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On m'appelle à régner Mondialisation, pouvoirs et rapports de genre

Graduate Institute Publications

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Sonja Lokar

DOI: 10.4000/books.iheid.6216
Publisher: Graduate Institute Publications
Place of publication: Graduate Institute Publications
Year of publication: 2003
Published on OpenEdition Books: 20 July 2016
Serie: Genre et développement. Rencontres
Electronic ISBN: 9782940503797



<http://books.openedition.org>

Electronic reference

LOKAR, Sonja. *Women Can Do It In: On m'appelle à régner: Mondialisation, pouvoirs et rapports de genre* [online]. Genève: Graduate Institute Publications, 2003 (generated 19 avril 2019). Available on the Internet: <<http://books.openedition.org/iheid/6216>>. ISBN: 9782940503797. DOI: 10.4000/books.iheid.6216.

WOMEN CAN DO IT

Sonja LOKAR

GENERAL LESSONS LEARNT FROM TRANSITION

Whatever the definition¹ of globalization, it is obvious that transition is a sort of globalization. The WTO, the IMF and the World Bank have more impact on the development patterns of transition countries than any of their national governments. One runs into McDonalds, Benetton, Vodafone and Shell shops in every country in transition. Cheapest USA action movies, South American TV soap operas and MTV have become food for souls in average homes in all transition countries. After 12 years of experience with the processes of transition, it is clear that different ways of transition – shock therapies, stop and go transitions, transitions by gradual reforms and, worst of

¹ Globalization is a penetration into national territories of international enterprises and transnational networks dealing with the exchange of goods, services and financial capital. But it also symbolises an increased mobility of capital, goods and workers. It is also a growing dissolution between an international economic, scientific and technological power and a political power which remains closed within national boundaries. Having become international, these clusters of enterprises and networks escape, at least partly, democratic political control as well as nationally established forms of negotiation and agreement between various social partners. Zdenek Suda, *The Globalization of the Labor Markets, A Challenge to the Social Contract*, Praha, 1994.

all, transitions by war – produce the same trends.² They only differ by their intensity. All the patterns of transition that have been applied until now have been a sort of colonialism, hostile to already developed though outdated industrial resources, hostile to universal welfare state institutions, and most of all hostile to the human capital. Women are the first losers but the long-term survivors of transition. They are the losers because they became the majority of unemployed, additionally impoverished and brutally exploited and because too many of them had to give up motherhood. But they are the long-term survivors of transition as most of them managed to keep their share in education, their share in all sorts of labor markets and to restart the struggle for their share of political power³.

TRANSITIONS BY WAR FROM THE GENDER PERSPECTIVE

Modern wars like the former ones have very earthly reasons – ownership and control over economic and natural resources. Actually the Balkans war was caused by the attempt of the old and new political elite to keep or get upper hand over the process of privatization on as big territory as possible.

The transformation of women into the objects of conservative and aggressive macho politics started years before the war. The nationalistic concept of womanhood started infiltrating into the mainstream politics. “Queen of the home and mother of the nation” was fiercely propagated as a new woman’s role model. At the first free and fair elections at the beginning of the nineties, the percentage of women MPs dropped below 5% in every single country of the region. In the beginning of this big political change women accepted different roles. Most of them became defectors into privacy, a considerable part of them followed the nationalistic leaders, and just a handful of them became the

² Sonja Lokar: Gender Aspects of Employment and Unemployment in CEE, World Bank Discussion Paper No. 411, 1999, pages:12-25.

³ See: Women in transition, UNICEF, 1999 and A decade of Transition, UNICEF, 2001.

leaders of the tiny opposition to the new political mainstream. The new women's movement for gender equality and peace started at the end of the eighties. The starting point of the transition in the South Eastern Europe region was the defeat of these pacifists and the outbreak of the wars.

HOW THE "STABILITY PACT GENDER TASK FORCE" CAME INTO BEING

In 1999, more than fifty governments, including all governments from the developed Europe, the USA, Canada, Japan, Russia, Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovenia, all post armed-conflict countries of the Balkans – Croatia, Bosnia Herzegovina, Montenegro – Albania, Macedonia, Romania and Bulgaria, and the most important international governmental organizations, such as the UN, the European Commission, the WB, the EBRD, the Council of Europe and the OSCE, started the so-called Stability Pact, a sort of Marshall Plan for Southeastern Europe.

At this time governments and international governmental organizations initiating the Stability Pact had explicit obligations to include gender equality issues as a priority and women agencies as equal partners in all their development aid and peace building operations. These obligations were clearly accepted by all of them as signatories and partners in the Convention for Eradication of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), in the documents of the UN Beijing Conference on Women from 1995, in all EU and Council of Europe Directives regarding so-called gender mainstreaming.

But there was and still is a big difference between the words and the deeds.⁴

⁴ See the Kvinna till Kvinna analysis of gender aspects of the Dayton Peace Accord, 2000.

On the other hand, in 1999, women in the Balkan region, especially those living in the most war-torn environments, like in Bosnia and Herzegovina, had already learned some of the bitterest lessons from the end of the twentieth century:

Transition in general and the one sold to the people in the form of violent creation of the so-called "greater nation states" in particular, is hostile to the most important human right – the right to live, the right to live free of violence, the right to free choice, the right to be different and equal. It is also hostile to economic and social human rights, to human resources and to every day needs of the weaker ones: children, women, elderly, disabled, minorities of all sorts, less educated and less well-off. From 1994 social democratic women in the countries in transition started to develop their request for different patterns of transition which would work for women too. In 1998 their regional network, named CEE Network for Gender Issues based in Budapest, was already connecting SD women from the European Socialist Party within the European Parliament with SD women groups and many women NGOs and trade union women groups in 21 countries in transition.

Women already knew that private strategies of survival were not working, and that they will never pull out the community from endless armed interethnic conflicts. Already in the early nineties women in the Balkan wars discovered NGOs as their first organized response to war violence, to displacement, to humanitarian disaster, to poverty and unemployment, to the fact that their former welfare state simply collapsed. In the mid-nineties, during the preparation for the UN World Women conference in Beijing, the global women's network managed to get war rape declared a war crime by international law, which showed that working in the NGOs was not enough. Women understood that they had to leave behind their role of objects and victims of only male, aggressive, conservative politics, and take over their share of political responsibility for a post-war development of their countries in the democratic, prosperous European societies based on the culture of peace and respect of all human rights.

In 1999, even before the start of the Stability Pact, women NGOs in Bosnia and Herzegovina had already learned how to use international governmental organizations to help them enact the 30% quota rule. They had already succeeded in getting 27% of women in the parliaments of both entities. They had organized massive campaigns to encourage women to vote, to stand for elections, to learn together, across all lines of ethnic, religious and political divisions, how to become politicians of the new women politics.

The Stability Pact initiators did not see gender equality as one of their priorities and did not understand that women should be invited in as their crucial partners. They saw women in this post-war region only as victims – this time as victims of organized crime – of pimps and human beings traffickers.

But this time, with the support of the OSCE Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina, women NGO leaders in Sarajevo were able to call it a day. In less than two weeks, in July 1999, with the help of the CEE Network for Gender Issues, the Appeal asking for the formal place of women in this new international peace building initiative was signed by more than 150 women NGOs, trade union women groups, political party women groups, representatives of the gender equality governmental bodies, famous journalists, politicians, gender equality experts, from 13 countries in the Stability Pact region, as well as from the developed European countries. The first idea of the Stability Pact Gender Task Force was born.

From the beginning the Stability Pact leadership looked upon this unexpected offer for partnership with women NGO movements from the South Eastern Europe region with surprise and unease – how can a serious intergovernmental institution take an agent with such a questionable formal legitimacy as a real partner?

In October 1999 the OSCE Mission in BiH and the CEE Network for Gender Issues also supported the representatives of the signatories of the Appeal prepare their formal request for the establishment of the

Stability Pact Gender Task Force and their first Plan for Action. A lot of lobbying from the OSCE, which became a general sponsor of the Stability Pact Gender Task Force, and from the CEE Network for Gender Issues was needed to get the approval for the formal establishment of the Stability Pact Secretariat. The Stability Pact Secretariat also found the solution for the issue of its questionable legitimacy: all governments from the beneficiary countries should be invited to nominate their representative in the Stability Pact Gender Task Force.

CATCH 22 OR HOW TO MAINSTREAM WITHOUT A STREAM

When it became clear that the Stability Pact would establish its Gender Task Force, there was a lot of expectations that this Task Force would work on so called gender mainstreaming. It meant that it should bring the prospective of gender equality in each and every activity of the Stability Pact and start to do it also in each and every country/territory of the region.

For the initiators of the Stability Pact Gender Task Force it was clear from the start that the Stability Pact structures were far from being able to open up for serious gender mainstreaming. This fact has been confirming itself at every possible step. All Stability Pact Gender Task Force attempts to mainstream gender in the initiatives of the Working Table II and III failed. Each streamlining operation or restructuring exercise within the Stability Pact brought out the idea that gender equality is not a priority of the Stability Pact and that the Stability Pact Gender Task Force should be suppressed. The funds that the Stability Pact Gender Task Force was able to get from the Stability Pact donors network stayed in the limits of 0,03% of the first Quick start package money in the year 2000-2001, and doubled for the projects we applied for in 2002-2003. The Stability Pact Gender Task Force could never get sustainable funding for its normal mid-term functioning at the regional and national levels, but had to rely on project by project financing of its regional logistic and strategic planning.

HOW TO NETWORK WITHOUT A SHARED IDEA OF THE PROBLEM, WITHOUT A COMMON STRATEGY, WITHOUT A COMMON GOAL?

In all Stability Pact countries, the public opinion was greatly polluted by traditionalistic and extremist religious backlash, by decades of domination by an aggressive militaristic ideology of women – mothers of nation, an incredible amount of war and domestic violence against women. Women gender equality agencies in the civil society were mostly service-oriented, dispersed, in many cases donors-driven and fighting each other for scarce foreign donations. Not one of the South Eastern Europe countries had a nation-wide gender equality NGO network, working on political and economic rights for women. The work of most of the NGOs was publicly close to invisible.

HOW TO LOBBY WITHOUT PARTNERS FOR LOBBYING?

Women in trade unions were only starting to get organized. Women in political parties were rather few, weakly organized, if at all. Women in elected and nominated positions were even fewer. Political tensions in the post war city councils and parliaments were so big that women from opposite parties nearly did not speak to each other. Most women political activists believed that their parties and themselves had much more urgent issues to solve than to stand for gender equality.

HOW TO MAKE GOVERNMENTS AWARE OF THE IMPORTANCE OF THE GENDER EQUALITY ISSUE?

Some of the governments in the South Eastern Europe region already had small and mostly inefficient gender equality bodies (like Slovenia, Hungary, Croatia, Macedonia, Romania and Albania). Bosnia and Herzegovina, FRY, Montenegro, Bulgaria and Moldova did not have any gender equality mechanism whatsoever. Not one government in the region had a good statistic showing actual political and economic power relationships between men and women.

For the Stability Pact Gender Task Force initiators it was clear that one has to create a stream in order to be able to mainstream.

WHAT IS SO NEW IN THE STABILITY PACT GENDER TASK FORCE INITIATIVE?

It happened for the first time in the history of the modern women's movement that *regionally connected women organizations directly asked for and managed to establish a gender equality mechanism within the international governmental regional peace building initiative*. It means that they have invented a new form of institution. They designed it and little by little had its mandate confirmed – the Stability Pact Gender Task Force got the right to seat at the Stability Pact Working Table I, to work within all Working Tables, to co-operate with all Task Forces, to be invited to the Stability Pact Regional Table meetings, to Regional Donor conferences, to the meetings of the Stability Pact Donors Network.

One of the most difficult passages for the women's grass roots initiatives, especially in the transition situations and even more so in transition by war, is the passage from being the voice of women's antiwar protest, the opposition to acting politics or replacement of the collapsed/inefficient/insufficient welfare state, to the conscious force of positive, affirmative action in peace building and in the democratic development process. *This is the passage from the defensive and self-centered identity to the proactive and open identity*. From the very beginning women organizations starting this initiative for the Stability Pact Gender Task Force were not only classical women NGOs, but also women organizations from different political parties, trade unions, parliamentarians, even from governmental gender equality bodies, from international governmental and non governmental organizations, and they were all willing to work on the principle of crossing all division lines: ethnicity, national boundaries, position-opposition, government-parliament-NGO, NGOs-trade unions-political parties, local-national-regional-international levels... This attitude led to a very specific, *cross-cutting organizational structure* of the Stability Pact Gender Task Force.

First double and from 2001 triple focal point persons came from each country/territory of the South Eastern Europe region: one from the NGO side, one nominated by the government, one nominated by the Parliament. The chair came from the South Eastern Europe region, and the co-chair from the European parliament. The Gender Task Force has a small Advisory board including representatives of the international governmental and non governmental organizations (OSCE, European Parliament, ODIHR, UNIFEM, UNDP, CoE, CEE Network for Gender Issues, NPA, Kvinna till Kvinna, Star Network for World Learning, and the representatives of the Stability Pact Trafficking Task Force and Parliamentary Cooperation Task Force).

The Stability Pact Gender Task Force managed to impose regional ownership of its initiative from the very beginning and to preserve it since. Women organizations from the region were absolutely uncompromising in their decision to formulate their plan for action on their own. They are the ones to make the needs assessments at the annual regional meetings, to define the strategy, to set up priorities, to prepare regional projects, to present them directly to the Stability Pact donors community and to organize and lead their implementation.

Women organizations from the South Eastern Europe region connected in the Stability Pact Gender Task Force showed their ability to directly interact with the most advanced world centers working on gender equality issues for decades – Scandinavian governments (Norway and Denmark became its first donors), the UN (UNDP, UNIFEM), the Council of Europe, the European Parliament, and to get direct support from the governments of the neighboring and other developed countries – from Austria and Italy, from Switzerland and Canada, from Germany, and first of all from the OSCE. Unfortunately, the Stability Pact Gender Task Force never got any support from the World Bank or from the European Commission. *In this interaction the transfer of international experience and best practice was always at least as important as the exchange of regional experience and best solutions.*

CREATING THE STREAM – “WOMEN CAN DO IT” TRAINING MODULES AS TOOLS

- Clear focus was of crucial importance. The Stability Pact Gender Task Force developed a series of adjusted training modules based on the Norwegian Labor Party Women manual named *Women Can Do It* as a major tool for raising awareness and creating a common understanding of the gender equality issues. Political empowerment of women was focused on creating lobbying partners in politics. Networking enabled to create the pressure of the grassroots women’s movement from the bottom up. Lobbying served for creating male allies in national and international decision-making bodies.
- Cross-cutting approach helped build synergies.
- Transfer and exchange of international and regional experience, know-how, best practice, helped create knowledge and courage for joint action.

THE SANDWICH STRATEGY

Little by little in each country of the Stability Pact region the Stability Pact Gender Task Force projects led to the establishment of the nationwide cross-cutting women movements promoting political, economic, personal and social rights for women. This was the result of the Stability Pact Gender Task Force’s bottom-up approach.

Little by little the UN, the OSCE, the Council of Europe, the Stability Pact started to strengthen their own gender equality strategies – the UN Security Council adopted its Resolution 1325 in 2001, international actors in Kosovo/a peace building mission included gender equality mechanisms in their transitional government from the very beginning and supported the establishment of the firm 30% quota, OSCE accepted its gender equality plan in 2000, ODIHR developed a gender aspect of their electoral observation operations, the Council of

Europe and the Stability Pact Gender Task Force together, and also the UNDP, worked hard on the establishment and improvement of the gender equality mechanisms in the countries of the South Eastern Europe region. The action of several strong international actors fighting trafficking of women and children started to give first results. This was the result of the top-down approach.

So South Eastern Europe national governments got caught in between and they started very slowly to move in the right direction.

Results or What Happens When Women Get a Formal Seat at the Big Table

1999	January 2003
Average of women MPs below 7 %	Average of women MPs 15 %
Quota rule enacted in one country (Bosnia and Herzegovina)	Quota rule enacted in four countries (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo/a, Macedonia, FRY)
Governmental body for gender equality existing in five out of 13 countries/territories	Governmental body for gender equality existing in 12 countries/territories (Only Bulgaria still does not have it)
Equal Opportunity Act unknown in all the countries of the region	Equal Opportunity Act enacted in three countries of the region (Romania, Slovenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and everywhere in some stage of preparations)

LESSONS LEARNT

1. *The progress is still not sustainable.* A change in the international policy focus and streamlining of the Stability Pact can easily jeopardise the Gender Task Force. A change in the political orientation of a government (Bulgaria lost the already prepared Equal Opportunity Act when a new government took office in 2001), a small change in the electoral legislation (with the opening of the party lists in Bosnia the percentage of women elected in 2002 in the parliaments of both entities dropped from 27 to 18 and 19%), a raise of general political tensions in the country which push the gender equality issue out of the mainstream political agenda (Albania and Montenegro 2002 national elections led to the stagnation of an already small percentage of women MPs) can still very easily reverse positive trends.

2. *Women of the region still need a regional institution for gender equality.* The progress is seriously hampered because the Stability Pact Gender Task Force is still not established as a stable mid-term institution with clear international mandate to serve as a regional catalyst promoting gender equality in all the countries of the Stability Pact region. Without a strong regional gender equality center which could work as an information clearing house, think tank for gender equality policies and training center, without small national offices with minimal but well equipped and professional staff in each country of the region, the Stability Pact Gender Task Force is losing its ability to open for cooperation with all potential partners in the region. This might be detrimental to its credibility in the region.

3. *National gender equality institutions and cross-cutting gender equality movements in each country of the South Eastern Europe region still need stable and strong international support in know-how and in funding.* Without such support the average number of women serving in local and national parliaments and governments might drop back again, national governments might let their gender equality bodies under-budgeted and understaffed, newly accepted gender sensitized legislation might stay only on paper.

NEW POLITICAL MOVEMENT

The situation in the South Eastern Europe region, in the European Union and in the world at the end of 2002 is very different from what it was in July 1999.

- Tudjman is dead, his party is in the opposition. NATO bombarded FRY, Kosovo/a became a UN protectorate, Milosevic is out of power and in the Hague, Macedonia exploded in its first armed conflicts and got a new government.
- The USA got a republican president, the Palestine-Israel peace project failed and the conflict has seriously aggravated, NATO forces unseated Taliban regime in Afghanistan, the war against terrorism started on 11th September 2001 in New York, Iraqi war is in the air.
- European Union writes its first constitution. 10 transition countries were invited to join the Union before the next EU elections in 2004. After 11th September, EU has to take over much more responsibilities for the still unstable and impoverished South Eastern Europe region. The European Commission and the World Bank are becoming the most influential players. South Eastern Europe region post-war countries are becoming first neighbors of the EU. The Stability pact is reorganizing, streamlining. Regional approach is changing into a country- by-country stabilization and accession agreements.

In this quickly changing political environment the Stability Pact Gender Task Force seems to be only beginning.

But the challenge this time is not any more *how to start* but *how to continue* regional efforts for gender equality in the South Eastern Europe