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# GENDER – BASED VIOLENCE, RELIGION AND MIGRATION: WOMEN AS SYMBOLS OF CULTURAL IDENTITY

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## Introduction

The paper deals with some of the gender and religious aspects of migrations and contemporary refugee crisis. The issue of migration is becoming one of the major issues of our era. Today, all around the world, people are on the move for different reasons: they are migrating to escape poverty, improve their livelihood and opportunities, or escaping conflict and devastation in their own countries.<sup>1</sup> Migration has become global phenomenon, and the peoples of all nations, religions and genders are facing ethical, moral and socio-political issues in view of it. The issue of misleading fixed (religious) identities, negative stereotypes and prejudices and fear of sharing common space (geographical, national, religious, cultural...) needs to be questioned with the moral imperative of hospitality, acceptance, tolerance and yet borders.

United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and Women's Refugee Commission (WRC) Initial Assessment Report states: "For the first time since World War II, Europe is experiencing a massive movement of refugees and migrants, women, girls, men and boys of all ages, fleeing armed conflicts, mass killings, persecution, and pervasive sexual and gender-based violence

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<sup>1</sup> World Economic Forum reports that at the end of 2017 there were 68.5 million forcibly displaced people; they included 25.4 million refugees, 40 million internally displaced people and 3.1 million asylum seekers. See "What are the issues facing refugee resettlement?" World Economic Forum, 2018, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2018/10/the-needs-challenges-and-power-dynamics-of-refugee-resettlement/>.

(SGBV).”<sup>2</sup> Although large movements of refugees and migrants are not a new phenomenon, the images of the past few years have shocked the world’s conscience: rickety boats piled high with people seeking safety; women, men, and children drowning in their attempts to escape violence and poverty; fences going up at borders where people used to cross freely; and thousands of girls and boys going missing, many falling prey to criminal groups. Unable to find safe ways to move, people suffer and die in search of safety while crossing the Sahara Desert, the Andaman Sea, the Mediterranean, and dozens of other dangerous places around the world.<sup>3</sup>

The UN Refugee Agency’s annual Global Trends study reports 68.5 million people had been driven from their homes across the world at the end of 2017. Refugees who have fled their countries to escape conflict and persecution accounted for 25.4 million. This is 2.9 million more than in 2016, also the biggest increase UNHCR has ever seen in a single year. New displacement is also growing, with 16.2 million people displaced during 2017 itself, either for the first time or repeatedly. That is an average of one person displaced every two seconds.<sup>4</sup> And large movements of people will continue or possibly increase as a result of violent conflict, poverty, inequality, climate change, disasters and environmental degradation.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> “Initial assessment report: Protection Risks for Women and Girls in the European Refugee and Migrant Crisis,” January 19, 2016, 3, UNHCR, UNFPA and WRC, <https://www.unhcr.org/569f8f419.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> “In Safety and Dignity: addressing large movements of refugees and migrants,” UN General Assembly, April 21, 2016, [https://refugeesmigrants.un.org/sites/default/files/in\\_safety\\_and\\_dignity\\_-\\_addressing\\_large\\_movements\\_of\\_refugees\\_and\\_migrants.pdf](https://refugeesmigrants.un.org/sites/default/files/in_safety_and_dignity_-_addressing_large_movements_of_refugees_and_migrants.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> Adrian Edwards, “Forced displacement at record 68.5 million,” UNCHR, June 19, 2018, <http://www.unhcr.org/news/stories/2018/6/5b222c494/forced-displacement-record-685-million.html>.

<sup>5</sup> Storms and other weather-related hazards are also a leading cause of displacement, with the latest data showing that 76% of the 31.1 million people displaced during 2016 were forced from their homes as a result of weather-related events. See “Global Risks 2018: Fractures, Fears and Failures,” World Economic Forum, 2018, <http://reports.weforum.org/global-risks-2018/global-risks-2018-fractures-fears-and-failures/>.

## On Hospitality and Migrations from Feminist Perspective

Migrations, displacement, voluntary or forced (caused by violent conflicts, war and persecution) is human condition of today. Both voluntary migration and forced displacement have been part of the human condition throughout history, and most people in the world are likely to have experience of such movements in their family histories. Given our globalizing and interdependent world, international migration is likely to become even more prevalent in the future. Despite the ambiguities, hospitality is a glaring moral imperative because of the escalation of world violence, global disparities in quality-of-life issues, international alliances, globalization, and widespread migration. We need to rethink the ethical-moral virtue of hospitality and find new ethics of acceptance and solidarity. In terms of Maurice Hamington, hospitality could be understood as a performative act of identity. "To give comfort or make welcome the stranger, the host must act; to resettle displaced people, a host nation must act. In the process of this action, the performance of hospitality, the host - whether it is an individual or a nation-state - is instantiating identity. There must be an "I" who gives, welcomes, and comforts, and that "I" is only known through action."<sup>6</sup> The same as, feminist hospitality drives at a non-hierarchical understanding of hospitality that mitigates the expression of power differential, while seeking greater connection and understanding for the mutual benefit of both host and guest, the understanding of migrations as a human condition needs to acknowledge the humanity and human dignity of every migrant person. Or as Seyla Benhabib has put it: "We need to decriminalize the worldwide movement of peoples, and treat each person, whatever his or her political citizenship status, in accordance with the dignity of moral personhood."<sup>7</sup>

Accordingly, feminist hospitality does not assume autonomously acting moral agents; the feminist hospitality that Maurice Hamington proposes creates and strengthens relationships, but not without the risk

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<sup>6</sup> Maurice Hamington, "Toward a Theory of Feminist Hospitality," *Feminist Formations* 22, no. 1 (2010), 23.

<sup>7</sup> Seyla Banhabib, *The Rights of Others: Aliens, Residents and Citizens* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 177.

that comes from the vulnerability of human sharing. Similarly, the impact of migration could be overwhelmingly positive, both for countries of origin and receiving countries, as United Nations General Assembly report states:

With the necessary political will, the world's responses to large movements of people can be grounded in shared values of responsibility-sharing, non-discrimination and respect for human rights, while also taking full advantage of the opportunity migration provides to stimulate development and economic growth.<sup>8</sup>

Throughout this paper, this feminist understanding of hospitality as a humane solution to one's suspicions regarding the ill disposition of a stranger, will be the proposed ethical platform. As such, it represents a deterrent to conflict or war and a desire for peaceful coexistence. It encourages frequent social intercourse between strangers. It is based upon the realization that a social contract - not to harm so as not be harmed - is preferable to the law of the jungle.

Because feminist theory has been driven by the experience of those marginalized in society, feminist hospitality should be particularly attentive to inclusive definitions of guest - guest as a migrant, as a refugee, as a stranger. Hospitality can be an occasion to enact feminist commitment to diversity and its acceptance.

### On Vulnerability and Migrations: Gender-Based Violence against Women

Around half of the world's international migrants are women. Women and girls make for around 50 percent of all refugees, internally displaced or stateless population, and those who are unaccompanied, pregnant, heads of households, disabled or elderly are especially vulnerable. The situation for female refugees is considered to be more difficult, where they are more likely to fall as victims of violence and sexual abuse (UNHCR, Women). UN General Assembly<sup>9</sup> and UNHCR (Ini-

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<sup>8</sup> UN General Assembly, "In Safety and Dignity."

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

tial Assessment Report)<sup>10</sup> explain that the risk of sexual and gender-based violence is high, as was illustrated in recent study on violence experienced by both Central American women travelling to the United States of America and refugee and migrant women on route to Europe (at least 1 in 5 refugees or displaced women are estimated to have experienced sexual violence); other challenges, particularly for women and girls in transit, include family separation, psychosocial stress and trauma, health complications, physical harm and injuries, and risks of exploitation. Trauma among refugees and asylum seekers is undeniable, and the vulnerability of women and unaccompanied girls heightens the risk of further abuse at all stages of the migration's journey.

European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights has stated that gender-based violence can occur in the context of conflict, during the migration journey, and in host EU Member States (for example, in reception and/or detention facilities). In the current report, gender-based violence – focusing on women and girls' experiences of violence – is understood as encompassing physical, sexual and psychological violence, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty. The violence relates to incidents that occur in either public or private places. It can therefore encompass violence by family members (intimate partner violence and domestic violence by different family members), and also forms of sexual harassment, alongside other forms of sexual violence, by different perpetrators. There is increasing evidence that gender-based violence is a major issue for migrant women and girls. A recent field assessment of risks for refugee and migrant women and girls identified instances of sexual and gender-based violence, including early and forced marriage, transactional sex, domestic violence, rape, sexual harassment and physical assault in the country of origin and during the journey to Europe.<sup>11</sup> Displaced or migrant women and girls are especially vulnerable.

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<sup>10</sup> UNHCR, UNFPA and WRC, "Initial assessment report."

<sup>11</sup> "Thematic focus: Gender-based violence," European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, June 2016, <http://fra.europa.eu/en/theme/asylum-migration-borders/overviews/focus-gender-based-violence>.

Apart of understanding vulnerability as universal and inevitable part of embodiment,<sup>12</sup> the other possible understanding of vulnerability would be also the one that deals with emotions.

Psychoanalyst, philosopher, feminist Julia Kristeva describes vulnerability not primarily as the result of heaving bodies that can be wounded, but rather exists because we occupy a place between being and meaning, between bodies and words. And precisely this gap between bodies and words, the ways in which words are never quite adequate to capture bodily experience, is figured as a wound. And according to Kristeva, this wound is the seat of our vulnerability. She suggests that the encounter with other puts us face to face with our own vulnerability with and for others. In this view, it is the fear and denial of our own vulnerability that causes us to hate and exploit the vulnerability of others.<sup>13</sup> And this view of vulnerability is also linked with vulnerability in terms of gender-based violence, which is defined as “violence that is directed against a person on the basis of gender or sex,” according to the UNHCR. Though men and boys can also suffer from sexual assault, the majority of victims are women and girls, who tend to be the most vulnerable. Unequal power relations create the conditions for gender-based violence to occur, and it can be perpetrated or condoned by relatives, community members, or government actors. Such abuse inflicts sexual, physical, or mental harm, and can take the form of threats, coercion, sexual assault, intimate partner violence, or honor killings. Survivors experience a range of physical and psychosocial effects, including injury, sexually transmitted diseases, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, social stigma, rejection, and isolation. While gender violence

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<sup>12</sup> Understanding vulnerability as universal and inevitable part of embodiment deals with the question of body - through the body, we are exposed, opened onto the world and to others, even as for others we are the ones to whom they are exposed and vulnerable. In this sense, vulnerability is universal, an inevitable part of embodiment. Social bonds condition my existence. Regarding this question cf. my essay Nadja Furlan Štante, “Women’s Voices and Vulnerability: Invisible and Visible Obstacles,” in *Borders/Debordering*, eds. Maja Bjelica and Helena Motoh (Koper: Annales University Press, 2016).

<sup>13</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Hatred and Forgiveness* (Colombia: Colombia University Press, 2012), 115.

is not uncommon among female migrants, individual cases of trauma and experiences accessing support vary considerably.<sup>14</sup>

### On Migration and Religion

The resurgence of religion is relevant in main fold contexts, e.g. in the context of democratic politics, in the context of political extremism and terrorism, or in the context of integration or non-integration of immigrants. Some of the ongoing discussions are connecting the latter two, particularly religious-political extremism and terrorism with failed integration.<sup>15</sup>

UNCHR (Note on the Integration of Refugees in the European Union) states that many integration challenges faced by refugees are similar to those faced by other third country nationals staying legally in the European Union. Discrimination and xenophobic attitudes affect refugees and other migrants alike, as does the need to bridge language and cultural barriers, including those relating to different gender roles and religion.<sup>16</sup>

The teachings, traditions and habits of a specific religion will influence migrants in their behaviors, approaches to situations and relations to each other. A person's value system is often based on religion. Religion can be an important part of the cultural capital of an individual, and if somebody migrates to another country they will carry these elements of faith. Even if all material possessions are lost, this religious capital will remain with the migrant. Religion can become an important part of the identity of migrants, even if they hold little interest in religious matters before leaving home country. When found in new situations without family and social links and when individual migrants feel the need to

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<sup>14</sup> Anja Parish, "Gender-Based Violence against Women: Both Cause for Migration and Risk along the Journey," Migration Policy Institute, September 7, 2017, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/gender-based-violence-against-women-both-cause-migration-and-risk-along-journey>.

<sup>15</sup> Sybille Drexler and Friderich Heckmann, "The Role of Religion for the Integration of Migrants. A Conference Report," December 2005, [http://www.efms.uni-bamberg.de/pdf/tagungsbericht\\_gmf7.pdf.pdf](http://www.efms.uni-bamberg.de/pdf/tagungsbericht_gmf7.pdf.pdf).

<sup>16</sup> "Note on the Integration of Refugees in the European Union," UNCHR, May 2007, <https://www.unhcr.org/463b462c4.pdf>, 2.

defend their identities, religion becomes essential. Depending on what migrant will find in the host country, religion will become a positive or negative element in the personal integration process. Therefore, the analyses of the role of religion in integration process is of a great importance for the integration of religious immigrants and has the greatest impact when it is locally defined. Existing studies indicate that education is the main area of weakness in the integration policies in most countries. That is why the implementation of a profound knowledge of religion in education system of primary schools and religious instruction for in public schools is of utmost importance.

Religion plays a complex role in modern conflicts, serving as both justification for violence and an inspiration and possibility for peace. In this context, the paper addresses the issue of understanding women as a symbol of cultural identity. This is strongly marked with the prejudice of inferior pro-creative role of women. Because of the negative stereotyping of women and their pro-creative role, women are consequently perceived as the “holy womb of nation” and as such vulnerable, violated and “conquered”.

### Women as Symbols of Cultural Identity

Women’s sexual role in the contemporary (Western - Christian) culture is still strongly marked by the impact of negative gender stereotypes, mainly related to the emphasis on the exclusive reproductive role of women, “child-bearing machines” in the service of procreation of the nation. Paradoxically, the very pro-creative role of a woman in certain frameworks is understood as the sacred and inviolable, as the highest value, the matrix of a certain society and cultural identity, which needs to be strictly protected and revenged in the event of desecration. Here we can draw the connection between the glorification of the subordinate role of a woman who is subdued to her husband and is chained to the domestic fireplace (the keeper of domestic fire) with the subordination of the woman, and her procreativity, to the society whose mirror the woman is. In this context, more purity or integrity is expected from women.



When external pressures on a society increase, a common reaction is to uphold women's virtue as a vital element of cultural identity, and thus try to protect and control this virtue. In France, during the second world war, women who were believed to have fraternised with the occupying German army were humiliated in public by having their heads shaved: in Somalia, women seen talking to American soldiers during "Operation Restore Hope" were stripped naked and beaten.<sup>17</sup>

Excessive emphasis on the exclusively familiar role of women, of woman as a mother, substantiated and justified the "division of labour myth" and kept the woman in the private, domestic sphere. The negative impact of division of labour myth is possible to trace also in dominant conceptions of gender roles in war, where female and child victims represent the most effective symbols of collective innocence and therefore moral righteousness which can be extended to other actions and decisions made on behalf of the collectivity.<sup>18</sup> In this context, women as a symbol of cultural identity are a "treasure trove" of a certain culture or society and represent a vulnerable prey, a target in the sense of a collective victim. In the context of biased concept where the female body is viewed as a "child-bearing machine" of the nation's descendants and the "mother" for preserving a particular society, the female body as such is an "object" of the overwhelming power of the occupier.

### Women's Bodies, Power-over and Rape

Religion (Christianity) has been one of the patriarchal structures that have objectified women and denigrated their bodies. At this point, we should briefly mention the strong negative impact of prejudice of perceiving women's body as the seed of carnal wickedness and seductive wilderness, imprinted negative stereotype by church fathers and perpetuated throughout church history.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Judy El-Bushra and Cecile Mukarubuga, "Women, War and Transition," *Gender and Development* 3, no. 3 (1995), 18.

<sup>18</sup> Elissa Helms, "Rejecting Angelina: Bosnian War Rape Survivors and the Ambiguities of Sex in War," *Slavic Review* 73, no. 3 (2014), 615.

<sup>19</sup> Nadja Furlan, *Manjkajoče rebro* [*The Missing Rib*] (Koper: Annales, 2006), 117.

And that brings us to the problem of vulnerability and its myths and common misconceptions about a weakness of women on one hand, and the danger of their sexuality, on the other. The prejudice of the virgin-whore dichotomy setup within cultures that historically have excluded female bodies from the properly social and political realm is well known. Women have been figured as either innocent virgins or dirty whores.

Among other negative consequences that negative gender stereotypes regarding women's bodies have had on the perception of women as embodied subjects, the vulnerability of women's bodies and their abuse is far more destructive. In this regard, Kelly Oliver examines various ways in which women involved in the war in the Middle East have been imagined as dangerous weapons linked with death. Within popular discourse, women's bodies, menstrual blood, and female sexuality can be used as tactics of war because of the potency of their association with the danger of nature.<sup>20</sup> To that extent the vulnerability of women's bodies could be understood as the one being violated and abused by violent others.

Patriarchal culture demeans and denies the elemental power of the female body. The strong stigma of female body and its procreative role is connected with the prejudice of impurity, savagery, with fear and respect at the same time. Because of all these negative stereotyping femininity, woman, and her body become extremely vulnerable. Among other negative consequences that negative gender stereotypes regarding women's bodies have had on the perception of women as embodied subjects, the vulnerability of women's bodies and their abuse is far more destructive. In this context women are also victims of torture under official definitions as military or civilian prisoners or as members of defeated populations in war, and are more often subjected to sexual torture, which until recently has not been understood either as torture or even a war crime.<sup>21</sup> In armed conflict, there is a widespread practice of targeting women for particular abuse, precisely because of their asso-

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<sup>20</sup> Kelly Oliver, *Women as Weapons of War: Iraq, Sex, and the Media* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

<sup>21</sup> Christine E. Gudorf, "Feminist Approaches to Religion and Torture," *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 39, no. 4 (2011), 613.

ciation with the identity and well-being of their community. The use of rape and other forms of sexual humiliation as a weapon of war has been documented in ex-Yugoslavia, but as a strategy as old as war itself.<sup>22</sup> Female rape survivors might therefore seem to fit well in nationalist frameworks as symbols of collective victimhood. Rape of the nation's women and simultaneously of the land itself – the ultimate threat posed by the (men of the) Other and thus the reason for man to fight and why women must be sheltered and protected.<sup>23</sup> Their rape could expose the failure of “their” men to protect and defend them. From this perspective, the bodies of women are not considered fully their own, but are evidently considered in these circumstances to be the property of men at large. Such explanations supply the background that creates callousness toward even the most violent denials of women's body right. According to Kelly Dawn Askin, “... triumph over women by rape became a way to measure victory, part of a soldier's proof of masculinity and success, a tangible reward for services rendered... an actual reward for war.”<sup>24</sup>

The extreme dehumanization and the objectification of the female body as an object of “ultimate victory” by the invader in the act of rape represents the extreme form of torture and a claim of female body. But this is often justified with the negative stereotypes and prejudices of a woman's wild, unclean nature, which must be tamed once and for all.

Even the victims themselves often come to feel that torture is socially inevitable, that women were created to suffer, that nothing and no one can make them safe from abuse. In fact, this is the root of the sin of torture: it strips victims of their humanity, their selfhood.<sup>25</sup>

It had been clear that rape was treated very differently within the same army depending upon the identity of the raped women. A classic case is the comparison of World War II. German military rape trials in occupied France with those in occupied Poland and the Soviet Union. Though rape by German soldiers was believed to be much less common in France than in the Slavic areas, punishments for rape in France were

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<sup>22</sup> El-Bushra and Mukarubuga, “Women, War and Transition,” 16.

<sup>23</sup> Helms, “Rejecting Angelina,” 616.

<sup>24</sup> Kelley Dawn Askin, *War Crimes Against Women: Prosecutions in International War Crimes Tribunals* (Leiden: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers 1997), 45.

<sup>25</sup> Gudorf, “Feminist Approaches to Religion,” 619.

severe, while rape charges were often dismissed or treated very lightly in the Slavic areas. Common explanations for why rapes – even mass rape, serial rapes by superiors, or brutal rapes- are usually not considered torture, share two related assumptions. First, it assumes nonconsensual sex is the ordinary lot of women, who until relatively recently were legally property of men; second, it assumes that men's sexual desire makes any unprotected women – including all women in “male space” –fair game.

There are also several cases of so called concept of genocidal rape – or rape as a weapon of ethnic conflict. For example, during the 1947 partition of India, thousands of women were abducted, Hindu and Sikh women by Muslim men, and Muslim women by Hindu and Sikh men, and taken to the newly nationally inscribed territories created by the new states of India and Pakistan. Abduction was presumed to mean rape. Many women killed themselves or were killed by male family members to avoid the shame, but some were also “given” to men known to their families, but of another religion. Treated in this context much the same way as ethno-religious operate in BIH, as a way of saving both their lives and their honor. The rape camps run by Serb forces in the Bosnian war where non-Serb women were imprisoned for the purposes of rape, forced impregnation, and other sexualized humiliations should present just such an unambiguous case of blamelessness. Similarly, in Rwanda, where sexual violence against women has taken many more forms and been committed over a longer period of time than that defined by the 1994 genocide.

The impact of the pregnancies that result from rape is massively damaging. Estimates of rape pregnancies in warfare include 20-50.000 Bosnian women in 1993 and around 5.000 women in Rwanda in 1994.<sup>26</sup>

Women are even on the “altar of war” often the collective victims of patriarchal androcentrism. An act of rape is understood as the last fortress of a cultural identity that has fallen and been subdued, and the women usually carry the consequences and the burden of brutal atrocities themselves. But if rape is seen as dishonoring a woman, even as genocidal for the way in which it is assumed to end a victim's sexual and reproductive capacity or plant the »seed of the enemy«, thus de-

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<sup>26</sup> El-Bushra and Mukarubuga, “Women, War and Transition,” 17.

prising the nation of its offspring, then it is not surprising that rape survivors are subject to suspicion and stigma in their own communities.

### Women in the Process of Healing Traumas and Religious Peace-building

Yet the destructive capacity of war derives not from physical violence alone but also from the deep injuries to people's sense of themselves and their sense of identity as a member of a community. In war, both the physical and the moral underpinnings of society are brought into question.

Women as victims of war violence (in the form of rape) are often left to themselves after the war finishes, they are driven to the margins of society or even outcast and murdered. These women used to be a symbol of purity and social identity, as sacrificial lambs, however, the society excludes them or does not provide enough support and recognition. This is also pointed out by Zilka Spahić-Šiljak who describes the wound healing process after the war and religious peace-building in BiH. For most women in BiH, religion was an important tool with which to ease their suffering and pain. However, the religious Muslim community in BiH was not ready to deal with this influx of traumatized women seeking refuge in faith. The only religious move made to help Muslim women during the war was to issue a decree (fatwa) by the Islamic Community of BiH "that raped women should be considered our hero-ines", with the recommendation that family members and society "accept these women and help them heal their traumas". Although this statement important, it was largely symbolic. What Muslim women needed from their religious leaders was a safe space in which to tell their stories and to be heard, but the men who led the Muslim communities in BiH felt that they lacked the tools to help these women. Without tangible support, these women had only partial spiritual relief and not the concrete help they needed to overcome traumatic experiences and huge social trauma. However, this fatwa could indeed serve as a first

step in reducing the burden of shame and trauma carried by victims of sexual assault during the war.<sup>27</sup>

Post-conflict reconciliation and reconstruction likewise offers the opportunity to acknowledge the contributions and sacrifices made by different groups of people during the war. It also provides opportunities for change in social relationships including gender relations.

Women's voices and help in the process of reconciliation, healing traumas and religious peace-building is of utmost importance. Tseard Bouta, Ayse Kadayifci-Orellana and Mohammed Abu-Nimer present the meaning of the contribution of women's forms of religious peace with the following words: "Women allow emotional and spiritual support and care for many communities in crisis area and war zones; they work to mobilize their communities and direct them towards peace and non-violence, acting as mediators between the two opposing sides, encouraging reconciliation, dialogue, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration."<sup>28</sup> When the war started in Balkans in 1991, some feminist theologians became active in secular women's organizations in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) to help women and children survive traumas sustained during the war and after, in the war camps.

Although the voice of women and their engagement in interreligious, intercultural dialogue and in the religious establishment of peace, at least on an overt formal level, is often omitted or ignored, it is on informal levels, in the expression of concrete actions that women's effort to restore peace is very much alive and present. In 2007, the Centre for Religious Tolerance organized international workshops for the empowerment of women's interreligious cooperation in Amman, Jordan. In 2009, an international conference on the topic of women, religions and globalization was organized at Yale University, where a special panel was dedicated to the issue of women's religious search for peace. Organizations like the Global Peace Initiative of Women (GPIW) and the World Conference on Religions for Peace (WCRP) are working to recognize

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<sup>27</sup> Zilka Spahić Šiljak, "Do It and Name It: Feminist Theology and Peace Building in Bosnia and Herzegovina," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 29, no. 2 (2013), 177.

<sup>28</sup> Tseard Bouta, Ayse Kadayifci-Orellana and Mohammed Abu-Nimer, *Faith-Based Peace-Building: Mapping and Analysis of Christian, Muslim, and Multi-Faith Actors* (Washington, DC: Netherlands Institute of International Relations, 2005), ix.

women's engagement in the process of religious peace-building and intercultural and interreligious cooperation.

The personal calling of the female individuals who knit the network of intercultural and interreligious cooperation in the context of the religious establishment of peace is a very important driving force for their endeavours. For example, Ayse Kadayifci-Orellana observes that many women understand their engagement in the quest for religious peace-building as a way of serving God. This also encourages them to persist despite the many difficult obstacles they face.<sup>29</sup> It should be noted, however, that the issue of equal gender recognition or recognition of women and their visible role at formal levels is in fact very closely related to the question of understanding and positioning of the religious (O)ther. Therefore, the key to equal recognition of women is one of the key components of a quality interreligious dialogue, or a key to the equal recognition of the religious (O)ther. Both are crucial in transforming and raising human consciousness both on the individual and collective levels.

### Conclusion

Women are often victims of brutal patriarchal torture and violence in the war and even in migration process. Because of rape, their bodies are degraded and objectified. As symbols of cultural and social identity, they are the last targets for the invader. Despite being subject to harassment and humiliation by both the military invaders and, consequently, by their own families, societies and religions, they are often left to themselves. In this regard, we can say that the influence of negative gender stereotypes and prejudices related to a woman, her sexual role and her body, which have been shaped and preserved throughout history in the sphere of cultural sociability and religious sphere, is evident. Therefore, the importance of actively involving women in the process of reconciliation, healing traumas and religious peace-building is of utmost

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<sup>29</sup> Katherine Marshall et al., *Women in Religious Peacebuilding* (Berkeley: United States Institute of Peace, 2011), 11, [http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/PW71-Women\\_Religious\\_Peacebuilding.pdf](http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/PW71-Women_Religious_Peacebuilding.pdf).

importance. Consequently, it also recognizes and critically deconstructs negative gender stereotypes and strengthens the self-image and social-religious image of a woman. Above all, it empowers both women actively involved in the process as well as the victims who get the support provided. With the help of women's religious-peace-building, women's voices are thus heard and recognized.

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