



Demonstration of the *Women in Black* in Belgrade on December 17, 1992. The banner reads 'Women in Black against the war'

Global 'Unity and Sisterhood'

a case study on (lesbian) feminist solidarity in Croatia and Serbia anti-war activism during the Bosnian and Croatian Wars (1991-1995).

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Master Thesis

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Supervisor: Dr. Corina Mavrodin

Date: 28-07-2023

Word count: 12664

Abstract

This master thesis aims to analyse the organisation Lesbian and Gay Men Action (LIGMA) in Croatia and Women in Black (WiB) in Serbia employing the transnational (lesbian) feminist network to obtain various forms of support for their anti-war activism during the Bosnian and Croatian War (1991-1995). It adds to the body of historical and sociological research that is attempting to rehabilitate (post-)Yugoslav anti-war and pacifist viewpoints in the (lesbian) feminist population that have been largely ignored in recent studies of the wars of Yugoslav succession. This thesis uses a comparative analysis of the correspondence of Serbian (LIGMA) and Croatian (WiB) anti-war activists with the transnational (lesbian) feminist network through international media and transnational solidarity movements. The methodology supports the notion that they used transnational networks to support their activism, however, it adds a new insight, the primary sources provided a new perspective from the eyes of Croat and Serb activists and the direct communication with international media and solidarity movements. It argues that LIGMA and WiB, used the (lesbian) feminist network as a starting point towards the general population and state interest, which would be its end goal. In addition, it provided them with financial, advisory, and solidarity support, such as funding for campaigns, media attention, material support, and expressions of solidarity and recognition for their work, while differing in type of organisations and projects of anti-war activism. The thesis concludes with a comparison and is followed up by a call for further research on transnational lesbian solidarity and sisterhood.

Keywords: Yugoslavia, lesbianism, feminism, anti-war activism, transnational movements.

Abbreviations

BiH	Bosnia-Herzegovina
CAWA	Centre for Anti-war Action Belgrade
HDZ	Croatian Democratic Union
ILGA	International Lesbian and Gay Association
JNA	Yugoslav People's Army
LIGMA	Lesbian and Gay Men Action
TRP	Italian Transnational Radical Party
SFRY	Socialist Federalist Republic of Yugoslavia
WIB	Women in Black Serbia

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Acknowledgments

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my thesis supervisor, Dr. Corina Mavrodin, for her guidance, feedback and support throughout this research project.

I also want to thank my mother, who has always encouraged me to pursue my academic goals and has supported me in every way possible.

Finally, I want to thank my girlfriend Aylin, who has shown remarkable patience and understanding during the writing of this thesis and my academic endeavours.

Introduction

*Men don't count on solidarity among women of different nationalities. That's how
[some] women get saved.*¹

The quote comes from Lepa Mladjenovic, a lesbian feminist activist from Serbia in response to the Bosnian and Croatian (1991-1995). Like many other women, she was fighting directly or in solidarity against these wars on Yugoslav territory. It underlines the importance of women in war and activism, as well as the significance of transnational solidarity.

Knowledge gap and intentions

This research aims to contribute to the collection of work on feminist activism and the lesbian community, both of which have been marginalised and silenced in academic research and society. By exploring the historical experiences of lesbian women, this research hopes to contribute to queer visibility, shed light on the struggles and achievements, and allow them to take up their rightful a space in history. It seeks to challenge the dominant narratives and assumptions that have erased or distorted the voices of these people and to create place for their stories to be heard and valued. In academic research, the female experience often resides in the shadows, with lesbian women, who have lived in obscurity from civilisation in history and the present, being almost invisible. Throughout this work, the label of (lesbian) feminists is invoked to take distance from speaking about activists that have not come out publicly. In this largely heteronormative and patriarchal world, respect for privacy and safety is essential, as being queer continues to be a dangerous and stigmatised identity. This research is a scholarly

¹ Lepa Mladjenovic et al., 'Voices from a War: An Interview', *Off Our Backs* 23, no. 5 (1993): 15.

endeavour and a political and personal one, reflecting my commitment to feminist and LGBTQA+ causes.

Furthermore, this thesis shall contribute to the body of historical and sociological research that is attempting to rehabilitate (post-)Yugoslav anti-war and pacifist viewpoints in the (lesbian) feminist population that have been largely ignored in recent studies of the wars of Yugoslav disintegration. With this research, the Bosnian and Croatian Wars (1991-1995) function as a historical analysis tool for (lesbian) feminism in anti-war activism. Within this scope, two organisations are studied in greater detail, Lesbian and Gay Men Action (LIGMA) in Croatia and Women in Black (WiB) in Serbia, who embody similar thinking organisations on the two opposite ends of the historical conflict. This study reports on the similarities and differences between these two organisations while portraying the everyday anti-activist activities and their interaction and contributing to the collection of the social history of domestic anti-war movements on the Yugoslav territory.

Moreover, this work will report on the transnational network of (lesbian) activism active during the Bosnian and Croatian Wars of 1991-1995. As a sociological work, it provides literature on the interconnectedness of international organisations and the element of sisterhood and solidarity. It analyses how domestic organisations are in constant link with international like-minded organisations and how they survive due to being part of a greater network. In previous work, the conflict has often been viewed from a more institutionalist perspective, looking at the European Union, NATO or the U.N. However, international grassroots organisations are essential in movements of activism and solidarity.

The Bosnian and Croatian War

In 1980, President Josip Broz Tito passed away, marking the beginning of the fall of the Socialist Federalist Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY).² Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, North Macedonia, Montenegro and Kosovo became entangled in the politics of nationalism that foreshadowed the break-up of the Republic.³ The disintegration in its beginning seemed like a fratricidal civil war, where former peaceful republics residing under the banner 'Brotherhood and Unity' for five decades would end in a violent battle of separation seizing their coexistence.⁴ Previously, in the early process of the dissolution of the Federation, the conflict was perceived as a "civil war". However, while during its continuation, the approach towards the conflict became more ethnic in nature, and the newly found term "ethnic war", was deemed an accurate description by the people inside Yugoslavia and the international community.⁵ The characterisation demonstrated how different ethnic groups, each claiming a specific territory as their own, engaged in violent conflicts to assert their sovereignty.⁶ Historians agree that the official trigger of the wars was the attack of the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA) on Ljubljana, the capital of Slovenia, in June 1991, after the state voted for independence.⁷ On June 25, 1991, Slovenia and Croatia declared independence from the SFRY.⁸ The JNA under President Slobodan Milosevic, elected in 1987, tried to implement preventative measures by crushing secessionist governments in the uprising republics.⁹ Several

² Nick Aikens et al., *The Long 1980s: Constellations of Art, Politics and Identities: A Collection of Microhistories* (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2018), 17.

³ Swanee Hunt, *This Was Not Our War: Bosnian Women Reclaiming the Peace*, E-Duke Books Scholarly Collection. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 6, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=600085>.

⁴ David Bruce MacDonald, *Balkan Holocausts: Serbian and Croatian Victim-Centred Propaganda and the War in Yugoslavia*, *New Approaches to Conflict Analysis* (Manchester, England: Manchester University Press, 2018), 1.

⁵ Dubravka Žarkov, *The Body of War: Media, Ethnicity, and Gender in the Break-up of Yugoslavia*, *Next Wave* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 4, <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822390183>.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ MacDonald, *Balkan Holocausts: Serbian and Croatian Victim-Centred Propaganda and the War in Yugoslavia*, 1.

⁸ Žarkov, 4.

⁹ MacDonald, *Balkan Holocausts: Serbian and Croatian Victim-Centred Propaganda and the War in Yugoslavia*, 1; Marion 1950- Faber, Roy Gutman, and Alexandra 1964- Stiglmayer, *Mass Rape: The War against Women in*

wars of separation took place, resulting in the fall of the Federation and the establishment of the independent nations of Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, North Macedonia, Montenegro and Kosovo.¹⁰

In 1991 the declaration of Franjo Tudjman, the first president of the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ), declared the official label of the Serb population on its territory as a national minority.¹¹ The Serbian population responded with the establishment of militia groups, which instigated armed uprisings and seized power in the villages where it had a majority.¹² HDZ responded with its nationalist politics, led by the former JNA general, Tudjman. Known as the "Father of all Croats," Tudjman was openly anti-Serb.¹³ In Milosevic's eyes, Croatia became an "enemy of the state" and "separatist nationalists and destroyers of Yugoslavia."¹⁴ The JNA, in combination with the Serbian militia, tried to prevent the separation and destruction of Yugoslavia by crushing secessionist governments in the uprising republics.¹⁵ The Serb army overtook one-third of its territory in the ruthless battle.¹⁶ The military leaders were not only concerned with winning ethnic territory but also driving out, permanently, all non-Serbs.¹⁷ Murder, imprisonment, deportation and the destruction of their property would ensure the non-Serbian population would not return to their previous home. To ensure the domestic Serbian people from the validity of ethnic cleansing practices, Milosevic gained

Bosnia-Herzegovina (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), 14, <http://www.gbv.de/dms/bowker/toc/9780803242395.pdf>.

¹⁰ Bojan Bilić, *LGBT Activism and Europeanisation in the Post-Yugoslav Space: On the Rainbow Way to Europe*, Palgrave Studies in European Political Sociology ([London]: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 188, <https://public.ebookcentral.proquest.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=4720091>; Catherine Baker, *The Yugoslav Wars of the 1990s*, Studies in European History Series (New York, NY: Macmillan Education Palgrave, 2015), 4, <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=45428>.

¹¹ Faber, Gutman, and Stiglmeier, *Mass Rape: The War against Women in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, 14.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Hunt, *This Was Not Our War: Bosnian Women Reclaiming the Peace*, 11.

¹⁴ Faber, Gutman, and Stiglmeier, *Mass Rape: The War against Women in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, 15.

¹⁵ MacDonald, *Balkan Holocausts: Serbian and Croatian Victim-Centred Propaganda and the War in Yugoslavia*, 1.

¹⁶ Hunt, *This Was Not Our War: Bosnian Women Reclaiming the Peace*, 12.

¹⁷ Faber, Gutman, and Stiglmeier, *Mass Rape: The War against Women in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, 15.

complete control of the media, distorting the reality of the conflict and broadcasting it to its population.¹⁸

On the preface of the war, in 1990, nationalist activists in Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH) took advantage of the collapse of the communist regime and divided themselves into official political parties.¹⁹ That November, the first free elections were held, and the three victorious ethnonationalist parties consisted of the Serb Democratic Party of BiH (SDS), the Bosnian wing of the Croatian Democratic Community (HDZ BiH), and the Muslim ethnonational Party for Democratic action (SDA).²⁰ The precariousness of the cooperation within these government parties was amplified by the crumbling of the Federation, bringing the uncertainty of the individual national ethnicities into focus.²¹ Immediately upon receiving wind of the declaration of Slovenia and Croatian independence in 1991, the non-Serbian population, the majority in BiH, was alarmed by the possibility of becoming part of Yugoslavia, or now Greater Serbia. As a result, the government organised a referendum about the BiH's secession with a referendum on February 29 to March 1, 1992, which the SDS boycotted. The results were a staggering 99 per cent in favour, missing the votes that were supposed to come from the Serbian minority population in BiH.²² Consequently, on March 3, 1992, BiH declared independence from Yugoslavia, and the Serbian army walked into the capital Sarajevo to forcefully prevent the statement, ensuing a three-and-a-half siege of the city and starting the Bosnian War, which ended in December 1995 with the signing of the Dayton Agreement.²³ Whilst these wars were raging on the Southern European continent, anti-war activism began to take shape in the

¹⁸ Faber, Gutman, and Stiglmeier, 20.

¹⁹ A. Maksić, *Ethnic Mobilisation, Violence, and the Politics of Affect: The Serb Democratic Party and the Bosnian War* (Springer International Publishing, 2017), 5, <https://books.google.nl/books?id=FrZ9DgAAQBAJ>.

²⁰ Maksić, 5.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Faber, Gutman, and Stiglmeier, *Mass Rape: The War against Women in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, 17.

²³ Žarkov, *The Body of War: Media, Ethnicity, and Gender in the Break-up of Yugoslavia*, 4.

territories of the nations in conflict and those recently liberated.²⁴ Here, (lesbian) feminist organisations such as WiB in Serbia and LIGMA in Croatia fought against the war on Yugoslav territory, continuing the Yugoslav tradition of 'Unity' and with a shift in focus from 'Brotherhood' to 'Sisterhood'.²⁵

Historiography and positioning

In this thesis, the concepts of 'transnationalism' and 'lesbian feminism' are central. The idea of transnationalism is understood by Francoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih as an area: "not bound by the binary of the local and the global and can occur in national, local, or global spaces across different and multiple spatiality's and temporalities".²⁶ In the case of Yugoslavia, the description fits in the collapse of the multinational Yugoslav Republic, dissolving into separate nations throughout the Yugoslav wars from 1990-till 1999. During these years, the women of the lesbian movement had to establish a new form of Tito's beloved Yugoslav motto: Brotherhood and Unity and found a transnational sisterhood on the Yugoslav territory.²⁷ This transnational 'sisterhood' found itself in the fight against gender violence, toxic masculinity and warfare.²⁸

²⁴ Sabrina P. (Sabrina Petra) Ramet and Branka. Magaš, *Gender Politics in the Western Balkans: Women and Society in Yugoslavia and the Yugoslav Successor States*, Post-Communist Cultural Studies (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), 155.

²⁵ Peter Norman, 'LIGMA Correspondence to ILGA Eastern Europe about the Member Registration', February 22 1993, ARCH03280 -Doos 28 Map 1. Deel 1: Correspondentie Balkanlanden 1993-1994; Sanja Sagasta, 'State of the Art: Lesbian Movements in Former Yugoslavia. I. Lesbians in Croatia', *The European Journal of Women's Studies* 8, no. 3 (2001): 363, <https://doi.org/10.1177/135050680100800307>; Bojan Bilić and Marija Radoman, *Lesbian Activism in the (Post-) Yugoslav Space: Sisterhood and Unity* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 1,

<https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=1851023>; Senka Knezevic, 'Remembering the Massacres in Bosnia', *Off Our Backs* 38, no. 1 (2008): 70.

²⁶ Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei 1961- Shih, *Minor Transnationalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 6, <http://catdir.loc.gov/catdir/toc/ecip0421/2004018754.html>.

²⁷ Jasmina Tumbas, Amelia Jones, and Marsha Meskimmon, '*I Am Jugoslovenka!* : Feminist Performance Politics during and after Yugoslav Socialism', *Rethinking Art's Histories* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2022), 235,

<https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=3177205>.

²⁸ Ibid.

Many scholars have developed theories about the relationship between the transnational and anti-war sentiments shared by the Yugoslav feminist movements. Jelena Petrovic argues that the feminist anti-war discourse in Yugoslavia found its origin in the female novel writings based on the (auto)biographical testimonies of women's experiences following World War I.²⁹ Here, warnings and everyday resistance to war were portrayed and shared amongst women.³⁰ Zsófia Lóránd argues that the anti-war narrative in Yugoslav feminism slightly reappeared during the “second-wave feminism” in 1985-1986.³¹ In this historical period, activism in LGB-rights and anti-female violence was pushed to the front of the feminist political agenda due to the inclusion of human rights and democracy in the Yugoslav discourse.³² She continues that during the 1980s, the transnational nature of the Yugoslav feminists increased and "all-Yugoslav" feminist meetings were organised, the first of which took place in Ljubljana in 1983.³³ Lóránd elaborates that the next phase in Yugoslav feminism started around 1990, when new groups appeared from the academic meetings, allowing activism to grow on the level of LGB rights, anti-war activism and the creation of women studies centres in and outside universities.³⁴

Numerous articles have been written about the importance of the role of transnational feminist activists in the anti-war mobilisation during the Bosnian and Croatian Wars of 1991-1995. Bojan Bilic and Marija Radoman empathise with the hardship of anti-war activism while facing a series of armed conflicts, which are accompanied by enormous casualties,

²⁹ Jelena Petrović, ‘Women’s Authorship in Interwar Yugoslavia: Palimpsest Effect’, in *Women’s Authorship in Interwar Yugoslavia: The Politics of Love and Struggle* (Cham: Springer International Publishing: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 274, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-00142-1_4.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Zsófia Lóránd, *The Feminist Challenge to the Socialist State in Yugoslavia*, *Genders and Sexualities in History* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 5, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-78223-2>.

³² Ioana Cîrstocea, *Learning Gender after the Cold War: Contentious Feminisms*, *Socio-Historical Studies of the Social and Human Sciences* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), 7, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-97888-4>.

³³ Lóránd, *The Feminist Challenge to the Socialist State in Yugoslavia*, 173.

³⁴ Ibid., 5.

psychological and material damage, and the regression of women's emancipation rights by decades.³⁵ Maja Korac again furthers this debate by attributing the attention of the West towards the wars in Yugoslavia to its feminist transnational networking, activism and lobbying.³⁶ Lepa Mladjenovic, one of the (lesbian) feminists that established the Serbian division of the Women in Black, elaborates on the transnational nature of the feminist anti-war movement by providing the example of the annual international meeting of 'Women in Black' in 1993.³⁷

Korec argues that the reasoning behind the feminist anti-war activism during the Yugoslav wars is the violent and highly gendered manner of warfare.³⁸ She elaborates on this idea with the explanation that female bodies were used as a territory in ethnic cleansing policies on which the war was fought; the most popular manner in which this was done was by forced impregnation in rape camps.³⁹ Tatjana Takeva writes that a significant aspect of this strategy was the systematic use of rape and enforced impregnation of Bosniak women. The estimation is that between 25,000 and 40,000 were victims, released from the camps only after their pregnancies had progressed beyond the possibility of safe abortion.⁴⁰ Forced impregnation was a tool to make a new Serbian generation who would resent its mother and fight for Serbian nationalism.⁴¹ Rape was used to accelerate ethnic cleansing, genocide and destruction of culture.⁴² She empathises that wartime rape has long been acknowledged as a common occurrence in the history of conflict. Women's bodies have often been seen as an essential

³⁵ Bilić and Radoman, *Lesbian Activism in the (Post-) Yugoslav Space: Sisterhood and Unity*, 4.

³⁶ Maja Korac, 'Is There a Right Time for Gender-Just Peace? Feminist Anti-War Organising Revisited', *Gender and Education* 28, no. 3 (2016): 432–33, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2016.1169252>.

³⁷ Lepa Mladjenovic, 'III. Notes of a Feminist Lesbian during Wartime', *European Journal of Women's Studies* 8, no. 3 (2001): 382.

³⁸ Korac, 'Is There a Right Time for Gender-Just Peace? Feminist Anti-War Organising Revisited', 433.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 434.

⁴⁰ Tatjana Takeva, 'Genocidal Rape, Enforced Impregnation, and the Discourse of Serbian National Identity', *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 17, no. 3 (2015): 1, <https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.2638>.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*

instrument of war strategy, and these "bodies" often constitute the symbolic and actual battlefield of the conquest of an ethnic domain in "an ongoing construction of women as the universal 'Other'".⁴³ Dubravka Žarkov argued that the use of rape by Croatian, Bosnian and Serbian military, as demonstrated by the U.N. Commission, was, in the case of Bosnian Serbs, a consistent policy, with men also included as victims of sexual assault in a similarly systematic nature.⁴⁴

By contrast, less research has explored the importance of the transnational lesbian movement within the feminist framework. Some scholars write about the importance of the transnational lesbian movement concerning anti-war activism during the Bosnian and Croatian Wars of 1991-1995. Bilic and Radoman credit the global lesbian community as the most significant contributor to anti-war activism during the Yugoslav wars.⁴⁵ They state that the lesbian community, with their human rights activism, laid the groundwork for women's rights in the area.⁴⁶ Mladjenovic continues this train of thought by stating that many lesbians were active in Belgrade, working towards bringing down the Slobodan Milosevic regime, which was responsible for the violent wars, by organising countless protest walks and demonstrations.⁴⁷ Furthermore, Mladjenovic, who identifies as lesbian, claims that she had an international network with lesbian feminist contacts worldwide, providing aid and professional experience while establishing the Women in Black organisation.⁴⁸ Sabrina Ramet, conversely, argues that the connection between lesbian interest in the Yugoslav wars due to the female nature of the Yugoslav wars.⁴⁹ Mladjenovic disagrees with this direct connection, stating that the

⁴³ Tatjana Takeva, 'Genocidal Rape, Enforced Impregnation, and the Discourse of Serbian National Identity', 1.

⁴⁴ Žarkov, *The Body of War: Media, Ethnicity, and Gender in the Break-up of Yugoslavia*, 6.

⁴⁵ Bilić and Radoman, *Lesbian Activism in the (Post-) Yugoslav Space: Sisterhood and Unity*, 92–93.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Mladjenovic, 'III. Notes of a Feminist Lesbian during Wartime', 382.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ramet and Magaš, *Gender Politics in the Western Balkans: Women and Society in Yugoslavia and the Yugoslav Successor States*, 155.

relationship between lesbianism and anti-war activism was not always a natural fit. Although, she sees a lot of similarities between male violence, nationalism, domestic violence, homophobia and armed conflict, all coming together in the patriarchal code of hate against the Other.⁵⁰ At the beginning of the war in 1991, the war separated all humanitarian movements, such as lesbianism and pacifism.⁵¹ Špehar, the co-founder of Croatian gay and lesbian action group LIGMA, elaborates on the role of LGB activists in the war, as the war took over all social activism, allowing all queer activists to join the leading social cause, the ending of the war.⁵²

This thesis aims to build upon the research of Bilic, Mladjenovic, Radoman, Ramet, Korec. The predominant research in this academic field has explored *if* (lesbian) feminist were active in anti-war activism during the Yugoslav wars and the *why* reasoning behind their motivation. This thesis examines *how* LIGMA and WiB used this transnational network for various forms of aid towards their goal.

Method, sources, and structure

The analysis in this thesis is particularly concerned with exploring two case studies, LIGMA in Croatia and Women in Black in Serbia. These will be presented in a dichotomous fashion and subjected to comparison in the conclusion. In the analysis, the historical context of the Yugoslav wars, especially the Bosnian and Croatian Wars (1991-1995), is of great importance. The organisations had a similar agenda and were active in different territories, belonging to the nations of the “aggressor” and the “oppressed”. Moreover, this thesis focuses on the

⁵⁰ Mladjenovic, ‘III. Notes of a Feminist Lesbian during Wartime’, 389.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 387.

⁵² Andrea Spehar, ‘Lesbians in Croatia’, *Internacional de Resistentes a La Guerra* (blog), 1 April 1994, <https://wri-irg.org/es/story/1994/lesbians-croatia>.

contextualisation of transnational (lesbian) feminism and anti-war activism within its historical context.

The core question of this research is: *How did the transnational (lesbian) feminist network provide aid and support in the anti-war activism in Serbia and Croatia concerning the Bosnian and Croatian War (1991-1995)?*

To answer this question, an in-depth analysis will be done on two organisations in Croatia and Serbia that were active in anti-war activism, thus sketching the transnational feminist community. Subsidiary questions will entail the following:

How did the Croatian (lesbian) feminist organisation LIGMA use the transnational network for anti-war activism relating to the Bosnian and Croatian Wars?

How did the Serbian feminist organisation Women in Black use the transnational network for anti-war activism relating to the Bosnian and Croatian Wars?

Answering the subsidiary questions requires the discourse of the organisation's Women in Black and LIGMA during the Bosnian and Croatian War (1991-1995). The primary sources used are correspondence, interviews, manuscripts and newspaper articles, which mention these organisations and their anti-war activism. The material answers how the two institutions provided the transnational (lesbian) feminist network with recognition and financial or advisory aid. As primary sources are found to prove the global network between domestic and solidarity movements under the anti-war cause, our main research question can be answered.

This paper will consist of two parts to give a rounded answer to the research question. The first part argues that the transnational (lesbian) feminist network aided the Croatian lesbian and gay organisation LIGMA. The second part discusses that the Serbian organisation Women

in Black used their alliances with international solidarity organisations to gain notoriety for their cause and attain financial and advisory aid. Structurally this thesis focuses on analysing the organisations based on global media and international solidarity movements. The first chapter examines the role of the Croatian organisation LIGMA in anti-war activism and lesbian human rights activism. It analyses domestic and international media platforms, which broadcasted activist notions designed to oppose Serbian aggression. Furthermore, it explores the use of global solidarity movements in order to gain recognition and financial and material aid to fund domestic anti-war activist activities. The second chapter examines the role of the Serbian organisation Women in Black in challenging the dominant narratives of nationalism and militarism in the former Yugoslavia. It analyses how WiB used various international media platforms to expose the atrocities committed by the Serbian regime, support the victims of war and violence, and communicate their messages of peace, justice and human rights to local and global audiences. Furthermore, it explores the cooperation and collaboration with international solidarity movements and organisations that support their cause and amplify their voice.

The thesis concludes with the presentation and analyses of the two case studies' main outcomes, highlighting their similarities and differences. It will also discuss the reasons, conditions, and strategies that enabled Yugoslav (lesbian) feminist activists to utilise the transnational (lesbian) feminist network as a valuable resource for their anti-war activism. The paper will conclude with some general insights on the role and impact of transnational (lesbian) feminist solidarity in times of conflict and crisis and the limitations and possibilities for future research.

Chapter 1: Lesbian and Gay Men Action (LIGMA) and transnational feminist sisterhood.

The organisation Lesbian and Gay Men Action (*Lezbijska I gej akcija*, LIGMA) was founded by Amir Hanušić and Andreja Špehar in Zagreb, Croatia, during the Bosnian and Croatian War in August 1992.⁵³ Hanušić and Špehar had previously constructed a relationship based on LGB activism and were the first publicly out individuals in Croatia.⁵⁴ The rationale behind the LIGMA establishment was to counter the longstanding silence about the existence of homosexuals, attain human rights in Croatia and initiate a more open approach in public life by presenting homosexual living and the topic of AIDS while protesting the war.⁵⁵ Špehar explains some of the main goals of LIGMA: “(...)we want to work for the protection of lesbians and gays in Croatia, to publish lesbian and gay magazines, and do AIDS education”.⁵⁶ The lesbian-gay alliance was a strategic action in which they could unite in order of a higher probability of success and to represent a joint front in confrontation towards the inhospitable social climate of Croatia.⁵⁷ However, LIGMA was divided into two sections based on gender, with the women's section coordinated by Špehar and the men's section coordinated by Hanušić.⁵⁸ LIGMA operated as a non-governmental organisation (NGO) since 1992, being the first registered NGO dealing with the rights of homosexuals in Croatia.⁵⁹ In the first year, LIGMA depended solely on the logistical support of the Italian Transnational Radical Party

⁵³ Bojan Bilić, *Trauma, Violence, and Lesbian Agency in Croatia and Serbia: Building Better Times* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 74, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=2373496>; Sagasta, 'State of the Art: Lesbian Movements in Former Yugoslavia. I. Lesbians in Croatia', 362.

⁵⁴ Amir Hodžić, 'Fragments of Queer Mobility.', *Transversal*. (blog), 1 March 2023, <https://transversal.at/transversal/1017/hodzic/en/1/03/2023>.

⁵⁵ Izabela Albini, 'Život i Svijet Dostojan Čovjeka.', *Speak Out*, 24 June 1994, 3.

⁵⁶ Špehar, 'Lesbians in Croatia'.

⁵⁷ Bilić, *Trauma, Violence, and Lesbian Agency in Croatia and Serbia: Building Better Times*, 74.

⁵⁸ Sagasta, 'State of the Art: Lesbian Movements in Former Yugoslavia. I. Lesbians in Croatia', 362.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 363.

(TRP), which had a Croatian branch, even though LIGMA planned to cooperate with Croatian political parties.⁶⁰ The hardship of lesbian feminist anti-war activism finds itself rooted in the element of being queer. Belonging to a lesbian or gay organisation was unattractive due to the intolerance of Croatian society.⁶¹ Membership in LIGMA was full of risks, as people could lose their jobs and families.⁶² Often, people who identified with the lesbian community would put shame on their families and lose their jobs and lesbian women who were not allowed to work lost financial security.

Furthermore, the organisation had difficulty growing public consciousness about LGB rights during wartime: "It is hard as people are more concerned about finding food to survive than struggling for their rights".⁶³ The all-encompassing nature of the ethnic war took away the energy and time from the activists, leaving only room for survival. Warfare erased humanistic missions, replacing them with only nationalistic and war ones. LIGMA, weakened by intra-group conflicts, financial burdens, societal homophobia, state repression and the political climate, disappeared from the activist scene in 1997.⁶⁴ To a great extent, being the first openly gay person in Croatia meant facing numerous verbal assaults, harassment by police, and physical attacks.⁶⁵ Additionally, the co-founders chose to emigrate, Špehar in 1995 to Sweden and Hanušić to Canada in 2007.⁶⁶

⁶⁰ Albini, 'Život i Svijet Dostojan Čovjeka.', 3.

⁶¹ Špehar, 'Lesbians in Croatia'.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Špehar.

⁶⁴ Bilić, *Trauma, Violence, and Lesbian Agency in Croatia and Serbia: Building Better Times*, 77.

⁶⁵ Marko Jurčić, 'Čitanka LGBT Ljudskih Prava.', *POVIJEST LGBTIQ AKTIVIZMA U HRVATSKOJ* (Fondacija Heinrich Böll, Sarajevski otvoreni centar, 2012), 91–92.

⁶⁶ Hodžić, 'Fragments of Queer Mobility.'

International Media Exposure

In 1994, LIGMA struggled to recruit activists and generate recognition and popularity among the lesbian and gay community. The amplified fear of retracting lesbianism/homosexuality into the private domain allows the continuation of (internalised) homophobia.⁶⁷ Due to the inhospitable political and social climate, the number of active members remained small. The lack of state interest in the cause and active anti-lesbian and gay rhetoric led to a further decrease of the political potential of the movement.⁶⁸ Furthermore, it was vital to indulge in newspaper interviews and collaborations with non-government-owned media in Croatia and worldwide. All official interviews would face censorship, resulting in scandal and insult.⁶⁹ LIGMA had to tap into a broader network of international media exposure, especially from the West, as it would invoke a movement of solidarity and support.⁷⁰ However, it preceded to use domestic organisations, which had alignments with domestic media and were in contact with the international community.

ARKzine

ARKzine was the monthly magazine by the Croatian Anti-War Campaign, *Antiratna kampanja Hrvatske* (ARK).⁷¹ The magazine allowed for a supplement from LIGMA to be added named *Speak Out*. The first was a preliminary bulletin in the 16th edition of *ARKzin* on 24 June 1994.⁷² The second and final was on 1 November 1994.⁷³ *ARK* was founded in the 1980s by academics such as sociologists, philosophers, and journalists, who acted under the principle that the

⁶⁷ Bilić, Bojan. *Trauma, Violence, and Lesbian Agency in Croatia and Serbia: Building Better Times*. (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 75.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Spehar, 'Lesbians in Croatia'.

⁷⁰ Tineke van der Berg, 'We Hebben Daar de Hele Tijd Zitten Huilen.', *De Gelderlander*, 17 April 1993, ARCH02602 – 1, Archief Lopend Vuur. Afdeling Nijmegen.

⁷¹ Bilić, *Trauma, Violence, and Lesbian Agency in Croatia and Serbia: Building Better Times*, 75; Sanja Sekelj, 'Digitalna Povijest Umjetnosti i Umjetničke Mreže u Hrvatskoj 1990-lh i 2000-lh' (University of Zadar, 2022), 81.

⁷² Albin, 'Život i Svijet Dostojan Čovjeka.', 3.

⁷³ 'Speak Out', 1 November 1994.

presence of warfare was not a sufficient reason to suspend diversity and freedom of speech, and at the same time, pleading for modern democratic socialistic Croatia.⁷⁴ Initially, it was founded as a newsletter of the organisation, which was supposed to contribute to the visibility of the peacekeeper's initiative in Croatia and the connection of similar-minded individuals and groups. It further developed into a platform or meeting space between similarly minded activists, a place of mutual recognition. The majority of people working at *ARKzin* were female, as men were fighting in the war or fleeing from it, using their female voice to discard the sentimentalities of the patriarchal nature of the continuous war.⁷⁵ As such, the collaboration between the lesbian feminist activists of LIGMA and the feminist activists of *ARKzine* was established. The magazine's primary focus pertained to Croatian anti-war activism, while appeals and critical retellings of the war in Bosnia were included.⁷⁶ More than anything, however, due to the published articles, the platform functioned as an incubator for grassroots movements, such as pacifism, anarchism, feminism, LGBT rights, and environmentalism.⁷⁷

ARKzin, in the 1990s, became the most important crucial channel of the anti-war initiatives in Croatia and Serbia and a like-minded public beyond the domestic.⁷⁸ The magazine became an integral part of the international mission towards freedom of speech. It maintained contacts with activists, artists and theorists from Western Europe, establishing a connection between the Croatian readers and the West.⁷⁹ Beyond simple international recognition, it is provided by the global network financially. *ARKzine* was dependent on international actors,

⁷⁴ Jo van der Spek, 'Arkzin Een Kier Naar Europa', *De Groene Amsterdammer*, 6 April 1994, <https://www.groene.nl/artikel/arkzin-een-kier-naar-europa>.

⁷⁵ 'Temidden van Het Oorlogsgeweld Werden Zowel in Belgrado Als in Zagred Vredesgroepen Oppericht.', n.d., Documentatiecollectie Solidariteitsbewegingen in Nederland - COLL00284 – 135, International Institute of Social History.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Bilić, *Trauma, Violence, and Lesbian Agency in Croatia and Serbia: Building Better Times*, 75; Sekelj, 'Digitalna Povijest Umjetnosti i Umjetničke Mreže u Hrvatskoj 1990-Ih i 2000-Ih', 81.

⁷⁸ Đorđe Tomić, Vesna Jankovic, and Bojan Bilić, 'Resisting the Evil. [Post-]Yugoslav Anti-War Contention', *Südosteuropäische Hefte*, no. 1 (2013): 135.

⁷⁹ Sekelj, 'Digitalna Povijest Umjetnosti i Umjetničke Mreže u Hrvatskoj 1990-Ih i 2000-Ih', 81.

acquiring support from abroad, with the main sponsor being the American Open Society Fund and smaller donations from the Dutch freedom of speech organisation Press Now.⁸⁰ It functioned as a glimpse into Europe for Croatian readers, and vice-versa, as it reached Western European readers, even though the magazine would only produce ten thousand copies a month, providing a new demographic audience with a view into the Croatian activist scene.

Furthermore, *ARKzin* used the international solidarity movements to create an anti-war statement signed by 75 organisations worldwide and attain financial aid for their wartime initiatives, such as establishing a Women's Shelter.⁸¹ In 1994 an article in the Dutch magazine *De Groene Amsterdammer* appeared about the magazine, called "Glimpse into Europe."⁸² The report, based on an interview with editor-in-chief Vesna Jankovic and feminist activist, elaborates on the history and daily activities of the magazine, consequently informing an entirely new audience of *ARKzine*'s presence:

*"In what state do we live?" is the recurring question among its readers. Arkzin tirelessly points out that it is a state where journalists are purged from the state radio, where human rights defenders wonder whether they should go abroad in order to secure their human rights, and where liberals are in opposition by calling that under no circumstances, there should be talks with the Serbs. In such a state, normality is a utopia.*⁸³

⁸⁰ Van der Spek, 'Arkzin Een Kier Naar Europa', 14; Vesna Jankovic, 'Arkzine Funding Aanvraag Press Now.' (13 June 1994), ARCH02399 – 12e, Archief Press Now.

⁸¹ 'Temidden van Het Oorlogsgeweld Werden Zowel in Belgrado Als in Zagred Vredesgroepen Oppericht.', n.d.

⁸² Van der Spek, 'Arkzin Een Kier Naar Europa', 14.

⁸³ Ibid.

By using the transnational (lesbian) feminist network and collaborating with the boldly critical *ARKzin*, LIGMA attempted to tap into the previously established network, thus growing its popularity and activist following. The rationale behind the supplement was that it would provide a representation of the day-to-day experience of queer people in Croatia during the war to inform the public and, importantly, enrage them about this injustice.⁸⁴ Additionally, *Speak Out* would provide queer people with a safe space to educate themselves and become aware of and familiar with members of their community during a difficult period while preaching anti-war activism.⁸⁵ On a more transnational level, the supplement would connect the international LGBT community with the domestic one, elaborating on queer events organised in Europe, such as the Gay Olympic Games in Amsterdam.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Bilić, *Trauma, Violence, and Lesbian Agency in Croatia and Serbia: Building Better Times*, 75.

⁸⁵ Jurčić, 'Čitanka LGBT Ljudskih Prava.', 91–92.

⁸⁶ Albini, 'Život i Svijet Dostojan Čovjeka.', 3; Bilić, *Trauma, Violence, and Lesbian Agency in Croatia and Serbia: Building Better Times*, 76; Sagasta, 'State of the Art: Lesbian Movements in Former Yugoslavia. I. Lesbians in Croatia', 362–64; Izabela Albini, 'Otvori Oči.', *Speak Out*, 1 November 1994, 9.



Figure 1. Covers of the *Speak Out* supplements, left: November 1, 1994, right: June 24, 1994.⁸⁷

⁸⁷ 'Cover. Speak Out', *ARKzine*, 24 June 1994, <https://monoskop.org/Arkzin>; Speak Out, 'Cover, Speak Out.', 1 November 1994, <https://monoskop.org/Arkzin>.

International solidarity movements

Another way in which LIGMA invoked the element of public interest and financial aid was via international solidarity movements. During LIGMA's existence, its activists had fought with constant financial struggles, intra-group conflict, intolerance of society and hostile political situations.⁸⁸ Špehar writes in the article '*Lesbian Question*' about the position of lesbian rights during the war: "Our minimal success is due to the fact that people are worried about securing food in these harsh economic conditions and haven't the time or energy to struggle for rights."⁸⁹ Izabela Albin, LIGMA member and queer-rights activist elaborated, in the LIGMA Bulletin Speak Out, the right to diversity is one of the privileges: "The right to diversity has become a category of privilege – those who have power or who are rich enough to buy it with money".⁹⁰ The financial structure of LIGMA has always been an issue. In her article IRG in 1994, Špehar pleads for the necessity of financial, advisory and material aid to survive:

*Financing is our major problem. There is a great economic crisis in Croatia (annual inflation is from 2,000 to 3,000 per cent). But we also need literature and other materials, advice, and your support. Our organisation is young but well-organised and willing to fight for our rights until the very end.*⁹¹

During the war in Croatia and BiH, LIGMA collaborated with international anti-war organisations such as the Italian Transnational Radical Party (TRP) and the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA)

⁸⁸ Sagasta, 'State of the Art: Lesbian Movements in Former Yugoslavia. I. Lesbians in Croatia', 362.

⁸⁹ Tanya Renne, *Ana's Land: Sisterhood I Eastern Europe* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1997), 210.

⁹⁰ Albin, 'Život i Svijet Dostojan Čovjeka.', 3; Bilić, *Trauma, Violence, and Lesbian Agency in Croatia and Serbia: Building Better Times*, 76.

⁹¹ Špehar, 'Lesbians in Croatia'.

Italian Transnational Radical Party (TRP)

In the first year, LIGMA depended solely on the logistical support of the Italian Transnational Radical Party (TRP), which had a Croatian branch.⁹² TRP, established in 1989, was a political actor functioning as an NGO focusing on non-violence, human rights, and European Integration.⁹³ TRP was the only formal party to support the queer-based organisation publicly, even though LIGMA planned to cooperate solely with Croatian political parties. It provided aid in workspace, phones and computers even after it acquired the status of an independent association in October 1993.⁹⁴ The city authorities denied LIGMA the right to office space and public meetings; thus, searching for a workspace was impossible.⁹⁵ Hanušić and Špehar claimed to have 30 members in October 1993.⁹⁶ Under the Lesbian population, there was dissatisfaction since becoming a member of LIGMA meant becoming a member of TRP.⁹⁷ The membership costs were ten *Deutsche Marks*; however, money was scarce.⁹⁸ The Croatian division of TRP left Croatia in 1993, ending its logistical support in previous years.⁹⁹

International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA)

During the Yugoslav wars, LIGMA, as an organisation, attended numerous international conferences and became a member of international queer rights organisations.¹⁰⁰ The collaboration with international actors provided insights and aims for attainable goals in Croatia and a broad network of allies.¹⁰¹ Consequently, in February 1993, LIGMA became an

⁹² Albini, 'Život i Svijet Dostojan Čovjeka.', 3.

⁹³ Bilić, *Trauma, Violence, and Lesbian Agency in Croatia and Serbia: Building Better Times*, 74.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Sagasta, 'State of the Art: Lesbian Movements in Former Yugoslavia. I. Lesbians in Croatia', 363.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 362.

⁹⁷ Bilić, *Trauma, Violence, and Lesbian Agency in Croatia and Serbia: Building Better Times*, 74.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Sagasta, 'State of the Art: Lesbian Movements in Former Yugoslavia. I. Lesbians in Croatia', 362–64.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

official member of the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA).¹⁰² Officially, it became an ILGA Eastern Europe division member as the organisation was separated into geographical territories. The association, then International Gay Association (IGA), was established in 1978 in Coventry, United Kingdom. As representatives from different organisations came together at a fringe meeting of the annual conference of the Campaign for Homosexual Equality.¹⁰³ From 1985 it included lesbianism in its aims; this was similarly reflected in changing the organisation's name to ILGA.¹⁰⁴ The organisation applies political pressure on governments on LGBTQIA+ issues and acts as an information and intermediary connection platform for individuals and groups within the transnational community.¹⁰⁵

The transnational network-based Eastern Europe division of ILGA made it possible to effectively connect the grassroots and solidarity movements and established organisations on the Eastern part of the continent. Thus, making it possible for organisations within disintegrated territories such as Yugoslavia to regain contact all over the post-federate state. Notwithstanding, it made it impossible for organisations on opposite sides of the Yugoslav ethnic conflict to acquire membership within the same organisation simultaneously. This wishes for reconnection within these territories of war is only sometimes wanted. Since the war broke out in 1991, Yugoslav feminism has changed remarkably. Previously, Yugoslav feminists would travel the Federation in order to encounter other feminists and talk about connectivity and sisterhood.¹⁰⁶ However, the war seemed to have ravaged some instances of unity entirely, implementing the element of nationalism within the realms of sisterhood and

¹⁰² Norman, 'LIGMA Correspondence to ILGA Eastern Europe about the Member Registration', 22 February 1993.

¹⁰³ 'About Us | ILGA World.', *ILGA World* (blog), accessed 2 February 2023, <https://ilga.org/about-us>.

¹⁰⁴ 'The History of ILGA (1978- 2012)', *ILGA World*. (blog), 2012, <https://ilga.org/ilga-history>.

¹⁰⁵ 'The History of ILGA (1978- 2012)'; Norman, 'LIGMA Correspondence to ILGA Eastern Europe about the Member Registration', 22 February 1993.

¹⁰⁶ Bojan Bilić and Sanja Kajinić, *Intersectionality and LGBT Activist Politics: Multiple Others in Croatia and Serbia* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 0.

unity.¹⁰⁷ Suddenly, all discussions of lesbian identity in Yugoslavia came to the same end, nationality.¹⁰⁸ Human rights referring to the queer community were pushed aside, and all concentration was put on the war, crises of refugees and opposing nationalist ideology. In the Yugoslav separation wars, Serbia-Croatia rivalry dominated the conflict.¹⁰⁹ The anti-Serbian sentiment within the Croatian nation trickled down in parts of the queer community. At the same time, antinationalist Serbian solidarity movements tried to align themselves with anti-war movements all over the territory. More than anything, however, Croatian women pacifists were experiencing the war on their environment, fearing for their safety and that of their families. Due to the existentialism and emotionally charged war experience, Croat-Serbian cooperation by rational understanding and argumentation was inconceivable.¹¹⁰ Many (lesbian) feminists in Croatia perceived the Serbs as the sole perpetrators of the war and themselves and the Bosnian Muslims as the only victims.¹¹¹ One of ILGA's correspondences shows Peter Norman's efforts, the coordinator for Eastern Europe, to connect the queer organisations in Croatia and Serbia. Here, we read the response of Norman to a letter from Špehar, co-founder of LIGMA, about the lack of interest of their organisation in future networking with Serbian groups.¹¹²

Of course, I quite understand why it is impossible for you to have contact with the Serbian group at the present time, but I would like you to know that our friends in Belgrade have put themselves at great personal risk, not only through their lesbian/gay activism but also through their involvement in the

¹⁰⁷ Bilić and Kajinić, *Intersectionality and LGBT Activist Politics: Multiple Others in Croatia and Serbia*, x.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ MacDonald, *Balkan Holocausts: Serbian and Croatian Victim-Centred Propaganda and the War in Yugoslavia*, 1.

¹¹⁰ Bojan Bilic, 'In a Crevice between Gender and Nation: Croatian and Serbian Women in 1990s Anti-War Activism', *Slovo (London, England)* 23, no. 2 (2011): 96.

¹¹¹ Ana. Miškowska Kajevska, 'Taking a Stand in Times of Violent Societal Changes: Belgrade and Zagreb Feminists' Positionings on the (Post-)Yugoslav Wars and Each Other (1991-2000)' ([S.l., s.n.], 2014), 18, WorldCat.org.

¹¹² Phillip M. Ayoub and David Paternotte, 'L'International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA) et l'expansion Du Militantisme LGBT Dans Une Europe Unifiée', *Critique Internationale (Paris. 1998)* 1, no. 70 (2016): 55.

peace movement and their active opposition to their government's aggression against neighbouring countries. ¹¹³

WE ARE PART OF THE WORLD TOO

The ILGA Eastern Europe division worked as a transnational connector, not just under the nations of Eastern Europe but transnationally. Individual organisations could send appeals to the Eastern Europe desk, which would consequently be sent to organisations belonging to the general ILGA network. On 7 August 1993, LIGMA used this possibility and submitted an appeal called: WE ARE PART OF THE WORLD TOO.¹¹⁴ The project urgently needed financial and material support to shelter lesbian and gay refugees from Croatia and BiH. In this appeal, it is brought forwards that the only requirements for entrance to the sanctuary were being a lesbian or gay person and from the geographical location of Croatia or BiH: “(...)And this action regards only Lesbians and Gays from Croatia, as well as from Bosnia Herzegovina, no matter their religion or their nationality.”¹¹⁵ The attention in the announcement reflects the repercussions of the war raging on the continent, as the geographical location was most important, not nationality or ethnicity. However, it also shows the diminishing importance of the factor of ethnicity in the often-named "ethnic war" happening on the Yugoslav territory.

ILGA Eastern Europe received the appeal and sent an updated version, which included organisations who agreed to support the request, to countless organisations globally. The official correspondence "The Croatian Refugee Appeal" shows the contemporary solidarity

¹¹³ Norman, 'LIGMA Correspondence to ILGA Eastern Europe about the Member Registration', 22 February 1993.

¹¹⁴ LIGMA Appeal for WE ARE PART OF THE WORLD TOO', 22 February 1993, ARCH03280 -Doos 28 Map 1. Deel 1: Correspondentie Balkanlanden 1993-1994, Archief International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA).

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

side of the transnational queer movement.¹¹⁶ Even though there is no active anti-war activism, it allows anti-war activism in housing refugees and army deserters while simultaneously bringing the harsh realities of the war into the public consciousness of the international queer audience. In the appeal, we can read about different feminist and queer transnational solidarity actors who would support and aid the project. Even before sending it, ILGA and LIGMA had created a global network of humanitarian aid towards the realisation of the WE ARE HERE TOO centre. The Women's Aid For Peace coordinated the pickup of supplies in Manchester and London, Manchester Gay Centre functioned as a collection point. And a lesbian/feminist group from Belgium let ILGA know they chose to work independently but liked sharing the transport facilities.

*LIGMA plans to open a centre with 15 overnight emergency accommodation places (open 24hrs). They aim to have a kitchen, library, meeting place and counselling facilities, and the centre would also become a distribution point for humanitarian aid. It is believed that there are hundreds, possibly thousands of gay and lesbian Serb, Muslim and Croat refugees from Bosnia in Zagreb, plus Croatian gays who are avoiding call-up or are deserters of the army. LIGMA has already identified at least 26 lesbians and 75 gay men in immediate need.*¹¹⁷

Furthermore, a representation of the communication between different organisations within Croatia is provided by the correspondence sent to ILGA Eastern Europe from NEXUS,

¹¹⁶ Peter Norman, 'ILGA Correspondence Capital Gay London about We Are Part of the World Too', 7 June 1993, ARCH03280 -Doos 28 Map 1. Deel 1: Correspondentie Balkanlanden 1993-1994., International Archive of Social History.

¹¹⁷ Andrea Spehar, 'LIGMA Correspondence to ILGA Eastern Europe about Opening a Humanitarian Aid Centre', n.d., ARCH03280 -Doos 28 Map 1. Deel 1: Correspondentie Balkanlanden 1993-1994, International Archive of Social History.

who acted as the liaison in Zagreb, specifically on customs and import. It gives a more in-depth retelling of the living experiences of lesbian and gay men, specifically in Croatia and generally during war times. Nexus writes about the discrimination of queer people by the church and the government, pointing at the treatment of queer people as “chetniks,” meaning Serbian people, the worst slur one could receive in Croatia during wartime. Even more importantly, the appeal concludes that in times of war, lesbian and gay people are the lowest on the totem pole for military aid, assistance, or other forms of support: ¹¹⁸

*All that is being asked for is a place of safety and citizens' rights; the church is speaking out very strongly against gays, and recently, a member of the government reported as saying, GAYS ARE NOT CROATIANS THEY ARE CHETNIKS; in other words, TRAITORS.*¹¹⁹

Chapter Conclusion

During the Bosnian and Croatian wars (1991-1995), Croatian lesbian feminists decided to unite with members of the gay community and solidarity organisations domestically and internationally. The objective behind these alliances was growth in resilience and durability against the inhospitable social climate of Croatia and the possibility of increased effectiveness. The Lesbian and Gay Action LIGMA used the collective framework and mission of their joint struggle for gay and lesbian public awareness and human rights. Even so, the contemporary social and political climate rendered any strides in queer activism and human rights impossible. The intolerance of Croatian society and the continuing war on the territory diminished the importance and relevancy of the members of the lesbian and gay community and its allies. The

¹¹⁸ 'Nexus: Fax from Zagreb', 22 June 1993, ARCH03280 -Doos 28 Map 1. Deel 1: Correspondentie Balkanlanden 1993-1994, International Archive of Social History.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

persistence of the war, insured itself, in all daily affairs, trickling over in the activities of the queer advocacy. During the wars, LIGMA initiated solidarity and humanitarian aid and commenced collaborations with anti-war organisations. These initiatives were organised domestically and internationally, using transnational (lesbian) feminist networks. It used international media exposure. The cooperation between LIGMA and *ARKzine*, the magazine of the Croatian anti-war movement, with *Speak Out*, highlights the domestic activity of anti-war activism. By initiating partnerships with national anti-war activist groups and introducing a queer element, it contributed to the awareness of LGB issues concerning general and transnational anti-war activism movements during the Bosnian and Croatian Wars. Furthermore, *ARKzin*, had strong ties with anti-war solidarity movements worldwide, continuing global activism.

Another point of action by LIGMA was the alliance of solidarity movements. In the beginning stages of the establishment, the organisation worked together with the TRP, providing aid on a financial level. Another organisation with which it aligned was the ILGA. Via this lesbian and gay organisation, it tapped into the global, transnational network of queer activists. Here appeals for refugee shelters could be sent around, resulting in financial support. The initiative WE ARE HERE TOO, founded by LIGMA supposed to provide a refuge for Lesbian and Gay refugees coming from the territories of war in Croatia and BiH in the city of Zagreb. The blueprint was subsequently shared as an appeal by LIGMA, ILGA and NEXUS to attain international aid and support. It received much correspondence between ILGA's different actors and members. This example illustrates how LIGMA used the transnational (lesbian) feminist community to receive financial, material and advisory aid for supporting lesbian and gay refugees from war areas in Croatia and BiH.

Chapter 2: Women in Black Belgrade (WiB) and transnational feminist sisterhood.

On October 9, 1991, *Zene u Crnom*, or Women in Black Against War Belgrade (WiB), took to the streets of Belgrade in order to protest against the war in Croatia.¹²⁰ The inspiration for the Serbian organisation came from the Israeli group Women in Black, who dressed in complementary colours while protesting in silence their country's treatment of the Palestinians and, closer to home, a similar demonstration in Sarajevo, Croatia on September 27 1991.¹²¹ However, as the conflict developed, it would also include the wars in BiH and Kosovo. The main activity was the organisation of non-violent demonstrations in the form of silent vigils. The attendees consisted of a majority of female demonstrators dressed in black, who stood in silence on the Republican square in Belgrade every Wednesday accompanied by banners. Although the number of participants remained small, the vigil was crucial in maintaining the pressure and presence of the women against the war in the capital.¹²² Furthermore, WiB organised international meetings, creating space for discussion on themes such as women's rights, anti-nationalism, and anti-militarism.¹²³ Simultaneously, it allowed women in the former Yugoslavia to experience the transnationality of sisterhood. Moreover, it published and sent out press releases, interviews, and articles on war-related issues.¹²⁴ The core themes of feminism, anti-nationalism and solidarity provided the pillars behind the organisation.

¹²⁰ Tanya Renne, *Ana's Land: Sisterhood i Eastern Europe* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1997), 180.

¹²¹ Athena Athanasiou, *Agonistic Mourning: Political Dissidence and the Women in Black*, Incitements (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 33, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=1584843>.

¹²² Renne, *Ana's Land: Sisterhood i Eastern Europe*, 182.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 180.

¹²⁴ Ana. Miškovska Kajevska, 'Taking a Stand in Times of Violent Societal Changes: Belgrade and Zagreb Feminists' Positionings on the (Post-)Yugoslav Wars and Each Other (1991-2000)' ([S.l., s.n.], 2014), 156, WorldCat.org.

Feminism

Upon seeing the logo of the WiB, the core feminist motive behind the organisation is presented.¹²⁵ The dove, a known symbol of peace, combined with the face, which one could perceive as having feminine features, shows the relationship between feminism and peace. (Figure 2., below) The logo imposes its critical feminist perspective on the patriarchal nature of militarism, fighting the broadly culturally shared Serbian sentiment of the glorification of war. From the “second-wave feminism” in 1985-1986 in Yugoslavia, LGBT activism and anti-female violence were at the top of the list in the feminist movement.¹²⁶ However, the war separated the different humanitarian groups, and queer activism was deemed less of a priority with the rise of continuous human rights violations.¹²⁷ Nonetheless, while the war continued, all separate missions seemed to come together - feminism, lesbianism, and pacifism - in a movement for human rights.¹²⁸ Lesbian feminist activists were still active in Serbia. However, they seemed to be shifting their main focus and participation to feminist and anti-militarist missions, joining organisations such as WiB, Centre for anti-war Action or SOS hotline.¹²⁹

Furthermore, transnational lesbian feminists continued to be in contact throughout the war. Lepa Mladjenovic writes in the American radical feminist magazine *Off Our Backs*: "Many lesbians, feminists and pacifists from this country and other countries have supported us, sent post cards, packages (before the embargo), letters, books and journals and words of love."¹³⁰ The principal initiator of WiB was the feminist activist Staša Zajović, who had a long-

¹²⁵ Zajovic.

¹²⁶ Zsófia Lóránd, *The Feminist Challenge to the Socialist State in Yugoslavia*, *Genders and Sexualities in History* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 5, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-78223-2>.

¹²⁷ Lepa Mladjenovic, 'III. Notes of a Feminist Lesbian during Wartime', *European Journal of Women's Studies* 8, no. 3 (2001): 387.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 384.

¹²⁹ Maria Lis Baiocchi, 'Women in Black: Mobilization into Anti-Nationalist, Anti-Militarist, Feminist Activism in Serbia', *CEU Political Science Journal* 4, no. 4 (2009): 481.

¹³⁰ Lepa Mladjenovic, 'Loving Women, Fighting War: A Serbian Lesbian Examines Militarism and Homophobia', *Off Our Backs* 24, no. 9 (1994): 8.

standing career in feminist activism.¹³¹ Previously, Zajović engaged in the Centre for Anti-war Action (CAWA), a mixed-gender group. Although the CAWA had a female majority in membership, the women noticed that issues of gender within the peace movement were not addressed, and patriarchal models were repeated.¹³² For example, while having a majority of female participants, men got the most media attention for their accomplishments.¹³³ The motive behind establishing a separate women's group was to make women's anti-war activism public and private efforts more visible.¹³⁴ Generally, women's resistance to war takes on a more intimate or hidden form due to their "role" as women as carers who tend to others.¹³⁵ Furthermore, due to the highly gendered manner of the Serbian warfare, pertaining to the use of rape camps, the Serbian feminist anti-war activism situated itself in the counter-position to alternative militarised, gendered, and sexualised sovereignty.¹³⁶ Similarities can be drawn between male violence, militarism, nationalism, domestic violence, homophobia and armed conflict, all coming together in the patriarchal code of hate against the 'Other'.¹³⁷ The WiB activists were demonstrating in their struggle to demystify and bring to attention the issue of sexualised war violence against women and bringing agency to women.¹³⁸ In the 1993 report of *Women in Peace*, the reasoning behind the silent vigil is illustrated:

We wanted our presence to be VISIBLE, not to be seen as something 'natural,' as part of a woman's role. We wanted it to be clearly understood that what we were doing was our political choice, a radical criticism of the

¹³¹ Athanasiou, *Agonistic Mourning: Political Dissidence and the Women in Black*, 49.

¹³² Baiocchi, 'Women in Black: Mobilization into Anti-Nationalist, Anti-Militarist, Feminist Activism in Serbia', 481.

¹³³ Miškovska Kajevska, 'Taking a Stand in Times of Violent Societal Changes: Belgrade and Zagreb Feminists' Positionings on the (Post-)Yugoslav Wars and Each Other (1991-2000)', 154.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Vesna Kesic, Marguerite R Waller, and Jennifer Rycenga, 'Frontline Feminisms: Women, War and Resistance', 2000, 257.

¹³⁶ Athanasiou, *Agonistic Mourning: Political Dissidence and the Women in Black*, 49.

¹³⁷ Mladjenovic, 'III. Notes of a Feminist Lesbian during Wartime', 389.

¹³⁸ Athanasiou, *Agonistic Mourning: Political Dissidence and the Women in Black*, 48.

patriarchal, militarist regime and a nonviolent act of resistance to policies that destroy cities, kill people, and annihilate human relations.¹³⁹



Figure 2. Cover of 'Women for Peace' report 1992-1993.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁹ Staša Zajovic, 'Women in Black against War.', *Women for Peace Anthology*, 8 March 1993, M EUR 8 1993 - C, Atria.

¹⁴⁰ Staša Zajovic, 'Cover', *Women for Peace: Anthology*, 8 March 1993, M EUR 8 1993 - C, Atria.

Anti-nationalism

The root of WiB's militant anti-war position intersected with women's suffering. Thus, this feminist commitment conflicted with the official patriarchal and nationalist military decisions that further fragmented the people of the once-united country throughout the decade of war in the 1990s and its aftermath.¹⁴¹ WiB adopted an anti-nationalist stance, which it proclaimed publicly.¹⁴² It was one of the first groups publicly denouncing and protesting the war in Croatia and the regime of Slobodan Milosevic for the atrocities it was committing. As a result, it positioned itself as the antithesis of the Serbian nation-state.¹⁴³ Its core motives aligned with the mentality that saw the Serbian regime as egregious aggressors responsible for the violence, war, and absence of civil democracy and civil society.¹⁴⁴ In this manner, the group had diverged from other NGOs in Serbia around the time, who implemented a policy of anti-nationalism to avoid internal conflict.¹⁴⁵

Not all feminists and their collectives shared the vehemently critical attitude towards the emergent definition of ethnonational citizenship.¹⁴⁶ Most WiB members did not acknowledge ethnicity as a dominating factor in nationalism, proclaiming their belonging to the Yugoslav race. They publicly rejected their belonging to the Serbian nation-state, noted for its work with individuals and communities who were victims of crimes committed by Serbian

¹⁴¹ Jasmina Tumbas, Amelia Jones, and Marsha Meskimmon, *'I Am Jugoslovenka!': Feminist Performance Politics during and after Yugoslav Socialism*, Rethinking Art's Histories (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2022), 427,

<https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=3177205>.

¹⁴² Vera Litrichin and Lepa Mladjenovic, "Belgrade Feminists," in *Ana's Land: Sisterhood in Eastern Europe*, ed. Tanya Renne (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997): 183.

¹⁴³ Baiocchi, 'Women in Black: Mobilization into Anti-Nationalist, Anti-Militarist, Feminist Activism in Serbia', 481.

¹⁴⁴ Renne, *Ana's Land: Sisterhood i Eastern Europe*, 182.

¹⁴⁵ Kesic, Waller, and Rycenga, 'Frontline Feminisms: Women, War and Resistance', 252.

¹⁴⁶ Athanasiou, *Agonistic Mourning: Political Dissidence and the Women in Black*, 53.

forces in "their name."¹⁴⁷ WiB assumed the not belonging to national identity as a political space for feminist critique of the politics of nationalism and its gendered underpinnings.¹⁴⁸ It was an unpopular position in a political environment where any vision that attempted to offer a paradigm that questioned the Serbian ethnic mission was shunned for jeopardising the nation's struggle against its supposed extinction.

Solidarity

The origins of WiB in Serbia, within a global organisation, highlight its transnational character as an international network for female advocacy. While the issues the Serbian group addresses are situation-specific, belonging to the worldwide network provides a broadly shared mission of solidarity, peace promotion and fighting the patriarchy.¹⁴⁹ Furthermore, another political aim of WiB was to strengthen the solidarity and community among women separated by war and borders.¹⁵⁰ The latter helped significantly in mediating the communication among feminist groups in different regions of Yugoslavia during the war at a time of closed borders and blocked all manner of contact.¹⁵¹ The women from Serbia did not have first-hand experience of war, and at least at the beginning of the conflict, could afford a much more political approach to their engagement.¹⁵² Thus, they would use it in solidarity to fight for people under militarist

¹⁴⁷ María O'Reilly, *Gendered Agency in War and Peace: Gender Justice and Women's Activism in Post-Conflict Bosnia-Herzegovina*, *Rethinking Peace and Conflict Studies* (London, United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 164, <https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-352-00145-7>.

¹⁴⁸ Athanasiou, Athena. *Agonistic Mourning: Political Dissidence and the Women in Black*. Incitements. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017, 54.

¹⁴⁹ Max Stephenson Jr and Laura Zanotti, 'Implementing the Liberal Peace in Post-Conflict Scenarios: The Case of Women in Black-Serbia', *Global Policy* 3, no. 1 (2012): 46, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1758-5899.2011.00102.x>; Staša Zajovic, 'Conference on Women's Solidarity in Venice, February 21-23, 1992.', *Women for Peace: Anthology*, 8 March 1993, 35, M EUR 8 1993 - C, Atria.

¹⁵⁰ Kesic, Waller, and Rycenga, 'Frontline Feminisms: Women, War and Resistance', 257.

¹⁵¹ Athanasiou, *Agonistic Mourning: Political Dissidence and the Women in Black*, 59.

¹⁵² Bojan Bilic, 'In a Crevice between Gender and Nation: Croatian and Serbian Women in 1990s Anti-War Activism', *Slovo (London, England)* 23, no. 2 (2011): 108.

aggression and the erasure of Muslim women.¹⁵³ Besides the element of (sexual) war violence against women, it became a central issue for all women in Yugoslavia. Effects of this gendered violence were experienced through work with refugees or the threat that nationalist tendencies might bring similar acts of violence to a woman's back door.¹⁵⁴ When the news about the war rapes in BiH emerged in August 1992, these groups responded immediately and consistently, setting up solidarity networks and organising numerous protest actions, struggling to demystify and denaturalise the issue of sexualised war violence against women and attempting to put it onto the agenda of international institutions.¹⁵⁵ All in order to connect with the entire Yugoslav region Europe and the world to build a more robust and tender network of sisterhood and solidarity.¹⁵⁶ A WiB statement released on June 10, 1992, unequivocally reiterates the principle of solidarity:

*We are the group of women who believe that solidarity is one of the deepest values of our existence, that active solidarity between women is the force and the tenderness by which we can overcome isolation, loneliness, traumas, and other consequences of hatred. We are the ones who come out in public with our bodies and our visions of a world without war, rape, violence, and militarism.*¹⁵⁷

¹⁵³ Miškowska Kajevska, 'Taking a Stand in Times of Violent Societal Changes: Belgrade and Zagreb Feminists' Positionings on the (Post-)Yugoslav Wars and Each Other (1991-2000)', 182.

¹⁵⁴ Mladjenovic, 'Loving Women, Fighting War: A Serbian Lesbian Examines Militarism and Homophobia', 8; Renne, *Ana's Land: Sisterhood i Eastern Europe*, 8.

¹⁵⁵ Athanasiou, *Agonistic Mourning: Political Dissidence and the Women in Black*, 48.

¹⁵⁶ Staša Zajovic, 'Zene u Crnom Protiv Rata, December 1991.', *Women for Peace Anthology*, 8 March 1993, M EUR 8 1993 - C, Atria.

¹⁵⁷ Staša Zajovic, 'Women in Black against War, June 10, 1992.', *Women for Peace: Anthology*, 8 March 1993, M EUR 8 1993 - C, Atria.

Silent vigils

As mentioned above, the core activity of WIB, in which the three pillars of WiB united, was the silent vigil signs with messages of peace hosted on the Republican Square in Belgrade every Wednesday from 15:30-16:30. (Figure 3., below)¹⁵⁸ The groups discarded activist tactics such as the exclamation of loud slogans. Instead, they used the deafening silence as their tool of activism, denouncing Serbia's role in the Bosnian and Croatian War.¹⁵⁹ The participants symbolise women's condition in war: as refugees, as those who care for refugees, as mothers and sisters of the dead, and as those raped and forced into prostitution.¹⁶⁰ In their appeals, they point to the intersectionality of the patriarchy, sexism, nationalism and warfare. Mladjenovic, looking back in 1999, expresses the reasoning for the silent vigils, dressed in black during the Bosnian Croatian War:

We felt that we needed to go out into the street in order to communicate our message to the public at large that we opposed the Serbian regime and its involvement in wars in Croatia and Bosnia and that we opposed militarism and violence against women. Each Wednesday, I would get up and think of the clothes I would wear. By choosing black in a time of war, we hoped that part of our sense of helplessness would be transformed into strength and action. So, it continued, standing on the street in black and in silence, season after season, for all the years of the war.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁸ Lepa Mladjenovic, 'Beyond War Hierarchies: Belgrade Feminists' Experience Working with Female Survivors of War', *Women & Therapy* 22, no. 1 (1999): 84, https://doi.org/10.1300/J015v22n01_07.

¹⁵⁹ Athanasiou, *Agonistic Mourning: Political Dissidence and the Women in Black*, 11.

¹⁶⁰ Renne, *Ana's Land: Sisterhood i Eastern Europe*, 182.

¹⁶¹ Mladjenovic, 'Beyond War Hierarchies: Belgrade Feminists' Experience Working with Female Survivors of War', 84.

The decision to wear black during these vigils lay in resistance, not a surrender to mourning, and was a symbolic propagation of resistance to the violence of war and everyday life.¹⁶² While the protests focused on specific wars, the moral reasoning was to rally against all aspects of violence towards and discrimination against all women, unencumbered by differences in ethnicity, culture, sexuality and ideology.¹⁶³ During the breakup of Yugoslavia, radical re-inscription of mourning by WiB was a de-authorising response to the continuous stream of media images of grieving women, used in manipulating the public into strategies to call for reparation for the sake of the nation.¹⁶⁴ The re-inscription of mourning as a political tool was used to bring the Bosnian and Croatian Wars to the attention of the Serbian population and the government responsible for the mourning.¹⁶⁵ Wearing black in some cultures means mourning, and the feminist act of dressing in black transforms women's traditional passive mourning for the dead in war into a decisive rejection of the logic of war. In the 1993 report of 'Women in Peace', the 1992 statement of the organisation elaborated on the use of black in the demonstrations:

*We are a group of women who stand in silence and black every week to express our disapproval of the war. We have decided to see what is the women's side of this war. Women wear black in our countries to show their grief for the death of their loved ones. We wear black for the death of all the victims of war. We wear black because the people have been thrown out of their homes because women have been raped, because cities and villages have been burned and destroyed.*¹⁶⁶

¹⁶² Renne, *Ana's Land: Sisterhood i Eastern Europe*, 174.

¹⁶³ 'About Us - Žene u Crnom Beograd', *Žene u Crnom* (blog), accessed 5 January 2023, <https://zeneucrnom.org/en/about>.

¹⁶⁴ Athanasiou, *Agonistic Mourning: Political Dissidence and the Women in Black*, 60.

¹⁶⁵ 'About Us - Žene u Crnom Beograd'.

¹⁶⁶ Zajovic, 'Women in Black against War, June 10, 1992.'



Figure 3. Women in Black protesting in a silent vigil, published in “Op ons kunnen ze rekenen” May 1993. ¹⁶⁷

International Media Exposure

WiB had to circumnavigate the propagated Serbian media in order to attain legitimacy, agency and safety. International media exposure, especially from the West, would incite global awareness, support and solidarity for the movement and its cause.¹⁶⁸ The domestic media would not allow for the publication of anti-Serbian statements and activities, rendering the participant of the activist organisations a "traitor of the Serbian nation."¹⁶⁹ The freedom of the press in Serbia lasted until the end of the war and was enshrined in the Yugoslav Constitution; in practice, it meant that the government had a firm grip on the totality of the press, which allowed for the elimination of the independent press and the continued broadcasting of propaganda.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁷ ‘Op Ons Kunnen Ze Rekenen.’, *Informatie Folder van Steunpunt Anti-Oorlog Groepen in Voormalig Joegoslavië*, April 1993, ARCH02201 – 617, Collectie Sociale Documentatie Sociale Bewegingen (CSD).

¹⁶⁸ Tineke van der Berg, ‘We Hebben Daar de Hele Tijd Zitten Huilen.’, *De Gelderlander*, 17 April 1993, ARCH02602 – 1, Archief Lopend Vuur. Afdeling Nijmegen.

¹⁶⁹ Mladjenovic, ‘Loving Women, Fighting War: A Serbian Lesbian Examines Militarism and Homophobia’, 8.

¹⁷⁰ Bart Rijs, ‘Bewind in Belgrado Maakt Onafhankelijke Media Stuk.’, *De Volkskrant*, 11 January 1995, ARCH02399 – 137, Archief Press Now; Baiocchi, ‘Women in Black: Mobilization into Anti-Nationalist, Anti-Militarist, Feminist Activism in Serbia’, 481.

Thus, WiB actively pursued international media outlets to inform the global public about their existence and political agenda. It primarily sought media outlets from sisterhood organisations, drawing upon the transnational feminist movement. While these feminist outlets would instigate an initial wave of global recognition and awareness of the political landscape of the Yugoslav women in war, it would boil over to the general media. WIB published interviews, letters and calls for action in newspapers and magazines globally.¹⁷¹

Off Our Backs

One of the feminist magazines that would provide ample publication space for the messages of WiB was *Off Our Backs*. The magazine was founded in late 1969 as an initiative to set up an anti-war coffeehouse.¹⁷² However, it transformed into its contemporary form after continuous discontent with the publication of feminist material by the (almost entirely male) editors and journalists of the leftist press.¹⁷³ The primary rationale behind the magazine is the belief that women's rights are a transnational and global movement.¹⁷⁴ Thus, the paper would function as an international platform which would provide room for information and discussion on relevant issues around the globe.¹⁷⁵ It used the efforts of volunteers and independent writers who could freely use the magazine as a stage for its domestic matters.¹⁷⁶ On multiple occasions, *Off Our Backs* magazine functioned as a platform for feminist anti-war activism from Serbia. It was often active in WiB in their quest for awareness and messages of solidarity to the Yugoslav Sisters in Croatia and BiH.

¹⁷¹ Sharon Groves, 'Celebrating "Off Our Backs" 35 Years of Independent Feminist Publishing', *Feminist Studies* 31, no. 2 (2005): 448.

¹⁷² Ken Wachsberger, 'Off Our Backs: The First Four Decades', vol. pt. 1 (Unknown: Michigan State University Press, 2012), 157, <https://doi.org/10.14321/j.ctt7ztbj3.13>.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Groves, 'Celebrating "Off Our Backs" 35 Years of Independent Feminist Publishing', 448.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 449.

In the 1992 edition Mladjenovic, active in Women in Black, wrote an article describing the political and social environment of anti-war feminists in Serbia. Feelings of separation, guilt and identity crisis haunted the picture she portrayed. The writing provides the reader with a short synopsis of Serbian feminist history, elaborating on its movements and organisations of the past and present. The example below by Mladjenovic in the article Belgrade Feminists 1992: Separation, Guilt and Identity Crisis in Off Our Backs illustrates the crossroads at which they are residing:

(...)we know that if we stand on the streets as small women's groups against the war, we expose ourselves to insults, but we still do that and feel brave. We know that if we are to deny the concept of national identity, there is nothing else they will allow us to stand for in exchange; we know that while men are urged to die courageously for their nation, raped and murdered women will never be considered brave, except by - us. We know that if we are to say aloud who we are and what we want, there will be no historically accepted political patterns for our experience or our language. And yet here we are.¹⁷⁷

Furthermore, the magazine would dedicate special rubrics to specific themes like war. In the article “Voices from War 1993”, the magazine interviewed a collection of women from BiH, Croatia and Serbia. The participants were in America visiting the Mother Courage Peace Tour, sponsored by Madre. In the interview, Mladjenovic elaborates on the current situation of the Bosnian and Croatian war and the role of Serbia, specifically the anti-war feminists and

¹⁷⁷ Lepa Mladjenovic, Vera Litricin, en Tanya Renne, ‘Belgrade Feminists 1992: Separation, Guilt and Identity Crisis’, *Off Our Backs* 3, nr. 23 (maart 1993): 3, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1395352>.

their domestic recognition, “They don’t know, for example, that Women in Black exist, that there’s anything like peace movements.”¹⁷⁸ With this article, the transnational feminist movement is enlightened, and awareness is grown about the Serbian peace initiatives. It presents the reader with the knowledge of ethnic cleansing and the understanding of it happening on Croatian and Bosnian soil by the Serbian military, information censored by the patriarchal and racist state media. Furthermore, the interview with Mladjenovic in *Off Our Backs* in 1994 provides insight into the mechanics behind the creation of war and vocabulary:

Of course, we have this very complicated, contradictory situation as feminists. First, we see that rape is presented by the media as a nationalist problem. Then we had to take step one further and say, okay, it's a woman's issue, but it's also a political issue because if it's done in a massive and systematic way and as an instrument of "ethnic cleansing," so it's not only a women's issue. All the time, we are learning. We don't have a long history of feminism where we could have caught onto what was happening so fast. We are trying to see ourselves and then talk to our women friends in Zagreb, and they said, well, this is "ethnic cleansing." It's so difficult to realise for us what's going on and to name something which you have never known before because we didn't even know what "ethnic cleansing" is.¹⁷⁹

In October 1994, Mladjenovic was allowed to return to the pages of *Off Our Backs*. This time she wrote explicitly about the role of women in the war, with the title “Loving Women, Fighting War”. In the article, she underlines the importance of solidarity towards the

¹⁷⁸ Lepa Mladjenovic et al., ‘Voices from a War: An Interview’, *Off Our Backs* 23, no. 5 (1993): 8.

¹⁷⁹ Mladjenovic et al., ‘Loving Women, Fighting War: A Serbian Lesbian Examines Militarism and Homophobia’, 14.

people of Croatia and BiH, toughing upon the distorted reality of not aligning with the regime of the territory in which one resides. Besides, it writes about the unnatural feeling of belonging to a nation at war while lacking in experiencing it ultimately. Mladjenovic writes: "But I am not a war survivor, I am not a refugee, I am not a Serbian mother. The city I live in was not ruined. I do not identify with the regime nor the nation I come from."¹⁸⁰ Another example of how WiB was influential in the Serbian public environment is presented in this quote from Mladjenovic in *Off Our Backs* in 1994:

*There are no more peace demonstrations on the streets of Belgrade; we are the only persistent positive warriors who believe that small acts of public disobedience are meaningful. We know they don't change any political decision, but they change our lives, and they matter to other women.*¹⁸¹

International solidarity movements

Another manner in which WiB brought about change and advocacy for the cause was to establish a network of global anti-war movements, growing the international discourse of their mission. The growing notoriety in the international community, via the workings of the transnational feminist network, allowed for an influx in international visitors and the establishment of solidarity groups concerning the Women in Black Belgrade organisation. Furthermore, the recognition by the West, and the simultaneous organisation of freedom trips and solidarity movements, supported the protection of the people involved and the organisation's legitimacy. As mentioned before, the anti-Serbian regime sentimentality was a dangerous attitude to proclaim publicly, and the activists were often subjected to police

¹⁸⁰ Mladjenovic, 'Loving Women, Fighting War: A Serbian Lesbian Examines Militarism and Homophobia', 8.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

interrogation, blackmail and intimidation in order to break the cohesion of the group.¹⁸² Furthermore, from 1993 onwards, the state initiated illegitimate legal proceedings against their public declarations in the vigils.¹⁸³ WiB became the scapegoat of the Serbian government for lack of acknowledgement of war and responsibility.¹⁸⁴ In the article *Off Our Back* in 1994, Mladjenovic writes, "*Some of us are harassed by police from time to time, just to be reminded that 'they are watching us.'*"¹⁸⁵ At a social level, the demonstrators were subjected to physical and verbal attacks during their street actions and were also socially stigmatised and criminalised.¹⁸⁶

Participation in the global feminist network Women in Black allowed for the spread of transnational messages of solidarity and activism. The Italian charter, *Le Donne in Nero*, was exceptionally fundamental in the early stages of the Belgrade chapter, organising the first feminist anti-war meeting between Croats and Serbs since the beginning of the war in 1992.¹⁸⁷ Next to the already existing network of WiB, independent solidarity movements were being established worldwide. These groups would organise benefits to collect money for the cause and organise freedom trips. (Figure 4., below)¹⁸⁸ The visitor used the time to get a feel of the state of the countries in the war, connect with similar thinking organisations on the ground floor and transfer supplies from their domestic countries.¹⁸⁹ While most organisations seemed to work with the CAWA in Belgrade, the Deventer charter of the Dutch solidarity

¹⁸² Baiocchi, 'Women in Black: Mobilization into Anti-Nationalist, Anti-Militarist, Feminist Activism in Serbia', 483–84.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Mladjenovic, 'Loving Women, Fighting War: A Serbian Lesbian Examines Militarism and Homophobia', 8.

¹⁸⁶ Baiocchi, 'Women in Black: Mobilization into Anti-Nationalist, Anti-Militarist, Feminist Activism in Serbia', 483–84.

¹⁸⁷ Miškovska Kajevska, 'Taking a Stand in Times of Violent Societal Changes: Belgrade and Zagreb Feminists' Positionings on the (Post-)Yugoslav Wars and Each Other (1991-2000)', 91.

¹⁸⁸ 'Cover', *Anti-War Action; Benefit Festivals for the Former Yugoslavia.*, 1992, ARCH04651 - Doos 002 Map 2.2, Documentatiecollectie Solidariteitsbewegingen in Nederland.

¹⁸⁹ 'Cover', *Anti-War Action; Benefit Festivals for the Former Yugoslavia.*, 1992, ARCH04651 - Doos 002 Map 2.2, Archief Internationale solidariteit.

organisation *Lopend Vuur* adopted WiB as their central organisation and beneficiary of all its collections.¹⁹⁰ In a diary entry of a Dutch activist, published on January 27 1993, in the Newsletter of *Steunpunt voor Actiegroepen in Voormalige Joegoslavië*, participating in a silent vigil on a freedom trip to Belgrade, one can see the popularity of international activists visiting the WiB:

*Today 94 freedom tourists from Italy arrived. Freedom tourists, I am cynical about people who come here to watch. Even though we are doing the same thing. At three, we are again with Women in Black. (...) This time we are of course with a higher number of participants, because a large group of Italians are joining us.*¹⁹¹

¹⁹⁰ 'Lopend Vuur: Notulen Vergadering.', 22 April 1993, ARCH02602 – 1, Archief Lopend Vuur. Afdeling Nijmegen.

¹⁹¹ Steunpunt Vredesgroepen in voormalig Joegoslavië, 'Nieuwsbrief Steunpunt Vredesgroepen in Voormalig Joegoslavië.', 27 January 1993, ARCH04651 - Doos 002 Map 2.2, Archief Internationale solidariteit.



Figure 4. Cover of a booklet by the Dutch organisation Anti-War Action about all its benefit festivals towards the former Yugoslavia from 1992.¹⁹²

Le Donne in Nero

The feminist organisation *Le Donne in Nero Italia* (Women in Black Italy) preceded the Serbian chapter of WiB. The establishment of the silent vigils was a reaction to the women's demonstrations towards Italian participation in the Gulf War.¹⁹³ It would not just be an inspiration: the organisation was pivotal in the start-up phase of the WiB. It provided financial support, allowed for renting office space and established a network with international and local peace groups.¹⁹⁴ As previously mentioned, the global WiB organisation was primarily involved in establishing a more comprehensive network of anti-war feminist groups, consisting of women from the region and internationally organising annual meetings for solidarity against

¹⁹² 'Cover' Anti-War Action, 1992.

¹⁹³ M Korac, *Linking Arms: Women and War in Post-Yugoslav States* (Life and Peace Institute, 1998), 34.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

war, nationalism and violence. *Le Donne in Nero* continued this trend and organised a solidarity meeting in Venice from the 21st to the 23rd of February 1992. (Figure 5.)¹⁹⁵ The location would function as a neutral ground away from the violent disintegration of Yugoslavia, where (post-)Yugoslav feminists and peace activists would exchange their experiences of the country's violent collapse, facilitating dialogue in a third country.¹⁹⁶

Furthermore, it provided a feeling of the globality of sisterhood. Italian women would facilitate exchange under the themes of nationalism, gender identity and violence while allowing for the re-establishment of the Yugoslav sisterhood, a shared mission against war, and restarting communication lines.¹⁹⁷ During the war years, it was difficult to maintain communication between different feminist groups. Nonetheless, the groups managed, with difficulty, to send out messages, news, food and books and tried to make the journey to meet with their Yugoslav sisters face-to-face.¹⁹⁸

Each year, WiB published an extensive report of international meetings entitled '*Women for Peace*'.¹⁹⁹ It consisted of transcriptions of debates, presentations and statements. The debate transcript shows that the meeting was turbulent, and tensions between the different feminists from nations at war rose. (Figure 6.)²⁰⁰ Although intended for listening to one another and expressing solidarity and support, the gathering would end in anger, disbelief, disappointment, pain leading to the cessation of friendships. Italian participants were excluded from the conversation, and the Croatian-Serbian nationalist dispute overtook most of the

¹⁹⁵ Zajovic, 'Conference on Women's Solidarity in Venice, February 21-23, 1992.', 35.

¹⁹⁶ Miškovska Kajevska, 'Taking a Stand in Times of Violent Societal Changes: Belgrade and Zagreb Feminists' Positionings on the (Post-)Yugoslav Wars and Each Other (1991-2000)', 91.

¹⁹⁷ Zajovic, 'Conference on Women's Solidarity in Venice, February 21-23, 1992.', 36; Renne, *Ana's Land: Sisterhood i Eastern Europe*, 182.

¹⁹⁸ Mladjenovic, 'Beyond War Hierarchies: Belgrade Feminists' Experience Working with Female Survivors of War', 88.

¹⁹⁹ Zajovic, 'Conference on Women's Solidarity in Venice, February 21-23, 1992.', 36.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

meetings and discussions.²⁰¹ The blaming of the Serbian feminist for the actions of the Serbian regime raised emotions high.

At the same time, this outcome would inspire the creation of other networks and friendships. Due to the ineffectiveness of the meeting in Venice, the activists of Women in Black from Belgrade and Pancevo (Vojvodina) decided to organise an international women's peace and solidarity gathering in the summer of the same year, proving more successful in their territory and succeeded in being organised throughout the 1990s.²⁰²



Figure 5. The poster of the international meeting between feminists from the Former Yugoslavia in Venice on 21-23 of February 1992.²⁰³

²⁰¹ Bilic, 'In a Crevice between Gender and Nation: Croatian and Serbian Women in 1990s Anti-War Activism', 108.

²⁰² Miškovska Kajevska, 'Taking a Stand in Times of Violent Societal Changes: Belgrade and Zagreb Feminists' Positionings on the (Post-)Yugoslav Wars and Each Other (1991-2000)', 91.

²⁰³ 'Le Donne in Nero, Fuori Dalla Guerra Un Luogo Di Dialogo.', <https://www.balcanicaucaso.org/Media/Gallerie/Donne-in-Nero-e-Balcani-un-volto-del-pacifismo-italiano#&gid=1&pid=7>.

MIRJANA: We haven't talked about the war yet, about who started it. This war is not an ethnic but a political war: we therefore must articulate it politically. We have to name the aggressor and the victim.

LJILJANA: I too am a victim, for I didn't want this war...

MIRJANA: I am a woman, but I am also a citizen of Croatia. The victim must be named. We have to say who among us is the victim

MARINA(Venice): All right, but do you think that makes you better than rest of us, that the victim is worthier.

LJILJANA: All of us are victims.

ASJA: I speak as woman-victim of war; women were targeted in this special war in Croatia, it being sequel to that which had already happened on Kosovo.

LJILJANA: From the very beginning, we the activists of the Belgrade Anti-War Center assumed that mobilization was illegal and that every man had the right not to comply with it.

STASA: 85% of the draftees in Belgrade did not respond. 25000 men are still hiding in order to avoid forceful mobilization. Even the Serbian regime had to admit that the response was poor.

ASJA: Where was that?

LJILJANA: In Belgrade.

ASJA: And what about the rest of Serbia?

STASA: It depends on the region.

ASJA: But I want to hear the numbers, the numbers...

LJILJANA: Asja keeps insisting on numbers. What numbers do you want? It's difficult to ascertain the exact number. We know the approximate number of draft-resisters, of those tried and of those who have fled the country.

MARINA(Venice): But I thought you had come here to talk and not in order to discuss some numbers, not in order to be interrogated.

ASJA: I beg you not to interfere, at least not now. Leave us alone.

(Asja also demanded that the interpreting be discontinued, but the suggestion was reject by most of the women. The attempt to exclude the Italian friend was unfair and unpleasant.)

VERONIKA: For example, in June of 1991, out of 150 draftees only one answered the call where

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Figure 6. Transcript of the debate during the Conference on Women's Solidarity in Venice 21-23 of February 1992.²⁰⁴

²⁰⁴ Zajovic, 'Conference on Women's Solidarity in Venice, February 21-23, 1992.', 37.

Lopend Vuur

Besides belonging to the international Women in Black community, WiB aligned themselves with individual solidarity organisations in Europe, such as *Lopend Vuur Deventer*. The Dutch solidarity organisation *Lopend Vuur* (Wildfire) was founded by the Dutch Feminist activist Tineke van der Brug due to an open letter she wrote to the Dutch newspaper *de Volkskrant* in September 1992.²⁰⁵ In this letter, she wrote about the horrors of the Bosnian concentration camps, which she linked to those previously in Germany.²⁰⁶ Furthermore, she asked the Dutch population to come into action and go to the territory to protest on-site.²⁰⁷ A Dutch solidarity organisation was necessary to support the civil movements and provide them legitimacy and possibly more safety.²⁰⁸ Even though she thought this letter would be enough to get hundreds of responses, she and the nine others only responses met and set up *Lopend Vuur*. The passion for activism was not new; Van de Brug had previously been engaged in social activism in the Dutch radical feminist organisation *Dolle Mina* in the 60s that fought for the right to abortion and the establishment of Women's Studies at Dutch Universities.²⁰⁹

The activities that fell under *Lopend Vuur* were all in order to raise domestic awareness for the end of the war in former Yugoslavia. This mission is reflected in the name *Lopend Vuur*, which translates to Wildfire. The mentality was that the organisation, support, and acknowledgement of the Yugoslav wars and violence and the necessity for peace would spread like wildfire.²¹⁰ The organisation's founders encouraged everyone to collect and set up their city

²⁰⁵ Hans Feddema, 'We Waren Inuïtief Tegen Militair Ingrijpen.', *Groenlinks*, November 1993, ARCH02602 – 1, Archief Lopend Vuur. Afdeling Nijmegen - ARCH02602 – 1.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ van der Berg, 'We Hebben Daar de Hele Tijd Zitten Huilen.'

²⁰⁹ Dolle Mina, 'Dolle Mina', *Off Our Backs* 1, no. 19 (1971): 3; Hans Feddema, 'We Waren Inuïtief Tegen Militair Ingrijpen.', *Groenlinks*, November 1993, ARCH02602 – 1, Archief Lopend Vuur. Afdeling Nijmegen - ARCH02602 – 1.

²¹⁰ 'Akties Als Een Lopend Vuurtje.', *Gebeden Op Maandag*, November 1993, ARCH02602 – 1, Archief Lopend Vuur. Afdeling Nijmegen.

organisation charter. The group had groups in 15 Dutch cities, working independently under the same term in solidarity with the wars on the Yugoslav territory—the allowance of organising independent groups under the same banner allowed for spreading Wildfire. The most prominent shared activity was the organisation of freedom trips to Former Yugoslavia in November 1992. (Figure 7., below)²¹¹ To organise the trip, all the different charters would work together to fundraise money for the representatives that would go on the trip and materials to bring to the organisations. ²¹² In October, there would be demonstrations in seven of the biggest cities of the Netherlands to find supporters and, more importantly, people who would help fund the trip.²¹³

Furthermore, the trip's experiences were meticulously documented for press statements and interviews.²¹⁴ During the freedom trip, the travellers would visit different cities in conflict areas of the Former Yugoslavia, try to connect with anti-war organisations active in the territory, and hand over signed letters about their alliance.²¹⁵ From the operational fifteen divisions of *Lopend Vuur*, every core group adopted an anti-war organisation in Serbia, Croatia or Kosovo.²¹⁶ The Deventer Charter of the movement adopted Women in Black in Belgrade and would send them all of the resources collected through their organisation. One of the main activities was joining the global trend of silent vigils. Every third Wednesday, participants would stand from 15:30-16:30 in silence in solidarity to attract attention to Women in Black and the situation in former Yugoslavia.²¹⁷ The female founders of Deventer, Anke Noorman

²¹¹ Joep Geelen, 'Lopend vuur, vredesreis naar voormalig Joegoslavië'. *Lopend vuur.*, okt 1992, accessed 10-5-2023.

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ 'Overzicht Acties Lopend Vuur Tot En Met September 1993.', Notulen, October 1993, ARCH02602 – 1, Archief Lopend Vuur. Afdeling Nijmegen.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Geelen, 'Lopend vuur, vredesreis naar voormalig Joegoslavië'.

²¹⁶ Feddema, 'We Waren Inuïtief Tegen Militair Ingrijpen.'

²¹⁷ Peter ten Cate, 'Sturen van Militairen Lost Niets Op.', *Deventer Dagblad*, 22 April 1993, ARCH02602 – 1, Archief Lopend Vuur. Afdeling Nijmegen.

and Corry Rietsma, set up a similar vigil in solidarity to join the global message of peaceful resolution instead of endless military violence.²¹⁸ The founders stressed that both men and women could participate in the demonstrations, but the majority of its attendees remained female, continuing the notion of transnational feminism.²¹⁹ Participants consisted of Turkish and Moroccan women who stood in solidarity with the Muslim women who fell victim to the Serbian regime.²²⁰ The organisation would send out an invitation for this vigil to all organisations who were active in activism regarding the war in Former Yugoslavia.²²¹ The two activist groups remained in close contact throughout the war, sending letters of support or packages of basic toiletries to the women in Belgrade (soap, toothbrushes, etc.).²²²

²¹⁸ Peter ten Cate, 'Sturen van Militairen Lost Niets Op.', *Deventer Dagblad*, 22 April 1993, ARCH02602 – 1, Archief Lopend Vuur. Afdeling Nijmegen

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ Corrie Rietsma, 'Brief Aan Aan Vredesgroepen in Nederland Die Zich Bezighouden Met Voormalig Joegoslavië.', 25 March 1993, ARCH02602 – 3, Archief Lopend Vuur. Afdeling Nijmegen.

²²² 'Lopend Vuur: Notulen Vergadering.', 22 April 1993, ARCH02602 – 1, Archief Lopend Vuur. Afdeling Nijmegen.; 'Overzicht Acties Lopend Vuur Tot En Met September 1993.', Notulen, October 1993, ARCH02602 – 1, Archief Lopend Vuur. Afdeling Nijmegen.

Lopend Vuur
VREDESREIS NAAR VOORMALIG JOEGOSLAVIË

**STOP met het verwoesten van levens.
Geen enkel land, taal of godsdienst is dat waard!**
Loop met ons Vuur mee, onderteken de brieven
en oproepen of steun een van de reizigers.

Lopend Vuur door Nederland:

Zaterdag	17 oktober:	Utrecht
Maandag	19 oktober:	Den Haag
Dinsdag	20 oktober:	Rotterdam
Woensdag	21 oktober:	Tilburg
Donderdag	22 oktober:	Groningen
Vrijdag	23 oktober:	Nijmegen
Zaterdag	24 oktober:	Maastricht

Lopend Vuur door voormalig Joegoslavië
Na vrijdag 30 oktober zetten we de tocht (onder voorbehoud) voort
in de volgende steden: **Ljubljana** (Slovenië), **Zagreb** (Kroatië),
Osijek, **Belgrado** (Servië) en **Skopje** (Macedonië). In deze steden
bieden we de ondertekende brieven aan waarin staat dat wij niet
langer willen toezien hoe mensen om hun afkomst of godsdienst
worden verjaagd, opgesloten of gedood. We verspreiden een oproep
om te laten weten hoe wij de vredesgroepen dáár kunnen helpen.

16.00 uur. Dampéin

Ontwerp: Jeroen Geelen/Magelijn, genootschap door 'Inhoudsgroepen: Komt!'

Collectie IIAV

Lopend Vuur Postbus 6031 3503 PA Utrecht Giro: 32 60 70

Figure 7. The poster of the different political events leading up to the freedom trip to Former Yugoslavia by

Lopend Vuur in October 1992²²³

²²³ Geelen, 'Lopend vuur, vredesreis naar voormalig Joegoslavië'.

Chapter Conclusion

During the Bosnian and Croatian Wars, many (lesbian) Serbian feminists disagreed with the political and military actions of the government in "their name". The Serbian government's chosen warfare tactics entailed acts of ethnic cleansing and gendered sexual violence. A selection of (lesbian) Serbian feminists, often already active in previous social, LGT and feminist activism, used their voices to contest the Serbian agenda of nationalism and the glorification of war due to a shared sentimentality of solidarity with Croatia and BiH, a group of women set up the feminist activist organisation Women in Black. From 1992 on, they would demonstrate against the Serbian government by standing on the Republican Square in Belgrade in silence, dressed in black, mourning the fallen people in those countries. However, protesting the war and government in Belgrade was not without risk, as the activists faced governmental and public threats, being labelled "traitors" of the nation. In order to attain global notability for the cause, incite actual change, and safeguard its legitimacy and safety, they needed to connect with the rest of the world via international media and solidarity movements. Therefore, due to the feminist nature of the WiB anti-war organisation, it initially invoked the transnational feminist network. WiB started with publishing interviews, articles and calls for action in feminist media, such as *Off Our Backs*, thereby circumventing state-controlled press, which would not allow the publishing of anti-Serbian or anti-war rhetoric.

Furthermore, WiB was established as a part of the global feminist peace network of Women in Black, which provided instances of sharing of expertise, financial aid and support. Especially the Italian chapter, *Le Donne in Nero*, proved essential in the beginning stages of the Serbian charter. It organised a solidarity meeting between the anti-war feminists from the Former Yugoslav countries in Venice, where feminists from enemy countries could express their solidarity and anti-Serbian sentimentalities and enable them to resurrect the Yugoslav sisterhood. Furthermore, WiB aligned itself with feminist solidarity movements outside its

network to fight on their domestic territories for public awareness against the violence on the post-Yugoslav region. The Dutch organisation *Lopend Vuur* adopted WIB as the main benefiter of their diligent work and organised a similar vigil in their hometown to raise awareness and financial aid. It would also plan freedom trips to Belgrade to join them in their protests and provide material support. Due to the transnational feminist network, the first step in acquiring international public interest and political awareness could be achieved. Consequently, it could reach the general media, other solidarity organisations, and supposedly the official national and international institutions to end the Serbian military interventions in the Former Yugoslav territory.

Conclusion

In this thesis, the main research question was: How did the transnational (lesbian) feminist network provide aid and support in the anti-war activism of Croatia and Serbia concerning the Bosnian and Croatian Wars (1991-1995)?

In my research, based on a case study on the organisation LIGMA in Croatia and Women in Black in Serbia, I have established that anti-war procured support and aid from the transnational (lesbian) feminist network in order to safeguard, broadcast and solidify their anti-war activism and cause. With the Yugoslav War erupting in 1991, many (lesbian) feminists on the territory, who had been part of a transnational sisterhood, found themselves on opposite sides of the military conflict. However, the wish for global sisterhood was not diminished, and the fight to end the military conflict and human rights continued. While belonging to enemy territories, LIGMA and WiB, shared similar goals and strategies for peace and justice. The manner in which these organisations were active in anti-war activism was different. LIGMA chose not to use public protests as the War continued through the Croatian region, and the perception of queer people by the general population made public protest too dangerous. Instead, it used the promotion of anti-war activism via domestic media and providing refuge to queer people and conscientious objectors from Bosnia and Croatia in their initiative WE ARE HERE TOO. The primary manner of protesting by WiB was the silent vigils, which occurred every Wednesday on the Republican square in Belgrade. The organisations consciously decided to use the public space to connect to the Serbian people. The demonstrations were dangerous even though no war was fought on the territory itself. It was not popular and sometimes not allowed to disagree with the nationalist agenda of the Serbian government and its military intervention. The (lesbian) feminist activist in Croatia and Serbia used the global network to voice their concerns and to seek support to challenge the nationalist and patriarchal narratives of the War. This thesis provides two main strategies in which LIGMA and WiB used

the previously existing network, international media and international solidarity movements, relying on the generosity of global sisterhood.

The first strategy for support and aid from the transnational (lesbian) feminist network was international media. LIGMA and WIB searched for cooperation with these organisations in order to preserve their legitimacy, agency and safety. The preferred first media contact was with the (lesbian) feminist global media, who were more sympathetic and supportive of their cause, circumventing the state media. After gathering enough exposure and supporters, it could gradually expand to the mainstream media and eventually to the official national and international institutions that had the power to end the War. LIGMA aligned itself with the Croatian anti-war magazine *ARKzine* and WiB with the American radical feminist magazine *Off Our Backs*. Both were similar in how it was connected to the global (lesbian) feminist network while not exclusively having an anti-war (lesbian) feminist focus. However, there are differences between LIGMA and WiB and their use of international media organisations. The first difference is that LIGMA used the global network more indirectly. Publishing the supplement *Speak Out* in the domestic magazine does not immediately tap into the international (lesbian) feminist network. However, *ARKzine* was a globally well-known anti-war magazine, which regularly featured topics such as human rights and LGBT rights and had direct ties to solidarity movements. Therefore, LIGMA used the greater-known anti-war magazine to tap into the international media more indirectly.

The second strategy for support and aid from the transnational (lesbian) feminist network was international solidarity movements. LIGMA and WiB used international solidarity organisations in order to receive assistance and support for their anti-war activism on the domestic Yugoslav territory. It was essential to build alliances and networks with groups who shared their vision of peace concerning the Bosnia and Croatian Wars. These alliances could raise awareness and mobilise international public opinion against the violence and

oppression perpetrated by the Serbian state, moving beyond the domestic audiences. Furthermore, it provided material and financial resources that would sustain the anti-war activities of the two organisations domestically. However, LIGMA and WiB differentiated in the kind of solidarity organisations they aligned with. While TRP was instrumental in the beginning, providing office space for the organisation, it was not active in supporting the further goals of the organisation. Overall, the primary type of solidarity movement that LIGMA corresponded with was that with a queer agenda. By becoming a member of the international organisation LIGMA, it was now a part of the transnational queer network. Thus, it was provided with a primarily queer support system, which supported the growing awareness of the global queer community and offered financial aid towards its anti-war activities such as WE ARE HERE TOO. WiB took advantage of its membership to the global anti-war feminist network it belonged to and used its alliance with the Italian charter *Le Donne in Nero* to gain support in the possibility of mending the broken sisterhood with the Yugoslav feminists and material and financial aid for their demonstrations. Furthermore, it would connect with international organisations in complete solidarity with WiB, such as the Dutch organisation *Lopend Vuur Deventer*, who copied its form of demonstration, the silent vigils and brought all its money from their collections exclusively to the organisation.

These findings prove the significant role that (lesbian) feminists had in anti-war activism during the Bosnian and Croatian Wars (1991-1995). And how the transnational (lesbian) feminist network was detrimental to the survival and success of these organisations on the post-Yugoslav territory.

Limitations

The study encountered several obstacles that affected its quality and comprehensiveness. One of them was the language barrier, as I am not proficient in Croatian nor Serbian, the languages spoken in the countries I examined. This loss made communicating with the local population and its sources more complex, and details might have been lost in the process. This loss continued in another obstacle: the lack of access to the Croatian and Serbian archives, which contain valuable primary sources on the global (lesbian) feminist network during the wars in the 1990s. These sources could have shed more light on the historical and political context of (lesbian) feminist activism in the region.

Furthermore, another obstacle I encountered was the low online visibility of the organisations I analysed, namely LIGMA and WiB. These organisations, established in the early 1990s before the widespread use of the Internet, did not have a solid online presence. LIGMA had no online presence, and WiB had an outdated website that was not maintained anymore. It made it difficult to contact them and obtain their documents, such as newsletters, correspondence, pamphlets, etc. Finally, the time constraint of the thesis limited the process and result. It prevented me from conducting interviews with the people still alive and active in (lesbian) feminist activism. These interviews could have provided rich and nuanced insights into the activists' experiences, motivations, challenges, and achievements.

Future research

This thesis has explored the role of (lesbian) feminist organisations in post-conflict Croatia and Serbia, but there are many avenues for future research on this topic. One possibility is to expand the geographical scope and include other countries that experienced the Yugoslav wars, such as Vojvodina, Montenegro and Kosovo, where activism faced different challenges and opportunities. Another possibility is to diversify the types of organisations that are analysed. In this thesis, I had to resort to the decision of choosing two organisations. However, there are

many more to be studied. A third possibility is to examine the aspect of lesbianism more closely and how it intersects with nationalism, feminism, and politics in the Yugoslav region. Due to time constraints, this thesis had to limit its scope to LGB organisations. Still, a more comprehensive study could also incorporate the experiences of the trans community, which is often marginalised and excluded from LGB activism, discourse and studies. These potential research directions could enrich our understanding of LGB politics and activism in post-conflict settings.

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