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Emancipation**

**INAUGURAL LECTURE
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**"Gender and democracy in the aftermath of war:
women's organization in BH"**

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Vice Chancellor, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I feel very honoured to be here this afternoon with occasion to address this inspiring audience, assembled in an impressive and beautiful place. I've been anxious to make the most productive use I can of the opportunity, thinking of ways it might chivvy my own thinking forward while at the same time engaging your interest and concern.

My research field is the gender relations of war-making and peace-making. I have a particular interest in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and in what I've come to think of as 'the space between us', a concern with the micro-processes in which people sometimes can, and do, cross and fill the space between difficult differences with words instead of bullets.

Over five years I've developed a working relationship with Medica Women's Association. It's based in the city of Zenica, in central Bosnia. Recently, with two colleagues from Medica, Rada Stakic-Domuz and Meliha Hubic, I've been studying other, smaller, Bosnian women's organizations in this post-war context.

Let me just outline what I intend in this lecture. Broadly it has three parts. I'll begin by describing the women's organizations we've made the subject of our study, caught up as they are in multiple and dramatic processes of change. They'll lead me to some thoughts about the need and potential for a women's movement in Bosnia. Finally I want to consider the relationship of such women's organizations to civil and political society - what might they contribute to an emergent democracy after war?

I'll begin, though, with a quick reminder of the background. In the years 1992-95 more than 200,000 people died violent deaths in B-H, two million people were displaced, 20 billion dollars of production capacity was destroyed and war losses totalled 100

billion dollars. That spasm of militarized violence was brought to a close by the mechanism of the "General Framework Agreement for Peace", negotiated at Dayton, Ohio, and signed in Paris on December 14 1995.

But it's hardly real security as yet. On the web sites I visit every day you read of frequent murders of prominent political, mafia or paramilitary figures. On average, ten people a month are killed by landmines. There are reports of attacks on people who try to return to their homes. There's also violence in the sense of imposed maps, borders and boundaries, official and unofficial, that combine with physical intimidation to inhibit movement, connectedness and relationship. And of course the armoured convoys of SFOR, the international peacekeeping military, still dominate the roads.

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You commonly hear the term 'the Transition' used to describe what's happening to the countries of East and Central Europe and the USSR following the collapse of the Communist regimes after 1989. But there are some who argue against what that word implies, and I agree with them. It suggests too similar a past. Yugoslavia wasn't like the other countries governed by Communist parties. 'The Transition' also suggests a predetermined arrival point - but who knows whether the Western powers' vision for the region will actually come to be? So instead, when considering the continuities and discontinuities in the pre-war, war-time and post-war moments of Bosnia's experience, I'd rather use terms like change, transit, pathway, trajectory and choice. They leave open more possibilities.

In any case, this is not one transition but several. First, there's the shift from war to something else. It is unclear as yet whether this 'something' is peace, or whether it should be called it 'no longer war' or 'not quite war' or 'not yet war again'. Second, there's political change, from a single-party to a multi-party system of rule. Third, there's the dramatic conversion of the state-led economy of the former Yugoslavia, which was a combination of social ownership and market, to the neo-liberal free market that's a condition of foreign aid today. Fourth, Bosnians are undergoing a transformation of the 'civil' aspect of society, the area of free association independent of the state. In this space new kinds of non-profit, non-governmental organizations are springing up.

What concerns us, as researchers, more than anything, though, is a fifth dimension of potential change: change in the *gender regime* - to use Bob Connell's useful term. Often in the aftermath of war there's outspoken concern to rebuild a more ethnically just society. But you don't hear, in Bosnia or other postwar societies,

policymakers recognizing this moment of flux as a chance to shape a more just gender regime. In BH current evidence points to a transit from something not very good to something much worse.

The patriarchal power and ideology that Yugoslav socialism, despite equality policies, had failed to shift in the fifties, sixties and seventies has to be seen as contributing directly to the rise of nationalism and militarism, and to the legitimation of violence in the eighties and nineties. Now, postwar, the incoming capitalism brings its own brand of unequal class and gender power relations. At its dark edges is a pathological masculine culture, a mafia for whom important sources of profit are prostitution and international trafficking in women. The gender regime that gets established in Bosnia now will establish the odds for and against progressive change in all the other dimensions of life.

Something depends on women's own agency. Women are noticeably active today in Bosnia's expanded sphere of voluntary organization. Analysis of a 1999 directory of associations suggests about half of them are led by a woman - that's a much higher female presence than in other locations in the public sphere. Of this half, around a third are leading associations in which the activists and beneficiaries are entirely women. A good many of these are monocultural, some even religious, and concerned primarily with humanitarian work. Often their focus is 'the family'. But a number of organizations met our research criteria in being first local; secondly clearly anti-nationalist; and third addressed to women's, rather than to family, needs.

We chose seven such organizations for closer study, partly guided by their location in towns or cities that were interesting for their ethnic structure, war history and current tensions. Banja Luka is one - the centre of Bosnian Serb political life. All the city's eighteen mosques and two Catholic monasteries were destroyed in the war, and today it's almost monocultural, with Bosniaks (Muslims) and Croats, much reduced and vulnerable minorities, keeping a low profile.

The other two towns we've been working in are the celebrated southern city of Mostar and the West Bosnian town of Gornji Vakuf - that its Croat inhabitants now want to call 'Uskoplje'. These are alike in being towns cut into two halves, either side of a border slashed through them by the fighting between Croat and Bosniak forces - in the "war within a war" as it was called. Most Serbs fled or were driven from these localities when Serb nationalist forces were attacking earlier in the war.

And here I need to alert you to a difficulty. The use of national names in Bosnia-Herzegovina is deeply problematic. The names

'Serb' and 'Bosnian Serb', 'Croat', 'Bosnian Croat' and 'Bosniak' (the term now used for 'Bosnian Muslim'), are in many ways artifacts of the fighting. As Dubravka Zarkov says, in her always thought-provoking way, 'violence is productive'. It was to produce new meanings for ethnic identities, to sharpen the differences and distance between them that the wars were launched. For many people, as a result, they have become a primary feature of their sense of self. For others, the whole concept of national identity has become anathema. How, then, can we use these names unproblematically now? When I use them, I'd ask you to hear a hesitation, imagine them in quotation marks. They're so deeply inscribed by violence that their meanings should never be taken as given, as real, or fixed.

We went out as researchers to spend time with the seven women's organizations. We used a qualitative approach, involving observation and interview. Our research questions, at an empirical level, were: who are the women, what are they doing and with what success? But at a more conceptual level we were interested in exploring what kind of relational world they aspire to shape in the aftermath of war. What political future do they prefigure?

The seven organizations differ in size and scope. Each has its ups and downs. Up means: projects funded, offices, salaries to pay two or three staff. Down means: running on empty, paid workers reduced to volunteering, many dropping out. In their choice of activity are five important themes, differently emphasized in the individual projects.

First and foremost is getting women back to *economic independence*. At the war's end, unemployment was 90%. How were women going to survive and maintain their dependents? So women came together to set up skills training, credit schemes and income-generating projects like knitting and sewing workshops.

Second, several of the organizations take action *against violence against women*. The publicity given to rape in the war, and the activity of women's projects for survivors, had sensitized women to male sexual violence. They saw a need for SOS help lines and shelters.

Third, some organizations offer *legal advice* and campaign for women's human rights. Fourth, there are projects to get women more *involved in politics* - educational seminars about the representative system and the various political parties; encouraging women to register and use their vote in elections; calling politicians to account.

Finally, and most important, there's *reconciliation work*. They bring women of different national names together. They support minority 'returnees', giving them moral support as they face up to the communities that expelled them, and material aid to see them through the first hard weeks - a cow, perhaps, and tools, candles, a few kilos of flour.

But it's not just ethnic rifts in the social fabric these women are stitching together. They aim to repair the bad feeling between local people and refugees (of their own ethnic group) who've flooded into the town, between people who stayed and people who fled, between people who fought and those who deserted, those displaced into other people's homes and those struggling to get them back.

The women's motivations in being active and organized seem to be, first, to *quell their own fear* (they experienced being afraid as terrible and are simply refusing to go on feeling that way). Secondly, to *escape confinement*. During the war it was a shock to be pinned in a basement under shellfire and, afterwards, not to have a job to go out to every day. Hate-filled towns are riddled with borders you can observe or defy - in either case at a cost. One is the threshold of your own front door. A third motivation is *regaining agency* after the victimhood of war. It's mainly men who have become the new entrepreneurs. 'Doing NGO' on the other hand is something women seem to be good at. It offers a chance to move forward, to effect something.

So far this account may sound ultra positive. But there's a down side to the picture of these women's organizations. Management structures are often incoherent or illogical. There's too little attention to democracy in decision-making. There are problems of leadership. Most of the organizations centre on a single, rather well educated, 'leader'. Some leaders are criticized for egoism, but in turn they criticize their followers for passivity. Skills, roles and opportunities aren't always well shared. Information and process aren't always transparent. Instead of co-operation there's often rivalry provoked by the competition for funding.

I've found that when you're researching this sector in Bosnia you have to defend yourself against attacks from cynics. People say, 'Surely you don't set any store by these little NGOs. They represent nobody. Those women are just in it for a grant and a salary'. These challenges made us think extra carefully about our research findings. But we came away feeling that, whatever their shortcomings, if organizations like this didn't exist we'd want to invent them.

We'd argue that they have a significance beyond their present reality. We can get at what this might be by addressing two other challenging questions sometimes asked of them by critics that

stand outside their world - critics in Sarajevo we talked with, and those in other countries whose work we read. First, do they add up to a *women's movement*? And second, what can they contribute to the overwhelmingly urgent task of *configuring democracy* in Bosnia-Herzegovina?

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Wondering about their potential as part of a women's movement, we asked the women: why do you organize as women? At one level it was a matter of *compassion and solidarity*, a supportive engagement with the sex-specific experiences of women in the war. In some ways, men and women had shared the experience of war. Both sexes left, or lost, or were driven from their homes - a shocking and entirely unanticipated occurrence. Women and men alike had sometimes found themselves on epic journeys on foot through forests and mountains - risking death in places they might once have visited on weekend picnics in the family car. How, in the routine of their modern, domestic lives, could they have imagined such a thing happening to them? Could we?

But in other ways the sexes had lived rather different wars. Men of fighting age had carried arms and engaged in combat, willingly or unwillingly. For many the fighting had involved brutalization and trauma. Or they had escaped the country, by expedience or by principle. A few women did serve in the military, but mostly women had the experience, in a way men didn't, of helping the young and the old to live through this uprooting, and of maintaining their own and others' nutrition and health in very challenging circumstances. Typically unarmed, they'd found themselves ascribed surprising new identities, at odds with their sense of self - that of 'victim', 'refugee' or 'war survivor'. Some had turned to prostitution to survive. If they did survive, that is. Because a lot did not. And many lived at such cost in trauma and loss that they would have preferred not to.

A second reason the women had for organizing as women was a refusal of *the inequality and marginalization of women* in the economy, in politics and more generally in public life. On the whole the women were conscious of a double reality concerning gender relations in the former Yugoslavia. On the one hand, the state in Yugoslavia had guaranteed women a certain degree of formal equality (in employment for instance) and a certain recognition of their special needs (such as maternity benefits and nurseries). On the other hand, this supposed equality had always been more formal than real. Family relations had been particularly resistant to change, continuing to be patriarchal, especially in rural society. Mirjana Morokvasic had written in 1986,

Women, in Yugoslavia can be economically independent, socially active, recognized and respected at work and yet

remain mere servants at home, where the man retains authority... In the private sphere, legislation was unable to resist the old values and replace them with something new.

Today, since the cataclysm of 1991-95, those old inequalities were remembered as new ones piled on top.

A third reason for being 'women-only' was that it made possible certain *ways of working*. If an organization is known to be a women's organization, ordinary women are more likely to feel comfortable stepping in the door. And it was a way of avoiding the ascendancy of men. Several women told us how, as well-qualified and even professional employees in large enterprises in the former Yugoslavia, they'd always remained in the shadow of men. One said, 'Men were the directors, the bosses. It was difficult to realize any idea of our own, however good it might be.'

Most important, women had seen women as the best hope for integrative working in these divided and embittered towns. Women said 'It was the men who carried guns in the war, they were the ones directly involved in the fighting. Between men here, there's this wall.' The possibility of rethinking enmity and recovering friendships seemed to arrive for women before men.

We asked the women we interviewed whether they felt themselves to be part of a '*women's movement*'. In the eighties there'd been a small but radical women's movement in Belgrade, Zagreb and Ljubljana but it had somehow passed Sarajevo by. During and immediately after the war in Bosnia a handful of women's organizations, opposing the ethno-national principle, sprang up to undertake social and psychological care of war-traumatized women. Medica Women's Association was important among them. Women's organizations in Serbia and Croatia that were opposed to what was being done in Bosnia by extremists in their national name, quickly showed solidarity with the Bosnian women. As soon as the dust of war settled, organized women from all parts of the region quickly re-connected with each other at workshops and conferences. Supportive women also came from women's movements in the USA and countries of Western Europe.

But do our handful of organizations and a few others like them add up to a specifically Bosnian women's movement? In my written paper I discuss definitions of social movement and the extent to which these women's organizations might be seen as fitting the criteria. We concluded from that reading that, while the potential is there, certain factors point the other way.

First, the shift from service provision to *campaigning* is slow at this local level. Second, our organizations don't really reflect any general upswelling of *consciousness* among Bosnian women about disadvantage and oppression. While the need continues to

identify and honour husbands and sons killed in the war, women are unready to critique the family. As yet there's not much in the way of a subversive women's culture - you don't find women's activist groups in the professions, women comedians, novelists, singers or artists dramatizing the inequities of gender relations. Just a little in the University perhaps. One woman told us

To say 'I'm a feminist' is very dangerous here. Only to say it. To *be* it is more dangerous. You have very many male, conservative and retrograde tendencies. Nationalism, sexism and xenophobia intersect. They support each other. I think it's a kind of totalitarian way of thinking. It's very hard to be a feminist in these cultural circumstances.

Peggy Watson writes that the transition to liberal capitalism in all the formerly state socialist countries (quote) 'offers men the opportunity of putting a greatly increased social distance between themselves and women. It is the rise of masculinism - she says - that's the primary characteristic of gender relations in Eastern Europe today'. With the new ascendancy of neo-liberal economics, the primacy of competition and the loss of socialism's welfare safety-nets, has come 'the enactment of masculinity on a grand scale'. If this gender regime becomes permanent it will be a disaster - and not only for women.

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One of the most cogent critics of NGO culture in B-H is David Chandler. In his book *Bosnia: Faking Democracy After Dayton* he argues that the international community has shifted the goal posts with regard to democracy. At the start, he says, it set requirements for constitutional rule, the creation of representative assemblies and electoral processes, to be supervised into existence by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. These have been implemented. But because the internationals were disappointed by the nationalist colour of the parties returned in the elections of '96 and '98, they've continued to deem democracy in deficit, and they've substituted as their fundamental criterion a flourishing 'civil society', particularly the growth of an associational sphere of interest groups. 'Democracy' says Chandler, 'has become a moral as opposed to a political category, and democratization now concerns societal values and attitudes rather than political processes'. International money is being pumped into local NGOs, that Chandler and other critics deem unrepresentative, undemocratic, inefficient, and middle class, dangerously fragmenting the political opposition and undermining the political process.

These dangers aren't illusory. But we would argue rather differently. While civil society certainly can't thrive without effective state institutions and a strong political society, the

reverse is also true. B-H isn't yet a democracy. We've applied criteria developed by Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan in their study of societies in transition to what they call 'consolidated democracy'. They propose that statehood and free elections must be accompanied by other conditions. A relatively autonomous political society involving respected political parties; a rule of law to ensure legal guarantees for citizens' freedoms and their independent associational life; a state bureaucracy that's usable by the new democratic government; a free market whose inequalities are mitigated by state intervention.

None of these things does B-H yet have. Consider the state. The Dayton peacemakers adopted the ethnic logic of the war, dividing the new country into two ethnically-labeled entities, a Muslim-Croat Federation and a Serb Republic, linked by a weak central government and no guarantee of equal treatment for minorities in either part.

In the political sphere, the anti-nationalist parties with democratic potential are fragmented and weak. More hangs on personalities than on structures. There are frequent corruption scandals. Lack of transparency, for instance in the process of drafting legislation, inhibits confidence.

And as to the economy - it's characterized by a black market, a large grey economy in which employment isn't officially recorded, and a hiatus where state ownership used to be and private investment is still awaited.

But Linz and Stepan propose a fifth necessary condition for consolidated democracy: a thriving civil society, the area of free association in the space between the family, the state, the market and political society. This, it could be argued, is becoming a reality in B-H.

Of course, we shouldn't be starry eyed about free association. The social movements of civil society aren't necessarily all progressive. Hegel reminds us that the very openness of civil society means it's always wreckable: antidemocratic reactionary forces (like nationalism) roam hungrily around this terrain.

Civil society has to be seen as a field of struggle, just as the political sphere is. But we can be selective, and support anti-nationalist and anti-sexist movements. They should be fostered not at the expense of, but *in tandem with*, effective state structures and responsible political society. On this basis we believe women's local, cross-ethnic, self-organizing groups - especially if they come to be an expression of a wider women's movement - *tendentially* contribute to the configuration of democratic society in a future B-H. And we'd argue that they do

it in three ways - by promoting inclusive democracy, local democracy and gender democracy.

First, inclusive democracy... Those in Bosnia and outside who launched the wars of differentiation and separation between Bosnian Serb, Bosnian Croat and Bosnian Muslim largely succeeded in their aims. Those who stood for co-existence and inclusivity lost. Some Bosnians, depending on their war experiences, feel safer for the new separation. But pre-war Yugoslav research showed the republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina had a higher 'tolerance index' than other republics - so a lot of Bosnians when they woke up to the new demography, felt bereft by the loss of the old companionship.

These women's organizations, in their small way, are modelling and promoting the ethnic inclusion and integration that's lacking in the national and local political system. They aren't altogether alone in this. At the bottom of Bosnian society, at the level of the individual, there is a growth of private interaction across the lines imposed by the war. Year on year, more people are visiting a friend's flat on the wrong side of town, or taking a bus over the inter-entity line. At the top, the international institutions and a few Bosnian politicians are trying to prevent segregation setting in for good. But these women's organizations are working at a distinctive level. What's lacking in their towns, and what *they* can contribute, is public activity at the mid-level of collectivities and institutions.

Let's take an example. In the divided town of Gornji Vakuf/Uskoplje, the school system has split in two since the war - where there was Yugoslav secondary school there's now a Croat one and a Bosniak one. The town's two antagonistic local authorities are doing their best to differentiate the school curriculum on national lines, to force into existence two languages where there was one. Individually, privately, some teachers from the two schools deplore this, and some keep contact with each other. But as a body, the schools, their heads and their professionals, can't. Some of the women in our projects happen to be teachers. Perhaps eventually they'll be able to effect some reconnection at this collective, public, level.

Second, local democracy... As manifestations of local activism women's organizations of this kind, along with other inclusive local NGOs, could help draw into existence worthy protagonists in the shape of responsive local authorities, where now there's effectively a void. Take the town of Mostar. Today its local municipal council is split into two separate authorities, nationalist dominated, locked in combat, minimally concerned with the quality of social welfare, services, the environment, development. They neither help nor hinder but simply ignore our local NGOs. There's no tradition from the former Yugoslavia on

which to fall back, of an active locality engaged agonistically with a responsive and inclusive local council. But by hammering away at the doors of the municipalities and the local party branches it's just, remotely, possible that local groups like these could kick-start the evolution of a genuine locality-based democracy.

These women after all have a clear vision for their town or city. They tell us they want it to be: a place where old friendships can be affirmed and renewed despite intervening experiences; where people are judged by what they do and say, not by the name they carry; where collective guilt isn't ascribed to the individual; where political divergences are dealt with non-violently and democratically; where religion is a question of private belief not of politics; where economic competition is lively but humanized; and where there are no extremes of wealth and poverty. They believe in an integration of the three ethnicities honed in war - but they also want their town or city to be inclusive of refugees and returners.

Interestingly, the women don't much use the word 'community' in this context. A lot of Yugoslav's were sceptical of Tito's sloganized community of 'brotherhood and unity' which, on the one hand, suppressed national and gender differences and on the other made it socially costly to refuse a homogenous Communist identity. The war was precisely designed to blow all that apart. Tito's singular community has been superseded by multiple communities of ethno-national belonging. The clerics invoke the community of mosque and church; the nationalists the ethnic community - 'our' half of the town, 'Gornji Vakuf' or 'Uskoplje'.

Community is always a dangerous concept for women. Liz Frazer, in *The Problems of Communitarian Politics*, shows how, when 'community' is invoked, social conflicts (especially gender oppression) that are a systematic feature of formations like the family, neighbourhood and congregation, escape identification and analysis. What the women in our organizations seem to be doing is rejecting the enclosures, exclusions and stasis of *community*, reaching over and beyond it towards a more fully *social*, permeable and connected world.

Third, then, gender democracy... Anne Phillips writes, 'With the odd exception, the entire debate on democracy has proceeded for centuries as if women were not there...' As a result, a 'relentless privileging, not just of real living men, but of the very category of the male itself, has formed and deformed political theory and practice'. Politics - this is the message of her book *Engendering Democracy* - has to be reconceptualized with both sexes written in.

It's ironical that the political system of Yugoslavia, during the regime of the League of Communists, was not altogether gender-

blind. It had acknowledged women's under-representation and ensured women's presence through electoral quotas. Even so and even then, women had only half the places they might have been expected to fill by virtue of their proportion in the population.

But worse was to come. The women's electoral quota was abandoned in the first multi-party elections, held in 1990, and in the first post-war elections. Women's representation plummeted to less than 3% at national level. Then, a campaign by the Bosnian League of Women Voters and intervention by the OSCE succeeded in modifying the voting system and thereby partially recovering women's former share of seats. But still women remain marginal to organized politics in Bosnia and there's been, as Martha Walsh puts it, 'a massive retrenchment of women from public life'.

Activity by women's organizations informing women about politics, encouraging them to vote and stand for election, showing them ways to intervene and giving them the skills to do so, can make a significant contribution to shifting an emergent Bosnian democracy towards gender democracy. But in a way more importantly, women like these, stepping into public space, expecting more of a contribution from men in the home, taking initiatives that conflict with the norm – this reshaping of entrenched patriarchal gender relations is also work for democracy.

Why? Full democracy means a democratic *society* as well as a democratic state - as David Held and many others have reminded us. So gender democracy means not only a fair share of parliamentary seats and executive posts but also democracy in marriage, in the family, in the street and in every workplace from the soup kitchen to the 'dot.com' enterprise.

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Three problems are liable to prevent women's organizations from playing this part in the democratizing of Bosnia. First, if they are to survive and gain an impact, new skills and practices have to be developed within them. The problem is, the kinds of skills and practices that are most needed are precisely the ones most former Yugoslavs just don't want to hear any more about: the skills of responsible and participatory management and decision-making.

When, in the 1960s and 1970s, the New Left and New Wave Feminism in Western countries were re-igniting enthusiasm for participatory democracy, looking to renegotiate and reshape the relations of power, for a lot of us Yugoslavia was a model of state socialism that differed excitingly from the Soviet version. But decentralized worker self-management, a worthy experiment, was often in practice bureaucratic and inauthentic. Some former Yugoslavs became disillusioned with its time-consuming

processes. Now, when Westerners evoke 'participation' and 'democracy', Bosnians are liable to meet them with weary cynicism.

The notion of women's 'emancipation' had a similar setback, contaminated by association with bureaucracy. Now it's not easy for the women of the women's organizations to reappropriate women's emancipation and reformulate it in the notion of women's *movement* - and it may be even harder to reawaken enthusiasm for organizational democracy.

Second, opportunities for realistic engagement with political power are lacking to the women's organizations. John Keane suggests an important condition for civil society is 'the cultivation of public spheres of controversy in which the violent exercise of power over others can be monitored and resisted non-violently'. The public spheres available to Bosnian women in which to controversialize power - things like: contested urban governance, a practice of political lobbying, campaigning and advocacy, a responsive media, accessible courts - are as yet seriously under-developed. The result is that women are muttering to themselves, rather than shaking the pillars.

Third, and most important, the women's organizations badly lack security of funding. NGOs scratch a living as 'hunter gatherers' in a primitive world. They're crucially dependent on international bodies - inter-governmental, governmental and non-governmental - for survival. Funding is very much on donors' terms. It's on a stop-start basis, always short term, seldom covers overheads. Now, anyway, a lot of donors are pulling out of Bosnia and moving to the sites of more recent wars and catastrophes. They're urging local NGOs to become self-supporting. But people are already desperate in their search for an income for their families. To generate surplus for a project is quite unrealistic. We're not the only ones arguing for an improved legal framework and a thought-through, responsible, long-term international funding policy for progressive NGOs.

Why does their survival matter? As I looked for an answer to this question it became startlingly clear to me just how pertinent it is to the Ribbuis Peletier chair, with its title *feminism, humanism and emancipation*, and to the preoccupations of a University for Humanist Studies. To address the question in this supportive academic framework, as I have this year, has affirmed for me that it isn't merely a parochial concern I have about a handful of Bosnian women struggling to pick up the pieces after a nasty local war.

Because the answer is: it matters that these women's organizations survive because they are potentially a social space (and a rare one) in which a genuinely transformative, progressive,

revisioning of the social might happen after catastrophic societal failure. With whom, otherwise, does the dynamism lie in Bosnia today? First, with the international institutions - and they're extraneous. Second, with the visionaries of private wealth through the market economy. They produce atomized individuals, not social being. They seek to increase, not diminish, inequalities. Third, the initiative resides with nationalist politicians and ideologues, and their stifling and murderous conception of community. Who else but the integrative NGOs are daring to refuse both individualism *and* a narrow notion of community, while still acting collectively? And ultimately, who other than these women's NGOs conceives of women as a collective social actor?

In closing I'd like to say three thank you's. First, to the Bosnian women with whom and about whom this research was done, for their partnership and trust. Second, thank you, all, for listening while I shared with you a small part of our work. Third, this is the last of several years of feminist activity at UVH funded by the late Mrs. Ribbius Peletier. I would like to thank the Peletier Board very very much for nominating me - the very last Peletier prof. And thank you to my academic colleagues here in Utrecht for your guidance and inspiration. The experience has been wonderful!