

Peace conference
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Coming from BiH, even though more than 20 years have past since the war – thinking about peace, and understanding what it takes to build a peace that is more than a mere absence of militarized violence, is something many of us in Bosnia are still doing, on daily basis.

There is sort of an officially proclaimed peace; formal progress measured in the absence of violence (the fact that there has been no re-laps to militarized violence); measured in the number of resolved property returns (how many forcefully displaced people got their property back – and please take note that I am talking about property and not the actual return); measured through the demilitarization that took place and the fact that the three armies (warring factions) are now all part of one and the same army; and also measured in the fact that Bosnia officially aspires to join EU.

These are just couple of FORMAL indications of the so-called successes of our peace agreement. This is what the political elite, both local and international, tell us, when they want to tell us that they have succeeded in transitioning Bosnia from a country in conflict to a country in peace.

I think that the perspective of a regular Bosnian is somewhat different, it is more along the line - "have we circled back to beginning of 90's, going straight ahead towards a new conflict". Of course, with the current power constellations, the current geopolitical context, the lack of volume of arms that existed in the 90s, the fact that the current armies are no way near the capacities of the Yugoslav National Army – very few are imagining the same type of war, the same type of intensity to violence – but none the less, more and more people are asking themselves "do we really live in peace", and more and more young people, families, are once again living the country due to lack of any prospect for progress (according to some media reporting, in 2017 some 35 000 people left the country).

WILPF has together with local activists spent some considerable time analysing and understanding both the peace agreement and subsequent post-conflict recovery and reconstruction processes, with a feminist lens. We have analysed the content of them as well as the outcome. And we do it, both to try to influence changes in how things are done in Bosnia, but also to raise red flags as to how things should not be replicated elsewhere, because believe me, they are.

And I think I would like to address three different aspects of what went wrong with the Bosnian peace: exclusion, compartmentalization and neoliberalism. Why I am choosing these three aspects, is because unfortunately Bosnia's experience is not isolated. We can see similar approaches taking place in other parts of the world, as we speak – Ukraine, Syria, Palestine, Iraq...

The margin of 20+ years since the end of the Bosnia war really does give us a lot of evidence as to the consequences of this absolute exclusion for both the sustainability and quality of

the peace. And when I say quality of the peace, I mean our ability to address the underlying causes of the war, and to build economic, political and social structures that can uphold sustainable and just peace.

A lot of our findings we have shared through feminist dialogues with both Syrians and Ukrainians.

So let me talk a little bit about **EXCLUSION**

I do not think it will come as a chock to you that there was a complete absence of civilian voices, in particular women's voices and experiences in the Bosnian's formal peace process. The voices that were present were the voices of the militarized ethno-national political elite. And this is something that to date is present in for example both Syria and Ukraine – the idea that the peace is built with those responsible for the war – the man with guns – and not with those for whom the peace matters the most.

By ignoring the civilian voices, and in particular women's voices, who took the lead on peace building even in the midst of war, serious omission were made in our peace agreement:

It did not ensure a creation of a reparations programme – a programme that would provide both material and other types of support to help the victims to overcome the most immediate effects of war. Women's groups primarily, but others as well, who were providing assistance on the ground to the victims during the war would have been able to spell out to the "peace negotiators" what it would take for these victims to recover – to some extent at least. Within the group of civilian victims of war – women, both as direct victims of GBV, but also as family members of victims of war (wives, daughters, sisters, mothers) have suffered greatly, and they continue to suffer because we still do not have systems that address the immediate and long-term needs of civilian victims of war. Because none of this was taken into consideration in the Peace agreement, 20 years later these groups are in a more precarious position than ever.

Also, the peace agreement itself focused on the protection of so called civil and political rights – for example by making sure that none of the ethnic groups can be discriminated against within our state institutions, and that is important. But these rights were given advantage over social and economic rights. Economic and social rights often constitute part of the root causes of conflict. Access to, and delivery of them is therefore essential to post-conflict transitions. The rights to healthcare, employment, social assistance, housing, and education should be a major preoccupation in the post conflict context. They are a precondition for access to justice, as well as to participation, and are highly gendered. The downplaying of economic and social rights in our peace agreement is consonant with the frequent practice of peace negotiations and liberal peace and peacebuilding assumptions that have privileged securing political order and stabilization over individual economic and social security and rights.

For us this has meant that while the constitution protects ethnic groups, the social and economic inequalities in the society are today greater than ever.

And this exclusion was unfortunately not isolated to the peace process itself. It sort of set the bar. The exclusivist approach to negotiating only with the ethno-national political elite has continued throughout the 20+ years, reducing the citizens' democratic rights to participate to representative democracy only – basically "you've had your elections". Any critical voices, outside of that formal venue of elections, are either ignored or shut down. And even with 1325 now some 17 year in effect, women's participation has not improved considerably.

The second aspect I wanted to bring up is **COMPARTIMENTALIZATION**, or if you wish – the BOXES. What is striking is that at that time when the peace was negotiated, and it seems so even today, there seemed to be this understanding that how and when you deal with inequalities in the society, including gender inequalities, will have no consequences for the peace. It is really mind blowing but everything that has been done with respect to the Bosnian peace has sort of followed that logic – nothing is seen as interlinked and everything can be addressed separately. Our peace, our lives, have been completely compartmentalized and the initiated processes have come according to highly problematic sequencing:

- First, we sign a peace agreement, and when we conceptualize peace in that agreement we do not think of reparations for the harms suffered, because that can be done later; 20 years later - nothing
- Then we deal with free and fair elections, but we do not deal with the ethno-national political elite and discourses that led to war, no, we let them participate in those elections, and then claim that there indeed was participation because we supposedly voted for them in those free and fair elections, and thus legitimized the peace agreement;
- When the talks on constitutional changes fail, we turn to the economics and forget the Constitution that entrenches the power of ethnonational elite that has ruined the very same economy of the country that we say we want to reform;
- We do not deal with gender inequalities, and inequalities in general, because that will be handled by the free market, and more importantly by the donor funded projects; That for example a donor country can support women's reproduction rights projects all while it financially and politically supports the reforms of the health-sector under which our clinics for protection of women's health and maternity are being closed – is not seen as a problem.
- When we want to increase the number of women in politics we do so by counting the % of women but we do not consider the patriarchal structures and ethnonational framework within which we expect the elected female politicians to contribute to changes;
- When we open the labour market "for women" we do not consider the limitations and circumstances under which they can engage in that labour market – such as functional public sector services, infrastructure etc;
- We understand economic empowerment of women through support to knitting projects or through giving microcredits or financial support to start up of small businesses that are supposed to be competitive on this new free market but we do not consider women's overall access to resources and decision making.

And on and on it goes.

The third and final thing I wanted to bring up, that sort of brings together both the exclusion and the compartmentalization is **NEOLIBERALISM**

What comes out strong from WILPFs analysis is that the entire framing of the Bosnian peace is firmly grounded in liberal understanding of peace and neoliberal approaches to post-conflict recovery and reconstruction. Meaning:

- liberalisation of the market as a “way to stabilise the country through attracting investments” and holding so called free elections without addressing power-relation created through the war;
- privatization of state-assets (or socially-owned assets)
- privileging foreign investors and elites in terms of access to resources and minimal state administration framed within the concept of “good governance” (in Bosnia, due to the constitutional setup of the country with a state level government, two entities, 10 cantons and a district this has actually translated into a huge administration but minimal services to citizens.

This direction has had tremendously negative effects on the citizens of BiH across the board, but also some very specific consequences on the lives of women.

- Be it in the lives of the civilian victims of war that are still not receiving reparations
- Be it in the lives of those women who are tasked with caring for those that have been injured and who are not able to get a proper medical healthcare because investing in public services was never part of the political economy of the recovery plan for Bosnia
- Be it in the lives of the laid off workers, among whom a significant number are women, whose factories and workplaces were, as part of the post-conflict reconstruction of the economy, shut down, or privatized, placing them in a precarious position

Creating peace through the free market system has meant that somewhere along the way, or actually quite early on, the fact that Bosnia is a country coming out from a conflict has been forgotten. At this point, when we look at the policies and actions from the international community, we are not talking about weak conflict analysis, but a complete absence of it. So what we have today in Bosnia is not a peace that is created on a proper understanding of what happened, and sustained by inclusiveness, social justice and equality for all, reflective of and attentive to the specific needs of large portion of our society affected by the war, amongst whom women make a substantive portion, what we have is absence of militarized violence, a sort of status quo, (but this is not to say that we do not have violence or militarization, both of them are very much present).

The status quo is sustained by the self-interest of the warlords and ethno-national political elite, the ideas of the international community that austerity measures lead to progress, that privatization is the magic medicine that cures it all, and an absolute blindness to the fact that the effects of the war in Bosnia did not disappear in 1995. A very important pillar that supports all of this is the willingness of the IFI's to turn peace and democracy, in the

sense of real, meaningful participation, influence and ownership of the direction our post-conflict society is taking into something that can either be

- bluntly disregarded (as in we do not have time for you, or you are not legitimate voices as we are dealing with your elected politicians and you have elected them in “free” elections)
- or can be turned into a commodity (excellent of you to engage in this issue, you are welcome in this space, but not in this, and you are certainly not welcome if you have ideas that differ from ours).

Also it does not seem as this approach has ever had a straight forward trajectory, with respect to where the country is supposed to go other than the free market. I do not know how many reforms the country has gone through, or started and then abandoned, and now the latest is the Reform agenda with capital R that categorically ignores the **post-war context of BiH**, is completely gender blind, and provides for alarmingly little space for **democratic dialogue** between the gvt and the citizens. Considering the extent of the interventions the reform agenda introduces it is going to make **critical influences** on how social justice and gender equality in this country play out in the future – both things that are absolutely detrimental for sustainability of the peace.

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