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## 7 Gender, conflict, and social capital

### Bonding and bridging in war in the former Yugoslavia

*Maja Korac*

The 1990s are marked by unprecedented mobilisation for armed conflict at the local or state level. With 44 countries, or 25 per cent of the world's states at war during this period, the world experienced more violent conflict than ever before. Conflicts of the 1990s are often called *new wars* (Kaldor 1999; Duffield 2001) as they are importantly shaped by the processes of globalisation, structural changes in the world economy and politics, that is, by the emergence of the "new world order." This type of war is characterised not only by the new, unconventional forms of warfare, but also by the changed form and nature of mobilisation for both forging war and promoting peace. The nature and forms of mobilisation in this type of conflict range from local or national to transnational or international.

Duffield (2001) defines new wars as *network wars* referring to the links and connections formed within states as well as at local-global levels, which are central to mobilising people/fighters as well as securing arms and other resources for this type of war. The centrality of networks to this type of war, however, goes beyond mobilising and resource factors. They are critical for how this type of conflict spreads and takes root in society causing widespread victimisation of populations for prolonged periods. Conflicts of the 1990s have been internal and overwhelmingly marked by the divisive politics that have transformed ethnicity into an effective weapon of war. Reshaping social networks and links at the communal level is central to constructing these wars as "ethnic" or "religious." Duffield (1997) and Kaldor (1999) point out that one of the highest and the gravest costs of new wars is the destruction of social networks and local communities caused by the divisive identity politics of this type of war. By spreading fear and hatred among populations at a communal level, political elites and local warlords mobilise them for support of, and engagement in, violent conflict, and effectively use ethnicity as a tool of war. Goodhand and Hulme (1999: 17–18) point out that "[i]n contemporary conflicts, 'the community' represents the nexus of conflict action." It is at the communal level, they emphasise, where most of the physical violence and suffering occurs (*ibid.*).

The destruction of social networks at the communal level is about undermining trust and webs of support embedded in (local) social connections tied through local institutions as well as other, informal ties such as family,

friendship links, and other forms of sociability and communal links. As these types of bonding and bridging social links are important sources of individual and group identities, as well as social stability and cohesion, their destruction is critical for implementing and spreading divisive politics of new wars and for mobilising support for them. Through various social and political mechanisms, the trust which these connections engender is gradually replaced by fear of a neighbour, friend, fellow co-worker or colleague, and often a relative or a family member, all of whom become labelled as the “Other” within the divisive, exclusionary discourse of new war. This type of discourse prescribes and imposes legitimacy of one type of bond, most often ethnic understood as primordial, and requires destruction, to the point of annihilation, of any bridging connections between diverse individuals and groups at the communal, local level, and beyond.

If undermining trust and webs of social support is central to the development and spreading of new wars, regaining, recreating, and developing new basis of trust is critical for building “viable constituencies for peace” (Goodhand and Hulme 1999: 18), hence, for conflict resolution and any lasting, sustainable peace. Such “islands of civility” (Kaldor 1999) consisting of individuals and groups promoting inter-group, cross-ethnic bridging connections and civic, rather than ethnic politics, exist or have the potential to emerge in the context of new war. It is critical, therefore, to acknowledge and support their existence or to identify social and political forces and spaces within which they have the potential to emerge, as well as to develop strategies to promote them. The character of connections underpinning this type of mobilisation in a new war are importantly about recreating old or developing new basis of trust between groups constructed by political elites and warlords as ethnic and opposing. In this sense, these inter-group links are primarily *bridging* in nature aimed at establishing bonds across difference and (ethnic) boundaries, rather than embedded in them. Much of these processes concern identity as well as politics, and are about the *politics of identity* rather than identity politics. This latter distinction is important as it points to the *bottom-up* processes through which local people challenge, subvert, and contest structures of power that constrain their social lives (Hill and Wilson 2003: 2). This process is in opposition to the top-down processes of identity politics whereby various political, social, and economic entities and elites attempt to mould collective identities into fixed and “naturalised” frames (*ibid.*).

The emphasis on social networks and trust as the entry point into the analysis of the new type of war, links social capital to the mechanisms and processes underpinning the ways in which they unfold, develop, and are made to last for prolonged periods of time or are undermined from within. The recognition of this link provides a useful conceptual framework for exploring how social networks and trust are reshaped in this type of conflict. It facilitates understanding of their role in spreading new war as well as in forging peace. Social capital is thus understood here as social-relational concept, encompassing norms of reciprocity and trust (Coleman 1990). To reveal and understand how social capital translates into social and political engagement for war or peace it is

important to identify conditions shaping norms of reciprocity and facilitating the development of different forms of trust in specific contexts.

In the remainder of this chapter, I develop further some of these points conceptually as well as empirically in reference to my research on the violent disintegration of Yugoslavia in the 1990s. By looking (back) at the processes that led to the formation of ethnicised states in the region, I explore the role of social capital, its bonding and bridging qualities, in setting the stage for spreading ethnic hatred and fuelling violence in this conflict, as well as in opening up spaces for reconciliation and conflict resolution. In doing this, I am particularly interested in examining the gender dimensions of these processes.

### **From cross-ethnic bridges to ethnic bonds: gender and the process of naturalising trust and reciprocity**

Ethnicity, understood as a set of fixed and *naturalised* (ethnic) ties and bonds defined by “common blood and origin” had been at the centre of attention during the violent disintegration of Yugoslavia. Conflict was most often described as *ethnic* war attributed to “the centuries of animosity” among the peoples of the Balkans and inequality marked by ethnicity. A more careful and informed analysis of the situation in the country demonstrates, however, that in ethnic terms Yugoslavia was, as Woodward (1995: 32) noted, a land of minorities, in which most local communities and large parts of the country were ethnically mixed, and no group had more than a regional majority. These ethnically mixed local communities were sites not just of peaceful multicultural co-existence, as known in the West, but of genuine cohesion exemplified in the high percentage of ethnically mixed marriages and people of ethnically mixed backgrounds (Kaldor 1999; Korac 2004; Morokvasic-Müller 2004).<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the primary social divisions and inequalities of the pre-war Yugoslavia “were not defined by ethnicity but by job status and growing unemployment” (Woodward 1995: 44). Thus, the social fabric of life at the communal level was importantly cross-ethnic, as were the socio-economic divisions and inequalities. How had these bridging social relations that allowed for the formation of specific forms of reciprocity and cross-ethnic trust been reshaped into bitter ethnic divisions and seemingly impermeable boundaries? What type of trust and reciprocity is shaped by this kind of boundary formation? How are these processes gendered?

In answering these questions it is necessary to examine, albeit briefly, the intersection of socio-economic and political factors and conditions of the 1980s, and explore how these led to the development of divisive identity politics and to the centrality of ethnic rather than civic politics in the region. A socio-economic crisis in Yugoslavia emerged in the 1980s and was linked to the reprogramming of the country’s foreign debt. The latter was dictated by the IMF and the World Bank which, following the world oil crisis of the mid 1970s, put pressure on the then Yugoslav government to introduce austerity measures and restructure the economy. The effects of these measures and the crisis that followed were visible and demoralising as millions of people were experiencing a substantial decrease

in their standard of living and an equally high percentage had lost their jobs. Structural limitations of the Yugoslav economy, which had relatively limited elements of market economy, as well as the country's inadequate political decision-making structures, in conjunction with the structural changes in the world economy and politics, led the society to a deep crisis. The resulting economic, social, and political restructuring caused a gradual dismantling of state socialism.

These processes triggered the onset of a personal and collective identity crisis for the population in the region. They also heightened people's sense of economic and social insecurity, because they were no longer protected by the shield of the socialist state. Ethnicity and ethnic (be)longing articulated and tied through nationalist claims for ethnic purity of their territories had a powerful appeal, as it promised millions of people a sense of belonging and security at the time of radical change. The post-socialist nationalists skilfully manipulated this sense of disorientation among the population. By seeking political power over sub-federal territories,<sup>2</sup> they aggressively sought to create a base for an ethnic identity that would support their projects of ethnically exclusive states. Given the cross-ethnic character of social relations and ties in the country as well as the actual ethnic mix of population territorially and geographically, the nationalists' aim for "ethnically pure" states required a radical shift in discourse. History and language were to be purged of any notion of peaceful co-existence, as cultural "cleansing" was a precursor to war. In the process, cross-ethnic links, cooperation, and historic ties were replaced by the essential notion of ethnic difference. Ethnic groups, the post-socialist nationalists claimed, were tied with a "common blood" and "common destiny" which form the *natural* basis for cooperation, reciprocity, and trust. Any other types of bonds were perceived as a *threat* to the historic, cultural, and territorial claims of the ethnic collective. Within the political nationalistic discourse and, consequently, the public realm, cross-ethnic links were treated as suspicious or more often as a dangerous aberration away from the natural and *normal* ethnic ties and bonds based on shared tradition, religion, and culture.

Despite the political claims made by politicians, multi-ethnic Yugoslavia was still a reality in the lives of its individual citizens in 1990–1. A survey of 650 refugees in Serbia, originating from 52 ethnically heterogeneous communities in Croatia, showed that the disintegration of their communities was not the result of ethnic tensions in their day-to-day lives in the experience of those surveyed (Milivojevic 1992). Rather, it resulted from political pressure orchestrated by the political elites and their nationalistic parties causing fear among the local citizens. This type of pressure gradually led to ethnic tensions, conflict, and their flight to Serbia (*ibid.*).

In this survey two-thirds of the respondents came from minority groups in their communities. Some 86 per cent of them had ethnic origins that differed from those of their neighbours, while 96 per cent had established friendships and 66 per cent had family relations with members of other ethnic groups. Fully 60 per cent denied the existence of ethnic divisions or intolerance in their

communities and 77 per cent had not had personal conflicts with members of other ethnic groups. While 5.5 per cent judged the atmosphere to be one of ethnic division and intolerance, only 1.2 per cent were able to give evidence of personal conflicts with members of other ethnic groups, and a mere 0.8 per cent were able to give evidence of collective forms of such conflict (Milivojevic 1992). These data describe the situation in ethnically mixed communities in Croatia before the first multi-party election campaigns in the region, in the winter of 1990. According to the same survey, from that time on, the situation started to change, and relations with neighbours, friends, and even relations among family members deteriorated.

My own research revealed a similar pattern.<sup>3</sup> For example, Goca, a Bosnian Serb woman from eastern Bosnia-Herzegovina, a teacher, portrayed the situation in her town a few years before her flight:

In our street, the neighbours were mostly Muslims [...] Those seven, eight Muslim homes around us, we didn't celebrate any holiday [religious] alone, our neighbours, all of them would come, wish us a happy holiday, but also, not a *Bairam* [Muslim religious holiday] passed without us wishing them a happy holiday [...] Believe me that we, from [her hometown], neither Muslims nor Serbs, didn't want war [...] We couldn't conceive there'd be a war, that I'd run away from my Muslim neighbour. And I also know that my closest Muslim neighbours didn't think so [...] Actually, two years before the war [the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina started in April 1992], something changed in the people, you'd talk with your friends, but there were some things you'd not talk about [...] You could feel it in the school [where she worked as a teacher], that parents were choosing a Muslim, a Serb teacher. That grieved me very much [...] In the circle of people with whom me and my husband were friends [...] the people started wondering the last two years what was happening, when those national parties won in our Bosnia [in 1990].  
(personal communication, summer 1995)

Similarly, Branka, a Croatian Serb woman from eastern Croatia, explained the situation in her hometown before flight:

You couldn't feel it [ethnic intolerance] at all, nor did anyone ask you what you were [in terms of one's ethnic origin]. I don't know [...] I didn't feel that we [Serbs in her hometown mostly populated by Croats] were being treated differently, we're this and you're that. Not until Tudjman's [the then President of Croatia] Croatian Democratic Union [HDZ party] started, those elections, then they went completely crazy. Maybe you wouldn't have paid so much attention to it, but there is this fear, the fear your parents passed on to you 'cause they have gone through some things [during the IIWW].<sup>4</sup> Like, here it is [nationalism] rearing its head again. Then the media, since we could only watch Channel 1 of the Belgrade and Zagreb state TV.  
(personal communication, summer 1995)

Politicians engineered war propaganda, targeting the voters who, in 1990, at the time of the first multi-party elections in the country, were still ambivalent and did not make a clear choice for nationalists and independence (Woodward 1995: 118). The process was not smooth, as it took time and a lot of war propaganda to recreate “national enemies” and to develop paranoia within ethnic collectives. As in other conflicts constructed as ethnic strife, for example in Rwanda, the role of the media was central to spreading fear and hatred among populations at the communal level.<sup>5</sup> As Parin (1994: 41) pointed out, television and radio were tightly controlled and were “serving the populace a diet of lies, invention, and propaganda, sometimes horrifying, sometimes sentimental.” The “television war” and the media war started long before the outbreak of the armed conflict.<sup>6</sup> In his analysis, Parin (*ibid.*) refers to a statement of Marco Altherr, the then Head of the International Red Cross delegation in the former Yugoslavia, in which he asserts that television was in large measure responsible for atrocities on both sides of the conflict in Croatia, “by having aroused instincts of revenge and unleashed reciprocal acts of retribution.”

In their rhetoric, the post-socialist nationalists claimed that the “unnatural” socialist regime had replaced religion, tradition, shared blood, and kin for the emancipation of the working class, women, and proletarian internationalism. The nationalistic discourse, for its part, offered a set of values constructed as traditional, which could easily be perceived as *natural*. According to these “new” values women were expected to take on the responsibilities for the (re)production of the group, as well as custody of cultural values and identity. Policies were introduced encouraging the population growth of the “right kind” in the name of “national security” (Korac 1996). Many authors have emphasised that women are central to producing and maintaining cultural and group identity (e.g. Yuval-Davis and Anthias 1989; Yuval-Davis 1997; Walby 1992). During the growing process of militarisation associated with the escalation of armed conflict, women often become specifically targeted because of these roles. This is because identity politics of new wars constructed as ethnic strife assign women with “honourable” roles as “Mothers of the Nation” and “Symbols of the Nation.”<sup>7</sup> They became increasingly seen as precious property to be controlled and “protected.”

In this type of conflict, women are seen as precious property of both the “enemy” and the nationalists. Their bodies become territories to be seized and conquered. Testimonies of the raped women in the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina show that conquering women’s bodies did not primarily mean sexual violence against them, but a pattern of revenge and aggression resulting in the physical victimisation of women (Stiglmeier 1994: 118). Physical and sexual violence against women in war (and in peace) serves as a “method” of “disciplining” women who fail to behave “properly.” Women are “disciplined” by men of the opposed ethnic group because they are loyal to their husbands and community.<sup>8</sup>

Rape in war constructed as ethnic strife is also a powerful symbolic weapon against the “enemy.” The woman, as a symbol of the nation, as pointed out earlier, depicts the “Motherland” as a spatial metaphor, an embodied

femaleness. Rape of the woman's body/nation, by planting alien seed, disrupts the maintenance of the collective. This logic leads to interpretations of rape as *ethnic harm*, rather than a violent assault on women's rights to reproductive self-determination, through the violation of women's bodies and control of their lives. Rape is also an effective weapon of territorial "cleansing," since men in patriarchal cultures will not return to the communities where they have been "humiliated" by the rape of "their" women (Korac 1999). The very logic of rape as a weapon in the brutal strategy of "ethnic-cleansing," as Meznaric (1994: 79) explains, rests upon "the use of gender as a means to control communication and to sharpen the boundaries between two opposed ethnicities."

The rape of women "belonging to the enemy" carries an important symbolic message from men to men. As Seifert (1994: 58) points out, it communicates to men of the opposing group that they are unable to defend their women. Therefore, she argues, sexual aggression towards women in war results, at a symbolic level, in wounded masculinity, marking men as "incompetent" in their role as protectors of their women (Seifert 1994: 58). Rape and sexual violence in war also functions as an important mobilising element for furthering militarisation of ethnic collectives. In war masculinity is predominantly equated with militarised aggression. Consequently, men are under constant pressure to prove their manhood by joining the military and by committing various acts of violence, importantly including sexual violence. Militarised violence, therefore, becomes the process within which men can ultimately prove their "wounded" masculinity.

Reshaping social relations marked by cross-ethnic ties and the creation of ethnic tensions, hatred and (militarised) violence was, therefore, a profoundly gendered process. Due to the patriarchal backlash of the transition period briefly outlined here, the notions of femininity and masculinity had been gradually reshaped and closely linked to the notions of ethnic purity, identity, and authenticity. This change and the resulting shift in the dynamics of gender relations of power were central to instigating (militarised) war violence. Women and men had gradually become mobilised and engaged with war through their reshaped gender roles. Their fe/male bodies, feminine and masculine, had been critical both symbolically and physically for naturalising ethnic bonds and the creation of new ethnicised forms of statehood.

In this sense, both women and men as specifically located and positioned gendered actors played active, albeit different, roles in this war. They also responded to the conflict in different ways. While some became actively involved in waging or supporting war, others sought alliances across conflict imposed divisions and demarcation lines organising themselves against war. The last section of this chapter examines both the conceptual and context specific reasons why (some) women opted for alternative political mobilisation during the violent disintegration of Yugoslavia, and became involved in anti-war initiatives *as women*. Their activism, I argue, had an important potential in conflict resolution although it was never fully acknowledged and adequately supported.



**Recreating cross-ethnic trust: bottom-up identity work of anti-war women's groups**

During the 1990s, there was a number of women's groups in Serbia (e.g. Women in Black Belgrade,<sup>9</sup> and Autonomous Women's Centre Belgrade), Croatia (e.g. Centre for Women War Victims Zagreb), and in Bosnia (e.g. Medica Zenica, and Women for Women, Sarajevo), which can be regarded as some of the very few "islands of civility" (Kaldor 1999). The work of these groups was aimed at re-establishing cross-ethnic ties and forms of trust, as these women recognised quite early on the centrality of maintaining old and developing new connections across ethnic lines and boundaries of the new ethnicised states.

The awareness of the centrality of inter-group connections across the ethnic divide for conflict resolution and post-conflict reconstruction prompted these anti-war women's groups to embark upon work with refugee women and women survivors of sexual violence in war. As these women have been the most violently affected by the exclusionary ethnic politics and nationalism in the region they were in the greatest need of support to overcome their experiences of victimisation as an ethnic "other." They were also those who, as it was then hoped, would eventually return to their homes and thus actively engage in re-building their multi-ethnic communities. The work with women who were subjected to sexual violence was particularly important because of the social and political implications of sexualised forms of violence in this type of conflict, as outlined earlier. Anti-war women's groups argued that women who were subjected to sexual violence in the conflict were further victimised by the aggressive politics of their governments and their media machines.<sup>10</sup>

In response to the processes of "othering" members of different ethnic groups, anti-war women's groups put emphasis on establishing multi-ethnic self-help groups for exiled women. This was regarded as critical for their overall wellbeing as it was considered that coming to terms with individual traumatic experiences is importantly linked to the process of group reconciliation. By implementing this approach they combined provision of humanitarian assistance with psycho-social and political work with victimised women. Women activists not only aimed to provide support by collecting and delivering aid, such as food or clothing, or by helping these women to find work and by offering them legal advice. Rather, the work of anti-war women's groups put strong emphasis on the importance of re-establishing destroyed connections across the ethnic divide, which they considered a critically important source of individual and group identity formation. This work demonstrated that women of different ethnic backgrounds, with diverse experiences of victimisation, could establish and maintain relationships of mutual respect. This was considered a starting point in (re)developing relationships of trust, which is a critical first step in overcoming divisions and fragmentation caused by exclusionary and nationalist politics of war (Boric 1994; Cockburn 1998; Korac 1998c).

In helping victimised women to come to terms with their traumatic experiences, some women's groups introduced discussion groups and writing workshops. This was regarded as yet another way of initiating a gradual and often painful process of (re)establishing respect and trust in the "other" side of the ethnic divide. In these workshops refugee and non-refugee women talked about family, friendship, and other social ties in their communities. After years of the divisive identity-politics of war and experiences of victimisation because of their ethnicity, these discussions provided a supportive context permitting women to remember the inter-ethnic links they had before the war, as well as those forged during the conflict, their flight and its aftermath. In doing so they actively explored the issues of loss, anger, hatred, and guilt. An activist of the Women in Black Belgrade explained, "the women have every right to their bitterness towards people from other ethnic origin," and that is why the exploration of their feelings was so important (personal communication, summer 1995). However, the discussion groups and written accounts were typically characterised by emerging stories and memories of life as it was before the war, and would gradually lead to the recognition of good and trusted neighbours, friends, and relatives whom the war turned into enemies, some real and some imagined. This practice was invaluable because it enabled the women to create a social space in which they were *allowed* to remember good and trusted people at the other side of the ethnic divide. Within the context of identity politics of war that promoted hatred and fear of an "other," defined as a member of the opposed ethnic group, this was regarded as a highly subversive activity. More importantly, because these women had traumatic experiences during the conflict because of their ethnicity, this process was a highly valuable step towards the reconciliation and healing. This process proved to be critical for many of the victimised women in dealing with their feelings of hatred and bitterness. It led to questioning issues of identity and belonging, as they were shaped by the divisive politics of conflict as well as their war experiences.

Through this type of "identity work" both refugee and non-refugee women started developing positive and constructive approaches to crises, and created spaces for mutual understanding and ongoing productive exchange. One of the women active in Autonomous Women's Centre Belgrade explained how each and every one of the women involved in this process aimed at building trust in the "other" side through their willingness to hear what the other side had to say, and through their trust that the other side is equally willing to hear them (personal communication, summer 1995). This type of communication and exchange created spaces in which women were positioned in a compatible way, and where the nationalist discourse of "right" and "wrong" ethnic belonging did not exist. Women's experience of exile and their involvement in work organised by anti-war women's groups in the region exposed the hollowness of essentialist beliefs in the "common destiny" of ethnic collectives and related narratives.

This process of women organising against war and the effort of keeping lines of communication open was not problem-free. It caused at times internal tensions and divisions.<sup>11</sup> The spread of war, distraction, and various forms of

victimisation of different ethnic groups in the region were new experiences for these women. During the early years of the conflict, they found them almost impossible to share. Their first meetings with women from “the other side” marked the beginning of a painful, yet an overall successful process of reconciliation of differences embedded in “relational positionality” of these women (Stasiulis 1998). Relational positionality is a concept which refers to: “the multiple relations of power which intersect in complex ways with position of individuals and collectives in shifting and often contradictory locations within geopolitical spaces, historical narratives and movement politics” (Stasiulis 1998: 16–17). Although the tensions and divisions resulting from women’s differentiated positioning and experiences of war and violence have become more widely/internationally known, their courageous and persistent initiatives to keep communications across the ethnic divide open were left largely unacknowledged. However, connections across the ethnic divide did not only survive, but also grew with the escalation of war violence and the growing numbers of refugees in the region.

The email link *Za mir* [for peace], which was almost the only means of communication within the war-torn region during the years of armed conflict, was one of the important ways of exchange among these women. It enabled women activists to share experiences and newly acquired knowledge concerning their work with refugee women and survivors of sexual violence in war. It also facilitated the establishment of new contacts and friendships, as well as the nurturing of established ones. Moreover, Women in Black Belgrade were involved in establishing a wider network of anti-war women’s groups, consisting of women from the region as well as internationally. This has resulted in an annual meeting of women’s solidarity against war, nationalism, and violence. Between 1992 and the early 2000, this international meeting was held every summer in Serbia, each meeting followed by a published report entitled *Women for Peace*. During the years of the armed conflict (1991–5), participation at these meetings was highly risky for many women coming from territories directly affected by armed conflict. It involved not only a laborious process of obtaining travel documents, but also long, exhausting, and often dangerous journeys. Moreover, these women were regarded as “disloyal” and subversive to the political interests of their “countrymen” and the state, because of their participation at these meetings. Thus, they were often in danger of being socially and politically stigmatised in their places of origin and of losing their jobs (personal communication with participants of the 6th Annual Meeting of Women’s Solidarity Against War, Nationalism and Violence, held in Novi Sad, Serbia, August 1997).

### **Women-as-women cross-ethnic organising and reconciliatory potential: concluding remarks**

It is not surprising that (some) women in the region had been actively involved in the grassroots work of keeping lines of communication open since the very beginning of tensions and turmoil leading to war. Cockburn (1998: 44), in her

analysis of women's "bridge-building" projects in Northern Ireland, Israel/Palestine and Bosnia-Herzegovina, points out that feminism understood as anti-essentialist and democratic, that is – inclusive of women differently situated in ethnic, class and other structures, tend to "immunise" women against regressive constructions of ethnic and national identity characterising conflict constructed as ethnic, religious, or communal strife. "If you pick a non-primordial gender card," she claims, "you are less likely to reach for a primordial national card" (ibid.). Cockburn further argues that such a gender critique reveals the seductive notions of the words "community," "country," and "people" invoked in nationalist discourse, which hide within it gender and class inequalities. She goes on to explain how anti-essentialist and democratic feminism helps (some) women to reveal the contradicting nature of the seemingly innocent notion of "home" that conceals confinement, divisions, oppression, and violence, and points out that such women are "the more likely to be sceptical of 'homeland'. If you see home as a 'golden cage' you may suspect that homeland too has its contradictions" (Cockburn 1998: 45). For these reasons, she concludes, a feminist analysis "makes women question the pursuit of political movements by violent means" (Cockburn 1998: 45). This and other similar feminist analyses emphasise that women are not "natural peacemakers" and that they can indeed be deeply involved in nationalist projects and politics. These analyses point out, however, that because women have not been exposed to masculine socialisation, they may be better positioned than men to question the values of a male-dominated society and to formulate a transformative, non-violent vision of conflict resolution (Carter 1996; *Women in Black Belgrade* 1994, 1997). Studies of conflicts in Colombia and Guatemala also support this argument and demonstrate that women's organising tends to produce greater peace-facilitating social capital than men's groups (Moser and McIlwaine 2001).

Women's organising against divisive politics and war violence in Serbia and other parts of socialist Yugoslavia had started quite early on, before the armed violence began. Feminism has a long history in the region, and feminists were the first to initiate an organised women's resistance to nationalism, violence, and war.<sup>12</sup> The emergence of nationalism and nationalist discourse left women increasingly "displaced" from participation in the labour force; it "planted" them back into the family and household. These developments were coupled with a decrease in woman's political participation.<sup>13</sup> As women were losing out in economic, social, and public life, and when their reproductive rights and freedoms came under attack by nationalists who saw women as biological reproducers of their nations, previously loosely linked women who called themselves feminists began to organise. Although these groups were small and coming from the political margin, they were among the first to publicly voice their opposition to nationalist politics, their tactics of spreading fear and hatred and to the process of militarisation in the region.

One of the groups these women formed in Belgrade was "Women in Black Against War," as mentioned earlier. These women were publicly protesting against the Serbian regime, nationalist politics, and war, and were pressing for creative

diplomacy and arguing for a voice for democratic women's groups and other non-governmental organisations in negotiating a cessation of hostilities in the country. The first vigil of Women in Black (WiB) Belgrade was held on 9 October 1991, and it remained the only permanent anti-war public protest to this day. This was not the only anti-war and peace initiative started by women. In fact, women launched almost all the early peace initiatives in Belgrade and Serbia (Mladjenovic 2003). Mladjenovic (ibid.: 41) argues that the reasons for women making up the majority in the early peace initiatives were threefold. Their gender position made it safer for them to act against the regime, as men were under threat of forced mobilisation. Also, their experience of doing unpaid work in the household made them more open to engagement in unpaid, volunteer work in the peace movement. Finally, their knowledge of "making do with less" facilitated their engagement in horizontal, non-competitive activities. Further, and in reference to research on gender, social capital and political participation, in any society women are more likely to be active in the more informal reaches of politics, such as peace movements, rather than in a more formal political arena (Lowndes 2006).

Through this kind of communication and activism these women became engaged in *bridging* initiatives and practices aimed at establishing bonds across difference and (ethnic) boundaries. The practice does not imply, however, abandonment of one's own "roots" or sense of identity and belonging. In this sense, bridging and bonding are not "either-or" categories (Putnam 2000: 23). Rather they involve the simultaneous processes of "rooting" in one's own membership and identity, and "shifting" in order to put oneself in the situation of other participants in the process or communication. This type of practice often pursued by women's groups has been termed *transversal* politics by Italian feminists.<sup>14</sup> This type of resistance to war that emerged initially among rather small and marginal groups of middle-class women who considered themselves feminists had been gradually, yet crucially, shaped and empowered by the experiences of refugee women who have been victimised by war in various ways. Their joint and successful efforts in organising multi-ethnic self-help groups remained a unique attempt in developing elements of a culture of reconciliation in the region. Although important, these groups and their work remained marginal within the "mainstream," male-dominated alternative political initiatives in the region as well as internationally.

The discussion in this chapter has aimed to contribute to gendered analyses of conflict and social capital by examining how the process of mobilisation of social capital for war or peace is gendered and context-specific. My analysis has also supported substantial empirical evidence that women-as-women organising in specific contexts promotes civic bridging links and supports a type of alternative politics that is embedded in cross-ethnic and cross-boundary trust and reciprocity. This type of links and communication are central to the reconciliation processes, conflict resolution, and post-conflict reconstruction. Further research and analysis is required to uncover other links and factors affecting these (gendered) processes in order to identify and support the ones which represent a resource for democracy and peace.

## Notes

- 1 At the time of the 1981 census, the number of people in ethnically mixed marriages and from ethnically mixed backgrounds was greater than the number of ethnic Albanians living in Kosova, Montenegrins, Macedonians, Bosniaks, and Slovenes (Petrovic 1985).
- 2 Denitch (1972) explains how the Yugoslav system of decentralisation was based on the identification of leadership, not with ethnic, but with geopolitical (republic) interests. Given that none of the republics was ethnically homogeneous, the local leadership was formed within the republics. Such formed leadership, in time, became the leadership on the federal level, but its power base remained in the republics. Denitch rightly argued, back in the 1970s, that this system had “a build-in tendency to develop localism and to encourage nationalistic demagoguery” (1972: 34).
- 3 Empirical data used in this chapter were collected between 1994 and 1997 as part of my PhD research project entitled *The Power of Gender in the Transition from State Socialism to Ethnic Nationalism, Militarization, and War: The Case of Post Yugoslav States*, York University, Toronto (Korac 1998a).
- 4 During the Second World War and the socialist revolution in Yugoslavia (1941–5) the massacres of civilians took place throughout the region. Some of the worst were committed by the *Ustashe*, pro-Nazi Croats, against the Serbian population in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. The *Ustashe* also murdered left-wing Croats and the Jews and Gypsies who came under the jurisdiction of the independent Nazi-state of Croatia. One of the most notorious death camps in this state was run by the fascist *Ustashe* at Jasenovac, where hundreds of thousands of Serbs were slaughtered between 1941 and 1945 (Denitch 1994: 30). As Parin (1994: 39) pointed out, independent Croatia of the 1990s was compared by many Serbs living there to the fascist, puppet Croatian state created during the Second World War. He also emphasised that the then Croatian government did not do anything to distance themselves clearly from the crimes of fascism (*ibid.*).
- 5 For more information on the role of the media in the conflict in Rwanda see Malvern (2002) and Des Forges (2002).
- 6 For more information on the role of the media in the Yugoslav conflict, see Žarkov (2007).
- 7 Gender dimensions of identity politics of new wars in general, and in Yugoslavia in particular, are more complex and go beyond the notion of women as “Mothers of the Nation.” For an in-depth analysis of how identity politics of conflict in Yugoslavia had shaped notions of femininity and masculinity, and the roles of women and men see Žarkov (2007).
- 8 This has been well-documented in testimonies of raped women in Bosnia-Herzegovina (Stiglmeier 1994: 136).
- 9 “Women in Black against War” started in Israel/Palestine in the late 1980s, and quickly spread to Italy, and on to Belgrade, London, Toronto, and other centres. By the late 1990s, it had become a worldwide network of anti-war and anti-nationalist women.
- 10 For more on these types of victimisation see Korac (1998b).
- 11 For more on the issue of internal tensions and divisions see Benderly (1997) and Korac (1998a: 35–46).
- 12 For more on the history of feminism before the conflict see Benderly (1997), Korac (1998a), and Papic (1995).
- 13 For more on how women were losing out in economic, social and public life see Milic (1996) and Korac (1998b).
- 14 Nira Yuval-Davis (1997) developed conceptually this well-known strategy of feminists worldwide and emphasised the centrality of the processes of “rooting” and “shifting” for this type of communication and exchange.

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