

IN DEPTH

## Always disobedient

**Staša Zajović**

Co-founder and coordinator of Women in Black of Belgrade

On October 9, 1991, Women in Black took to the streets of Belgrade for the first time. This was the beginning of our nonviolent resistance against the war and the Serbian regime's politics. We are still in the streets. So far, we have organized about 2,000 street actions with common objectives: the rejection of all forms of war and violence, especially those carried out by the state or the community where we live; creation of bonds of solidarity, alliances and coalitions with women regardless of borders or state limitations, national or any other divisions; a policy of peace among women on a global scale based on denouncing local, regional, and global militarism and on the inextricable link between feminism and anti-militarism.

During the first ten years of our existence we lived in a country where state-organized crimes were committed: the regime's war campaign aggressions, largely responsible for the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia. Unfortunately, the overthrow of Slobodan Milosevic in October 2000 did not bring about the desired changes. In recent years, here in Serbia we have been living the race for "European integration" without facing up to our criminal past, accountability for the war and war crimes; criminal privatization projects, increased poverty and every imaginable form of discrimination existing. Elections held in May 2012 and March 2014, saw the perpetrators and the creators and/or accessories to the policies of the 1990s being allowed to return to the political scene in Serbia.

***Not in our name!***

The Belgrade Network of Women in Black is a feminist, anti-military, anti-nationalist, anti-fascist, alter-globalization network made up of women, as well as men, from

different generational and ethnic groups, levels of education, social status, lifestyles and of different sexual preferences. From this perspective we apply the principles of a policy for peace and solidarity and we defend three clearly-defined slogans:

1. *Not in our name!:* In reference to non-violent, clear and unequivocal public resistance against the system which exercises aggression and declares wars in our name and against those who, once the wars have ended, have denied, minimized, relativized or glorified crimes committed in our name.
2. *We will not be tricked by our own people:* Feminist ethics of responsibility impel us to oppose nationalists, militarists and all those patriarchal forces, primarily in the country where we live but also in all other countries.
3. *Always disobedient.* We exercise disobedience in war and any other imposition on behalf of the patriarchy because we are responsible citizens, independent women and free thinking human beings.

## **Challenges facing our feminist and anti-militarist policy**

The feminist and anti-militarist internationalism has helped us to survive the most difficult times but this policy faces significant challenges ahead. First, proliferation of the NGO sector creates divisions within the feminist movement and leads to depoliticization of all issues by dispensing with the analysis of the political and social context. Secondly, policy mainstreaming of the gender perspective, or so-called “state feminism”, sparks conflict between feminist activists and women represented by the institutions. Thirdly, the international aid policy is very often conditioned by cooperation with the State, which threatens solidarity and exacerbates the rivalry between NGOs.

In this context, the Network of Women in Black works to offer solutions and alternatives in different areas, from encouraging grassroots activities through feminist activism, creating spaces for feminist reflection, constantly agitating the State through challenging their demands, building coalitions based on solidarity at a regional, European and international level, to being accountable to the women we work with and developing feminist ethics of responsibility, care, and solidarity.

**“ We exercise disobedience in war and any other imposition on behalf of the patriarchy because we are responsible, independent and free thinking beings ”**

### **Justice and security**

Since the end of 2010 we have been involved in the creation of a Women’s Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, scheduled to be in operation by May 2015. The aim of the tribunal is to create alternative forms of justice and exert pressure on the institutional legal system both nationally as well as internationally. The court will address the silenced, forgotten or unacknowledged forms of violence against women: violence on ethnic grounds, military violence, rape as a war crime, economic and social crimes, etc. It will therefore become a space where women who have suffered injustice, both in wartime and in peacetime, will be given a voice.

The scope of this initiative means that we are working with several thousand women from over a hundred cities. There is no doubt that this is a complex process and one that faces many challenges in the intricate role of the court whose scope will cover seven states of the former Yugoslavia.

**“ The Women’s Tribunal for Former Yugoslavia will address the silenced, forgotten, or unacknowledged forms of violence against women ”**

Facing up to our past and punishing war crimes, freeing ourselves from the fear of being different and to define our identity, strictly applying the principles of transitional

justice to include women in the peace talks and negotiations between Kosovo and Serbia in compliance with United Nations resolution 1325... These are just some of the challenges we currently face, always grounded in a feminist and anti-militarist approach, questioning the concept of traditional militarized security.

As outlined in the Women in Black Safety Charter, the feminist concept of security is defined in the following way:

- Women's solidarity, mutual support, joint work of women against militarism, regardless of the state and beyond the limits of national borders, to create a world free of military violence and all other forms of violence.
- The absence of violence against women. The absence of fear, poverty and all forms of discrimination and injustice.
- Freedom from the fear of being different and to define one's own identity, breaking down the imposed ethnic, state, and cultural consensus.
- Strict application of the principles of transitional justice, in other words, confronting the past and punishing war crimes.
- Resources should be allocated entirely to peace, health and the spread of knowledge, and on the other hand, nothing should be spent on weaponry. The higher the military budget and military spending, the lower the level of security.
- The inclusion of women in peace negotiations ensuring their influence in all segments of the implementation of United Nations resolution 1325.
- Women's right to self-determination, in other words, resistance to social control over women. This means enjoying full sexual and reproductive rights. Our slogan is: my body is my country and it is my right to choose who is going to protect me.

Photography : Simran Sachdev / CC BY / Desaturated. - *Women in Black holding a solidarity banner at the Srebrenica Genocide Commemoration* -

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