet. Just got assenting nods from people sitting closest to us […] especially from a woman who was later introduced as Sonja Lokar (had just heard the name earlier), so maybe it was not that odd. However, we were later on criticized by the coordinator of the conference for raising the issue of abortion […] so maybe there was a little bit of discussion at least, we felt satisfied. After all, we were not exactly surrounded by any real advocates of gender equality (unfortunately), with some exceptions [emphasis added].\textsuperscript{893}

\textsuperscript{891} Bajramović Jusufbegović 2018.
\textsuperscript{892} Weekly report February 2 2004.
\textsuperscript{893} “Vi pratade en hel del om abort och en kvinnas rätt till sin kropp och hade räknat med att få en del mothugg, men det var ovanligt tyst. Fick enbart medhållande nickar från de som satt närmast […] framförallt av en kvinna som sedan blev presenterad som Sonja Lokar (har bara hört namnet förut), så det var kanske inte så konstigt. Dock fick vi kritik senare av ko-ordinatorn för konferensen att vi hade tagit upp abortfrågan […] så då kanske det blev lite diskussion i alla fall, vi kände oss nöjda. Vi var trots allt inte direkt omgivna av några egentliga förkämpar för jämställdhet (tyvärr), med vissa undantag.” Weekly report August 30 2006.
Eager to convey knowledge about ‘the right version’ of gender equality and feminism, the field representatives did not expect that they might be knocking on an open door. What this example shows is not only a lack of knowledge about history, but also about relevant female actors in the region.\textsuperscript{894} The attitude manifested here resembles superiority rather than context-sensitivity and partnership. As we have seen earlier in this section on study visits to Sweden, assumptions were made and norms set concerning ‘real’ advocates of gender equality and ‘real’ feminists on the basis of Kvinna till Kvinna’s own definitions of those concepts.

The last study visit to Sweden was carried through in 2005. The same year, in the annual request to Sida for 2006, regional exchange was “defined as an area where even further effort should be made”.\textsuperscript{895} It should be noted that this emphasis on regional exchange was not new, but had been encouraged by Kvinna till Kvinna during most of the period studied. However, from 2006, the organization wished to use funds previously spent on study visits to Sweden for encounters within the Balkan region. An exchange of experiences between activists from the region was considered to offer “many comparative advantages”.\textsuperscript{896} Women’s NGOs “in the countries further back in the line” where Bosnia undoubtedly was included, were believed to have a great deal to gain from hearing about the experiences of their counterparts in neighboring countries, in this case Croatia, which had been successful in demanding women-friendly changes in legislation.\textsuperscript{897}

\textbf{Swedish and regional experts in Bosnia}

Activists in ‘partner’ organizations received education also via conferences and seminars arranged in Bosnia. The number of such meetings, organized either by local NGOs with support from Kvinna till Kvinna or entirely by the latter has been rather high. While the themes treated on these occasions were miscellaneous, the emphasis here lies on the ones concerning women in politics as well as women’s activism. A substantial number of seminars was led by lecturers from Sweden who were expected to deliver knowledge and share experiences believed to be missing in Bosnia. It is a common way of capacity-building, closely linked

\textsuperscript{894} Sonja Lokar is a sociologist who was active in politics in the early 1990s. Lokar is one of the initiators of the Stability Pact Gender Task Force for South Eastern Europe and a regional expert on gender issues.

\textsuperscript{895} Annual request to Sida 2006, 10.

\textsuperscript{896} Annual request to Sida 2006, 10.

\textsuperscript{897} Annual request to Sida 2006, 10.
to a liberal vision of peacebuilding and imbued by “serious power imbalance”. Prior to the peace operations initiated after the Cold War, importing expertise from Western countries to developing countries has for decades been an essential part of development practice. As Jane L. Parpart contends, despite the critique and the earlier mentioned change in the language of external actors, “the presumption of Western technical and moral superiority never flagged”.

Lars Bäck, an adviser to the Swedish Minister of Equality Margareta Winberg, spent four days in Bosnia in the fall of 2001. Upon his departure from Sweden, he was “hop[ing] that many men will come to listen. They will get an instructive lesson in what democracy is – that power should be shared by both women and men”. After Bäck returned home, he wrote a text published in KvinnatillKvinnas newsletter. Besides celebrating the work of Bosnian women’s NGO regarding domestic violence, trafficking and lobbying for legislative changes, he wrote about his encounter with “a country spelled with a large M – Men’s Bosnia” suggesting that the country should be renamed “Mennia”. The desire to mobilize support for KvinnatillKvinna resulted thus in a generalization concerning Bosnian men. The image of the abusive and dominant Bosnian man was contrasted with the Swedish gender-conscious man embodied by the gender expert Bäck himself. Nowhere do we, for instance, read a single note about the high rates of domestic violence and trafficking in Sweden. These facts are omitted and the problem placed specifically in the Bosnian context. It is worth mentioning that KvinnatillKvinna itself, informed by the balkanist discourse, both explicitly and implicitly displayed a belief of the Balkans as an “extremely male chauvinist” area where “women are often a forgotten group”. There is no shortage of comments about Balkan macho men.

899 Parpart, 143.
Sweden’s status as one of the most gender equal countries in the world can sometimes give the impression that the road to gender equality has been a conflict-free process. As mentioned in previous section, Kvinna till Kvinna realized the value of sharing knowledge about the hard work of the women’s movement behind this success early on. The Swedish women’s struggle for equality was viewed and used as a source of inspiration to local activists. It is in this context we should place invitations of Swedish experts to Bosnia. Women with long experience of participation in political life in Sweden were invited to Bosnia. Not surprisingly, many of the seminars on women’s role in politics and women’s organizing took place during election years, which in the Bosnian context means every second year. A few months before the general elections in 1998, Tone Tingsgård, Social Democrat and at the time member of the Swedish Riksdag, spoke at a conference about women’s role in politics.904 Two years later, when another parliamentary election drew near, her older party colleague who had had an impressive political career came to Bosnia. Anita Gradin had during her many years in politics held several ministerial positions, served as ambassador in Austria and was the first Swedish European Commissioner between 1995 and 1999. In her lecture, Gradin addressed the importance of women having access to decision-making. She also encouraged the politicians to form women’s sections within their political parties in order to be more successful in putting women’s issues on the agenda. Her speech was distributed to all member of the RS parliament via women parliamentarians.905

It is noticeable that all Swedish politicians who came to Bosnia to share their experiences with local women were Social Democrats. The choice of invited speakers probably depended on the existing contacts. Recommendations were sought from persons such as Lena Ag, who had a background in the Social Democratic Party, especially its women’s section SSKF, and who herself visited the country on a couple of occasions lecturing and leading workshops on female politicians and the media.906 Further, one should also take into account the long tradition of international commitment and solidarity existing in SSKF. As Emma Elinor Lundin has shown in her thesis on connections between Swedish Social Democratic Women and women in the African National Congress of South Africa, SSKF has been supporting projects aiming at developing women’s political competence since the 1960s. Throughout the 1970s, it kept close ties

904 Quarterly report to Sida May-August 1998.
with women that took part in liberation movements in different corners of the
world, aided projects focused on women and informed the public about their
grievances. At the same time, Social Democratic women, as for example Anita
Gradin, who chaired the Swedish delegation at the UN conference on women
in Nairobi, took active part in discussions on women’s issues in the interna-
tional arena.907

Some lecturers, as for example Gunilla Thorgren, the former Undersecretary
of State to the Swedish Minister of Culture Marita Ulvskog and a journalist, as
well as her journalist colleague Maria-Pia Boëthius, had quite an exciting activist past.908 Both had fascinating success stories about the feminist struggle for
gender equality to tell. Above all, they had the potential to convey with credi-
ibility the message of how important it is that women act as a united front in
order to achieve results. While Thorgren had been involved in the Swedish fem-
inist Group 8 as well as in the US-based radical feminist movement Redstock-
ings active in the 1970s, Boëthius was the initiator of the feminist network Sup-
port Stockings in the early 1990s. The story of the construction of Support
Stockings is of particular relevance here. Kvinna till Kvinna’s field representa-
tives themselves had on different occasions used this example when speaking
about methods practiced by Swedish women in order to get access to politics.
It counted as a story “which really inspires everyone here”.909 Some local activ-
ists got an opportunity to meet Maria-Pia Boëthius during a study visit to Swe-
den in 1998 and were, according to Kvinna till Kvinna, “very impressed to meet
a real activist”.910 They wanted her to come to Bosnia, which she gladly ac-
cepted, writing to Kvinna till Kvinna about her readiness to “help them in every
possible way”.911

Unlike the generally positive view on study visits in Sweden, bringing Swe-
dish experts to Bosnia seems to have triggered some debate within the organi-
zation. During the interview I conducted with two of Kvinna till Kvinna’s
founders, I was told that the matter of “flying down a lot of Swedish experts”
used to lead to heated discussions during the first Kvinna till Kvinna board

909 “vilket alla blir otroligt upplyfta av här” Weekly report May 23 1997.
910 “mycket imponerad över att möta en riktig aktivist” Quarterly report to Sida May-
August 1998, 3.
911 E-mail from Maria-Pia Boëthius to Kvinna till Kvinna, June 9 1998.
meetings.912 Written internal sources show that utilizing Swedish experts was sometimes not considered as a success. I managed to trace two occasions of field representatives expressing dissatisfaction with invited experts.913 One of the cases also exposes a disagreement between those working at the Sarajevo office: “Regarding the seminar itself, we have slightly differing opinions on how good it was”.914 Unfortunately, due to scarce information, it is not possible to account for the exact differences of opinion. Generally, the sources consulted for this research show very few signs of opposition within Kvinna till Kvinna. However, some differences of opinion and even introspection were discerned in interviews with a few former field representatives when we touched upon the topic of Swedish experts and the exclusion of local women from positions at the Swedish foundation.915 Having left the organization was probably an important factor for this openness. According to Åke Daun’s research on the Swedish mentality, which I find helpful here, ethnically and socially homogenous societies create homogenous cultures. In such cultures, everybody knows their place, and silence is often used as a tool to avoid jeopardizing one’s own position.916 If we apply Daun’s thoughts to Kvinna till Kvinna, it seems likely that it was important for its personnel to know what they could say and, even more crucially, what not to say.

Alongside inviting Swedish experts, Kvinna till Kvinna also made use of regional experts that it assessed as having valuable knowledge to convey. The two founders I interviewed spoke about realizing early on that Swedish experts might not always be the best solution:

Of course, however, we cannot deny that there are times when we do not have the same experiences and if we take the network meetings, we can then choose to invite […] our partners from Croatia to speak in Georgia or wherever it may be, which has some kind of…which shares the same experience. It is obvious that in different issues in different contexts […] we cannot share the experience of being a refugee or whatever it may be. When necessary, we must try not to let on

912 “flyga ner en massa svenska experter”, Interview with Susanna Lennartsson, July 2 2009. See also Interview with Fanny Eriksson, December 27 2013.
914 “Vad gäller själva seminariet så har vi lite olika åsikter om hur bra det var” Weekly report September 19 2003.
915 Interview with Fanny Eriksson, December 27, 2012; Interview with Alva Magnusson, July 23, 2013.
916 Daun 1980.
Another source lets us know that besides the Swedish experts not having similar experiences as the women Kvinna till Kvinna wanted to support, there was also a worry about “[giving] the impression that there is a too big of a gap to overcome”. While the reference to large gap implies underdevelopment of ‘the Others’, it also reveals an awareness that relying excessively on Swedish experts could lead to disempowering instead of empowering the ‘partners’. Transferring knowledge within the Balkan region has been promoted by the Swedish foundation. In practice, it meant that usually lecturers from the well-known former Yugoslav feminist centers in Slovenia, Serbia and Croatia came to Bosnia. Bosnian women, in turn, went to Macedonia and Kosovo to share their experiences. This approach, along with the earlier mentioned refocusing of study visits from Sweden to the region, indicates an appreciation of local women’s knowledge and their important role in spreading of it. In this way, Kvinna till Kvinna confirms what scholars such as Parpart have argued, namely that only those external actors who take the time to get to know their ‘partners’ and learn from their own mistakes develop respect for local knowledge. However, we should bear in mind that regional educators have also at some point been exposed to Western expertise, and are themselves not free of power ambitions. To their less educated sisters, they can appear as a local technocrat elite.

Local responses
Generally, Bosnian NGO women were positive towards spending some time abroad for training purposes. In evaluations, they tend to emphasize what they learned and what existing ideas were refreshed. We should not forget that a

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917 “Men sedan ska vi inte sticka under stol med att…det finns ju naturligtvis tillfällen där vi inte har samma erfarenhet och om vi tar nätverksmötena eller så där kan vi då välja att bjuda in […] våra partners från Kroatien för att prata i Georgien eller vad det nu kan vara där man har någon slags…där man delar samma erfarenhet. Och det är klar att i olika frågor i olika sammanhang […] vi kan inte dela erfarenheten av att vara flykting eller vad det nu kan vara för någonting. Då får man ju när det behövs…får man inte låtsas om det […] och då får man hellre då låta några andra dela med sig.” Interview with Mia Sund, July 2 2009.

918 Final report to Sida 2004, 110.

919 Annual request to Sida 2002; Annual request to Sida 2003.

920 Parpart, 149-150.

921 Evaluations 1998 study visit to Sweden by Bosnian NGO women.
trip to Sweden after a few years of isolation was probably an attraction for local women. Comments about the visit to Stockholm, which had little to do with the work-related content of the trip but offered leisure activities, bear witness to this.922 Neither should we underestimate the fact that for the majority of these women travelling abroad was a luxury they themselves, at the time, could hardly afford. Judged from different sources, Kvinna till Kvinna a great many compliments for arranging the study visits to Sweden.923

Swedish experts were also generally much appreciated, not least due to the fact that these occasions usually consisted of both theoretical and practical parts.924 Persons invited to Bosnia typically stayed for a few days in the country in order to have enough time to engage with Bosnian NGOs and lead the practical work. Local activists let their Swedish donor know that they were inspired and “gained new energy”.925 As the source material indicates, Swedish experts were not seldom brought to Bosnia at the request of local NGOs.926 Having a dialogue on this matter was important for Kvinna till Kvinna.927 Occasionally, Kvinna till Kvinna questioned requests from local NGOs for visits from Swedish experts, arguing that they had already had many of those. Other solutions were sought, which sometimes still resulted in a suggestion to use the Swedish contacts of another local NGO.928

Bosnian activists emphasize the profound significance of influences from Sweden. After a seminar on feminism, held by the political scientist Maud Edwards, one activist said to the field representative that it “strongly affected her and her views on women’s struggle”.929 Also, I was told that:

922 Weekly report April 10 1996.
925 “fått ny energi” Quarterly report April-June 2002, 3.
928 Weekly report April 1 2003.
It could be said that this quote contains elements of what Nataša Kovačević has called the self-colonizing tendency. Kvinna till Kvinna is described as a saviour coming to a patriarchal area to enlighten its less informed sisters. The knowledge it brought there was new and much needed. However, what we also see here is an appreciation of care and support that de facto, at a critical point in time, enabled women’s activism in Bosnia. It is no secret that Bosnian women’s activists welcomed the involvement of foreign actors. Sources indicate that the interest among local activists to learn more about the historical roots of activism in Bosnia was limited during the immediate postwar years. Inspiration and role models were imported from all over the Western world. It is not surprising then that some of them admitted to know better “French and English women’s movements than ours”.

Others, while thankful for foreign support, made sure to remind me that feminist action has a long history in Bosnia, thus demonstrating the ambivalence that, as Blagojevic argues, characterizes the attitude of the semiperiphery towards the core. By 2009, when I did my first interviews in the country, the role of external expertise and the role of Bosnians as eternal students were starting to be questioned: “If you in 2009 say I want to do this and then a foreigner...”

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930 “Kvinna je nama ponudila jedan model društva koji mi nismo poznavali ranije. Model društva gdje je poloj žene sasvim drugačiji, u kojem su odnosi među polovima sasvim drugačiji i u kojem je pravni okvir koji definiše život porodice i žene sasvim drugačiji. Mi smo mislile da to znamo. Mi smo ušle u nešto što nismo još ni znale. Znači ušle smo bez jedne potpuno teorijske osnove, jer je naše obrazovanje [...] bilo zasnovano na patrijarhalnim idejama. Dakle, mi o ženskim pravima i ženskom pokretu nismo učili. Mi smo mislile da smo ravnopravni.“ Interview with Angelina Branković, September 1 2009. On the importance of foreign organizations for the ‘awakening’ of interest for women's activism see also Interview with Tina Mladenović, September 2 2009; Interview with Divna Trifunović, September 10 2009.

931 “francuski i engleski ženski pokret nego naš“ Interview with Angelina Branković, September 1 2009.

932 Interview with Sanja Novosel, September 8 2009; Interview with Meliha Selimović, September 6 2009.
comes as a consultant. 2009? Are the foreigners not [here] since 2002? Why again?! Could you not be a consultant? For example [emphasis added].” 933 Interestingly, I was included in the Bosnian ‘we’ although the interviewee was well aware of the fact that I lived in Sweden and had done so for a long time. It, however, unveils a perception of foreign (Western) experts as exclusive bearers of knowledge transferred to Bosnia. Indeed, the quote above raises legitimate questions. What expertise did Bosnian activists possess? Were they invited to Sweden as experts and, in case they were, on what occasion? Activists from Bosnia went from time to time to Sweden to participate in seminars arranged by Kvinna till Kvinna. The purpose was, for example, to speak about trafficking to Swedish troops preparing for deployment to a conflict area, or participate in discussions on the situation in Bosnia and its future. 934 Discussions in which they took an active part seem to have been closely linked to the problems they faced in their communities. The source material used in this thesis does not offer any information about Bosnian activists being invited to seminars where the main topic was, for instance, gender equality and feminism.

**Expectations and rebellion of the context**

External interveners not seldom strive to transplant the values brought from home into the societies they seek to mend. 935 Kvinna till Kvinna was careful to point out that it did not want to tell Bosnian women exactly what they should do, but “give them knowledge and models so that they themselves can decide which path they want to take”. 936 However, in reporting to sponsors of the study visits, results were carefully listed and promises made to “follow up to what extent they have been able to apply effectively – or specifically plan activities or actions based on the experience the visit provided”. 937 Different sources

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934 *Tidningarnas Telegrambyrå* October 17 2002; Newsletter no. 7, December 2002; Newsletter no. 6, December 2005. Natalija Petrić from the NGO United Women, who participated at the seminar on Bosnia’s future was earlier the same fall invited to The Book Fair in Gothenburg. See Newsletter no. 4, September 2005.


936 “ge dem kunskap och modeller så att de själva kan välja vilken väg de vill gå.” Application to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1997.


232 SANELA BAJRAMOVIĆ *Hierarchical Sisterhood*
show that the organization expected that study visits would yield concrete results, but also that these expectations were both unrealistic and lacked context-sensitivity. To inspire an NGO from Mostar to embark on some pre-election activities focused on women’s rights, in January 1996, barely a month after the peace agreement was signed, a group of eight women was brought on a study visit to Sweden.938 While sources do not reveal details about the visit itself, we find out that it was concluded by the identification of a need for information about women’s human and legal rights in Bosnia.939 The plan was that the NGO would apply for a grant from Sida and, if approved, create a number of radio programs on women’s rights that were to be aired prior to the first postwar elections. However, it took a few months before a project proposal was submitted to Sida. In the meantime, discussions about whether the NGO was at all prepared to talk about human rights in public or not took place. There was no consensus among those who were involved in the organization regarding the matter.940 During meetings with Kvinna till Kvinna’s representative, who reminded them of their talks in Stockholm, activists tried to convince her that the week spent in Sweden was truly appreciated and even expressed shame for their hesitation about openly working with human rights. Suggestions regarding another NGO that Kvinna till Kvinna could work with when it came to rights were also verbalized.941

How is it that women who, as Kvinna till Kvinna reported to its Swedish supporters, during their visit in Sweden “realized that in Bosnia-Herzegovina women are invisible in political life and no [political] party looks after women’s interests”942 and thought that spreading information about human rights “was a brilliant idea” hesitated about carrying out such a project once they returned home?943 Did discussions and doubts that arose after the study visit to Sweden depend on disinterest or perhaps the very political nature of human rights?

After the first multi-party elections in the 1990, women in Bosnia were pushed off the public scene. The war and the everyday struggle for survival that came with it, re-established their position in the private sphere. The difficult

938 Quarterly report to Sida January-March 1996.
939 Newsletter no. 2, March 1996.
940 Weekly report March 22, April 10 1996.
941 Weekly report April 10, March 22 1996.
942 “konstaterade att i Bosnien-Hercegovina är kvinnorna osynliga i det politiska livet och inget parti tar till vara kvinnornas intresse.” Newsletter no. 2, March 1996.
economic and political situation in combination with continuous reports about extensive corruption by politicians caused a view on politics as an utterly dirty and dishonest business and a primarily male sphere.944 Research conducted by Zilka Spahić-Šiljak shows that Bosnian citizens of both sexes and different religious affiliation, living in different parts of the country, and regardless of the level of education, only declaratively support women entering politics and holding positions of power. While tying women to the family, obligations related to political work in the practically all-male sphere were believed to jeopardize women’s morality.945 Similar conclusions regarding politics not being a place for women, at least respectable ones, are drawn by Elissa Helms. In politics as a male arena, women “were doubly suspect as political actors, both for entering this contaminated realm and, on a personal level, as it cast suspicion on their sexual reputations”.946

Taking into consideration the prevailing attitudes toward politics in general and a political role of women in particular might shed some light on the attempt of the local NGO to withdraw from the tense sphere of formal politics, which it would enter by carrying out pre-election activities. If we add the fact that the war had just recently ended and the domination of public space by ethno-nationalist parties, propagating human rights for all people was at the time not risk-free. Such activity could be interpreted as betrayal of their ‘own side’ and lead to ostracism, not least in a segregated city like Mostar where in 1996 incidents were still happening on a daily basis. Neither should we dismiss the possibility that some local activists themselves, no matter how cosmopolitan they declared themselves, were not ready to face the other side and acknowledge its rights. To what degree did Kvinna till Kvinna understand the reservations of local activists in Mostar towards openly engaging in political work, and how was this reluctance handled?

For starters, being political, daring to present one’s beliefs publicly and openly fight for them was without doubt seen as virtue by Kvinna till Kvinna.947 While considered needed, efforts done to improve women’s health and enhance knowledge and skills were intended as preparatory measures for the political

944 Spahić-Šiljak 2010, 249.
945 Spahić-Šiljak 2010, 244-295.
946 Helms 2013, 168.
work that local NGOs were expected to do. Despite the failure of talks in Stockholm, it is possible to discern that the organization, through its representative in the field, continued to bring up the subject:

It is clearly that a harsh situation, and human rights constitute something very dangerous and political. [...] I personally think they make it much bigger than it is, but as someone said – these women are not at all accustomed to thinking politically and thus everything comes dangerously close to party politics. For most of them, a special campaign before the elections means that the listeners will be told which party to vote for.948

Helms writes about the troubles of women’s NGOs with politics. Above all, many organizations strived to distance themselves from those in power, blaming them for the war as well as the ongoing difficult situation in the country. Due to politics being viewed as a whore, as a popular saying goes, it has been common for women’s NGOs to label their work as humanitarian instead.949 However, a wealth of projects that focused on, for instance, refugee return, ethnic reconciliation and not least violence against women, prove that they have definitely been carrying out political work. Nonetheless, it is activities related to elections that seem to be seen as the real political work.950

After the revelation that local women, whom Kvinna till Kvinna viewed and promoted as a force of change in postwar Bosnia, hesitated to enter the field of politics, the Swedish organization seems to have somewhat adjusted its method of work. While abandoning political issues was not an alternative, one of the lessons learned was that it is necessary to help local activists to develop work with women’s rights, without it becoming too political. Sources show that suggestions were made about engaging in the seemingly unpolitical domains of society such as health, child care, schools as well as other things that affect women’s everyday life.951 Information about dilemmas encountered at the local ‘partner’ organization never reached the home audience, as it was important to sustain the enthusiasm for donating funds that would finance the mission. Only

949 Helms 2013, 158-159, 176-190.
950 Aganović 2015, 43.
a sentence made it into the quarterly report to Sida: “There has been a lot of discussion on what a humanitarian organization dares to say.”

As it turned out, the NGO eventually relented and a set of radio programs focused on women’s rights was broadcasted before the elections. This case uncovered the uneasiness of local women to concern themselves with political issues immediately after the war, thus indicating that motivating and strengthening them in that area could be a lengthy process. Despite that, Kvinna till Kvinna was looking to “broaden its democracy program”, firmly emphasizing its goal to support women’s groups which work to “get women into politics and bring up women’s issues on the political agenda”. It is important, though, to note that at the beginning of 1996, the number of local women, not to mention women’s NGOs, engaged in enhancing the political participation of women was very limited. Although some publications mention great participation of women in civil society at this time, this is partly true when it comes to organizations in the Federation, but in the RS women’s organizing did not start until the second half of 1996. Evidence suggest that Kvinna till Kvinna was one of the first international actors in Bosnia to actualize the issue of women’s political participation. Information about Swedish experiences remained to be seen as a source of inspiration for Bosnian women. In the spring of 1996, four women from Bosnia and Croatia visited Sweden. This time more attention was paid to the selection of women who were brought to Sweden. To be chosen, the women had to have demonstrated an interest in politics and a will to change society. These were also individuals with a wide network of contacts so they “can pass on the knowledge they obtained during the Sweden visit.”

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953 A short report from your special correspondent…, March 23 1996; Report to Kvinna till Kvinna’s board, June 12 1996; Newsletter no. 4, August 1996.
954 “breddar sitt demokratiprogram” Newsletter no. 1, January 1996.
955 För “att få in kvinnor i politiken och få upp kvinnofrågor på den politiska dagordningen” Newsletter no. 1, January 1996.
957 For generally larger number of NGOs in the Federation see Hurtić, Šapčanin and Woodward 2000, 342.
958 Newsletter no. 3, May 1996.
959 “kan föra vidare kunskaperna de få under Sverigevistelsen” Application to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1997.
Already in 1997, there were signs that the peace efforts made by the international community in Bosnia did not yield results as quickly as expected. The same ethno-national parties that the international community wanted to remove won the first postwar elections, which, according to critics, were held much too early. There had been little time for the formation of any kind of organized resistance. While keeping up the positive tone in its communication with the home audience, internal sources reveal a sense of a fatigue within Kvinna till Kvinna:

I think we all are a bit tired and disillusioned at the moment, wonder if we are doing any good, there is frustration about the fact that many of those we work with do not seem to be learning anything, instead we are still a bit like nannies etc etc. X [another international] would like an international colleague, someone to discuss certain things with, Y [another international] said the same thing yesterday and I think that is something that we all want [emphasis added].

This is an example of the ‘blaming of the other’ that happens in international development and peacebuilding contexts. Gudrun Dahl and others see it as an inevitable by-product of neoliberal thinking about the possibility of each individual to choose freely and act accordingly. While stereotyping and the attribution of problems to ‘the Other’ perpetuate the inherently unequal relationship between international and local actors, Maria Eriksson Baaz contends that they can also be interpreted as ways of handling feelings of one’s own uncertainty and failure. The disappointment expressed above clearly shows that Kvinna till Kvinna had more far-reaching ambitions than the situation on the ground allowed. Besides resting on the essentialist idea that women were not responsible for the war and therefore would find it easier to agree on the future, this reasoning also implies both underestimation of the consequences of the war as well as poor knowledge of the local context. That moderation and patience have not been the strengths of the international community when dealing with gender policy in Bosnia is affirmed by Vanessa Pupovac who notes that Bosnia

960 See, for example, McMahon 2002, 25.
961 “Jag tror att vi alla är lite trötta och desillusionerade just nu, undrar om vi gör någon nytta, frustrationen över att flera av de som vi arbetar med inte verkar som om de lär sig något utan vi är fortfarande lite av daddor osv osv. X skulle vilja ha en internationell kollega, någon att diskutera vissa saker med, Y sa detsamma igår och jag tror att det är något vi alla vill.” Weekly report June 4 1997. See also Weekly report September 12, 19, October 29 1997.
962 Dahl 2008.
has generally been expected to carry out radical changes in this area in much shorter period of time than would ever have been possible in Western countries.\textsuperscript{964} Unrealistic expectations regarding fast results of international efforts in a postwar country where segregation, besides being a product of war, is also cemented in the peace agreement itself borders, as Patrice MacMahon once put it, “on ahistoricism at best, foolishness at worst”.\textsuperscript{965}

**Concluding remarks**

Empowerment is nowadays one of the buzzwords routinely used in many contexts. However, to empower people may be a rather complicated undertaking in post-conflict areas, often previously unknown to international interveners. This chapter has provided an analysis of the main methods used by Kvinna till Kvinna to empower women’s NGOs in Bosnia. The creation of meeting places and the provision of education have been put center stage. The analysis was conducted along two different lines of interpretation, one focused on notions of Western/Swedish supremacy and the other on well-intentioned efforts to awaken interest in women’s issues and cooperation in favor of an inclusive peace.

The findings show that Kvinna till Kvinna very actively and strategically engaged in (re)building relationships and encouraging cooperation between women’s NGOs in Bosnia. The organization was from an early stage after the war involved in creating meeting places. Carefully planned meetings with regard to differences among activists were arranged in Bosnia, but also on more neutral territory such as Sweden. The space created was aimed for organized women to meet and connect both as human beings and as a collective of activists. This was also an alternative learning space meant to provide them with relevant and useful knowledge. Both of the functions of this space can be seen as valuable contributions to empowerment within a peacebuilding context. The persistent work of Kvinna till Kvinna as a facilitator of communication and a contact between local women’s groups resulted eventually in inspiration for the latter to network on their own. However, arranging gatherings for women and calls for community among them was initially mostly an internationally driven project. The influences from the fourth UN conference on women is apparent. Women in Bosnia were seen as a potential peacebuilding force expected to meet shortly after the war across divides and work together. As I have shown, this was unrealistic in the deeply ethnically divided Bosnia, forcing local NGO

\textsuperscript{964} Pupavac 2005, 393.

\textsuperscript{965} MacMahon 2002, 28.
women to find ways to balance between loyalty to donors and to their communities.

It can easily be concluded that Kvinna till Kvinna’s mission in Bosnia was to a great extent a pedagogical one due to the fact that education was another dominant method of empowerment. Two ways in which education was delivered were treated here, the study visits to Sweden and inviting Swedish and regional experts to Bosnia. However, I argue that field representatives also had an educational role. The analysis has revealed an unquestionable readiness, based on female solidarity, to support the newly formed women’s NGOs in their work for an inclusive peace. The political dimension of empowerment, included in Stromquist’s definition of the concept, has been emphasized. For example, awareness-raising about gender inequalities and attempts at igniting mobilization around common issues were an integral part of the education provided. Interestingly, a belief in transnational sisterhood existed juxtaposed with notions of Swedish supremacy constructed through ‘othering’ of both Bosnians and international actors, primarily Americans, in Bosnia.

As a Swedish actor, Kvinna till Kvinna saw itself as possessing special knowledge about gender equality, feminism and the third sector, three areas in which Bosnia ‘lagged behind’. Through education, Kvinna till Kvinna sought to change the attitudes and behaviors of its Bosnian counterparts, whose view of women’s activism and feminism was not identical to that of the Swedish foundation. In these particular areas, Bosnia was seen as a clean slate. A token of this is the striking silence about state socialism, its gender order and women’s history in the area, but also the obvious lack of knowledge about these aspects of Yugoslav/Bosnian history demonstrated by field representatives. The practice of employing exclusively Swedish staff at the Sarajevo office indicates that transferring the ‘right’ view of gender equality/feminism/third sector activism was prioritized over and above the staff having significant local knowledge. This implies an idea of one-way capacity building as well as a hierarchy of knowledge. The knowledge of Bosnian NGOs that was recognized and promoted was narrowed down to the social issues they worked with and the situation in Bosnia. The link between knowledge and power appears clearly here. At the same time, the findings presented in this chapter suggest that the role of Kvinna till Kvinna in the transfer of experiences and knowledge from Sweden has been appreciated, and the knowledge itself desired, among Bosnian NGOs. The sources indicate self-colonizing tendencies, based on internalized thoughts about Bosnia lagging behind and therefore having to be enlightened. However, we also need to understand that the support and attention given by Kvinna till Kvinna bolstered women’s groups in this post-socialist and postwar space at a
critical point in time. Given this, we can say that their capacity to engage in a myriad of issues was enhanced.

Skeptical towards the notion of universal knowledge, Marina Blagojević cautions against believing that knowledge created elsewhere can explain social realities in the semiperiphery. Yet, external interveners have tended to presume that exporting models from their countries of origin would be helpful. This chapter has shown that Kvinna till Kvinna, despite using expressions such as “gaining inspiration” when describing the purpose of study visits to Sweden, expected the outcomes of these visits to be turned into concrete action. However, to paraphrase Blagojević, the context rebelled, and we have seen that “inspiration” could not easily be translated to the Bosnian politically sensitive postwar context where newly created women’s NGOs pursued a less publicly exposed type of activism. The shift to an emphasis on regional exchange that eventually occurred signals that Kvinna till Kvinna was willing to learn from these experiences and adjust its methods. Steven Sampson has described Western intervention in the Balkans as benevolent colonialism, acknowledging its civilizing aspect but also urging us seriously to consider its benevolent aspects in terms of aiding peacebuilding in the area, not solely driven by self-interest. In my judgment, this conception when applied to the case of Kvinna till Kvinna’s involvement in Bosnia captures well the ambivalence we find at Kvinna till Kvinna regarding the goodwill based on female solidarity and the idea of Swedish supremacy.
CHAPTER NINE

Fostering solidarity

Everywhere in former Yugoslavia we encounter women’s willingness to cooperate, regardless of ethnic and national boundaries. In communities where forces sometimes kindle ethnic tensions, these women work for reconciliation and gathering around common goals. We do everything we can to support them. Women’s willingness to look forward together, instead of focusing on the differences and what has been, can make the difference between peace and another war.\footnote{“Övertält i forna Jugoslavien möter vi kvinnors vilja till samarbete, oavsett etniska och nationella gränser. I samhällen där krafter ibland underbläser de etniska motsättningarna, verkar dessa kvinnor för försoning och samling kring gemensamma mål. Vi gör allt vi kan för att stödja dem. Kvinnornas vilja att gemensamt se framåt, istället för att se till motsättningarna och det som varit, kan utgöra skillnaden mellan fred och ännu ett krig.” Newsletter no. 1, February 2000.}

This statement by the first Secretary General of Kvinna till Kvinnna, Kerstin Grebäck, presents women’s part of civil society as an oasis of interethnic encounters and cooperation. While this is, as this chapter aims to show, a simplified description, it captures well the strong conviction at the Swedish foundation about the importance of community between women in conflict-affected areas and their joint work towards peace. As we have seen previously, considerable efforts had been put into motivating and preparing women’s groups in Bosnia to take on political issues and cooperate.

It is said that the postwar moment provides women with opportunities to participate actively in transformation of their societies. Many use this chance to engage in promoting women’s rights with the aim of achieving inclusive peace. Researchers like for instance Julie Arostegui suggest that the trauma experienced during the conflict holds the potential of bringing women together.\footnote{Arostegui 2013, 533.} Research on the last two decades has indeed documented many examples of cooperation between women in conflict/post-conflict settings around the world.\footnote{Cockburn 1998, 2007; Porter 2007; Arostegui 2013; Moosa, Rahmani and Webster 2013.} At the same time, the creation of any kind of movement-like collective action, especially in the era of NGOization characterized by professionalized NGOs with their own distinct interests engaging in competition for donor
funds, has proven to be a challenge. To act together requires a sense of community and at least a minimum of identified common interests. This chapter looks at women’s collective action in postwar Bosnia, exemplified by both successful cooperation and conflict. It also explores Kvinna till Kvinna’s role in fostering solidarity between domestic women’s organizations.

In the course of analysis in this chapter, the following questions are addressed: How did the cooperation between women’s groups in Bosnia unfold and what were its main achievements? How was the cross-entity cooperation perceived by domestic NGOs? What challenges arose in connection to cooperation and unity? How were they handled by Kvinna till Kvinna?

**Cooperation between Bosnian women’s NGOs**

Excitement was high. TV cameras were rolling and reporters swarmed with notebooks and pencils poised. T-shirts and tote bags, 2,000 of them, were emblazoned with a watermelon motif, the metaphor being that women are like the seeds of that favorite summer fruit, numerous and highly essential to its reproduction and resistance. Representatives from NGOs, clad in bright yellow shirts bearing the slogan “Glasajete za Zene” (Vote for women), were picking up their bag allotments for their organizations. The complete slogan on the bags, “Vote for Women – Women Know Local Problems Best – We need women to solve our problems – Vote for Women”, rhymes in Bosanski. The names of twenty-six women’s organizations from both the Bosnian Federation and the Republika Srpska were also listed. Visible here, among women, was the unity and cooperation so lacking at the parliamentary level.

Observations made by the professor of women’s studies Janet M. Powers, who attended the launching press conference for the 2012 pre-election campaign organized by women’s NGOs in Bosnia, provide us with a glimpse of this action. She underlines the cohesion manifested at the occasion and contrasts it, with good reason, to the general absence of political will to work jointly for the well-

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969 Lang 1997.

970 Powers and Prozo 2016, 186.
being of all citizens of Bosnia.\footnote{Cooperation between politicians from the two entities concerning common interests has proven difficult to establish. Hence, cross-entity organizing of women politicians has not yet been possible. While a club of women parliamentarians has been formed in the Federation in 2013, gathering women from different political parties, with the purpose to overcome political differences and work for interests of all citizens, no such activity has so far been realized on the state level. A suggestion to move in that direction was rejected by women politicians from the RS stating that there was no need for organizing because they were “completely equal”. See Miftari 2015, 69.} As in other violently divided societies, organized women in Bosnia have since the end of the war constantly challenged the fragmentation of the country by meeting and working together. Already during the war, Cynthia Cockburn documented positive examples of inter-ethnic cooperation in her study on the women’s therapy centre Medica. Founded in the midst of the war in Zenica, a predominantly Bosniak city in central Bosnia, Medica employed women of different ethnicities who attended to the needs of women in their community, including many refugees.\footnote{Cockburn 1998, 174-210.} However, while the women at Medica spent the war on the ‘same side’, many NGO women that crossed ethnic lines after the war have in fact lived on opposite sides of the front. In other words, while women at Medica fought to \textit{hold together}, the postwar encounters were more about \textit{coming together} after years of ethnic segregation.\footnote{Cockburn 2007, 79.}

A precondition for any kind of shared action was the early contacts pursued by women who refused the wartime model of total dividedness. Remembering the beginnings, Velenka Lazović said:

> What is perhaps specific for Bosnia is that we have very successfully broken down barriers. All of us together. And that gives a special quality to Bosnian women’s organizations and [it] should be an example for all others. Our cooperation was not only formal, but we really established friendly relations, real and somehow unbreakable bonds. At the same time, we were pioneers in that in Bosnia.\footnote{“Ono što je specifično možda za Bosnu, što smo jako uspješno razbijali te barijere. Sve zajedno. I to daje nekakav poseban kvalitet bosanskim ženskim nevladinim organizacijama i treba da bude primjer i za sve druge. Ta naša suradnja nije bila samo formalna nego smo zaista uspostavljali prijateljske odnose, prave i nekakve neraskidive veze. Istovremeno smo bili pioniri u tome u Bosni I Hecegovini.” Interview with Velenka Lazović, September 1 2009.}
In speaking about the NGO women’s border crossing, she accentuated that it was a success achieved by joint efforts. Thus, a ‘we’ can be discerned in her narrative. Lazović was also careful to point out that the relationships created between Bosnian activists often turned into friendships, which is something her colleague Danijela Pižula mentioned too. The latter spoke about the privilege of having NGO friends all over the country, considering it “a great richness”. Kvinna till Kvinna particularly was given credit for facilitating opportunities to meet and establish contacts.

While the women residing in the Federation did not speak about being condemned for contacts with ‘the other side’, the ones from the RS shared with me their experiences of working inside local communities imbued with aversion to cross-ethnic encounters. Their narratives bear witness of logistical difficulties during the first crossings of the entity line as well as the animosity, including threats, they had to endure in their localities for providing services to non-Serbs and striving to re-establish ties broken during the war. Moreover, connections with Western donors did not always work to their advantage. As the international factor in Bosnia was proclaimed the enemy of the Serb people, anyone receiving funds from the West risked being blamed for treason. The suspicion towards NGOs in the RS was eventually lessened when they embarked on burning social issues such as, for instance, domestic violence and trafficking, which made them valuable actors in their localities.

Just meeting across ethnic differences in a divided setting is thus in itself a political act that can endanger those who seek contacts outside their communities. Despite all the obstacles and the potential danger, there were women’s experiences of working inside local communities imbued with aversion to cross-ethnic encounters. Their narratives bear witness of logistical difficulties during the first crossings of the entity line as well as the animosity, including threats, they had to endure in their localities for providing services to non-Serbs and striving to re-establish ties broken during the war. Moreover, connections with Western donors did not always work to their advantage. As the international factor in Bosnia was proclaimed the enemy of the Serb people, anyone receiving funds from the West risked being blamed for treason. The suspicion towards NGOs in the RS was eventually lessened when they embarked on burning social issues such as, for instance, domestic violence and trafficking, which made them valuable actors in their localities.

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975 “veliko bogatstvo” Interview with Danijela Pižula, September 1 2009.
976 Interview with Velenka Lazović, September 1 2009; Interview with Danijela Pižula, September 1 2009; Interview with Alma Miljanović, September 9 2009.
977 Interview with Velenka Lazović, September 1 2009; Interview with Danijela Pižula, September 1 2009; Interview with Ana Marković, May 30 2012; Interview with Vera Jovanović, September 18 2013.
978 Danijela Pižula told me, for example, that her organization Lara closed its office during the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) bombings of Serbia in 1999. Any connection to Western donors was at the time risky in Bijeljina, which, not least due to its geographical position, traditionally cultivated close ties with Serbia. For example, young people from Bijeljina predominantly choose to pursue university studies in Serbia meaning that a large number of them was directly affected by the bombings. See interview with Danijela Pižula, September 1 2009.
979 Interview with Angelina Branković, September 1 2009; Interview with Velenka Lazović, September 1 2009; Interview with Ana Marković, May 30 2012.
groups in Bosnia which continued to engage in cross-ethnic encounters which with time evolved into cooperation on concrete projects. Some of them used the space that opened in connection to the elections in 1998 for joint action. Since then, cooperation between women’s NGOs on pre-election activities calling for enhanced political participation of women has more or less become a standard and a bright example of women’s collective action in postwar Bosnia. The very first pre-election actions carried out in 1998, when lobbying for the introduction of gender quotas was on the agenda, hold a special significance as a meeting point for women’s groups and are remembered as a moment of realization that such groups “actually do politics”.

In 1998, having formed a network called the League of Women Voters, a group of 13 organizations from both the Federation and the RS conducted a campaign focused on educating female voters.

The voter turnout in the first general postwar election in 1996 was high and included a significant number of female votes. However, apart from turning out to be a total success for ethno-nationalist parties, the 1996 election was also devastating in regards to the political representation of women with only one woman winning a seat in the state Parliament. In entity Parliaments, the House of Representatives of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the National Assembly of Republika Srpska, 5 percent and 2.4 percent of the Members of Parliament were women. The local elections, held in 1997, did not yield better results. The problem of women’s minimal presence in formal politics, despite the measures taken, was never resolved in socialist Yugoslavia. In 1990,

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980 Aganović 2015, 43.
981 The idea of forming a Leagues of Women Voters came from the US diplomat Swanee Hunt, who advised activists in Bosnia to build an organization like the US League of Women’s Voters. The latter was founded by the women engaged in the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) back in 1920 with the purpose to provide political education to the public.
982 Bakšić-Muftić 2002, 52.
when the first multi-party elections took place, the situation dramatically worsened.983 Despite this fact and the knowledge that women were severely affected by the war, no women participated in the peace negotiations in Dayton.984 Research shows that peace missions, especially those holding extensive mandates, have a tendency to affect power relations between men and women in the host states. When international actors lack knowledge and awareness about gender relations in the society they operate in, they risk contributing to a deterioration of the situation.985 The absence of women in Dayton and a lack of consideration of gender specificity in Bosnia did not promise “that in the newly created society their [women’s] voices and interests will be fully presented”.986

The pre-election process in 1998 testifies that important international actors such as OSCE and USAID, who strongly supported the campaign of women’s NGOs, at that point identified women as the priority target group. In 1998, the OSCE Interim Electorate Commission imposed allocation of gender quotas, insisting that three people out of the first ten on the ballot lists be women.987 As mentioned before, women were in – quite an essentialist way – thought of as being forces who could counter nationalist tendencies and perhaps speed up the peace process in Bosnia. Relevant voter education was believed to be a step in convincing women to vote differently than men. A great deal of focus was also put on female politicians. OSCE’s democratization department created a program called “Women in Politics” with the aim to strengthen female politicians and encourage them to cooperate with each other. Interestingly, the attention given by international actors to increased women’s representation in Bosnia happened also in Western Europe during the 1990s. It was seen as a priority and

983 In socialist Yugoslavia, the representation of women at all levels of government was generally low. Not until the mid-1970s, after the introduction of the so-called delegate system including quotas, did the number of women in political decision-making bodies start to increase significantly. The results of these changes were visible in republic and municipal assemblies in Bosnia which in 1986 had 24 respectively 17 percent of women among its delegates. See Spahić-Šiljak 2010, 147. However, the trend of women’s representation increasing was short-lived. In 1990, the percentage of elected women declined. Out of 240 seats in the Parliament, women won only seven (2.92 percent). See Bakšić-Muftić 2002, 52.

984 The only women in the Bosnian delegation in Dayton were two interpreters. See Veličković 2010, 31.

985 See, for example, Olsson 2007, 34-35.

986 Veličković 2015, 30.

a step towards an inclusive democracy.988 Women’s NGOs have been instrumental in carrying out this work. Using the slogan “There are more of us”, the campaign carried out by women’s NGOs reached 14,000 women across Bosnia.989 Besides mobilizing female voters and educating them, especially the ones living in rural areas who tend to be less informed about political events, but make up a considerable part of the electorate, NGOs worked with female politicians.990 Education and promotion of female candidates have ever since 1998 been usual pre-election activities of women’s NGOs. Establishing contacts with the media in order to enhance the visibility of female politicians in public, street actions, press conferences as well as putting pressure on authorities in local communities have been a significant part of this work.991

Joint achievements
What has the coming together and cooperating on the issue of women’s political participation meant in terms of concrete results? The introduction of the gender quota before the 1998 elections and the dramatic increase of women in elected bodies that followed were one of the first fruits of cooperation between NGOs from both entities.992 As many as 26 percent of the delegates in the state Parliament were women, and a significant increase occurred also in political institutions at the entity level.993 As the number of elected women achieved in 1998 never repeated itself and women remain the underrepresented sex on all levels of government, questions have been raised about whether pre-election campaigns conducted by NGOs make any difference.994 For women’s organizations, the aim of working to promote women politicians was, however, not only about increasing the number of women in formal politics. As, for example, Linda S. Stevenson demonstrates for Mexico and Yvonne Svanström for Sweden, connections with politicians and bureaucrats are vital for placing gender on the political agenda and achieving legislative changes. In fact, these contacts are

989 Aganović 2015, 42.
990 Spahić-Šiljak 2010, 247.
991 Annual report to Sida 2010, 4-5.
992 Aganović 2015, 42-43.
993 Spahić-Šiljak 2010, 162.
994 Popov-Momčinović 2013b, 276-282.
perceived as a precondition for success. Also Bosnian NGOs which engaged in these types of activities had their own agenda when they worked on promoting female candidates for political positions. Despite the critique that will be presented further ahead in this chapter, the cooperation between women’s organizations and female politicians has at times proved to be successful. By joint efforts, they played a major role in the passage of several important laws.

In Bosnia, a number of women’s NGOs have been an active party at all stages of the institutionalization of gender equality. The role of women’s NGOs in putting gender issues on the agenda of legislative bodies has been significant. Besides the Gender Equality Law adopted on the state level, worth mentioning are also strengthened laws on protection against domestic violence in both entities and the Law of Social Protection that recognized women who suffered wartime rape as a victim category eligible for financial support from the state passed in the Federation. Except for lobbying politicians and providing them with information from the ground, women’s groups were also highly involved in criticizing the existing laws and even in writing the bills. Much of the preparatory work is usually done on the municipality level, among other things by arranging meetings between women from different political parties. Again, NGOs have functioned as a driving force pushing for a minimum of common interest to gather around. Bosnia is, however, a case in point that legislation on gender quotas and gender equality does not guarantee implementation. Generally, research conducted in conflict-ridden areas shows that the road from

995 Stevenson 2001, 163-195; Svanström 2004. See also several other texts in Howell and Mulligan 2001.

996 Besides being the first country in the region to introduce legal quota, Bosnia was also the first to adopt a law on gender equality. Adopted in 2003 and amended six years later, it is a comprehensive law that covers many areas. Numbering 33 articles, the Gender Equality Law prohibits discrimination within areas such as education, employment, social welfare, health care, sports and culture, public life and the media. Not least, it prescribes equal representation of both sexes at all political levels of authority. See http://arsbih.gov.ba/

997 See, for example, Interview with Angelina Branković, September 1 2009.

998 Interview with Ana Marković, May 30 2012.

999 Williams 2017, 104-112. Gender institutional mechanisms on state as well as entity level consisting of Gender Equality Agency, placed under the Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees, and Gender Centers, were established to monitor the implementation of the law and the Gender Action Plan. There are also Gender Equality Commissions at municipal level. Other than that, Bosnia has so far ratified numerous international human rights conventions. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) is one of those mentioned in the Constitution.
gender equality policy to practice proves to be rather long, despite a substantial presence of international actors expected to aid the process. In this context, activities undertaken by local women’s groups with the aim of advancing gender equality are considered to be of special significance.\textsuperscript{1000}

Pre-election campaigns were a type of actions that some women’s NGOs in Bosnia started early to gather around. A glance at the lists of participants in campaigns carried out in connection to elections from 1998 and on, shows that the majority of them were Kvinna till Kvinna’s ‘partners’.\textsuperscript{1001} The four organizations with which I conducted interviews have been cooperating extensively with other NGOs in their respective entity as well as outside of it. They also count among the few Bosnian NGOs that have actively been working at different levels on furthering gender equality. The struggle for survival forces NGOs to work hard on their own promotion, meaning that they seldom present themselves in a wider context of women’s organizing. In her thesis on the women’s movement in post-Dayton Bosnia, Zlatiborka Popov Momčinović scrutinized websites of women’s NGOs finding that a very limited number of them acknowledged the existence of other NGOs or emphasized the importance of cooperation and solidarity.\textsuperscript{1002} An interesting fact is that all four of them have been supported by Kvinna till Kvinna. Activists from three of these NGOs have been interviewed by me for the purpose of this project. Significantly, before I posed a specific question on cooperation, the absence of other NGOs in their narratives was striking. They were eloquent promotors of their own organizations and we spoke at length about their own work.

However, once the theme was opened, an enumeration of projects realized in collaboration with other NGOs and membership in networks on several levels followed. From this, a type of NGO solidarity that had evolved over time could easily be discerned. There had been both enough time and space in terms of joint projects for this solidarity to form. Solidarity as such does not have to exist a priori, but can also be “a result of acting together”.\textsuperscript{1003} Clearly, it was based on mutual interest. The vulnerability of NGOs, both in relation to donors

\textsuperscript{1000} Olonisakin, Barnes and Ikpe 2011, 37-169, 230-231. In Bosnia, engaged in monitoring the effectiveness of gender mechanisms at all levels, some women’s NGOs have proved particularly successful in making positive impact on Gender Equality Commissions in their localities. See OSCE, The Status and Activities of Municipal Gender Equality Commissions in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Overview and Recommendations, 2009.

\textsuperscript{1001} Newsletter no. 3, June 1998; Quarterly support to Sida January-April 1998.

\textsuperscript{1002} Popov-Momčinović 2013b, 250-265.

\textsuperscript{1003} Eduards 1992, 96.
and the environment in which they operated, forced them to guard each other’s back. In practice, it meant supporting each other’s activities, even when not formally involved in a certain project. Both written and oral sources testify that Bosnian NGOs regularly responded to calls from their colleagues to participate in their project activities. Because of that, as an activist told me, “we could always count on support from X and X, that they would respond and help us to successfully implement our projects”. Although cooperation was generally described in positive terms, signs of rivalry came up when we approached the subject of activism making comparisons with the neighboring Croatia and Serbia:

We are not united. Women’s activism is not united on the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In my opinion. That would be my viewpoint. It is more about who will expose themselves, who will get notable, because if you are notable the greater the chance is that you are going to survive. Now, it has all come down to survival.

Danijela Pižula was one of the few activists who openly expressed doubts about the existence of solidarity between women’s NGOs in Bosnia. She was explicit about the fact that the lack of resources led to competition and caused serious tensions within the NGO sector. The role of donors in this context is important as they often tend to instigate competition instead of fostering solidarity.

Awareness about the benefits of coming together when applying for grants from foreign donors was apparent. The withdrawal of donors from Bosnia has worried women’s NGOs in the country for a long time. During my first field trip to Bosnia in 2009, they were busy reinforcing their own capacities in order to be eligible to apply for funding from the EU. Realizing that carrying out EU projects can only work in collaboration with others, they were preoccupied with seeking potential partners. Given the mentioned circumstances, making a joint appearance before the donor was certainly one of the prime motives of cooperation as it increased everyone’s chances to receive grants. The posed

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1004 “uvijek smo mogli računati na podršku X i X, da će se odazvati i da će pomoći da se naše projektno aktivnosti što uspješnije provedu.” Interview with Angelina Branković, September 1 2009.


1006 Interview with Velenka Lazović, September 1 2009.
question about cooperation was exclusively understood as one about collaborations on the level of donor-funded, well defined projects. It is primarily within this context that young Bosnian NGOs have been meeting, and not surprisingly this was how they envisioned cooperation in the future. However, as showed earlier, the ‘project solidarity’ could indeed yield results. The fact that Bosnian legislature has become more women-friendly is a product of collective action basically created in connection to projects financed by foreign donors. Not disputing the fact that negative consequences of NGOization were felt in Bosnia, Elissa Helms suggests that “Bosnia is less a case of NGOization of feminism – that is, as a movement – than it is an example of the movementization of NGOs.”

It should also be added that cooperating on concrete donor-funded projects can be seen as rather comfortable not just due to the financial part, but also in terms of the subjects covered and the beneficiaries they worked with on the ground. For example, working together on a project focused on such a general theme as the political participation of women did not require a great deal of compromising, especially as each organization realized the project within the borders of their own entity. Few of those I interviewed problematized this. On the whole, conflicts and disputes between women’s groups were hardly ever mentioned. Only one activist mentioned then on going attempts to form a nationwide feminist-oriented women’s network that we will turn to below, briefly adding “but we do not have the same views about the forming of the association and the network.”

A Bosnian feminist network – possibility or wishful thinking?

In 2005, after almost a decade of meetings and different types of cooperation, it was time for the next step. A conference, arranged by a domestic NGO and called “Women’s civil scene in Bosnia – 10 years after Beijing Declaration and Plan of Action” was held in Sarajevo gathering nearly 80 participants. However, the conference which was to resume efforts of NGOs during the 10 year period and “on this basis create a platform with common objectives for future work” was in regards to the latter a failure. While common interests often led to cooperation on donor-funded projects and membership in numerous issue networks, the idea of further rapprochement and formalizing of the same was dif-

1007 “ali nememo iste stavove o formiranju asocijacije i mreže” Interview with Angelina Branković, September 1 2009.
different. To function, the intended nationwide feminist-oriented network demanded a large degree of consensus on many issues, including sensitive ones that had not been dealt with previously.

Focusing on what turned out to be a long-standing process of forming a women’s network, we will shed light on how political and societal contexts affect relations between women’s groups. We will also analyze the role of Kvinna till Kvinna as a helping hand in the effort to unite. It is noteworthy that the subject of a nationwide network was almost completely absent in the oral sources. With one single exception mentioned earlier, neither women at Kvinna till Kvinna nor Bosnian activists from nominally feminist NGOs whom I interviewed spoke about the network. This is an interesting fact considering two things. First, the network, although an informal one, was established in September 2009 when I conducted the majority of the interviews in Bosnia. Second, Kvinna till Kvinna as a third party, as will be shown here, has played a very significant role in this process. Written sources, created by Kvinna till Kvinna, give an insight into this process.

We learn that discussion regarding the network was resumed shortly after the Sarajevo conference, this time in Brcko. Actually, the conference on women and political life held there in December 2005 ended by a joint decision to form a Women’s Network.\footnote{Weekly report December 17-18 2005.} It is important to note that forming a network at this particular point was a part of preparations for the upcoming general elections, not least because one of the previously experienced problems was a lack of coordination in relation of pre-election activities of NGOs.\footnote{Weekly report October 9 2003. Poor coordination of NGO work is a generally known phenomenon. Struggling for survival, local NGOs practically take what is offered to them.} At Kvinna till Kvinna, this decision was greeted with enthusiasm. The next issue of Kvinna till Kvinna’s newsletter contained the following:

**BOSNIAN WOMEN THREATEN TO FORM A PARTY OF THEIR OWN**

The Bosnian women’s movement is willing to form its own party unless gender equality issues are taken seriously before the parliamentary election in the fall. They have launched an intense election campaign. […] The network consists of 14 women’s organizations from the whole country who think that it is time that the Bosnian Gender Law starts being implemented. […] The network will put
forward its demands and suggestions to politicians at both local and national levels.\textsuperscript{1011}

Obviously, a very optimistic message was sent to its Swedish supporters. Expressions like “Bosnian women threaten” and “intense election campaign” indicated unity, public visibility and a certain degree of militancy.

The idea about threatening the status quo with plans to form a women’s party was familiar to the Swedish audience. Roughly a decade earlier, such a threat was a successful move made by the Swedish network Support Stockings that forced the established political parties to include more women on higher positions. The fact that Bosnian NGOs had connections with female journalists, who were supposed to report about their activities, implies another similarity with how the Support Stockings operated.\textsuperscript{1012} It is likely that the idea expressed by some activists in Bosnia was motivated by inspiration from Sweden. As mentioned earlier, the methods and success of the Support Stockings were conveyed with eagerness on numerous occasions, which was much welcomed by local NGOs.\textsuperscript{1013} The latter were usually impressed by Swedish women’s achievements.\textsuperscript{1014} However, Swedish experiences were not easily translated into the Bosnian context.

\textsuperscript{1011} “BOSNISKA KVINNOR HOTAR MED ETT EGET PARTI [.] Den bosniska kvinnorörelsen kan tänka sig att bilda ett eget parti om inte jämställdhetsfrågor tas på allvar inför höstens parlamentsval. Nu drar de igång en intensiv valkampanj. [...] Nätverket består av 14 kvinnoorganisationer från hela landet som tycker att det är dags att den bosniska jämställdhetslagen börjar tillämpas. [...] Nätverket kommer föra fram sina krav och förslag till politiker på både lokal och nationell nivå.” Newsletter no. 1, February 2006.

\textsuperscript{1012} Newsletter no. 1, February 2006.

\textsuperscript{1013} While actions by the Support Stockings were presented to Bosnian activists exclusively in a positive light because they managed to increase the number of women in the Swedish Parliament, it is noteworthy to mention that the network received a significant amount of critique within Sweden. Except from disapproval of a part of the male public, criticism also came from women who argued that the network failed to represent the interests of all Swedish women, thus omitting both class and ethnicity from its perspective. See Ulmanen 1998; Thorgren 2003.

\textsuperscript{1014} My search for a public threat with a women’s party made by the group of Bosnian NGOs did not give any results. Perhaps this was only said to demonstrate determination in front of the donor. In any case, the idea of a women’s party as such was neither a novelty in Bosnia nor elsewhere in the region; in the beginnings of the 1990s there was a women’s party in Serbia and between 1996 and 2000 also in one of the entities in Bosnia. None of them had success in attracting support. See Cockburn 1991; Aganović 2015, 40-41.
Besides the challenging political situation and the legacies of the war, women’s NGOs often lacked supporting systems needed for them to exert more influence on the male-dominated political sphere. For example, the contacts with and the support of the media that were of decisive significance for the success of the Support Stockings did not exist in the case of Bosnian NGOs. The latter lacked access to the media which itself needed education in gender issues, often provided by women’s NGOs.

Further, despite cases of fruitful cooperation, activists verbalized disappointment in the majority of women in politics. There was an expectation that female politicians would represent women’s interests. As I was told, NGOs could rely on few female politicians in their strivings to add women’s and gender issues on the political agenda. When elected, they tend to forget “our common goals” and “behave worse than men”. They struggled with understanding this behavior. At the same time, they were aware of the marginalization of female politicians in their own political parties which usually had well-established power structures. Indeed, research shows that female politicians around the world, regardless of the ideological orientation of their party, experience marginalization and even active opposition. Bosnia is no exception to this. In addition, the strong emphasis on ‘the ethnic’ leaves little space for interests based on other social categories. Politicians of either sex are expected to represent first and foremost the interests of their ethnic collectivity. The situation in Sweden has been considerably different. As the political scientist Lena Wängnerud has noted, elected women in Sweden care about and represent women’s interests. They willingly cultivate contacts with women’s organizations. However, research points out that it is unclear how much the cooperation between

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1016 There were, of course, exceptions. One of them is the current President of the Bosnia-Herzegovina Journalists’ Association Milkica Milojević whose interest in and dedication to gender equality has been recognized. Besides being a journalist, she has actively engaged in the work of several women’s NGOs in the RS.
1017 Interview with Lejla Hodžić, September 11, 2009; Weekly report November 17 2002; "naše zajedničke ciljeve", "ponašaju se gore od muškaraca" Interview with Danijela Pižula, September 1 2009.
1018 Interview with Vera Jovanović, September 18 2013.
1019 Hedlund 1996; See also Karlsson 2016.
1020 Miftari 2015, 78-87; Popov-Momčinović 2013b, 279.
1021 Mujkić 2007.
female politicians and the women’s movement “has changed the societal position of ordinary women” in Sweden.\textsuperscript{1024}

Finally, to ‘repeat’ the kind of activity realized by the Support Stockings in Sweden demands a certain amount of public visibility and even militancy. Feminist activism, as it is usually viewed by feminists in Western countries, is synonymous with public activity such as campaigns, protests and appearances in the media. As Elissa Helms has written, and my findings support, NGO women in Bosnia have had a slightly different view on how activist work should be pursued. Considering the context in which they operated, they refrained from too much public visibility, thus believing that a moderate approach would be more fruitful.\textsuperscript{1025} I heard stories about lobbying mayors and female politicians during small meetings, even criticizing the authorities in public but in a more subtle way. The importance of being tactical in contacts with the media was also voiced: “Any non-governmental organization that opens up a front with the media will make the biggest mistake. There are always other ways to make allies with/from the media”.\textsuperscript{1026} It was about slowly winning the media over in order to eventually benefit from it. Even though Kvinna till Kvinna referred to experiences from Sweden as inspiration and not literary transferable to Bosnia, it nonetheless at times expected local NGOs to apply the “plenty of advocacy training” they had received.\textsuperscript{1027}

\textbf{Solidarity across difference}

The paradox of women’s organizing is, as the political scientist Maud L. Eduards writes, that “\textit{the more women act together, the more divided they become}”.\textsuperscript{1028} It would soon be obvious that, by the time Kvinna till Kvinna’s newsletter was issued, the success described in it did not match the situation on the ground. As its representatives in Bosnia wrote in the beginning of February 2006, a conversation with a ‘partners’ in the RS about the Women’s network led to a rather agitated discussion that landed in quite strong feelings, especially toward the women’s organizations in Sarajevo, and we even got a sense of separation between the RS and the Federation. [It was said] That the RS in the current situation had very strong and competent women’s organizations, mainly because

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{1024} Millé and Wängnerud 1999, 203.
\item \textsuperscript{1025} Helms, 7, 11.
\item \textsuperscript{1026} “najveću grešku će napraviti bilo koja nevladina organizacija koja otvori front sa medijima” Interview with Angelina Branković, September 1 2009.
\item \textsuperscript{1027} “hel del training i advocacy” Report from Kvinna till Kvinna’s strategy day 2005, 4.
\item \textsuperscript{1028} Eduards 1992, 95.
\end{itemize}
the situation in the RS is generally worse than in the Federation, according to X [NGO woman]. But this seems to lead to conflict mainly between the RS and Sarajevo. Some kind of a capital city know-it-all syndrome. Something must have happened since the conference because the atmosphere was quite different. Y [another NGO woman] seemed angry and disappointed, but it was hard to understand why.1029

There has traditionally existed a strong urban/rural divide in Bosnia that did not diminish but, as some suggest, had grown even stronger with the war in the 1990s.1030 When it comes to the NGO sector, tensions between organizations in the capital and more provincial areas were not unusual. Those in the capital were more likely to receive donor funding as well as most of the coordinating posts.1031 The quotation above indicates that Kvinna till Kvinna suspected a conflict between women’s NGOs not solely based on competition for funds. However, it had difficulties with pinpointing the problem. As Helms has noted, the significant participation of women in civil society in Bosnia was often interpreted and presented by both foreign and local actors as “evidence of ‘women’s’ desire for change, for democratic participation, for peace and ethnic tolerance – for a united, multi-ethnic, democratic Bosnia”.1032 Questioning this, she conveys that Western feminists occasionally coming to Bosnia were particularly prone to draw this sort of rapid conclusions. Given Kvinna till Kvinna’s long and active presence in the country, especially considering its pronounced goal of keeping close contact with local NGOs, one could assume that it by 2006 was well acquainted with the position of its ‘partners’ on crucial issues regarding Bosnian postwar society. However, while maintaining a positive tone outwardly and generally presenting all their partners as anti-nationalist agents of change who strive towards a united Bosnia, my findings indicate that the Swedish NGO was, in fact, not at all sure of that.1033


1030 See, for example, Stefansson 2007; Kolind 2002.


1032 Helms 2012, 6.

1033 Quarterly report to Sida April-June 2002.
The field representatives continued to probe the situation about the formal network at NGOs in both entities, but few were willing to speak openly about what the exact problems were. Those who did identified the still existing fear among the population as well as the idea that “the women’s organizations in many respects stick to the political division of the country” as the main reasons for disagreements. Thus, regular meetings with local NGOs were not a guarantee that Kvinna till Kvinna would get accurate information about NGO women’s opinions on what they perceived as sensitive issues. The comment sent to the Stockholm office shows an awareness about this:

Very delicate processes, which are difficult to grasp properly. Nobody can really be openly ‘nationalist’ in our company because they know that we do not support that. But there is a great deal of activity beneath the surface, no doubt.

Kvinna till Kvinna’s declaratively firm stand towards nationalism was not easily applicable on the ground. As shown earlier, especially immediately after the war, there was considerable caution towards any manifestation of nationalist thinking. The Swedish foundation was one of the donors that very actively pushed for overcoming differences and uniting, which was also in accordance with Sida’s viewpoint. Knowing the preferences of donors to establish a democratic and integrated Bosnian state, NGOs usually presented themselves as open

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1037 Still holding anti-nationalism as one of its principles, there are indications that the caution somewhat lessened after Kvinna till Kvinna had localized its ‘partners’ in Bosnia. At times problematic information about alleged nationalistic views of individual NGO women came from other sources. One such situation occurred in 2002 when the NGO Lara published a book on women who from nineteenth century and on left a mark in the former Yugoslav area. One of the women portrayed was Biljana Plavšić who then in 2002 admitted guilt to the ICTY. While Plavšić was celebrated for opposing to the corrupt leadership in the RS, people in the Federation viewed her as a war criminal. The fact that she was included in a book on prominent women was met with harsh criticism in the Federation, particularly in the weekly Dani, which accused the editor of being a Serb nationalist. As one of the two sponsors of this publication, Kvinna till Kvinna received a warning sign from Sida which requested the serious accusations to be investigated. See Weekly report July 4 2002.
to interethnic dialogue and cooperation. Although women’s NGOs ranked the Swedish organization as a particularly benevolent donor with whom they shared basic values and had a fairly open dialogue with, we notice that ‘political correctness’ was practiced even in this contact.

The fear of losing resources forced local NGOs to uphold the image of cosmopolitan organizations. Ethnic and ideological disagreements were skillfully hidden by avoiding to speak about problems that depended on these differences in front of donors or anyone who had contact with them, including researchers. During my encounters with activists in Bosnia, differences of this kind were never directly mentioned, perhaps because they wished to show the NGOs in the best light. However, when we spoke about women’s activism in Serbia and Croatia, which are much more ethnically homogenous countries, narratives of activists from both entities exposed ethnicity as the premier reason for disunity among women’s groups in Bosnia.1038 What was admired in the neighboring countries was that “women have risen above identifying exclusively by national, geographical, territorial or whatever affiliation. Instead, the problems or needs of women were lifted above personal, different identities”.1039 At the same time as the lack of female solidarity was seen as negative, there was a great awareness of the fact that Bosnia and Bosnians in general had suffered far more from the conflict in the 1990s.1040

Worry about a domination of right-wing nationalist parties was usually a part of the NGO repertoire connected to elections. Kvinna till Kvinna’s reports conveyed it to Sida as a token of the engagement of women’s NGOs for a changed Bosnia.1041 The fact was though that during the postwar period the country has barely had a non-nationalist alternative with a capacity to attract voters from both entities. According to Jakub Šedo, political parties in Bosnia “are connected with ethnicities whether or not they try to appear non-ethnic, and whether or not their candidate lists are representative of other ethnicities”.

1038 Interview with Danijela Pižula, September 1 2009; Interview with Lejla Hodžić, September 11 2009; Interview with Nermina Rudan, September 14 2009.
1039 Interview with Vera Jovanović, September 18 2013.
1040 Interview with Vera Jovanović, September 18 2013. See also Interview with Danijela Pižula, September 1 2009, Interview with Velenka Lazović, September 1 2009; Interview with Nermina Rudan, September 14 2009, Interview with Lejla Hodžić, September 11 2009.
1041 Quarterly report to Sida April-June 2002.
which the ethnic composition of its electorate shows. Nominally social-democratic parties that exist in the RS and the Federation do not share the same vision of Bosnia. In their views on the past as well as the future, they are more close to the right-wing parties in their respective entity than each other. This leads us to the importance of an at least fairly favorable political environment for any activity on the national level. In a setting as the Bosnian one, as Nermina Rudan told me, “every activity of the women’s movement that has a [...] universal approach to women[‘s rights] faces a political barrier”.

Attempts to realize a nationwide women’s network, identified as a need by NGOs in both entities, happened in an extremely unfavorable political context. In fact, during the election year of 2006 the political situation in Bosnia deteriorated sharply. Tensions started somewhat earlier with unpacking a controversial issue of constitutional reforms, supported in the Federation and firmly rejected by the RS. Any expansion of the powers of the state was, as interpreted in the latter, an attack on the autonomy of entities. The tensions intensified during 2006 with the pressures to reform the police from ethnically organized multiple forces to a joint police force. In protest to the police reform, a process that was strongly supported by the international community, parliamentarians from the RS blocked the work of state institutions. The pre-election campaign was characterized by a ruthless nationalist political discourse. Calls for greater centralization of the state that came from the Federation were countered by an emphasis on a more autonomy from the RS. Even threats of a referendum regarding secession of the RS from Bosnia were part of the pre-election rhetoric. The polarization of Bosnian society was further exacerbated because of newly discovered mass graves as well as other war-related subjects such as convictions for war crimes issued by ICTY, and wartime sexual violence.

As we have seen, there are strong indications that women’s organizations were not immune to the wave of ethnic homogenization that swept Bosnian society during 2006. There is some evidence that NGOs in the Federation, led

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1042 Šedo 2010, 90.
1043 “svaka aktivnost ženskog pokreta koja ima [...] univerzalni ženski pristup, suočava se sa tom političkom barijerom” Interview with Nermina Rudan, September 14 2009.
1044 The referendum issue was brought up by the chairman of Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (SNSD), Milorad Dodik, who after the elections became the Prime Minister of the RS. Even though, at least nominally, SNSD was a social-democratic party, it had a major role in the creation of tensions before the elections in 2006. The party eventually replaced its initially moderate position, which was supported by the IC, with an extremely nationalist one. In 2011, SNSD was suspended from the Socialist International and a year later expelled from it.
by a few strong ones from the capital, requested a degree of openly demonstrated solidarity between NGOs in the whole country.  

From the position of NGOs in the RS, where there were increasing separatist tendencies, this was problematic. As an NGO leader from a ‘partner’ organization in the RS said to Kvinna till Kvinna, “she did not want to assume responsibility for a formal network, e. g. to be ultimately responsible for what they do for example in Velika Kladuša [a small, Bosniak-dominated town in the Federation] etc. She did not think that it was time for such a [network] yet”.  

This is evidence of what research conducted in similar contexts conveys very clearly. Namely, in Bosnia as for example in Northern Ireland, it is a common occurrence that women, even if engaged in cross-ethnic dialogue and cooperation on a myriad of practical and uncontroversial issues, stay loyal to the prevailing standpoints of their ethnic/national communities when it comes to core issues perceived to be of national importance. A great deal of Bosnians consider their ethno-national identity the most important, which, as Roland Kostić has shown, is due to an internalized belief that one’s existence in Bosnia is threatened.

Thus, the attempts to realize a more formal alliance of women’s NGOs, brought ethnic differences between them to the fore. This brings us to the role of Kvinna till Kvinna. How did the Swedish foundation handle the deadlock it learned about during the winter of 2006?

**Kvinna till Kvinna – a facilitator of solidarity?**

Tensions grew as the election approached. Attending a meeting on transitional justice with a focus on war crimes trials, Kvinna till Kvinna was again reminded that difference matters:

As expected, these discussions become quite delicate and it was noticeable also at this meeting. Women from the RS and women from the Federation have

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1046 “Hon ville inte ta på sig ansvaret för ett formellt nätverk, dvs att vara ytterst ansvarig för vad de gör i t ex Velika Kladusa etc. Hon trodde inte att det var dags för ett sådant ännu.” Weekly report February 2 2006.
1048 Kostić 2007, 95.
slightly different ways of looking at things and if someone expresses themselves ‘incorrectly’ the atmosphere easily turns sour.\footnote{Det blir ju som väntat ganska känsliga diskussioner det här och det märktes även på det här mötet. Kvinnor från RS och kvinnor från Federationen har lite olika sätt att se på saker och ting och det blir lätt infekterat om någon uttrycker sig ’felaktigt’.} Despite this, there is no evidence that the Swedish foundation shied away from putting difficult questions in front of its Bosnian ‘partners’ to discuss. Sources show that controversial and burning political issues, as for example constitutional changes, were put on the table whenever Kvinna till Kvinna was in the position to set the agenda for joint meetings.\footnote{Weekly report September 26 2006.} Writing about challenge of dialogue in connection to the Northern Irish case, Elisabeth Porter contends that “activists need no longer be plagued with any precondition for unity prior to forming alliances”.\footnote{Porter 2000, 152.} The work of bell hooks, and others, defines solidarity as a result of a process of which diversity is a natural part.\footnote{hooks 1984, 57, 65. See also Eduards 1992; Ferguson 2011.} The practice of Kvinna till Kvinna shows that it sympathized with the idea of working on solidarity and that it actively participated in creating preconditions for women’s NGOs in Bosnia to engage in this process.

Thus, in the midst of the network crisis, the organization used its regular network meeting, held in May 2006, for initiating discussion on “largest hindrances for stability in Bosnia”, but also for encouraging cooperation between NGOs.\footnote{Weekly report May 6, 7 2006.} Its Secretary General, Kerstin Grebäck, who was much respected among activists in Bosnia, gave a lecture on women’s organizing in an international perspective, potentially providing inspiration. The content of the meeting reveals intentions to start a dialogue between women’s groups and call for community: “Would collaboration between women’s organizations increase your influence? Any ideas for such collaboration?”\footnote{Weekly report May 6, 7 2006.} This approach fits well the idea of creating a space for envisioning a shared future despite unrest and political fragmentation in society at large, articulated by peace researchers such as John Paul Lederach.\footnote{Lederach 1997, 107-127.}

\footnote{Final report to Sida 2005.}
dialogue, including potential disagreements, is viewed as a foundation for commonly defined goals.1056

The further development of events indicates that Kvinna till Kvinna had a pivotal role in not only gathering women’s organizations during the delicate political situation in Bosnia, but also motivating the same to continue to work together. It seized every possible opportunity to bring up cooperation between NGOs. At the end of May, in connection to another meeting, the Swedish NGO arranged an opportunity to, “discuss and coordinate the election activities for the fall”.1057 The aim was to get the NGOs to start discussing common activities to be done before the elections. The fact that this meeting was held far too late, as the elections were only a few months away, is yet another sign of how tensions in Bosnian society reflected on relations between women’s groups. While no agreement on concrete pre-election activities was reached, a need for a network became once again apparent and articulated.1058 With the sponsorship of Kvinna till Kvinna, a meeting devoted to the network issue was hosted by a NGO from the RS in July. It ended though with another failure to formalize the cooperation. In conversations with local NGOs individually, Kvinna till Kvinna learned that envy and competition for funds additionally disturbed and slowed down the process.1059

The subject was once again unpacked in November at a seminar organized by Kvinna till Kvinna. The elections had passed and this time the outcome was a more positive one:

We had agonized a bit about this, because the meeting last summer had not gone well at all. But it turned out that the discussion was very good and everyone felt empowered and excited to actually arrive at some kind of consensus. That is, they are not ready for a formal network, but everyone feels the need for at least an informal network. They also thought that it was important that a B&H women’s network should have headquarters in the capital […]. But in a first

1056 Ferguson 2011, 243-245.
phase, it is ‘only’ about disseminating information to everyone from everyone, that is, create an e-mail list.\textsuperscript{1060}

Evidently, the progress had been modest. The conclusions made were not a novelty, but more or less a repetition of the previous ones. Discussion regarding objectives and organization of shared activities was postponed to 2007 and the three special meetings that were to be financed by Kvinna till Kvinna. This was not the first time the Swedish NGO had used funding as an incentive to bring about a continuation of the dialogue on NGOs collective acting. For example, the meeting arranged by a local NGO in July was realized after a message from Kvinna till Kvinna that it would finance another attempt to get the network started. The negative attitude that prevailed at the NGO slightly changed after this offer: “At once, she seemed somewhat invigorated by the idea to possibly continue to pursue this.”\textsuperscript{1061}

There is no doubt that Kvinna till Kvinna in this particular case preferred a rather background role for itself. However, the good intentions of entrusting arrangement of such meetings to local NGOs, as it turned out, resulted in competition rather than cooperation, which threatened to lead to unwillingness to work together. It is perhaps therefore we see Kvinna till Kvinna in the role of organizer at the later date. However, the fact that it “had prepared some questions about the network that they got to discuss in small groups” indicates that the Swedish NGO took more responsibility for restarting the dialogue than simply providing a meeting place.\textsuperscript{1062}

Interestingly, the organization downplayed its own role in this process in the information it gave to its supporters. While internal sources indicate that Kvinna till Kvinna took on a more active role than it really wanted, the network was outwardly presented as an exclusively local initiative.\textsuperscript{1063} In a report to Sida it is, for example, stated that: “Representatives from Kvinna till Kvinna did not

\textsuperscript{1060} “Vi hade våndats en aning kring detta, eftersom mötet i somras inte hade gått bra alls. Men det visade sig att diskussionen blev mycket bra och alla kände sig stärkta och glada över att faktiskt komma fram till något slags konsensus. Det vill säga, man är inte redo för ett formellt nätverk, men att alla anser att man behöver åtminstone ett informellt nätverk. Man ansåg vidare att det var viktigt att ett B&H women’s network borde ha säte i huvudstaden […] Men, i en första fas, handlar det ’bara’ om att sprida information till alla, från alla, dvs skapa en e-mail lista.” Weekly report November 30 2006.

\textsuperscript{1061} ”Då verkade hon med ens lite uppgoddad av idén att eventuellt fortsätta att driva detta.” Weekly report February 2 2006

\textsuperscript{1062} Weekly report November 30 2006.

\textsuperscript{1063} Final report to Sida 2006; Final report to Sida 2007.
take part in those meetings, but provided a neutral space for them to meet”, which does not match the findings based on internal sources. The latter convey that the organization took active part in lessening the conflicts, and they needed to push for continuation of the dialogue. However, to state anything else would have been in discordance with the image of Kvinna till Kvinna as a capable donor specifically geared to support initiatives of local women. This act can also be interpreted as an attempt to keep the image of Bosnian women’s NGOs as ambitious peace actors worthy of support.

From 2007, when the network issue was discussed exclusively in connection to other seminars arranged by Kvinna till Kvinna, the organization got a slightly different role:

This is our strategy now, to basically provide only a venue in conjunction with other meetings that we organize but that we ourselves take a background role. Last time when the organizations met, in December, we played a certain role by initiating discussion with different thoughts about the advantages and disadvantages of a network. This time we kept away from the meeting until the end

We see here that Kvinna till Kvinna, on the one hand, takes on a more passive role, but, on the other hand, by placing the meetings in connection to its own seminars, the organization ensures continuity of the dialogue. The meetings continued throughout the next years being an important platform for connections between NGOs and a forum where the idea of a nationwide network was debated and kept alive. In 2007, when Kvinna till Kvinna ceded the planning and moderating to them, “It appeared that there were quite heated discussions with a lot of positioning and arguments between different organizations”. As it turned out, this time the animosity did not primarily go along ethnic (and entity) lines, but displayed competition between NGOs who worked with the same type of social issues in the RS. As Kvinna till Kvinna’s representative

1064 Final report to Sida 2006, 5.
wrote to Stockholm, the formation of the network was “still a very slow process with a lot of obstacles on the way.”

However, the rather small steps taken were appreciated. With the sponsorship of the Swedish foundation, a larger shared activity was realized before the local elections in 2008 under the name Women’ Network in Bosnia. Although the network was never formalized during the period covered by this thesis, a considerable group of NGOs, the majority of whom had been Kvinna till Kvinna’s ‘partners’ for many years, continued to act under the same name. They also proceeded to carry out joint pre-election campaigns and occasionally even reacted publicly together on injustices related to gender.

Previously, I have shown the emphasis Kvinna till Kvinna generally put on meetings between Bosnian women’s groups. It is, however, apparent that cooperation at the national level has been even more desirable. The organization was open about its intentions to support the creation of a women’s movement in Bosnia. In its efforts to bring together and preferably unite its Bosnian ‘partners’, it is unclear how much attention was given to a recognition of differences between them, which, as scholars say, is crucial in multicultural, divided settings. Oral sources, in particular, reveal that local women’s organizations had been avoiding to talk about politically sensitive issues, related both to the past and to the future. When asked if there were topics on which Bosnian women’s groups had difficulty cooperating, a well-experienced women’s activist quickly replied:

That is the problem! This is still a problem among organizations from both entities. [...] because simply on war themes...we never opened those issues. It is skillfully pushed under the carpet. And we never faced the past. [...] It should have started a lot earlier, but it was just not possible. [...] That is why we are not politically strong, because I will not speak...I will only criticize in Republika Srpska. I will not criticize [what is happening] in the Federation and vice versa [...] We are good, but we do not have a common point of reference, which is the worst. [...] In fact, I am really angry. We had a seminar recently that Kvinna [till

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1071 Newsletter no. 5, August 2002; Quarterly report to Sida April-June 2002; Quarterly report to Sida May-August 2004; Weekly report September 1-9 2008; Annual report to Sida 2010; Annual report to Sida 2012.
1072 See, for example, Yuval-Davis 1997; Porter 2000; Aggestam, Cristiano and Strömbom 2015.
Kvinna] organized. Women spoke euphorically about constitutional changes [saying] “We want to change the constitution from the aspect of gender equality”, but changing the constitution without changing this state apparatus that is bulky, expensive, unsustainable...what are we talking about? We first need to see what kind of state we want. Do we want a religious state [...] We need to see if we want this entity and the other entity or if we want to have government at the state level [...] I even wrote it now in a report to Kvinna that we simply need to open those questions.1073

In Bosnia, silence has been used as a strategy to handle different understandings of the past and (re)build relationships.1074 In her statement, Ana Marković speaks openly about the silence among women’s NGOs in Bosnia. While division on the basis of ethnicity was under the surface in interviews I conducted with NGO women in Bosnia in 2009, none of them expressed it this clearly. By 2012, when I met Marković, this was starting to change. In fact, it was only towards the end of the period examined in this thesis that Bosnian NGOs themselves started to voice the need for widening the dialogue, and they initiated a few projects leading in that direction, which Kvinna till Kvinna supported. Note that Marković also specifically spoke about constitutional changes, a deeply infected topic in Bosnia that had for years been causing much political tension. The subject of constitutional changes had been discussed at seminars organized by the Swedish foundation, but mostly in terms of gender equality, a rather uncontroversial topic among women’s groups. She, on the other hand, explicitly touched upon the national question and argued that this is the area that needs to be unpacked in order for women’s groups to move towards a greater political

1073 “E, to je problem! To je problem još uvijek među organizacijama iz oba entiteta. [...] jer naprosto o ratnim temama...mi nikad nismo otvorile ta pitanja. To se vješto gura pod tepih. I nikad se nismo suočile s prošlošću. [...] To je trebalo mnogo prije početi, ali naprosto to nije bilo moguće. [...] Zato mi nismo politički jake, jer ja neću da govorim ... Ja mogu samo da govorim u Republici Srpskoj. Ja neću da kritikujem u Federaciji a i obrnuto [...] Dobre smo, ali nemamo zajedničko što je najgoro. [...] Ja sam vrlo ljuta u stvari. Mi smo imali jedan seminar nedavno, Kvinne su ga organizovale. Žene su euforično pričale o ustavnim promjenama ‘Želimo da mijenjamo ustav sa aspekta ravnopravnosti polova’. A ustvari mijenjati ustav, a ne promijeniti ovaj državni aparati koji je glomazan, skup, neodrživ. O čemu mi pričamo? Mi najprije moramo da vidimo kakvu mi to želimo državu. Je li mi hoćemo vjersku državu [...] Moramo da vidimo hoćemo li mi ovaj entitet i onaj drugi entitet ili hoćemo na državnom nivou da imamo vladu [...] Ja sam to napisala čak sad u ovom izvještaju što ide Kvinnama da mi naprosto ta pitanja moramo otvoriti” Interview with Ana Marković, May 30 2012.

1074 Mannergren Selimovic 2010, 185-189; Stefansson 2010; Mannergren Selimovic and Eastmond 2012.
solidarity. An important part of the transformational solidarity that Ferguson talks about is engaging in a dialogue where differences are openly discussed. Another important part is joint action. It is through these processes, including a reconstruction of each one’s interests, that political solidarity can be reached.\textsuperscript{1075}

\textbf{Concluding remarks}

Unity and disunity are, as Maud Eduards lets us know, parallel processes when women organize.\textsuperscript{1076} This chapter, which has pursued the question of women’s collective action in postwar Bosnia, demonstrates this clearly. Examples of cooperation and conflicts were studied through the case of political participation and through a focus on attempts to form a nationwide feminist-oriented women’s network. The chapter has sought to capture some of the complexities concerning women’s coming together in violently divided societies. It also shows the role of Kvinna till Kvinna in creating preconditions and motivating women to mobilize and act together for the purpose of social change.

Organized women in Bosnia have generally played a role in normalizing relations in this postwar country. They set a good example for their society when they engaged in cross-ethnic meetings and established a dialogue with each other early after the war. By meeting and cooperating they defied ‘othering’ of members of the ‘wrong’ ethnicities, which not seldom put them in a difficult situation in their own communities. A number of women’s NGOs seized the opportunity after the war to come together for the purpose of furthering women’s rights. Strongly encouraged by international actors, they participated very actively in enhancing political participation of women in formal politics, achieving legislative changes and generally in the institutionalization of gender equality. Narratives of Bosnian NGO women reveal that much of the cooperation occurred in direct connection to donor-funded projects. It can be easily concluded that this has been a pragmatic cooperation, not seldom motivated by the need of donor grants. It was also a rather comfortable collaboration which indeed demanded a joint application for grants, but which also allowed the NGOs to work within the borders of their own entity. Still, the project-based activity yielded not only valuable results on the level of beneficiaries, but also, through the process of meeting and acting together, a kind of ‘NGO solidarity’ and occasional instances of collective action.

\textsuperscript{1075} Ferguson 2011, 243-245.

\textsuperscript{1076} Eduards 1992, 95.
However, women’s NGOs had most often gathered around questions of a less sensitive nature, like for example pre-election campaigns in favor of female politicians. Taking the step towards formalized cooperation in the form of a nationwide feminist-oriented network turned out to be significantly more problematic. As this chapter has shown, the process of creating a Bosnian women’s network occurred in an unfavorable political environment when the tension between the two entities was extremely high. What this situation revealed is that women’s NGOs, despite almost a decade of cooperation, were not immune to (were affected by) the political split in Bosnia. While the competition within the civil society sector was one of the reasons for the difficulties regarding the formation of the network, both written and oral sources point to differences based on ethnicity as the major reason. Simply put, when issues concerning ‘national interests’ are at stake, social categories such as ethnicity/nationality tend to transcend the importance of gender identity. This process has not just revealed the hardships in terms of tensions between local women’s groups, but also the persistent determination of Kvinna till Kvinna to aid the creation of the network.

The pronounced desire of Bosnian NGOs to organize on a national level was received with enthusiasm at Kvinna till Kvinna. However, it gradually became clear that it would not be a smooth process. The investigation has exposed that it took time for the field representatives to understand wherein the problem lay as its ‘partners’ – out of fear of losing support – were unwilling to admit that the disagreements went along ethnic lines. Nonetheless, we see Kvinna till Kvinna continuously encouraging dialogue between women’s groups by creating meeting space and emphasizing identification of common goals and ways of cooperation. The way it handled the situation conveys a belief in solidarity as something that is built rather than a precondition for acting together. This is indeed congruent with influential feminist scholarship on female solidarity, which foregrounds space for differences between women to be discussed.

It is unclear to what extent differences and disagreements between its ‘partners’ were welcomed by the Swedish foundation. Sources indicate that there was a silent agreement to keep sensitive issues away due to both Kvinna till Kvinna’s emphasis on commonalities based on gender identity, but also local NGO’s avoidance of such issues. Towards the end of the period studied, this silence was starting to be problematized by Bosnian NGOs, which had realized the need for a deeper cooperation based on political consensus. Perhaps more attention devoted to difference could have quickened this process, but the complexity of the context in which Bosnian NGOs operate, torn between different loyalties, should not be ignored. Perhaps a period of silence and cooperating on
common, less sensitive issues was an important precondition so that the process of achieving political solidarity could start in earnest.
CHAPTER TEN

Hierarchical Sisterhood

International interventions into conflict-affected areas around the world have been a common phenomenon in the post-Cold War period. While these missions generally show limited results in establishing lasting peace, the role of women as peace actors has proven to be of great importance. However, women’s peace efforts are still unrecognized, undervalued and severely under-searched. In this thesis, women’s engagement for peace within the context of international peacebuilding in Bosnia is put center stage. The overall aim has been to contextualize and analyze the possibilities and challenges faced by the women-oriented Swedish foundation Kvinna till Kvinna during two decades of supporting Bosnian women’s organizations in their strivings to contribute to a normalization of life in postwar Bosnia. The encounter between the two actors has been of particular interest. Kvinna till Kvinna formed in 1993 during the Bosnian war, originates from the peace movement and has been supported mainly by the Swedish government aid agency Sida. The period under scrutiny stretches between 1993 and 2013, which means that the focus lies predominantly on the postwar years marked by a massive international presence in Bosnia. The overall research questions this thesis sought to answer are:

- What characterized the role of Kvinna till Kvinna in the post-socialist, violently divided Bosnia?

- How can the cooperation between Kvinna till Kvinna and its main donor Sida be defined? Did the cooperation change over time, and if it did, how?

- How did the Swedish-Bosnian encounter unfold over time? What type of relationship developed between Kvinna till Kvinna and women’s NGOs within the context of peacebuilding in Bosnia?

By focusing on rhetoric, narratives, practice and silences, the ambition has been to understand and illuminate this international/local relationship from the perspective of both actors. Methodologically, this study combines a hermeneutic approach with that of oral history. Both cultivate a genuine interest in historical actors, viewing them as subjects worth understanding on their own
terms, which has demanded thorough contextualization. The empirical material utilized consists of both written and oral sources, the majority of which are used in research for the first time. A combination of a variety of sources, including different categories of written sources such as official, semi-official and internal documents produced by Kvinna till Kvinna, has enabled a fuller and a more nuanced picture of the role of the organization in Bosnia as well as an in-depth study of the relationship with supported women’s NGOs and the cooperation with Sida. The oral source material used here comprises interviews conducted with Kvinna till Kvinna employees and with women active in four Bosnian women’s NGOs, which have been long-term ‘partners’ of the Swedish foundation.

To capture the complexity of the peacebuilding endeavor, critically scrutinize it and discern its benevolence, inspiration was found in postcolonial and semiperipherality theories, as well as influential theorizing on peacebuilding, sisterhood and solidarity. For the purpose of making the two actors’ work visible and understanding it properly, a broad view on peace and peacebuilding has been employed encompassing issues of gender justice, human relations and a variety of activities. Core concepts utilized in the analysis are peacebuilding from below, encounter, Balkanism, Othering, de-development, lagging behind, self-colonizing tendency and solidarity. In what follows, the main research findings are briefly summarized and discussed.

The few times Kvinna till Kvinna is mentioned at all in other research, it is depicted as a positive example of international presence in the Balkans. According to the former gender expert at the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in Bosnia, Madelaine Rees, the “role and work of [Kvinna till Kvinna] in Bosnia has been exemplary”. Philosophy professor Nanette Funk counts it among a selected number of Western women’s organizations not entirely occupied by self-interest, but principle-driven and without a purely neoliberal agenda or imperialist motives. In the only existing piece of systematic research on the Swedish foundation, conducted by the communication researcher Stephanie Norander, the main conclusion was that Kvinna till Kvinna successfully translated feminist principles into its practice.

This thesis does not invalidate the achievements of Kvinna till Kvinna. It does, however, through empirical investigation based on source material covering a longer period of time, provide a comprehensive and nuanced account of its engagement in post-socialist and postwar Bosnia by probing deeper into the

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carefully contextualized encounter with Bosnian women’s NGOs. This study exemplifies how even well-intentioned external efforts contain problematic characteristics typical to interventions in the era of liberal peace as well as some problems of sisterhood. The argument made here is that a mixture of Kvinna till Kvinna’s own notions of women’s peacebuilding and of the area in which it operated, along with donor agendas and concrete circumstances on the ground, both enabled and limited its work in Bosnia.

International attempts to build peace in conflict-affected countries conducted during the recent decades has received a great deal of criticism. Alongside expressed willingness to aid these countries on their path to peace, obvious discrepancies have been identified between the rhetoric and the practice of international actors. The general peacebuilding discourse indeed contains a wealth of jargon aiming to diminish the power imbalance that permeates the international/local relationship by promising to put the local in the driving seat of the peacebuilding process. However, practice bears witness of a top-down and externally led peacebuilding dominated by values and norms imported from Western liberal democracies. Unsurprisingly then, many have pointed to colonial tendencies in today’s peace missions. The focus put on changing attitudes and behaviors of host populations makes them, as it has been argued, “a modern version of the mission civilisatrice”.

This thesis has presented two parallel lines of thought that manifested in Kvinna till Kvinna’s encounter with its Bosnian ‘partners’, namely a belief in transnational sisterhood coupled with a belief in Swedish supremacy.

The idea of female solidarity has guided and marked the involvement and the role that Kvinna till Kvinna played as an external peacebuilder in Bosnia. The formation of the organization as a reaction to suffering of women during the Bosnian war was in itself an act of solidarity. Kvinna till Kvinna worked actively, especially during its inception when fundraising campaigns were its main source of income, to awaken a sense of solidarity among Swedish women. The fundraisers put emphasis on common experience of male oppression and women’s vulnerability in war, but also on women’s potential as peacebuilders. This signals that Kvinna till Kvinna, with its roots in the peace movement, was in the early 1990s on the cutting edge of viewing women as valuable peace actors. Further engagement in Bosnia shows not only a persistent encouragement of domestic women’s organizations to cooperate, but also to do so on the basis of their commonalities and the fact that they all worked for an inclusive peace.

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This thesis has shown that Kvinna till Kvinna has had a decisive role in connecting women’s NGOs and building relationships between them as well as giving impetus for joint action and creation of the women’s movement in this violently divided setting.

Female solidarity was also found to constitute a foundation in the relationship between Kvinna till Kvinna and women’s groups it supported. Both actors spoke about the importance of shared values regarding bettering women’s situation. For Bosnian NGO women, Kvinna till Kvinna distinguished itself from other donors by genuine care, the ability to take them seriously and engage in dialogue with them. As a pioneer of peacebuilding from below, the peacebuilding model advocated by scholars like John Paul Lederach, the Swedish foundation highlighted local actors as true peacebuilding forces and saw its own role in supporting their initiatives. My findings suggest that this was sincerely attempted to be put into practice. However, the results of my investigation also expose power imbalances in this type of cooperation that at first glance may seem insignificant. While Lederach himself did not attach much importance to the power dimension in the local/international encounter, peace researchers such as Thania Paffenholz have recently been warning that local actors are “still at risk of being dominated by soft power inherent in the international peace builder’s interventionist logic of training and peace infrastructures”.1079 I argue that the practice of Kvinna till Kvinna in Bosnia illustrates that the organization, despite a general emphasis on local ownership, systematically exercised soft power over its Bosnian ‘partners’. Through frequent meetings and utilization of soft methods such as conversation and persuasion, the field representatives sought to influence local NGOs in a desired direction, inducing them to adjust to donor preferences, which with time usually happened.

As alluded above, the mission of Kvinna till Kvinna in Bosnia has to a great extent been pedagogical. It is unquestionable that Kvinna till Kvinna saw itself as an active donor that wished to contribute to the empowerment of its ‘partners’ in several ways. Education turned out to be a dominant method intended to strengthen local activists. Research shows indeed that empowerment of women happens with success in alternative learning spaces organized by autonomous organizations.1080 There is solid evidence that Kvinna till Kvinna put a great deal of effort in equipping Bosnian NGOs with knowledge they could use in their work, especially attending to the political aspect of empowerment.

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1079 Paffenholz 2015, 860.
1080 See, for example, Stromquist 2002.
However, education was also a method used to inspire Bosnian NGO women to think differently.

There were early signs of ‘Othering’ the former Yugoslav area and its people. Parallel to positive references to peace-promoting competent “tough core of people” in the area, there were traces of Balkanist and Cold War discourse. Nationalism and “communist mentality” were at an early stage identified as threats to future Bosnia. The Balkans was perceived as an “extremely male chauvinist” area where women were oppressed. However, it is from late 1995, after the organization increased its presence on the ground, that notions of Bosnia lagging behind and thoughts about educational needs of local women emerge. The latter were considered to need education in areas ranging from gender-awareness and human rights to critical thinking and public speaking. As many other contemporary aid organizations, Kvinna till Kvinna has neither externally nor internally used language that can be classified as colonial rhetoric. Nonetheless, this thesis pinpoints the existence of a ‘we’ (Swedes) versus ‘they’ (Bosnians) thinking that puts the former in possession of the knowledge that the latter needs to acquire on its ‘transition’ path. I have also found notions of Swedish supremacy expressed not only in relation to Bosnia/Bosnians but in relation to other donors as well. My findings thus confirm the Swedish self-image in the context of international development identified by other research where Sweden tends to be placed outside of colonial history and Swedish aid/peace workers perceived as more respectful of indigenous people.1081

Kvinna till Kvinna saw itself contributing knowledge to its Bosnian ‘partners’ in gender equality, the third sector, and even feminism. In particular, the first two are known to be areas of Swedish expertise. Statements regarding the feminist views of the Swedish foundation being “new and radical” in Bosnia, the investment in education of its ‘partners’, and, not least, the unforeseen silence about state socialism and its gender order bear witness of that Bosnia was seen as a clean slate concerning the aforementioned areas. Another surprising finding of this research is the lack of deeper knowledge about the local context at Kvinna till Kvinna, including basic facts regarding Yugoslav/Bosnian women’s history. My conclusion is that it was deemed as irrelevant for its mission in Bosnia. By employing exclusively Swedish staff at the Sarajevo office, transferring the ‘right’ view of gender equality/feminism/women’s activism was secured. This practice along with study visits in Sweden and hiring of Swedish experts sends a clear message about who was the learner in the Swedish-Bosnian encounter. It also tells that there was a hierarchy of knowledge.

At the same time, Kvinna till Kvinna continuously evaluated its own work methods and reflected over adequate ways to support its ‘partners’ by having dialogue with them regarding their educational needs. It is equally important to underline that knowledge transferred from Sweden has been appreciated and asked for by Bosnian women’s NGOs. This fact has, on one hand, been interpreted as a self-colonizing tendency due to signs of internalized beliefs of underdevelopment, not uncommon in the semiperiphery (the Balkans), which tends to more voluntary accept influences from the core (Western countries). On the other hand, the findings clearly show that the attention received from Kvinna till Kvinna was significant for young women’s groups with limited financial resources, which used educational opportunities offered to increase their own capacities. In concluding what has been said so far in this chapter, I turn to Steven Sampson’s suggestion that Western intervention in the Balkans should be seen as benevolent colonialism, a concept that captures well the ambivalence laid out here. This thesis has taken his urging to consider benevolent aspects of international peacebuilding in the region seriously. It shows that Kvinna till Kvinna was indeed not solely driven by self-interest, but guided by female solidarity and sincere intentions to aid its Bosnian counterparts. However, the findings have also revealed notions of Swedish supremacy constructed through ‘Othering’ of the ‘partners’, and attempts to influence and change them.

Thorough contextualization of the Swedish-Bosnian encounter has showed factors that conditioned it as well as its dynamics. The conclusion is that this was an encounter between “subjects previously separated by geographical and historical disjunctures, and whose trajectories now intersect”.\footnote{Pratt 1992, 7.} Up to the early 1990s, Yugoslavia was an unknown territory for Swedish aid. The newly formed Kvinna till Kvinna, a newcomer in aid work, entered the war-torn post-socialist space with goodwill and an ambition to pursue openness and curiosity in encounters with local NGOs. However, the findings reveal that its Swedish staff came to Bosnia with limited knowledge about the area. Not seldom was their knowledge based on stereotypes about the Balkans and the socialist past of Yugoslavia. This resulted in bringing norms regarding women’s organizing that differed from local ones. Coming from "the country on the sidelines" in regards to war, they also struggled with connecting to war-related experiences and understanding consequences a war has on society and its citizens.\footnote{Sturfelt 2008, 32.} In ad-
dition, the encounter was burdened by the asymmetry inherent in international/local (donor/recipient) relations. The relationship between the Swedish government aid agency Sida, Kvinna till Kvinna and Bosnian NGOs was one of interdependence. This thesis has showed the efforts Kvinna till Kvinna continuously made to create good contact with Sida and influence its views on women’s role in peacebuilding. It has also illuminated how Sida, as an important background actor, both enabled and limited the cooperation between Kvinna till Kvinna and its local ‘partners’.

The unfolding of the Swedish-Bosnian encounter during two decades shows an apparent change over time, thus disclosing a movement towards a greater power imbalance in the relationship between Kvinna till Kvinna and women’s organizations it supported. This process began with the abandonment of the principle to provide support from the distance (from Sweden) in the fall of 1995 when the Swedish foundation embarked towards active presence in Bosnia. Through this move, the potential for better understanding of the needs of local NGOs was enhanced as was the possibility to control and influence them. We could also observe a redefinition regarding the kind of relationship Kvinna till Kvinna wished to cultivate with women’s groups in Bosnia. In the initial phase, thoughts about closeness based on friendship were voiced, but with time the friendship became problematic and the relationship turned into a contractual one. Professionalization of Kvinna till Kvinna, including stricter reporting requirements from Sida and a higher degree of bureaucracy, prompted increased control which seriously affected the relationship. While this took place at the beginning of Kvinna till Kvinna’s second decade in Bosnia, the control of local NGO’s work had in reality been continuous since the establishment of the field office. What this thesis has shown is that the control, which gradually intensified, was a way of coping with the lack of insight into actions of ‘partner’ organizations. The latter resisted the control and influence by its Swedish donor in many subtle ways, primarily avoiding to address the issue directly and potentially cause a conflict. The resistance that manifested over time as well as critique expressed in oral sources used in this thesis show the ambivalent relationship of the semiperiphery to the core. I argue that the simultaneous interest in influences from Western countries and rejection of them was especially pronounced in the post-Yugoslav space which had experienced de-development, but where people still remembered better times.

Judging from what has been said so far, the relationship that over time developed between Kvinna till Kvinna and its Bosnian counterparts can be described as a hierarchical sisterhood. This concept has previously been used by a few historians seeking to understand contact between women from different
classes in Nordic countries at the beginning of the twentieth century. My conclusion is that the concept hierarchical sisterhood captures well the asymmetry and the desire for female solidarity found in the Swedish-Bosnian encounter that started in the last decade of the same century. It is worth repeating that gender-focused research has generally been preoccupied with power relations between men and women, thus leaving differences and hierarchies between women somewhat aside. This is problematic, especially when dealing with transnational connections within contexts such as international development and international peacebuilding. These are in rule permeated by an inherent inequality in relations between international and local actors. During recent decades, the emphasis on commonalities between the women of the world has generally been replaced by a recognition of the fact that women’s experiences differ across time and space. Moreover, women’s experiences depend on the intersection of multiple social categories. Notions of sisterhood have been questioned and difficulties with putting it into practice addressed.

What constitutes a sisterhood between women is by no means a given. The ethnologist Jenny Gunnarsson Payne sees sisterhood as an empty significant that can be filled with different and even conflicting demands. Her explanation that sisterhood is “necessarily paradoxical” as it, on one hand, has universal ambitions appealing to all women and, on the other hand, usually includes a limited circle of sisters is also confirmed here. The solidarity and support of Kvinna till Kvinna was intended for women who actively sought to bring about change in postwar Bosnia. The ideal Bosnian female peacebuilder was one who prioritized her gender identity before the ethnic one, embraced multiethnicity, distanced herself from the communist past and engaged in political activism both voluntarily and as an NGO employee. She was initiative-taking, but at the same time willing to continuously educate herself. This thesis has showed that finding ‘islands of civility’ that matched the romanticized image of the local peacebuilder held by the Swedish foundation was indeed a challenge. Organized women in violently divided post-socialist Bosnia were not easily put into the essentialist categories of either victims or peacebuilders. Thus, within the group of by Kvinna till Kvinna supported organizations some deviations from the aforementioned image were tolerated.

The sisterhood between Kvinna till Kvinna and its ‘partners’ as well as between the latter was based on shared values about the general need of bettering

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1084 See, for example, Björk 1999, 68-70.
women’s situation in postwar Bosnia. Support from a women-oriented donor was, as Bosnian NGO women underlined, significant due to its sensibility to problems that women face on a daily basis. As historians have noted, organized women have not had a difficulty agreeing that the position of women needs to change. However, “both the strategies and the objectives were the subject of ongoing debates” and in the case of the Swedish-Bosnian encounter a matter of constant negotiation. I have earlier in this chapter explained that this was not an encounter between equals. Despite the fact that Kvinna till Kvinna subscribed to the idea of transnational sisterhood and in many ways demonstrated female solidarity, the relationship very quickly turned into a hierarchical one. The uneven power dynamics perpetuated and even increased with time. Research shows that relations developed in transnational encounters are in more cases than not asymmetrical, but not necessarily in any total sense.

Peace researchers have also started to criticize essentialist understandings of the international/local relationship associating the former with the power and the latter with resistance. While there is no doubt regarding which of the actors studied was in the most privileged position, my findings show that there was some mobility with regards to superior/inferior positions. As an intermediary, Kvinna till Kvinna was dependent on information from its local ‘partners’, but was not always able to receive it. When it suited their own interests, some Bosnian women’s groups withheld information about things ranging from their own activities and situation in the local communities to taxes. These findings challenge the image of local actors as powerless victims of Western domination and indicate that they occasionally were in the position to exert power over the donor.

Despite the limitations of sisterhood manifested in the Swedish-Bosnian encounter during the international peacebuilding mission in Bosnia, there is evidence that the cooperation between Kvinna till Kvinna and its Bosnian ‘partners’ in many respects was fruitful. The hierarchy appears to have been, at least temporarily, accepted by women’s groups in Bosnia which appreciated the support provided by the Swedish foundation and skillfully used it to build up their own capacities as well as to further women’s rights in this postwar setting. This thesis has made visible both the potential of transnational encounters occurring in the peacebuilding context, but also problematic features we need to continue pondering. Driven by a sincere commitment to support women’s peace efforts, the women that formed Kvinna till Kvinna dared to enter to them unknown

1087 Florin, Sommestad and Wikander 1999, 8.
1088 Saunier 2013, 87.
territories. Their “capacity to imagine something rooted in the challenges of the real world yet capable of giving birth to that which does not yet exist”, that Lederach calls moral imagination, has, I believe, been decisive for the contributions it made during the two decades of engagement in Bosnia.\textsuperscript{1089} At the same time, it is an undeniable fact that the Balkans, and in particular Bosnia, has been, as one former field representative expressed it, “our field trial area”.\textsuperscript{1090} The work of Kvinna till Kvinna on the ground can be characterized as a continuous process of learning by doing. Studying this process, one discovers the truthfulness in Mary Kaldor’s description of Bosnia as “a laboratory for post-Cold War intervention”.\textsuperscript{1091}

While Kvinna till Kvinna demonstrated a general will to learn from its experiences, adjust its working methods and engage in dialogue with ‘partner’ NGOs, this thesis has showed that some ideological thoughts guiding the mission of the Swedish foundation were stable and rather non-negotiable. Particularly problematic are the notions of cultural (Swedish) supremacy constituted of ‘right’ knowledge in certain areas, and lack of interest in contextual knowledge deemed as outdated and irrelevant in times of the ‘transition’. Scholarship has, however, found that differences not only matter, but should be openly discussed. For example, some recent peace research proposes allowing disagreements in areas of intractable conflict to come to the surface in order to create a more lasting peace. It emphasizes a plurality of opinions rather than utilization of universal norms as a cohesive factor that characterized liberal peacebuilding.\textsuperscript{1092} Perhaps applying rhetorical listening could serve us in taking seriously the wealth of different experiences women bring into encounters with each other as well as resisting notions of that one is better than the other. Besides a will to understand the point of view of others, rhetorical listening implies a critical approach to one’s own references of the world. It is a process that can potentially bring the parties who meet to a better understanding of each other’s standpoints. On the other hand, it is likely to be paved with discomfort and unease.\textsuperscript{1093} This process requires empathy as well as a degree of vulnerability, and could perhaps benefit from a dose of moral imagination.

\textsuperscript{1089} Lederach 2005, ix.
\textsuperscript{1090} “vår försöksregion” Interview with Julia Samuelsson, October 13 2010.
\textsuperscript{1091} Kaldor 2007, 122.
\textsuperscript{1092} See Aggestam, Cristiano and Strömbom 2015.
\textsuperscript{1093} See Ratcliffe 2005.
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Appendix

Interview Guides

Kvinna till Kvinna

Background information: age, education, profession
History of the organization
Role and goals of the organization
Tasks preformed in the organization
Knowledge about former Yugoslavia
Cooperation with Sida
Cooperation with Bosnian NGOs

Bosnian women’s organizations

Background information: age, education, profession
History of the organization
Past and current projects
Cooperation with Kvinna till Kvinna
Comparison between Kvinna till Kvinna and other donors
Cooperation with other women’s NGOs in the country and the region
Women’s activism in Bosnia: Past and present
The future of the organization
Acknowledgements

Encounters constitute the main theme of this dissertation. In the prologue, I described the unexpected encounter with Tima Delić. Since then, I have carried with me the wisdom told through Tima’s, in many ways tragic, life story and allowed myself to be influenced by her positive attitude towards life no matter the circumstances. What our meetings have taught me is that patience and joy are essential virtues, as necessary when writing a thesis as in life in general.

While it may be difficult to fully acknowledge the women who participated in my research, it is fair to say that without you and without the willingness of Kvinna till Kvinna specifically to ‘let me in’, there would most certainly not be a thesis. I owe immense thanks to every single one of you for unselfishly sharing your experiences and knowledge so that we together could contribute to a discussion of global significance. I would like you to know that it has been one of the most enriching life experiences that you can imagine.

Many other people within academia and outside of it helped this thesis come to fruition. For starters, had it not been for the unwavering support of Ann-Sofie Ohlander, professor at the Department of History, Örebro University, while I was writing my Master’s thesis, I doubt that an application for doctoral studies would ever have been sent in. I will always remember the enthusiasm she expressed for supervising a student who suddenly one day showed up at her office door with an idea to write about wartime sexual violence, a difficult but important subject. Not hesitating for a second, she took me on and even after my Master’s thesis was completed kept talking me into continuing to pursue research. Intentionally or not, Ann-Sofie also set an example of what it means to approach students’ ideas with curiosity and take them seriously, which I now strive to emulate in my own teaching practice.

It is not an overstatement to say that during the arduous process of writing and finishing the thesis, my main supervisor Christina Carlsson Wetterberg has been an invaluable source of support and inspiration. Along with her knowledge and wisdom, she also provided both patience and belief in me. Christina, no words can express what your support has meant to me and I cannot even imagine being without it in the future. With her competence in Conflict and Peace Studies, Maria Småberg has also been an important mentor. Apart from being the most caring supervisor a doctoral student could ever have, Maria persisted in sending texts that challenged me to expand my views as well as sharpen and nuance my interpretations. Henric Bagerius came onboard late in the process, but at a decisive time. He contributed with a unique combination of intense presence, absolute support and intellectual rigor. My words of deep
gratitude go to all three of you. For your careful mentoring of a doctoral student that wanted too much, for never-failing encouragement and for reminding me not to lose sight of the importance of the subject I was writing about. You have sharpened my thinking in many ways – some of which, I hope, this thesis demonstrates. Any errors, of course, remain my own.

Academia is, indeed, an interesting context which includes both competition and solidarity. Scholars are constantly sharing ideas and influencing each other. My research benefited tremendously from the generous input from fellow historians at Örebro University and beyond. Those at the ‘home front’ I would like to thank for their moral support, and for commenting on draft versions of this thesis are: Daniel Alsarve, Malin Arvidsson, Stefan Backius, Louise Berglund, Gunnela Björk, Jimmy Engren, Klara Folkesson, Anna-Karin Frih, Henrik Gjersvold, Lena Hallberg, My Hellsing, Björn Horgby, Jörgen Lennqvist, Andreas Mårdh, Torsten Nybom, Anna Pettersson, Thord Strömberg, Robert Svensson, Andreas Thörn and Zeki Yalcin. I am especially indebted to the generosity of Malin Arvidsson for commenting and proofreading much of what I have written.

In 2013, I had the privilege to spend two weeks as a visiting PhD Student at Malmö University via Nationella forskarskolan i historiska studier. I am thankful for the welcome I received, both from senior researchers and PhD Students who made my stay in Malmö pleasant. Conversations started there continued during a course in oral history that spring. I am also very grateful to Irene Andersson (Malmö University) and Lina Sturfelt (Lund University) for contributing constructive critique and insightful suggestions when my thesis manuscripts were delivered at my half-way and final seminar.

As a fortunate participant in other dynamic research environments at Örebro University, such as Narration, Life and Meaning (BLM) and the Center for Feminist Social Studies (CFS), I appreciate opportunities I have been given to present texts at research seminars, workshops and conferences, and to meet scholars from all over world. Special thanks go to Professor Liisa Husu for sending e-mails filled with words of encouragement and practical advice needed in the final stage of thesis writing.

I owe a debt of gratitude to Anna Linzie for proofreading the thesis manuscript and Aida Džiho-Šator for checking my Bosnian-English translations. I also thank Grant Michels for last-minute proofreading of the final chapter. Fieldtrips within Sweden and to Bosnia as well as participation in conferences were possible due to grants from the foundation Theodor Adelswärd’s minne, Anna Wedholm’s foundation and the HS Faculty Board at Örebro University, which I acknowledge with thanks. A generous grant was also received from
Helge Ax: on Johnson’s foundation which enabled me to peruse additional archive material that turned out to be of great importance to my research.

Many thanks to the amazing administrative staff and economists at HumES for their constant readiness to be of service. Also, the library staff, not seldom stunned by the number of books that I was borrowing, deserves a thank you. I have had the fortune of teaching in different disciplines. Whether it has been history, gender studies, social studies or education sciences, the cooperation with colleagues and encounters with students have been, and continue to be, true learning experiences. Thank you all for showing interest in my research and for cheering me on!

What I know for sure is that life during this intellectual adventure would have been much harder without family and friends. Research trips to Bosnia would never have been as pleasant and problem-free without family members who unselfishly offered accommodation and any other help I needed. Special thanks to Ibrahimovićs in Tuzla, Halepovićs and Bajramovićs in Sarajevo and, of course, majka Hajra, the matriarch of the Zagić family, who countless times greeted us at her precious home in Derventa. Hvala vam! I am appreciative of Therese and Grant Michels for their genuine friendship which I am sure will continue for many years to come. Thank you both for caring and soothing words when I needed them the most. Another friend, Vladimir Tenjer, used his artistic talent to create the book cover illustration. Deniza Tenjer, whom I have known since we were students, is an excellent listener and a wise friend who, when life gets a bit tough and the future seems uncertain, tells you: “How exciting! You do not need to know everything beforehand”. Somewhat unwillingly, I do agree with her.

Dijana, Husein and Narcisa Jusufbegović have made extraordinary contributions by spending days and nights taking care of two wonderful and lively children whenever there was and was not a need for it. I am thankful to my parents, Enisa and Selim Bajramović, for equipping me with the ethical compass that guides me through life and for being caring grandparents to my children. As the oldest of seven children, I developed the habit of being overprotective of my siblings early. Having grown up to be wise and independent persons, now they take care of me by reminding me of this self-imposed responsibility and the need to ‘tagga ner’. Dinko, Dinka, Alma, Nedim, Dino and Ali, that is exactly what I need! So, thank you.

Now let me turn to the ones with first-hand experience of living with a dissertation writer. I thank Anvar who did not only encourage me to embark on doctoral studies but also was always willing to lend a helping hand along the
way, no matter what the task was. My daughter Ella Lilly and son Denni Benjamin have shown remarkable understanding for long working hours and occasional travels. At the same time, it was the flexible working hours that allowed us to enjoy often very slow walks to and from pre-school and school as well as meaningful leisure-time activities. Mommy loves you and wishes for you to walk through life with joy, showing both empathy and integrity in encounters with others.

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As the late poet Maya Angelou once said, when we need support and courage, looking to those who walked before us and ‘bearing with us’ some of ‘our people’ might be helpful. So, I have done just that. This book is dedicated to one of them, my aunt Sadeta Vladavić who left us in October 1992 at the age of 33. She lost her life during the siege of Sarajevo while, as many other women in the city, trying to uphold the sense of normalcy during wartime. Sadeta was a hardworking and generous person who cherished the multicultural character of the society she lived in, but who also dared to challenge its gender norms. Her cosmopolitan values led her to Sarajevo, which she loved dearly, and the fact that she rests precisely there is a great consolation.

She remains a source of inspiration and one of ‘my people’.

Örebro in August 2018,

*Sanela Bajramović*


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