

Living It Out: Feminist Liberation Commitments

INTRODUCTION

Mary E. Hunt

The Feminist Liberation Theologians' Network (FLTN) gathers at the American Academy of Religion/Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meetings to discuss topics of common interest. Founded in 1995 and sponsored by the Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics and Ritual (WATER), the group has met at least annually since then. In recent years, the group has deconstructed its own title, taking on in turn, "feminist," "liberation," and "theology," to understand how the concepts have changed and what new content might inform their use.

At the 2012 meeting in Chicago, Illinois, more than fifty colleagues from a dozen countries gathered under the leadership of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and myself to look critically at how members live out their feminist liberation theological commitments in their daily lives. Before small-group discussion and a lively plenary session, four colleagues provided personal examples, which are captured in this Living It Out section:

Rebecca Alpert, Associate Professor of Religion and Women's Studies at Temple University, offers a thoughtful assessment of Jewish feminist justice work, discussing her responsibility as a rabbi to foster public discourse about the deeply fraught situation in Israel/Palestine and the embrace of nonviolent efforts to overcome the seemingly intractable struggles.

Rita Nakashima Brock, codirector of the Soul Repair Center at Brite Divinity School, describes her involvement in the Occupy Wall Street Movement, especially its work to Occupy/Decolonize Oakland, California. As a minister, Rita joined other people of faith in nonviolent witness that resulted in their arrests. She was part of the strong presence of women of color in Oakland who insisted on economic justice for workers.

Peggy Schmeiser, director of Government Relations at the University of Saskatchewan, is a religious scholar who brings her feminist liberation commitments to government service, engaging in both scholarly work and administration. Informed by the work of feminist writer Alison Stuart regarding how

women's lack of religious freedom plays out in larger social and legal settings, she encourages people "to investigate the perceived sacredness and irrefutability of religious belief and practice, particularly when they give rise to or implicitly support the potential violation of recognized human rights" (§§).

Zilka Spahić-Šiljak, research associate at Harvard Divinity School for 2012–13, is a professor at the University of Sarajevo, where she specializes in religion, human rights, and peace building. Her essay offers the little-known history of feminist liberation theology as it emerged from war and struggle in the former Yugoslavia, a response to the need for "religious answers and comfort for the shame and guilt female survivors of sexual trauma felt" (§§). She reports that the scholarly apparatus of feminist work in religion and the writings of many well-known colleagues came into play as useful resources for making sense of women's lives. It is a "grassroots approach" in doing and practicing feminist theology and then learning how to name it (§§).

The academic and practical work of feminist scholars are indispensable tools in responding to people's immediate needs, especially those of women and children. While the diverse presentations and discussion printed here illuminate many overlapping themes, including the importance of focus on the arts and ritual as feminist liberation resources, all focus on using feminist theological resources for concrete social change aimed at human rights and peace. Making connections to larger social and political movements is important to the success of feminist liberation theology, with cross-generational sharing key to keeping this work going and growing. *JFSR* readers are welcome at future FLTN meetings.

JEWISH FEMINIST JUSTICE WORK: FOCUS ON ISRAEL/PALESTINE

Rebecca T. Alpert

Of all the work I do as a Jewish feminist, the most difficult and important is the small contribution I make to pursuing peace and justice in Israel/Palestine. The difficulty begins with the act of naming the work. In the institutional Jewish community, and even with other Jewish feminists, using the term "Israel/Palestine" rather than referring to the "Israeli-Palestinian" or "Middle East" conflict—thereby recognizing that Palestine deserves to be recognized as an independent entity—is a political act of rebellion or even treason. Framing this work as pursuing peace and justice in Israel/Palestine marks me as someone who cares more about finding a just solution to the conflict than safeguarding the future of the state of Israel and therefore a dangerous person. However, as feminists, we learned many years ago that what we call things is important,

and the act of naming the work “pursuing peace and justice in Israel/Palestine” matters.

It also matters that I name the social locations from which I do this work. I do it first as a lesbian feminist committed to speaking out about issues of oppression and justice wherever they arise, but also a Jew and rabbi living in North America who now identifies as a post-Zionist. My status as a rabbi gives me the obligation and opportunity to “speak truth to power.” I speak as an American Jew because I reject the commonly held notion that I have no right to criticize Israel because I do not live there. The United States is Israel’s greatest ally in part because of the insistent and well-funded pressure certain Jews (and Christians) exert on American elected officials. For that reason, I believe it is up to American Jews and Christians to demand that our government use its power to pressure Israel into negotiating in good faith.

Although I have been critical of the policies of the Israeli government since my first extended stay there in 1969–70, I did not identify as post-Zionist until after the 2006 war in Lebanon.¹ At that time, the simple thought occurred to me, as it did to others, that it is impossible for Israel to claim to be both a Jewish state (which I identify as the primary Zionist goal) and a democracy. I believe that Israel must choose between those options. I have in recent times also seen myself as obligated to choose, and I have no doubt which of those Jewish values is more important to me. So I have chosen to cast my lot with those who are fighting for equal rights for everyone in Israel/Palestine. To my mind, the label post-Zionist best captures that position.

In this essay, I describe several places where feminist perspectives have nourished and challenged me in this work: the Jewish feminist network in Israel, the Jewish feminism that grounds the organization known as Jewish Voice for Peace, and the queer activism that has challenged “pinkwashing.” Each has provided inspiration, opportunities for action and solidarity, and raised questions that I face in this struggle.

The Jewish Feminist Movement in Israel

The Jewish feminist movement in Israel began in earnest in 1988 with the founding of Women in Black. After the First Intifada, Women in Black organized weekly vigils at key sites in every city in Israel. Every Friday, women dressed in black and stood in silence to protest the occupation and mourn the deaths resulting from the brutal response of the Israeli military to the Palestinian uprising. The power of this simple ritualized demonstration caught on and spread around the world; Women in Black now operates in twenty countries, protesting against the culture of war that produces violence against women. It

¹ I tell the story of how I came to my position on Israel in Rebecca T. Alpert, “War and Peace,” in *Whose Torah? A Concise Guide to Progressive Judaism* (New York: New Press, 2008).

is a powerful contribution that Israeli feminists have made to create this global activist network.

Over the years, dozens of other feminist groups in Israel have protested the occupation and engaged in activities such as providing legal assistance to Israeli conscientious objectors and working in solidarity with Palestinian women to develop networks of dialogue and leadership. They have created programs to provide legal and financial assistance to women in the West Bank and Gaza and have been deeply involved in the efforts of the Israeli left wing to question and struggle against government policies.

But communications between Israeli and Palestinian feminist peace activists have been radically diminished and undermined by the current Israeli government's policy decision to divide its population with a separation barrier. Residential segregation and travel prohibitions intentionally keep Israeli and Palestinian activists apart. While some Israeli feminist organizations do the very difficult and strategic work to keep at least minimal communications open, most have accepted these restrictions and refrain from making contact with their counterparts in Palestine.

Jewish Voice for Peace

Over the years, I had often voiced my opposition to Israeli militarism and occupation through writings, demonstrations, sermons, and membership in Breira and New Jewish Agenda, left-wing groups of American Jewish dissenters in the 1970s and 1980s. I have been proud to be listed on the "Self-Hating and/or Israel-Threatening" website² from its inception. But I had never found a home for this work until I joined Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP). This organization, founded in 1996 and staffed primarily by Jewish women activists, has created a rabbinic cabinet composed of equal numbers of men and women rabbis, cantors, and rabbinical students. The most visible member, Lynn Gottlieb, has recently been publicly targeted because of her activities, especially her efforts to oppose the blockade of Gaza. I am pleased to work with JVP as they support Israeli and Palestinian aspirations for security and self-determination and an end to occupation and welcome those who take different positions on the Palestinian-led effort known as BDS, which stands for Boycott, Divestment, and Sanction. Though I have mixed feelings about boycotts, I am involved in the divestment campaign targeting TIAA-CREF, the company that holds the retirement accounts for academicians and seminarians. JVP has tirelessly sought to persuade TIAA-CREF to engage in selective divestment from international

² See <http://www.masada2000.org/shit-list.html>. On this website's homepage is an image of a toilet followed by the names, photographs, and descriptions of the peace and justice activities of thousands of Jewish supporters of Middle East peace across a wide spectrum that the site owners see as "Self-Hating and Israel-Threatening." The site has no identified owner.

corporations (like Caterpillar, Motorola, and Veolia) that supply equipment and arms for the occupation.

I have also been inspired and challenged by the thoughts of three feminists on JVP's board of advisers: Adrienne Rich, Judith Butler, and Sarah Schulman. I mention Adrienne both in memory of my beloved friend and because of her forthright and brave stances on Israel/Palestine beginning in the mid-1980s that inspired me and others to add, as she did, a fourth question to Hillel's famous inquiry: "If I am not for myself, who will be for me? If I am only for myself, who am I? If not now, when?" With her I say, "If not with others, how?"³ In an essay with that title, she reminded us that feminist principles demand working in coalition, with others. This idea is at the heart of my involvement with BDS and JVP as I stated in a recent article: "Having long decried the violent means that some Palestinians have used to call attention to their plight, we in the American Jewish community cannot now turn our backs on a Palestinian movement that uses nonviolence to work for peace. Rather we must do everything in our power to raise Jewish voices, rabbinic voices, and proclaim our solidarity with them."⁴

Judith Butler has taken a position more radical than mine in arguing that the values that undergird her anti-Zionism are universal and not Jewish. To Butler, Jewish identity is built on the refusal of particularism; to be Jewish is at its core nothing but to be in conversation with the non-Jew. Nevertheless, I am engaged with this issue precisely because I am a Jew in conversation with other Jews, and I experience Israel as a failed partner in that dialogue, standing for values of insularity and opposition to the Other that I do not share.

Although I disagree with Butler fundamentally on that issue, an insight at the end of her new book has resolved a profound dilemma for me.⁵ I am often asked what I see for the future, what would be a satisfying resolution of this conflict. I am far too pessimistic to assume that a two-state solution is still a possibility—the lived reality that Israel has created through its settlements on the West Bank and stultification of an independent and healthy Palestinian economy make that unimaginable. Yet I had not been able to embrace the idea of a binational state. Although I could dream of a place where the creative and exciting dimensions of Jewish/Israeli culture could be sustained in peaceful co-existence, I also feared the obliteration of the Jewish character of Israel under an oppressive Palestinian regime. What Butler calls to my attention, however, is that the Israeli occupation has already created a binational state that is characterized by wretchedness in relation to its oppression of its citizens and residents who cannot claim Jewish ancestry or identity. This seems to be an accurate

³ Adrienne Rich, "If Not with Others, How?" in *Blood, Bread, and Poetry: Selected Prose 1979–1985* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1986), 209.

⁴ Rebecca T. Alpert, "Solidarity with Palestinian Activists" *Tikkun* 26, no. 1 (Winter 2011): 30.

⁵ Judith Butler, "What Shall We Do without Exile?" in *Parting Ways: Jewishness and the Critique of Zionism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 205–24.

characterization of the status quo; who is oppressed depends only on which side has the power. Butler has encouraged me to notice that it is not binationalism I should worry about, but any configuration that perpetuates inequality and permits the two sides to refuse to be partners, to share this land that is the heritage of two peoples.

Closer to home, and returning in closing from theory to practice, I found myself embroiled last spring in the battle over what Sarah Schulman has termed “pinkwashing.” Schulman wrote an op-ed column in 2011 in the *New York Times* to call attention to this phenomenon.⁶ She reported that Israel, hoping to encourage the international community to look beyond war and strife, designed a marketing campaign that emphasized their social and cultural accomplishments and downplayed their militarism and violence. Part of the plan was to stimulate tourism, and gay men were identified as a potential target market. Israel has made great strides in support of LGBTIQ rights in employment, the military, and the arts; Tel Aviv has indeed become “a gay destination,” although Israel lags woefully behind on issues like gay marriage that are under the jurisdiction of the Orthodox establishment, and religious attacks, sometimes violent, have disrupted gay pride parades and community centers. And under Israeli rule, gay and straight Palestinians alike are subject to the same strictures and civil rights abuses. Israeli Palestinians cannot gain domestic partnership benefits if they are in relationships with Israeli Jews, they cannot apply for asylum, and they have been threatened with blackmail.⁷ Schulman named the campaign “pinkwashing” and encouraged the gay community to resist being drawn into support for a country that welcomes queers only if they are not Palestinian and uses gay rights to divert world attention from other human rights abuses.

This past year Israel brought this campaign to the United States, sponsoring a speaking tour featuring LGBTIQ Israelis in San Francisco and Seattle that met with both strong support and resistance there from American Jewish LGBTIQ groups. Israel also played a central role in the annual Philadelphia Equality Forum that designated Israel the “featured nation” and honored Israeli ambassador Michael Oren. I withdrew from speaking (albeit about another subject entirely) at the Equality Forum when requested to by Queers for Palestine and, along with Katherine Franke, entered the pinkwashing conversation in the only journal willing to engage the debate, *Tikkun*.⁸

Talking about Israel in public in the manner I do, as Adrienne Rich suggested so long ago, makes me a target for anger, accusations of self-hatred, and censorship in the Jewish community. And I do recognize that some portion of

⁶ Sarah Schulman, “Israel and Pinkwashing,” *New York Times*, November 22, 2011.

⁷ See Richard Silverstein, “U.S. Gay Rights Activists: Stop Pinkwashing Palestinian Suffering!” *Tikkun*, June 7, 2012, <http://www.tikkun.org/nextgen/u-s-gay-rights-activists-stop-pinkwashing-palestinian-suffering>.

⁸ *Ibid.*

non-Jewish anti-Israel sentiment is really only veiled anti-Semitism once again rearing its ugly head. To a majority of Jews and Israelis that makes the risk of speaking out too great. In their opinion, it is better to remain isolated, to be only for ourselves, to assume no one else will ever be for us, and to take on the example of the Jews of Masada and fight to the death. But there are also a growing number of young American Jews with strong Jewish identities that do not center on Israel and have the courage to question the story my generation accepted of “a land without people for a people without a land.” I place my hope in them and the Jewish feminist values that move us toward justice and peace.

WHAT HAS OCCUPY GOT TO DO WITH FEMINIST LIBERATION THEOLOGY?

Rita Nakashima Brock

“Occupy is the movement I have been waiting for.” I heard many seasoned East Bay activists say this at general assemblies, marches, and other Occupy/Decolonize Oakland events. Our graying heads added salt to the largely young activists who attended events and camped on the city’s downtown plaza from October 10 to November 15, 2011—except for October 25, when a violent police raid cleared the plaza and made Oakland an international story. Within a day of the raid, the plaza was again occupied with tents, and within a week, Occupy/Decolonize Oakland held a general strike and successful port shutdown that drew tens of thousands of people.¹

The Occupy Wall Street (OWS) movement erupted in September 2011 as a protest in response to the international financial crisis. OWS coalesced and amplified a variety of movements through solidarity actions, though, often, the solidarity seemed incredible. In one early march in Oakland, a large group of middle-aged Asian women who belonged to the Service Employees International Union appeared with the Oakland librarians, the anarchist Black Bloc group, Health Care Workers for Reform, students from the University of California, Berkeley, Dykes for Choice, advocates for transgender acceptance and immigration reform, and the Interfaith Tent @ Oakland. Women leaders of all colors, including feminist clergy and theologians, were visible and important in Oakland, and many were young women raised by feminist mothers. The gener-

¹ Adam Gabbat, “Occupy Oakland: Iraq War Veteran in Critical Condition after Police Clashes,” *The Guardian*, October 26, 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/oct/26/occupy-oakland-veteran-critical-condition>; Amy Goodman, “Dozens Arrested at Occupy Oakland as Police Raid Encampment, Tear Down Tents,” *Democracy Now*, October 25, 2011, http://www.democracynow.org/2011/10/25/dozens_arrested_at_occupy_oakland_as; and “Occupy Oakland General Strike—As It Happened,” *The Guardian*, November 3, 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/nov/02/occupy-oakland-general-strike-live>.

ation under forty has their own activist strategies and understands—as feminist liberation theologians have always understood—that the struggle for economic justice is a core issue for women.

For the November 2 strike in Oakland, and for a dozen subsequent days, religious leaders and feminists with the Interfaith Tent set up a large canopy sanctuary among the thick forest of new tents crowding the plaza. Our contribution was to teach and advocate for nonviolent practices, to hold the moral and spiritual core of the movement as sacred, to embody a nonviolent presence at Occupy/Decolonize events, to offer a spiritual space and presence and religious activities to those who sought them, and to make a visible public witness of religious involvement in and support for the OWS movement. In December 2011, we sent four delegates (two women of color, one white man, and one African American man, aged 37 to 67) to a national gathering of Occupy Faith at Judson Memorial Church in New York. In March 2012, we hosted a second national gathering in Oakland.

In the predawn hours of November 15, 2011, a police raid ended the encampment in Oakland. Sixteen of us from the Interfaith Tent refused an order to leave our sanctuary. We were prepared for pepper spray, tear gas, beanbag bullets, flash-bang grenades, tanks, sound cannons, and possible serious wounds. While our videotaped arrest did not involve police violence, we knew at the time that this second raid was part of a federally organized effort to destroy the movement. Naomi Wolf would later expose the involvement not only of law enforcement—including trained sniper assassins—but also the financial institutions that caused the fiscal crisis that precipitated the movement:

It was more sophisticated than we had imagined: new documents show that the violent crackdown on Occupy that fall—so mystifying at the time—was not just coordinated at the level of the FBI, the Department of Homeland Security, and local police. The crackdown, which involved, violent arrests, group disruption, canister missiles to the skulls of protesters, people held in handcuffs so tight they were injured, people held in bondage till they were forced to wet or soil themselves—was coordinated with the big banks themselves.²

Whenever I have spoken about the OWS movement and our rather fierce branch in Oakland, I find people puzzled about the determination of activists to keep their encampments in the face of violent official opposition and possible lethal violence. But I think this determination makes perfect sense when one understands the deep creativity, imagination, joy, humor, and love that ground the OWS movement's activist outrage, which is its sole public media face.

² Naomi Wolf, "Revealed: How the FBI Coordinated the Crackdown on Occupy," *The Guardian*, December 29, 2012, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2012/dec/29/fbi-coordinated-crackdown-occupy>.

Filipina American Nadinne I. Cruz, former director of the Haas Center for Public Service at Stanford University now working in grassroots organizing and people's movements, draws a distinction between strategic and imaginative social movements. Strategic social movements tend to be organized around an issue, focus on strategies and outcomes for identifying what is wrong and pushing forward with demands and goals. Imaginative social movements bond people through the act of creating what does not exist, rather than in making demands of a system too corrupt or limited to understand or address the moral and spiritual vision of such a movement.

Cruz calls this form of creative imagination "civic arts," explaining that "the imaginative is essential, and the rendering of what has been only in one's imagination into reality is through one's engagement and participation in shaping our social order. It is as if the various social worlds in which we live are our artwork, our participation and engagement is our art process, and the medium of this civic artwork is one's self."³ Civic arts enable those hungry for just, sustainable life and peace to live out the values that ground such hungers in liminal spaces where imagination and creativity connect people, and relationships are forged, not just for strategic goals, but for the sake of life itself. Respect for others and taking care of each other are constantly, if imperfectly, enacted, and not just preached.

In their book *Occupy Religion*, Kwok Pui Lan and Joerg Rieger call these kinds of relationships "deep solidarity."⁴ In applying a postcolonial lens and using OWS to construct a theology of the multitude, their work unpacks the power of the movement for many social movements, including feminist liberation. In highlighting deep solidarity, they demonstrate the value of networking movements, supporting each other in a common struggle for a just and peaceful world and sustainable planet.

The printing press was the gasoline on the revolutionary fires for democracy and human rights of the sixteenth to twentieth centuries. The OWS movement is fueled by the Internet, especially social media. Smart phones, instant messaging, and blogs enabled the suddenness and the planetary reach of its success. Social media reached thousands almost instantly with powerful images and ideas that coalesced previous movements into the energy that formed around the global financial crisis in 2011. Within a month of the occupation of Zuccotti Park in New York on September 17, 2011, nearly a thousand events and hundreds of encampments had cropped up around the world. In places like London, Cairo, Tokyo, Nashville, Seattle, and Mexico City, occupiers supported

³ Nadinne I. Cruz, "The Urgent Need for Thinking and Imagination for 'Doing Good,'" Carleton College Commencement Address, May 2008, <http://apps.carleton.edu/events/commencement/past/2008/speeches/cruz/>.

⁴ Kwok Pui Lan and Joerg Rieger, *Occupy Religion: Theology of the Multitude* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2012).

each other's events, shared ideas, and maintained lines of communication. Local encampments allowed people outside the big costal occupations to enact and be part of a larger movement and to find kindred spirits wherever they traveled.⁵

By mid-October, OWS had shifted public and media discourse to social inequality, foreclosures, greed, and taxing the rich, instead of the summer conversations about the debt ceiling, lowering taxes, and the Republican Party primary elections. The success of Barack Obama's campaign strategy of framing Mitt Romney as a clueless and callous wealthy capitalist was given wide traction, I believe, by OWS's success in turning public attention to the corporate institutions responsible for the suffering of so many and the movement's isolation of the financial elite as only 1 percent of the population.⁶

In choosing to ignore the red-blue polarization of US politics and claiming the space of 99 percent, OWS may have succeeded in pushing an electoral seismic shift in the United States that will reverberate for the next four years and beyond as the nation's demographics move away from a white majority. While it will not be utopia but messy politics instead, we will not have the archaic patriarchal society desired by super-rich Republicans and their Christian-Right enablers. For that alone, the civic arts of OWS have made a lasting contribution to feminist liberation praxis and theological work.

FEMINIST LIBERATION COMMITMENTS ENACTED

Peggy Schmeiser

At the outset, I wish to thank Mary Hunt and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza for the opportunity to participate in this discussion. They continue to serve as powerful models for the ways that feminist scholarship in theology and religion can be actualized toward equality and social justice goals.

The writings of feminist liberation theologians deeply influenced my early academic formation. Their courageous and inspiring work fueled my impulse not only to interrogate and challenge so-called sacred texts, traditions, and doctrines but also, more recently, to consider and address seemingly secular mechanisms and processes that inform contemporary social governance and justice structures in ways that I believe perpetuate harm to women and others. I am thus grateful to share a few professional and personal experiences that can per-

⁵ "Occupy Wall Street Spreads Worldwide," *The Atlantic*, October 17, 2011, <http://www.theatlantic.com/infocus/2011/10/occupy-wall-street-spreads-worldwide/100171/>. A list of over nine hundred sites is provided at "List of Occupy Movement Protest Locations," *Wikipedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Occupy_movement_protest_locations.

⁶ H. Samy Alim, "What If We Occupied Language?" *Opinionator* (blog), *New York Times*, December 21, 2011, <http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/12/21/what-if-we-occupied-language/>.

haps offer some additional and diverse illustrations of how we, as theologians or secular scholars, might live out our feminist commitments within the academy and beyond.

After earning a PhD in Women and Religion and despite the concern of my doctoral advisor, I declined several academic opportunities to work with governmental organizations, including positions with our federal departments for culture and the status of women, as well as with UNESCO in Paris. In these roles, I was regularly engaged in international negotiations and forums in support of women's equality and cultural diversity, including with the United Nations, the Commonwealth, and the Organization of American States.

While exhilarated to apply my academic training and interests in those multilateral collaborative forums, I was also profoundly discouraged by how certain regimes—political, social, and religious—perpetuated injustices and violence against certain groups, particularly women and children, often without opposition from domestic and international communities. Religious movements, in particular, seemed immune to criticism and were rarely scrutinized in political forums for their role in perpetuating inequality. (the proposed edits changed the meaning from what was intended). Whether in isolated communities with prescribed gender roles that disadvantage women and girls or in more visible political movements that maintain legal authority to limit female access to positions of power and influence, religious tradition and doctrine persist, often under the rubric of respect for diversity, as a basis and entitlement to discriminate against members of one's own community and citizenry.

Against this backdrop, I am convinced there is a need for both secular and theological scholars of religion to investigate the perceived sacredness and irrefutability of religious belief and practice, particularly when they give rise to or implicitly support the potential violation of recognized human rights. Within Christianity, Alison Stuart's work has been particularly illuminating in this regard in examining European jurisprudence to expose how women's freedom of religion is impeded by their lack of power and equal positioning in their own religions.¹ Addressing the tension between respect for religious diversity and freedom versus the condemnation of all systems, including religious systems that relegate women to an inferior status in myth or reality, remains a challenge not only in the public service but within the academy as well.

Recently, I had an opportunity to combine my public-sector experience with my ongoing commitment to the academy. Between 2007 and 2013, I was employed in the Office of the President at the University of Saskatchewan where I lead the institution's government relations, a role that required me to engage regularly with all levels of government—municipal, provincial and federal, as well as international.

¹ Alison Stuart, "Freedom of Religion and Gender Equality: Inclusive or Exclusive?" *Human Rights Law Review* 10, no. 3 (2010): 429–59.

While I have never missed an opportunity to remind university administrators and funders of the importance of valuing all spheres of scholarship, particularly the humanities where critical analytic abilities are perhaps best developed, my recent teaching and appointment as a Policy Fellow with our Graduate School of Public Policy have enabled me to pursue more intensively my interests in legislation, policy, and justice as they intersect with categories of religion, gender, and identity. Having expanded my teaching subjects to include public administration and governance, I encourage students to rethink intersections of religion and politics and to consider the ways that legislation and legal interpretations, including within the framework of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, both rely on and reinforce conventional definitions of religion that support patriarchal hegemonies within culture. Whether it is hate speech laws that could potentially sanction religiously motivated utterances or exemptions permitting religious organizations to discriminate based on gender and sexuality in ways otherwise prohibited by law, presumptive notions of religion and religious freedom continue to undermine the very equality goals targeted by the legislation in which they are often contained.

Most recently, I have expanded my research areas as a principal investigator in a multidisciplinary research project in collaboration with two scientists from Canada's only synchrotron (a microscope-like structure about the size of a football field that generates light a million times brighter than the sun²), along with a sociologist, and an expert in the field of university administration.³ Together, we are undertaking interviews at four of Canada's top research-intensive universities to identify collaboration models across the humanities, fine arts, social sciences, and "big science." This feeds my intellectual interests in the ways that scholars across scientific and nonscientific fields claim particular authority and access with regards to so-called truth and our place within the world. Government funding agencies have also taken a strong interest in the potential research findings and the possible implications for better support of multidisciplinary collaboration including within the fields of religion and culture.

I want to complement these examples from my professional and academic life by sharing one more personal example of the ways our learning and scholarship can take hold in our efforts to evoke change in our own lives and those closest to us.

When our son Samuel was born in 2007, the Saskatchewan provincial legislation recognized my partner Katrina, his biological mother, as his only parent. We were told that if I were a man, I would be included on his birth certificate

² "Canadian Light Source," <http://www.lightsource.ca/>.

³ Research project entitled "Collision and Convergence: Assessing and Maximizing the Mutual Benefits between 'Big Science' and the Humanities," with contributions from Peggy Schmeiser, Jennifer Poudrier, Dean Chapman, Susan Bens, and Bill Thomlinson.

as his parent whether I was biologically related to him or not. As a same-sex couple, however, we would have no choice but to go through an adoption process to have my parental status recognized.

Putting aside that I was already feeling emboldened by research I had just previously undertaken for an essay I had hoped to complete entitled “Children Need a Father’: Unpacking Theological Paranoia of Female Parenting,” I was, of course, compelled on this occasion to press the issue further. We were quickly informed by provincial officials, however, that only a human rights complaint against the government could compel any possible modification of these rules and the legislation on which they were based. That is precisely what we undertook but, from what we’ve been told, in a somewhat unusual manner.

Knowing how long doctrine can take to evolve, particularly when it pertains to gender and sexuality, and having worked previously in policy development and with public officials, we sought out a collaborative approach to this complaint process and spoke directly and openly with elected and bureaucratic officials about what we were seeking. Without going through all the details of this long process, which involved extensive exchanges with government officials on proposed legislative amendments with our suggestions highlighted in multicolor track changes, we did successfully receive, about twenty months later, a new backdated birth certificate showing Sam as the first child to be officially recognized in Saskatchewan as born to same-sex parents. At this stage of my life, I must admit a deep longing for an academic position in a religion and culture program where I could explore in more depth with students the intersections of religion, law, and gender, and the ways we can use our privileged positions, knowledge, and understanding beyond the academy to evoke change. I would like to form an alliance of feminist scholars that is prepared and has financial backing to seek intervenor status in key Supreme Court cases where categories of religion and gender need to be challenged for their intrinsic roles in injustice. I would like Focus on the Family and the Promise Keepers to shudder when they see us coming out of the offices on Capitol Hill and our Parliament buildings because we have become our nations’ most effective and successful lobbyists for the rights of women and children.

For now, I am content to share my experiences to illustrate how the commitments we undertake as feminist theologians and scholars of religion manifest themselves in all sorts of circumstances. Lives are changed in concrete ways and liberation grows a little larger.

DO IT AND NAME IT: FEMINIST THEOLOGY AND PEACE-BUILDING IN
BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Zilka Spahić-Šiljak

Feminist theology is a new phenomenon in the Balkans, and only a few women, more precisely, only a few female Catholic theologians and writers, discussed this topic in the former Yugoslavia.¹ It was important work in the post-Vatican Council period as it shed light on the role of women in family, church, and society, though no larger, systemic scholarly work or initiatives in faith communities and churches by feminist theologians existed. Even today, the majority of women and men in the Balkans, including theologians, do not know what feminist theology is and if it is indeed possible to combine feminism with theology.

This lack of understanding is, in large part, a hangover from the days of socialism when ideology and political order marginalized and suppressed religion and considered feminism as alien. Consequently, women, particularly women believers, would not dare reveal these two identities in public. Being a feminist was not acceptable, but being religious feminist was inconceivable—and is still today.

Feminism and feminist initiatives, however, developed slowly in the former Yugoslavia, though mostly of a secular and atheist provenance that did not take religion and female believers into account. It should be noted that, unlike in many Communist countries, feminism in Yugoslavia was not formed as state feminism within official communist organizations. Instead, it flourished as an independent endeavor of female scholars, journalists, and activists to change Yugoslav society from within.² Feminist organizations and groups showed resistance to the communist state, and their work brought to the surface questions of freedom and individual choice. As Slavenka Drakuli explains, the self-management system allowed women to work, to be mothers, and partisan heroines.³ But inclusion in the workforce, family support, and political participation were not sufficient for these feminists, whose calls for freedom of choice were a danger to the socialist status quo. Their movement indeed represented radical

¹ Marica Stanković, *Žene u Evandjelju* [Women in the New Testament] (Zagreb: Kršćanska sadašnjost, 2011); Ljiljana Matković, *Žena i crkva* [Woman and church] (Zagreb: Kršćanska sadašnjost, 1973); and Ana Maria Grunfelder, *Mulieris Dignitatem, document koji stvara dvojbe* [Mulieris Dignitatem, a document that makes doubts], OŽ XLIV (Zagreb: Institute of Philosophy and Theology SJ Zagreb, Croatia, 1980), 3–4.

² Jill Benderly, “Feminist Movements in Yugoslavia, 1978–1992,” in *State-Society Relations in Yugoslavia 1945–1992*, ed. Melissa Katherine Bokovoy, Jill Irvine, Carol Lilly (Scranton, PA: Haddon Craftsmen, 1997); and Drude Dahlerup, *The New Women’s Movement: Feminism and Political Power in Europe and USA* (London: Sage Publishers, 1986), 1.

³ Slavenka Drakulić, *Smrtni Grižeh i Feminizmi: Ogledi o mudjologiji* (Zagreb: Znanje, 1984).

change, but that change that did not include a place for religious women and their voices as agents of these changes.

Thus women believers were marginalized by the state communist ideology, by secular feminists, and by their own faith communities and churches. Such triple exclusion and marginalization made women theologians reluctant to deal with feminist theology, and they remained silent, dealing with other topics that did not *uznmiruju* (disturb, in the sense of provoking) the state or the church or secular feminists. They also did not have the opportunity to learn about feminist theology at universities or to attend any alternative to state-sponsored education. Largely, except for several articles published by Catholic theologians in Croatia and some individual efforts made by female theologians who had studied abroad, mostly in Germany and Austria, feminist theology was almost completely absent from the social and academic discourse.

When the war started in Balkans in 1991, some female theologians became active in secular women's organizations in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) to help women and children survive traumas sustained during the war and after, in the war camps. NGO-ization of women's initiatives was a result of foreign donor influence, and the aid was often politicized.⁴ But at the same time, the NGO framework opened the floor for various perspectives in the promotion and protection of women's human rights, including the feminist theological perspective.

The sociopolitical climate in the 1990s changed very quickly from socialism to ethnonationalism cloaked by ethnoreligious ideologies. Religion erupted in the Balkans and became an important factor in the establishment of political legitimacy, while faith communities took the opportunity to reenter the public arena and to take control of religious education in public schools. Though this now meant the opportunity to teach religious education in schools, women were excluded from hierarchies within the faith communities and decision-making positions; men designed the curricula for religious education, which resulted in the usage of patriarchal textbooks that repositioned women into traditionally (religiously) assigned gender roles.

Around this time, many female theologians had to rethink their lives and find a way simply to survive during turbulent times. They were also driven to help their people, especially women and children who suffered the most, though they did not know much about civil society organizations or feminism. When the first woman's NGO, Medica Zenica, was established in 1993 in BiH, Muslim theologians were invited to join and help other women find refuge after imprisonment in the war camps. Although secular and atheist feminists in the former Yugoslavia did not take women believers and their perspectives on women's

⁴ Elissa Helms, "Women as Agents of Ethnic Reconciliation? Women's NGOs and International Intervention in Postwar Bosnia–Herzegovina," *Women's Studies International Forum* 26, no. 1 (2003):15–33.

rights and liberation into account, many became very supportive and collaborative during and after the war because the goals were the same—to bring peace to BiH and to empower women in exercising their rights in all sphere of life.

Five key channels for feminist theological development in BiH contributed to the peace-building process. I argue that secular feminist initiatives and non-governmental organizations were essential factors in providing space for discussion and shaping the educational programs in feminist theology.

The first channel for this change was the involvement of female Muslim theologians in Medica Zenica, which focused on helping women from the war camps recover from rape and torture. The second channel of change was the launch of the NGO *Žene ženama* (Women to Women) women's studies program in Sarajevo. The third channel was the integration of feminist theology courses within regular gender studies and religious studies programs at the University of Sarajevo. The fourth channel was the publication of relevant literature, magazines, and translations of feminist texts of various faiths into the local languages. The fifth channel was the development of new tools for UNSCR 1325, the UN resolution on women, peace, and security implementation, where religion and feminist theology became the most attractive and effective tools in pursuing these peace initiatives. These five channels provided room and a safe space for female and male feminist theologians to learn, write, explore, and build capacities in local organizations and academic institutions for integration of both gendered and religious perspectives in their work.

Healing Traumas and Reconciliation

The involvement of Muslim female theologians into the psychosocial work groups was the first channel for the development of feminist theology in BiH. These groups helped women fleeing the war to Zenica City, in the center of BiH, seeking help and shelter. I was one of the Muslim theologians invited to work with other feminists and activists during this time. When we began our work with female war victims, none of us knew what feminism—or feminist theology, for that matter—was, nor did we understand how to use religion to help heal traumas and other psychosocial hardships. Over time, we learned to be creative in answering their questions, deeply enmeshing ourselves in their experience of pain, suffering, and trauma. Their words became our own, and this deeply intimate, shared pain fueled our desire to hasten the healing process. Out of these shared moments of suffering, feminist theology was born.

In attempting to answer one of the most fundamental questions many of these women asked—Why did God let religious women be raped and tortured?—we practiced feminist theology without being aware of it. For most women in BiH, religion was an important tool with which to ease their suffering and pain; a last refuge when everything else had fallen apart. However,

the religious Muslim community in BiH was not ready to deal with this influx of traumatized women seeking refuge in faith. The only religious move made to help Muslim women during the war was to issue a decree (fatwa) by the Islamic Community of BiH “that raped women should be considered our heroines,” with the recommendation that family members and society “accept these women and help them heal their traumas.”⁵ Although this statement was important, it was largely symbolic. What Muslim women needed from their religious leaders was a safe space in which to tell their stories and to be heard, but the men who led the Muslim communities in BiH felt that they lacked the tools to help these women.

Without tangible support, these women had only partial spiritual relief and not the concrete help they needed to overcome traumatic experiences and huge social stigma. However, this fatwa could indeed serve as a first step in reducing the burden of shame and trauma carried by victims of sexual assault during the war. Thus the first feminist theological work was ad-hoc theology to meet the needs of women, and not a systemic exploration and scholarship—in other words, we employed a kind of “do it and then name it” approach. Without religious guidance or tools for dealing with these situations, female theologians were left to create theological responses and interpretations to meet the needs of these women based on personal experience and the sociocultural context of BiH in 1990. They “did” feminist hermeneutics of the Qur’an and hadith by contextualizing readings and interpretations.

As a result of the contextualized interpretations of the Islamic tradition feminist theologians provided, victims of rape were empowered to better cope with the traumas and social stigma of rape, and women believers in general felt more comfortable working in secular organizations. Although religion was part of public discourse within the circles of the ethnoreligious elites, the newly developed sector of civil society was mostly secular. Religion was not used as a “conversation starter” or as a lens through which to bring about justice and reconciliation in BiH.⁶ However, secular organizations eventually understood that religion was a necessary voice in the national conversation; about five years after the war, they began to involve religious perspectives in the promotion of human rights, gender equality, and peace building.

⁵ Zilka Spahić-Šiljak, “Images of Women in Bosnia, Herzegovina, and Neighboring Countries, 1992–1995,” in *Muslim Women in War and Crisis: From Reality to Representation*, ed. Faegeh Shirazi (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010).

⁶ Ina Merdjanova and Patrice Brodeur, *Religion as a Conversation Starter: Interreligious Dialogue for Peace Building in the Balkans* (New York: Continuum, 2009), 108.

First Women's Studies in BiH

During the war, women were preoccupied with surviving and providing support for those in need. But after the war, there was a need to start education and programs for women and men to learn how to articulate their experiences of feminism and feminist theology into theoretical frameworks and concepts. Woman's organizations, such as *Žene ženama Sarajevo*, launched the first non-degree program of women's studies in 1998, offering a course on gender and religion to students. As a result, scholars who taught literature, ethics, and law had to learn how to integrate feminist theories in their courses, and feminist theologians had to learn how to teach feminist theology and integrate feminist critical hermeneutics—the hermeneutics of suspicion and remembrance.⁷ The challenge was even greater because there was the need to provide a comparative approach to feminist theology from the Judeo-Christian-Islamic perspective. Thus today's most prominent feminist theologians, Mary Daly, Rosemary Radford Ruether, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Judith Plaskow, Riffat Hassan, Fatima Mernissi, and others became a part of the required literature of the first feminist theology courses.⁸ Mernissi's book *The Forgotten Queens of Islam* was translated into Bosnian in 2005, and Schüssler Fiorenza's book *In Memory of Her* was translated in 2012 into Croatian.

Students were eager to learn more about the innovative approaches in the interpretation and understanding of sacred texts. Of particular interest were those texts relevant to women and their lives, such as tracts about family and marriage relations, domestic violence, and female participation in politics. The first feminist theology courses opened a small window onto nonmainstream theology. For the first time, Muslim men and women learned how to read the text of the Qur'an with respect to the internal logic, context, and grammatical composition of the text and its principles of equality and equity.⁹

The majority of these students were involved in the promotion of women's human rights and peace-building work, raising feminist theological arguments

⁷ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1994).

⁸ Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk, Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983); Judith Plaskow, *Standing Again at Sinai, Judaism from a Feminist Perspective* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1990); Riffat Hassan, *Religious Conservatism: Feminist Theology as a Mean of Combatting Injustice Toward Women in Muslim Communities/Cultures*, Islamic Research Foundation International, Inc. http://www.irfi.org/articles/articles_101_150/religious_conservatism.htm (accessed July 8, 2013); Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973); and Fatima Mernissi, *The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam* (Cambridge: Perseus Books, 1991).

⁹ Amina Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman, Rereading the Sacred Text from Woman's Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 3; and Asma Barlas, *Believing Women in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004), 182.

in the field while working with women and men in local communities. As students, they were not equipped to teach and engage in the academic discussion of feminist theology, but they learned enough to give guidance on where to find alternative sources of argumentation for nonmainstream theological exegesis and how to use religious arguments in navigating peace building.

Gender Studies and Religious Studies at the University of Sarajevo

The same team of scholars who taught women's studies worked for years to introduce gender studies and religious studies at the University of Sarajevo as a regular academic program. In 2006, they succeeded when a course on gender and religion became part of the curricula, taught by local Muslim, Orthodox Christian, and Catholic theologians with Jewish theologians invited from European countries.

Although gender studies and religious studies at the University of Sarajevo are new programs supported mostly by foreign donors and still not entirely accepted by local political academics and leadership, they yield significant results, with dozen of young graduates ready to spread this knowledge in their respective fields of interests. It is important to mention that the course on gender and religion is always taught by female feminist theologians with the support of feminist-oriented male rabbis, priests, and imams as guest lecturers. In terms of authority, having feminist male clergy in the classroom strengthens the course because men and especially clergy in patriarchal societies still enjoy higher authority than women. A concept introduced by male clergy is easily accepted, while female scholars and theologians have to invest double and triple efforts to be heard and recognized as authorities. Thus working in partnership with male feminist-oriented theologians was a strategic move to convey the message of feminism and to get attention and recognition. Today, many students both from religious studies and gender studies work as teachers in schools or in NGOs, and the tools are given to them in these courses in order to pursue gender equality, peace, and reconciliation.

Publication of Relevant Literature and Texts

Along with women's studies, gender studies, and religious studies, it was important to publish and translate literature about feminist theology. In the last ten years, several books were published on the initiatives and scholarly work of the Franciscan Catholic nun and professor of feminist theology Rebeka Jadranka Anić from Split (Croatia),¹⁰ professor emerita of Serbian language and

¹⁰ Rebeka Jadranka Anić is one of the rare Catholic theologians in the Balkans writing about feminist theology and doing feminist theology both through exegesis and through her activism in the field. She is highly profiled researcher and work in the Institute for Scientific Researches Ivo Pilar in

literature and founder of women's studies and gender studies Svenka Savić Novi Sad (Serbia),¹¹ and myself, a professor of gender and religious studies (Sarajevo).¹² We three scholars in these three centers in three post-Yugoslavian countries have made an important triangle in feminist theological work that crosses state and ethnonational borders and boundaries imposed after the dissolution of Yugoslavia. We demonstrated that it is possible to work together and support each other's endeavors in planting the seeds of feminist theological work in peace-building initiatives.

One of the greatest contributions in presenting feminist theology to a broader audience is the magazine *Svjetlo Riječi* (Light of the Word), published by Franciscans of Bosna Srebrenica Province. Over six years, Anić wrote her columns in *Svjetlo Riječi* about feminist theology in the Christian tradition and these texts were collected and published in the book *Žene u crkvi i društvu* (Women in Church and society).¹³ Franciscans appeared to be open to feminist theology, and they provided a space in the media for these themes even as other religious presses (Islamic, Orthodox Christian, and Jewish) ignore these

Split, Croatia, and her scholarship is well known in the Catholic Church, but also outside the church and theological circles. Her major work in the last twenty years includes the following books: Rebeka Jadranka Anić, *Kako razumjeti rod? Povijest rasprave i različita razumijevanja u Crkvi* [How to understand gender? History of the debate and different understanding in the Church] (Zagreb: Institut društvenih znanosti Ivo Pilar, 2011), Rebeka Jadranka Anić and Zilka Spahić-Šiljak, eds., *I vjernice i građanke* [Women believers and citizens] (Sarajevo: TPO fondacija–CIPS–Univerziteta u Sarajevu, 2009), and Rebeka Jadranka Anić, *Više od zadanog. Žene u Crkvi u Hrvatskoj u 20. stoljeću* (Split: Franjevački institut za kulturu mira, 2003).

¹¹ Svenka Savić deserves all merits for launching the women's studies program in Novi Sad and introducing the first gender studies program within the public university system in the Balkans. Her example was followed by other feminist scholars in Belgrade, Zadar, Skopje, and Sarajevo. She is not theologian, but professor of Serbian language and literature, but she became interested in feminist theology and organized the first conference on feminist theology that resulted in the book: *Feministička teologija* [Feminist theology] (Novi Sad: Futura publikacija, 1999). Another important publication edited by Savić and Anić is *Rodna perspektiva u međureligijskom dijalogu u XXI veku* [Gender perspective in interreligious dialogue in the twenty-first century] (Novi Sad: Futura Publikacije i Ženske studije i istraživanja, 2009). As a founder of women's studies and gender studies, Savić introduced gender and religion and feminist theology as one of the optional courses within these programs.

¹² I was on the first Muslim theologian and gender studies scholar in the Balkans who explored feminist theology and introduced these courses within gender and religious studies in Sarajevo. See Zilka Spahić-Šiljak *Women, Religion, and Politics: Impact Analysis of Interpretative Religious Heritage of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam on the Engagement of Women in Public Life and Politics* (Sarajevo: IMIC, TPO CIPS of the University of Sarajevo, 2007), Spahić-Šiljak and Anić, eds., *I vjernice i građanke*, Zilka Spahić-Šiljak and Abazović Dino, *Monoteističko troglasje: uvod u Judaizam, kršćanstvo i islam* [Monotheistic three voices: Introduction to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam] (Sarajevo: Rabic, CIPS, TPO, 2009), and Zilka Spahić-Šiljak, *Contesting Female, Feminist, and Muslim Identities: Post-socialist Contexts of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo* (Sarajevo: CIPS of the University of Sarajevo, 2012).

¹³ Rebeka Jadranka Anić, *Žene u crkvi i društvu* [Women in Church and society] (Sarajevo: Svjetlo Rije i, 2010).

topics. However, feminist theological scholarly work is still not widely present within religious and secular academic discourses, and only a limited number of students at theological seminaries, religious studies and gender studies are acquainted with these topics.

Feminist Theology in Support of UNSCR 1325 Implementation

Knowing the limits of our work at religious studies and gender studies, Anić and I decided to do something that broadly impacts women and men in local communities, churches, and NGOs. In cooperation with women in secular women's organizations, we decided to unite all of our efforts in the implementation of women's rights in BiH. Setting legal norms is an important first step, but implementation and acceptance of these norms entails a long-term process of changing certain customs and popular ideations. Religion as the key element of identity in BiH is an idea that has not been explored enough in scholarly work or activism. Anić and I felt there was a need to include the religious voice as a partner in the promotions of women's rights and peace building in postwar BiH.

Within TPO Foundation program, we designed the training material and the collected texts on women's rights for a workshop focused on integrating religion with gender rights activism. We particularly aimed to improve the implementation of CEDAW¹⁴ and UNSCR 3125,¹⁵ both of which focus on women, peace, and security. It was a unique opportunity but also a challenge for feminist theologians, Muslim and Christian,¹⁶ to design training material based on the core beliefs and teachings of these religions on one the one hand, and the universalist human rights perspective, on the other.

As a group of scholars—theologians, religious studies, and human rights—we designed the book *Women: Believers and Citizens* and an associated training manual with instructions on how to use the book for further training activities in the field.¹⁷ It was the first comparative study of women's rights within a feminist theological framework, and is now one of the most important materials in feminist theology in the local languages of BiH. The next step of the project

¹⁴ CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women, adopted in 1979, and ratified in 1981. Today 187 countries ratified the Convention and Bosnia and Herzegovina is among them. For more, see <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/>.

¹⁵ UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security adopted in 2000 by the United Nations, became an important framework and tool in promotion and advocacy for women's participation in peace building processes. For more, see http://www.usip.org/gender_peacebuilding/about_UNSCR_1325.

¹⁶ There were no Jewish feminist theologians in the Balkans who could contribute to that material in local language and there was no funding to engage somebody outside BiH, so we were not able to include Jewish perspective in the material.

¹⁷ Zilka Spahić-Šiljak and Rebeka Jadranka Anić, *Women: Believers and Citizens* (Sarajevo: TPO Fondacija Sarajevo, 2009). Information about the book and the Project are available on the TPO Foundation Sarajevo website: www.tpo.ba.

was to gather women from NGOs, faith communities, faith-based organizations, and teachers of religion and to train them in these topics. They attended a twelve-day training session where they studied the history of women's rights in the West, the anthropology of women in the Bible and the Qur'an, the role of women in education, and their participation in public life, politics, peace building, and reconciliation. The participants were expected to provide a similar education in their organizations and to use the book and manual in designing other programs for promoting women's rights. They were also expected to use the manual when providing psychosocial therapies and services to their users or when pursuing peace-building activities in their local communities. The workshop was well received, and women were excited to attend the trainings. But most important, they emphasized how much they had learned from the other participants and about other religious traditions. As one Muslim woman said: "Now I see that the world did not start with us Muslims and Islam, and how much in common we have with Christianity." These trainings, in and of themselves, were important peace encounters, and they provided the opportunity to build new networks between organizations and individuals.

Feminist theology in BiH and the Balkans began its development from the immediate and localized experience of war, suffering, and pain. It erupted from the need to provide religious answers and comfort for the shame and guilt female survivors of sexual trauma felt. With the support and encouragement of secular feminist organizations that opened the floor for feminist theology female theologians of the Abrahamic traditions practiced feminist theology unconsciously; it was only later that this grassroots approach discovered the theories and methods of feminist theology as it was synthesized in scholarship, and began to understand what they were doing and to call it feminism. After the war, several other channels were used to support feminist theological work, including launching women's studies, gender studies, and religious studies programs in universities, as well as the publication and translation of relevant literature into local languages and the designing unique of training materials for the promotion of women's human rights and peace building.