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**Original scientific paper**  
UDC 159.922-055.1/.2:[305-055.2:141.72  
DOI 10.7251/SOCEN2120045Z  
COBISS.RS-ID 133792001  
Accepted: 19/03/2021

## **Ethic of Care and Its Reflections on the Feminist Theories of Law and Justice**

### **Abstract**

*Although feminism brings together varied and often conflicting feminist ideas, the concept of feminist legal theory (feminist jurisprudence) is often defined unequivocally. A common foothold for many feminist theories can be found, directly or indirectly, in the concept of ethics of care. This paper focuses on the fundamental features of this concept relevant for further sociological and legal discussion of justice and fairness. Feminist debates, marked by a distinctive divergence of opinions in feminist theories (of rights and justice), are observed through the prism of critical reflections on the theoretical concept of ethics of care, without losing sight of the feminist experiences in the region. The ultimate intention of this discussion is to consider the potential for integration of ethics of care with the ethics of rights and justice through the gender mainstreaming strategy.*

**Keywords:** *feminism; feminist theories of rights; ethics of care; ethics of justice*

### **Introduction: Theoretical and Conceptual Framework**

This paper discusses the influence of ethics of care on feminist legal theories. In her writings that define the boundaries of this concept, Carol Gilligan, although a psychologist, has substantially steered and shaped the discussion on the theories of rights and justice. Direct lines of influence can be identified in relation to cultural feminism, also known as difference feminism. An offshoot of radical feminism, this approach evolved in the 1980's and its focus was mainly on examination of legal systems. Cultural feminists like Leslie

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Bender<sup>2</sup> believe that current justice systems base their frameworks and foundations on the men's ethics of rights and justice, and that they completely disregard different voices from the ethics of care that could result in significantly different legal norms. In this context, the authors analyse the ways in which ethics of care could reshape different branches of the law.<sup>3</sup>

Cultural feminist, similarly to Gilligan, take an "agnostic" stance towards the matter of biological roots of gender differences and focus their efforts on demonstrating that traditionally feminine qualities, such as care and empathy, are useful traits that have been unjustly devalued by the society<sup>4</sup>. However, unlike Gilligan, cultural feminists favour the "ethos of care" over the "ethos of rights" and believe that "basing legal rules on communitarian values and an ethos of care would result in the making of dramatically different choices".<sup>5</sup> Their essential claim is that "virtually all our existing legal system is the product of the male ethos of rights"<sup>6</sup>.

Still, we should note that the problem with these discussions is essentially epistemological and boils down to the issue of knowledge production in science, which pervades even legal science. Over the recent decades, feminist theories became profiled as the hub of discussions in the field of social science and humanities, however the practice of ignoring them persists in institutional circles. Feminist discussions find their space yet remain isolated and ghettoized. In the region, they take place in, for example, conferences labelled as feminist (and most often organised outside the institutional academic framework) or in separate panels on general topics, but are not treated as a scientific paradigm that is integrated into discussion on specific issues in a broader context or as a dimension that should be taken into account.

The discussion in this paper was primarily motivated by the predominantly ignorant treatment of the sociology of law as an interdisciplinary field towards feminist debates about/in law. If we consider the purpose of the feminist legal theory, this paper treats it primarily as a sociological legal theory. Namely, following in the footsteps of Robin West, we can conclude that its purpose is descriptive, critical and normative. Descriptive because it describes the social reality of law; critical due to analyses that explain in an attempt to describe how law, despite accepted principles, still fails to deliver

<sup>2</sup> Leslie Bender, 'From Gender Difference to Feminist Solidarity: Using Carol Gilligan and an Ethic of Care in Law', In: *Vermont Law Review* 15/1, 1990

<sup>3</sup> William Turnier et al., 'Redistributive Justice and Cultural Feminism' U: *The American University Law Review*, Vol. 45/5, 1996. (1275-1322.), <http://www.aulawreview.org/>, [17/07/2013]

<sup>4</sup> Margery Lucas, 'Difference Feminism Now', In: *Society*, Vol. 52 Issue 5, 2015. p. 499

<sup>5</sup> William Turnier et al., *op. cit.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 1285

on gender equality; normative on account of changing and transforming the law.<sup>7</sup>

The first part of the paper maps the various feminist approaches used to construct feminist legal theories and points out their mutual correlations. The second part focuses on emotional and cognitive psychology approaches to justice, to identify the features of Carol Gilligan's model of ethics of care. Conclusions based on this model are in literature often taken as the common feature of feminist legal theories. The objective of discussion in the third part is to point out the divergence of opinions between feminist legal theories. Disagreements will be observed through a prism of critical reflection against the theoretical concept of ethics of care, while not losing sight of the feminist experiences in the region. And finally, the fourth part examines the potential models of ethics of care and the viability of transposing it from the domain of private life and civil society to the domain of politics and public life.

### **Feminist legal theories**

The main feature of feminism are disagreements that result in different theoretical approaches. Ann Snitow, American writer, professor and activist, in her last book *Visitors: An American Feminist in East Central Europe*, says that feminism is not an ideology because it “doesn't offer a consistent world-view” and “has never been a fixed configuration of beliefs”.<sup>8</sup> Essentially, it is not possible to derive a syncretic view of feminism and therefore feminist legal theories, but we can discuss the disagreements that define them and, in this way, track the genesis of certain ideas.

The key disagreements from the 1980' were summarised in the debate between liberal and radical feminists. However, according to Robin West, although their “oppositional nature” should not be underestimated, “in some contexts their approaches are complementary”.<sup>9</sup> So, for example, even with opposing views on issues such as “the regulation of pornography and the legalization or criminalization of sex work”, on some other issues (such as direct and/or indirect workplace discrimination, women in politics, right to abortion, etc.) there was less disagreement.<sup>10</sup> Although this does not serve

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<sup>7</sup> Robin West, 'Introduction to *Research Handbook on Feminist Jurisprudence*', U: Robin West & Cynthia Grant Bowman (ur.) *Research Handbook on Feminist Jurisprudence*, Cheltenham, UK/Northampton, MA, USA: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, 2019, p. 1-4

<sup>8</sup> Ann Snitow, *Visitors: An American Feminist in East Central Europe* (New York: New Village Press, 2020), p. 123, 180, 181

<sup>9</sup> Robin West, *op.cit.*, p. 16

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*

to overcome the theoretical differences, solidarity within the movement becomes possible only on selected issues where agreement exists.

Loud arguments between radical and feminist liberalism were quieted but also deepened by new theoretical approaches that converged, *inter alia*, on their critique of liberalism<sup>11</sup>. Based on the work of Robin West<sup>12</sup> as an alternative feminist legal theory, we can identify the relational feminist legal theory, the vulnerability theory, intersectional feminism, socialist feminism and postmodern and queer feminist legal theories. Old disputes were only seemingly settled with the ‘new’ feminist legal theories, considering that these were shaped by the old debates. Their relationship to Carol Gilligan’s theory can be described in a similar vein because they both critically surpass it and remain rooted in some of its fundamental approaches.

So, for example, law professor and originator of critical race theory Kimberlé Crenshaw introduces the concept of intersectionality to highlight the intersection of various social identities. Insights into the difference between experiences of social inequality of women and men are still present, but are now viewed also in terms of how “various forms of inequality often operate together and exacerbate each other”.<sup>13</sup> As Crenshaw explains:

“We tend to talk about race inequality as separate from inequality based on gender, class, sexuality or immigrant status. What’s often missing is how some people are subject to all of these, and the experience is not just the sum of its parts.”<sup>14</sup>

Intersectional approaches, same as other modern feminist legal theories, start from the critique of existing approaches (primarily those specific to cultural feminism, which rests firmly on the model of ethics of care) that are based on the thesis of women’s generally subordinated position and their common, universal experience of otherness. At the core of these criticisms is the view that generalization of the experience of otherness fails to take into account the particularly bad position of marginalised groups, whether as various and intersecting forms of exclusion or through recognition of specific positions of the most vulnerable groups. However, such approaches ultimately expect feminism to remain sensitive to even the most minute differences and causes of variations in circumstances of specific groups.

<sup>11</sup> Despite the criticisms, many female authors emphasise the values of feminist liberalism (see, for example, Sylvia A. Law ‘In defense of liberal feminism’, In: Robin West & Cynthia Grant Bowman (eds.) *Research Handbook on Feminist Jurisprudence*, Cheltenham, UK/Northampton, MA, USA: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, 2019).

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>13</sup> Katy Steinmetz, ‘Q+A: Kimberlé Crenshaw’ *TIME Magazine* 195 (7/8), 2020, p. 82 <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=asn&AN=141838309&site=ehost-live>.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*

Cultural feminism based on the ethics of care treats the female experience of otherness as sufficient grounds for analysis of social inequality and opens the door for further analysis of intersections between gender identity and other grounds for exclusion. On the other hand, authors like Kimberle Crenshaw see that individuals often experience “subordination at the intersection of their identities, rather than on the basis of one identity or another”.<sup>15</sup> In a similar vein, Haleigh Prevost and Jennifer M. Kilty point out that “intersections of sexism, racism, and colonialism operate through the segregation framework to produce and consolidate gendered and raced inequities”.<sup>16</sup>

Still, by pointing out the shortcomings of cultural feminism and Carol Gilligan’s theory, all these approaches ‘splinter’ the unified, homogenised ‘female identity’ to a multitude of particular female identities. The subjects of their theoretical approaches are still coherent group identities. So in terms of ‘new’ approaches, we can identify postmodern, post-structuralist feminist and queer theories. However, these approaches are ‘subversive’ to the extent that “they question traditional, hegemonic understandings of sex and gender, for example”.<sup>17</sup> But only through such questioning can the feminist debate rise out of patriarchal dichotomies and free itself from the assumption that “gender always and exclusively means the matrix of the ‘masculine’ and the ‘feminine’”<sup>18</sup>.

Still, we can identify at least two problematic consequences of this approach. First, gender is a category that allows us to describe and explain the social reality. Second, although many female theorists recognise the importance of identity deconstruction, at the same time it concerns them because it also undermines the foundations of feminist theory.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Lezlie L. Green, ‘Erasing Race’, *SMU Law Review Forum*, 73 (2020), p. 70

<sup>16</sup> Haleigh Prevost & Jennifer M. Kilty, ‘You Start to Feel like You’re Losing Your Mind: An Intersectionality-Based Policy Analysis of Federal Correctional Segregation Policy and Practice’, *U: Canadian Journal of Women and the Law*, vol. 32, no. 1, 2020, p. 192

<sup>17</sup> Martha Albertson Fineman, ‘Introduction: Feminist and Queer Legal Theory’, U: Martha Albertson Fineman, Jack E. Jackson i Adam P. Romero (ur.) *Feminist and Queer Legal Theory: Intimate Encounters, Uncomfortable Conversations*. London/New York: Routledge, 2009, 2016, p. 1

<sup>18</sup> Judith Butler, *Raščinjavanje roda* (Sarajevo: TDK Šahinpašić, 2005), p. 39

<sup>19</sup> An illustrative example of such debates about the subjectivity of feminist theory can be found in the book: Seyla Benhabib et al, *Feminist Contentions: A Philosophical Exchange* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

## (Emotional and) Cognitive Psychology Interpretations of Justice

The concept of justice as the foundation of law can be observed from different and mutually complementary perspectives, one of which is the view that focuses on individual moral judgement. One of the first versions of cognitive psychology interpretations of justice, aimed at establishing the rules of individual moral judgement, was Protagoras' myth on virtue (Plato, 1968, p. 18 - 24).<sup>20</sup> In this dialogue, Parmenid says that justice and other political virtues are given equally to all men, but individuals must develop them through practice and learning before they can be manifested<sup>21</sup>.

From antiquity to this day, various cognitive theories of individual moral judgement and moral development of individuals have been developed. A decisive turning point in thinking on this issue came with Piaget's theory of social learning, subsequently further developed by Lawrence Kohlberg. Kohlberg offered a model with three levels of moral development (with each level consisting of two stages): pre-conventional, conventional, and post-conventional.<sup>22</sup> At the first level, moral (i.e. *pre-moral*) judgement is conditional upon the consequences of disobeying external rules; on the second level, social norms and expectations are adopted as one's own; only at the third level the individual constructs his/her own individual value system.<sup>23</sup> However, one of the conclusions of Kohlberg's theory is that women often do not reach higher levels of moral development and are unable to be impartial and objective. Authors such as Sigmund Freud, Erik Erikson, Jean Piaget and Lawrence Kohlberg believed that women are "constructing the problem differently" and that "they're starting from a different set of premises".<sup>24</sup> Such critical observations were the starting point for Carol Gilligan's writings.

This psychologist published her first text in 1977 under the title *In a Different Voice: Women's Conception of the Self and of Morality*, which subsequently (in 1982) led to the book *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*. With these the author constructs a critical view of earlier theories, whose primary focus was on masculine subjects. The problem is essentially methodological and related to sampling, but it ultimately produces

<sup>20</sup> Platon, *Gorgija/Protagora* (Beograd: Kultura, 1968), p. 18-24

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 20-24

<sup>22</sup> Lawrence Kohlberg, 'Moral stages and Moralization: The Cognitive developmental Approach', U: Lawrence Kohlberg, *The Psihology of Moral Development; The Nature and Validuty of Moral Stages*, San Francisco: Harper and Row, San Francisco, p. 172, 175-177, 1984

<sup>23</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 173

<sup>24</sup> Carol Gilligan, 'Revisiting 'In a Different Voice', *LEARNIng Landscapes*, 11 (2), 2018, p. 27

significant theoretical consequences. Still, a critical approach does not imply rejection of earlier theories, rather their supplementation.

Gilligan points to the shortcomings, the main one being Kohlberg's response scoring scale. She repeated his research and tested the judgement of girls and boys using the case of the Heinz dilemma<sup>25</sup>. The boy Jake solves the dilemma by giving priority to the value of life and uses this logic to justify his choice:

For one thing, a human life is worth more than money, and if the druggist only makes \$1,000, he is still going to live, but if Heinz doesn't steal the drug, his wife is going to die. (Why is life worth more than money?) Because the druggist can get a thousand dollars later from rich people with cancer, but Heinz can't get his wife again. (Why not?) Because people are all different and so you couldn't get Heinz's wife again.<sup>26</sup>

The boy Jake does not see breaking the law as wrong and justifies his opinion with the thesis that laws were made by men, so they are changeable and can also be wrong.<sup>27</sup> His argument is based on assumed fundamental moral values and the belief that laws, under certain circumstances, do not necessarily correspond to those values. Through ethical and logical consideration of the problem, Jake arrives at a rational, correct solution, independent of the power of any authority.<sup>28</sup> However, in response to the same dilemma, a girl by the name of Amy uses different arguments, does not take a firm moral stand and considers the consequences of the different choices available to Heinz. Unlike Jake, she is not sure if Heinz should steal the drug and asks herself if there is any way Heinz can find the money.<sup>29</sup> When asked why Heinz should not steal the drug, as Gilligan explains, Amy does not refer to the law but to potential consequences of that action on Heinz's ability to care for his wife in the future:

If he stole the drug, he might save his wife then, but if he did, he might have to go to jail, and then his wife might get sicker again, and he couldn't get more of the drug, and it might not be good. So, they should really just talk it out and find some other way to make the money.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> This dilemma was developed by Kohlberg to measure moral development and consists of the following: should a man called Heinz steal a drug that he cannot afford to buy if he needs it to save his wife's life? (See more in: Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*. Cambridge/Massachusetts/London: Harvard University Press, 2003, p. 25-26).

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 26

<sup>27</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 27

<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 28

<sup>30</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 28

But, as Gilligan notes, Kohlberg's scale assumed only logical and rational responses, i.e. mathematical weighing of solutions to a moral dilemma. On the other hand, the girl's responses go deeper and multiply the moral dilemma by contemplating the long-term consequences of each choice.<sup>31</sup> Looking at specific features of girls' responses, Gilligan offers a somewhat different theory of moral development and concludes that moral development in women proceeds through three stages: selfishness, marked by concern only for herself; caring, characterised by concern for others close to her; and universal caring, characterised by the ability to care for the welfare of mankind as a whole.<sup>32</sup> While developing the theories of care, Gilligan offered a different emotional and cognitive approach.

The book *In a Different Voice* incited many feminist theorists to criticize ethics of justice and develop ethics of care instead. The debate on ethics of justice vs. ethics of care initially concentrated on the question whether men and women truly deliberate moral issues differently, as well as the advantages of ethics of care over the ethics of justice. Feminist proponents of ethics of care emphasise its superiority over ethics of justice on account of the fact that ethics of care focuses, first and foremost, on the development of moral disposition and virtue and not on learning moral principles and rules. It is more adequate because it seeks contextual answers to moral problems rather than abstract, universally applicable rules.<sup>33</sup>

In some of the later feminist legal theories, especially those that espouse cultural feminism, ethics of care was given primacy over the masculine ethics of rights and justice. In Carol Gilligan's theory, it is just a different voice. If we look at it this way, her theory essentially does not contradict earlier theories, particularly Kohlberg's, but is a theory that considers a different, 'female' voice in addition to the 'male' voice. The difference between these two voices is that the 'male' voice favours rights and justice while the 'female' voice accentuates care and interpersonal relationships. However, with respect to further interpretation of Carol Gilligan's theory and understanding of her impact on sociological and legal determinations of justice and rights, we must go back to two previously noted contradictions often encountered in feminist (legal) theory. The first has to do with the context in which we place the dichotomy of the 'male' vs. 'female' approach, and the other with the theoretical

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 28

<sup>32</sup> More on focuses and transitional stages: Sara Ann Reiter, 'Kohlberg – Gilligan Controversy: Lessons for Accounting Ethics education', In: *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*, No. 7, 1996, p. 33-54

<sup>33</sup> Jasminka Babić-Avdispahić & Asim Mujkić, *Etika* (Zenica: Udruženje za filozofiju i društveno-humanistička istraživanja, Eidos, 2019), p. 141-142

disposition of the ethics of justice and the ethics of care. Only then can we proceed to review the possibility of integration of these two approaches.

### **On the Contradictions in Feminism**

The identity-based approach matrix – ethics of care and ethics of justice – both reflects and supports the patriarchal dichotomy of ‘male’ vs. ‘female’. Unlike the first wave of feminists who were predominantly inspired by liberal ideas of universality of human rights and equality of human beings, the second wave focused on the differences between men and women with a tendency to universalize the female experience as a constant experience of otherness. Such assumptions, characteristic of the early days of the second wave, are still present today in various debates and not just those on moral development but also, for example, debates on leadership styles and management skills, feminist epistemology, female peace activism and eco-feminism. The assumption in each of these approaches is that of the universality and specificity of the ‘female’. It is assumed to be universal and in common to all ‘women’ and specific as a locus of difference from the ‘male’.

This homogenisation of collective female identity is becoming particularly problematic in its essentialist versions. Each of those versions includes claims about the essence, the core of the ‘female’ identity and assigns to it certain common, primordial traits (such as the more peace-loving gender, caring, emotional, etc.). These strategies are similar to patriarchal strategies that are based on a series of binary oppositions. Although fundamentally the same in their approach, their outcomes are different. The patriarchal approach uses dichotomies (such as rational – emotional) to keep women in the private sphere, while the feminist one wants to engage them in the sphere of politics and public life. However, unlike the first wave of feminism, the second wave directed its efforts not on equal participation in firmly entrenched masculine structures but on questioning them and transforming them through a ‘different’ voice.

Clearing the female identity of all differences is not necessarily embodied in the biological, so in an effort to avoid essentialism the basis for homogenisation is sought mainly in the various forms of social behaviour, most of all in gender socialisation and specific experiences of subordination. The contradiction inherent in these approaches is that patriarchally defined women’s roles produce experiences which develop the ‘feminine’ virtues of emotion, compassion and care. At the same time, their potential depends on the possibility to transfer these virtues into the domain public and political life. Theo-

retical concepts inspired by the work of Carol Gilligan find their confirmation in empirical studies attempting to ‘measure’ the difference between the ‘male’ and ‘female’ approach in different areas. Such studies were also conducted in our region, mostly in the field of economics. For example, Jasna Kovačević and Jelena Milinović present the results of empirical research on ‘male’ and ‘female’ leadership.<sup>34</sup>

In effect, the historical perspective allows us to track fundamental similarities and specific differences in the articulation of second-wave feminist ideas in the region and in the Western, democratic societies.<sup>35</sup>

Both Western feminists and Yugoslav feminists demanded fundamental structural changes, basing their demands on theoretically similar insights into women’s generally subordinated position. Still, their respective circumstances largely resulted in a different intensity of events. While feminists in the West, mainly in the US and primarily in radical feminist circles, marched to legalize abortion and advocated laws to ban pornography, Yugoslav ac-

<sup>34</sup> Jasna Kovačević, “Rodne razlike u etičkom donošenju odluka”, In: Amila Ždralović (ed.), *Rod i ekonomija*, Sarajevo: SOC, 2019; Jelena Milinović, *Liderke izbliza. Prilog proučavanju liderstva žena u Bosni i Hercegovini* (Sarajevo: Sarajevski otvoreni centar, 2017)

<sup>35</sup> The narrative about women’s single identity, women’s affairs and antagonisms between genders has shaped the feminists’ efforts and activities in the region during the 1970s. The end and the culmination of the first phase of the Yugoslav feminist movement (this paper uses periodization provided by Đurđa Knežević in her article “Kraj ili novi početak? – Feminizam od šezdesetih do danas u Jugoslaviji/Hrvatskoj”, In: Andrea Feldman (ed.), *Žene u Hrvatskoj, Ženska i kulturna povijest*, p. 248-249, Zagreb: Ženska infoteka, 2004) was marked by the conference “Drug-ca Žena, Žensko pitanje – novi pristup?” (*Comrade Woman. Woman’s Issues – New Approach*), which took place at the Student Cultural Centre in Belgrade in 1978. Discussions at this conference can also be seen as an inauguration of the second phase of the feminist movement, considering that they brought up a unified category of the female and a unified approach by highlighting the ‘differences’ between ‘Western’ and Yugoslav feminism. The differences arose from different ways of life in substantially different social and political circumstances. As Žarana Papić writes in 1992, women in Yugoslavia lived in a “different civilization” from women in the West (Žarana Papić, “Mogućnost socijalističkog feminizma u Istočnoj Evropi”, In: Adriana Zaharijević, Zorica Ivanović and Daša Duhaček (eds.), *Žarana Papić, Tekstovi 1977-2002*, Beograd: Centar za studije roda i politike, Fakultet političkih nauka i Žene u crnom, p. 197). In Western democratic societies, the issue of women’s right to their own bodies and legalization of abortion is accentuated, while women are strengthened through work in small groups that emphasise the importance of sisterhood and solidarity (Milena Karapetrović, “Istorija borbe za prava žena i rodnu ravnopravnost”, In: Amila Ždralović and Saša Gavrić, (eds.), *Uvod u rodne studije: Teorija, pravo, politika – za studentice i studente društvenih nauka*, Sarajevo: Sarajevski otvoreni centar and Pravni fakultet, p. 25). On the other hand, in the society of socialist equality and exercised rights (such as the right to work, education, divorce and abortion), women “were silenced”, “lulled into passivity” and pulled “into the trap of socialist ideology” that claimed to have solved the so-called “women’s” issue. Still, as feminists and Marxists, feminist theorists spoke out about the patriarchal character of the socialist society and the general subordination of women in the society.

tivists were equally radical about the political circumstances in their society and raised the issues of restrictions and reach of the socialist equality of men and women. Their narratives about women's subordination and the need for solidarity, regardless of their many differences, are essentially the same. Remembering the 1978 conference, Nada Ler Sofronić says:

We spoke out in public, took the risk of media, institutional and party slaps and smacks, especially because we invited the most important women to this conference, feminists from the developed West who told an almost identical story but about how the West, which brags so loudly about its democracy, is actually a democracy without women; it was the fact that they were feminists and about how they and we got abandoned by our marvellous leftists after '68 and pushed away from lecterns back to copiers and cafeterias, of course not all of us. Women were definitely realising that they need their own movement and that they must fight for their rights independently and in solidarity with other women, in their own independent movement.<sup>36</sup>

The continuity of this idea was interrupted by the breakup of the society and the state, and with the concept of democracy "which is conservative, traditional, nationalistic and simplified"<sup>37</sup> feminism entered a different phase. In her article "Telo kao proces u toku" (*Body as an Ongoing Process*), published in the magazine *Sociologija* in 1992, Žarana Papić notes that in the course of "development and branching of feminist theories", "mature feminism" directs the same criticisms at the "early feminism" as it "in its earliest stages directed at the 'male theory' that disregarded the issue of gender division."<sup>38</sup>

Knowing that the category of "woman" is neither homogeneous nor static/universal but rather a heterogeneous, multi-faceted category that can both synchronously and diachronously assume different positions and roles, points to a specific historical gender dynamics in which superior-subordinate relationships may vary depending on the cultural patterns of masculinity and femininity. The universalism of the previous phase of feminism was subsequently rightly criticised, because "empty" universalism cannot be used to understand or shed light on the cultural wealth and diversity of possible relations between the sexes."<sup>39</sup>

Žarana Papić finds support and grounds for her claims in an essay by the sociologist Judith Stacey. Stacey recognises Carol Gilligan's book as extremely important because the author "challenged the false universalism in scholar-

<sup>36</sup> Nada Ler Sofronić, "78 Revisited", In *ProFemina*, 2011, p. 3

<sup>37</sup> Žarana Papić, *Mogućnost socijalističkog feminizma u Istočnoj Evropi*, p. 195

<sup>38</sup> Žarana Papić, *Telo kao 'proces u toku'*, In: Adriana Zaharijević et al, (eds.), *Žarana Papić, Tekstovi 1977-2002*. (Beograd: Centar za studije roda i politike - Fakultet političkih nauka i Žene u crnom, 2012), p. 165

<sup>39</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 166

ly narratives about (putatively human) moral development that were rooted exclusively in studies of the experiences and subjectivities of males.”<sup>40</sup> Following this course, we can recognise at least four conceptual frameworks arising from Carol Gilligan’s theory. First, she shook the epistemological foundations of objectivity and neutrality of masculine scientific theories and introduced analytical categories which generally cannot be ignored in any analysis in the field of social science and humanities. Second, she created a framework for future feminist theories, particularly those developed in the framework of cultural feminism. Third, the feminist critique that followed paved the path for postmodern and post-structuralist feminist perspectives. And four, the book was a direct influence on various women’s movements and it also provided a conceptual framework for interpretation of the scope and limitations of their activist action (primarily in the domain of women’s peace activism and eco-feminism).

An illustrative approach in this context is the women’s (peace) movement in the region after the 1990s. Namely, towards the end of the 1980s there was a spontaneous flourishing of women’s lobbies, women’s parliaments, independent women’s associations in Serbia, Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina.<sup>41</sup> In the words of Tatjana Žarković and Jelena Gaković:

“Women’s peace activism in the countries of the former Yugoslavia is a unique example of solidarity which knows no physical or symbolical boundaries imposed by the nationalist ideology. [...] The approach to peace, security and conflict resolution which is traditionally characterised as women’s approach primarily focuses on thinking and action based on the model of ethics of care and responsibility.”<sup>42</sup>

In their interpretation of women’s peace activism, female authors’ theoretical explanations reach for categorization devices provided by Carol Gilligan. In that, they consider the (postmodernist) criticisms of this approach but they also believe that the need for critical reflection on the importance and potential of women’s peacebuilding association is precisely the reason why the above debate must be placed into its social context. Without disputing the importance of this approach, and with the necessary critical remarks about

<sup>40</sup> Judith Stacey, On Resistance Ambivalence, and Feminist Theory: A Response to Carol Gilligan, In: *Michigan Quarterly Review*. Vol. XXIX, No. 4, 1990, p. 537

<sup>41</sup> Sanja Licht & Slobodan Drakulić, When the Word for Peacemaker was a Woman: War and Gender in the Former Yugoslavia”, In: Jelisaveta Blagojević & Dušan Dorđević Mileusnić (eds), *Belgrade Women’s Studies Journal - Selected Papers Anniversary Issue*, 2002, <http://www.zenskkestudie.edu.rs/en/publishing/online-material/women-s-studies-journal>

<sup>42</sup> Tatjana Žarković & Jelena Gaković, Women’s Peace Activisms, In: Amila Ždralović et al., *What is the Gender of Security? 20 years of the Security Council Resolution 1325 ‘Women, Peace and Security’ and its implementation in Bosnia and Herzegovina* (Sarajevo: Sarajevo Open Centre i OSCE, 2020), p. 111

the essentialist grounds for association, we can conclude that feminisms in Bosnia and Herzegovina and its neighbouring countries have entered a different phase. Research generally confirms significant involvement of women in civil society and development of various women's policies.<sup>43</sup>

### **Theoretical Dispositions of the Ethics of Justice and Ethics of Care**

Based on past research, it can be concluded that although women often associate around the patriarchal matrix, these associations have grown into a strong movement. Particularly when it comes to associations in small local communities where the activists identify, at least declaratively, the idea of women's solidarity as extremely important; they articulate a common female identity and raise it as an issue only occasionally, by recognising the intersecting grounds for discrimination and the position of women in vulnerable groups. The range of activities carried out by associations and informal groups is versatile and includes organisation of social gatherings and outings, programmes for economic strengthening of women, humanitarian activities, prevention and combat against domestic violence, organisation of preventive medical check-ups, etc.<sup>44</sup> Most associations self-identify as women's associations and organisations and individuals create networks for further cooperation and support, such as *Ženska mreža BiH*<sup>45</sup>, *Ženska romska mreža*<sup>46</sup>, *RING mreža*<sup>47</sup> and *Sigurna mreža*<sup>48</sup>. Activist action in general is marked by different activities, but the dominant and clearly identifiable model is the ethics of care which is complementary to a patriarchal-defined female identity as a basis

<sup>43</sup> Ristin Thomasson, *To make room for changes – Peace strategies from women organisations in Bosnia and Herzegovina*. The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation, 2006. <http://www.peacewomen.org/node/90314>; Zlatiborka Popov-Momčinović, *Ženski pokret u Bosni i Hercegovini: artikulacija jedne kontrakulture*, Sarajevo: Sarajevski otvoreni centar, Centar za empirijska istraživanja religije u Bosni i Hercegovini, Fondacija CURE, 2013; Amila Zdralović and Miela Rožajac – Zulčić, *Ženski mirovni aktivizam i njegov utjecaj na mir i sigurnost*, In: Andriana Zaharijević (ed.), *Neko je rekao feminizam? Kako je feminizam uticao na žene XXI veka*, Sarajevo: Sarajevski otvoreni centar Fondacija Heinrich Böll – Ured u BiH Fondacija CURE, 2012

<sup>44</sup> I base this conclusion on past empirical research on the women's/feminist movement, the findings of which were to a large extent already published in: Amila Zdralović & Zlatiborka Popov Momčinović, *Activisms on the Margins: Capacity Assessment in Ten Selected Women's Organizations*, Sarajevo: Fondacija CURE, 2019

<sup>45</sup> See more at: <https://zenskamreza.ba/o-nama/>.

<sup>46</sup> See more at: <https://www.zrm-uspjeh.ba/index.php/bs/o-nama>.

<sup>47</sup> See more at: <https://www.ring.ba/index.php/nama/o-mrezi-ring>.

<sup>48</sup> See more at: <https://www.sigurnamreza.ba/en>.

for association and activism. Still, it should be noted that in fighting for their rights, women also articulate theoretical views that correspond to feminist liberalism.

In that, activist action still suffers from the general failings of civil society action and often receives criticism that it has NGO-ised feminisms and reduced them to project activities guided by donor policies. This also reflects on feminist theories, because most of them are generated in 'major' feminist/women's associations linked to individuals from the academic community and fill the gaps that result from the general situation and the lack or absence of financial investment in research and publications in the field of social science and humanities. In extra-institutional spheres of the civil society, it was also easier to initiate various research and education programmes.<sup>49</sup>

The above is not meant to diminish the value of activities taking place in the non-governmental sector, which include informal education programmes and scientific research. The findings of that research provide information about the social reality of the law with respect to gender equality and serve as guidelines for further advocacy activities and transformation of rights. The wealth of that research is demonstrated by, for example, publications published by organisations such as Sarajevski otvoreni centar and Fondacija Cure.<sup>50</sup> Research results are used by organisations to periodically produce reports on the status of (women's) human rights, such as the reports of civil society organisations on the application of key findings and recommendations of the CEDAW committee for Bosnia and Herzegovina.

However, a question that remains justifiably open is the extent to which knowledge production in project cycles is theory-impaired, considering that the objectives and subjects of study are defined within the scope of a broader project. Specifically, their outputs give us a 'snapshot' of the present situation and useful background information but, justifiably so considering their primary purpose, often fail to provide deeper theoretical analysis and productive criticism. One such example is the treatment of the UN agenda on Women, Peace and Security, which is theoretically firmly based in ethics of care.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>49</sup> Midhat Izmirlija & Amila Ždralović, *Feministička teorija, nauka i istraživanje u Bosni i Hercegovini*, In: Amila Ždralović and Saša Gavrić, (eds), *Uvod u rodne studije: Teorija, pravo, politika – za studentice i studente društvenih nauka*, Sarajevo: Sarajevski otvoreni centar and Pravni fakultet, 2019

<sup>50</sup> To learn more about these organisations' publications, please see: <https://fondacijacure.org/category/publikacije/istrazivanja/> and <https://soc.ba/>.

<sup>51</sup> "Feminists who come from the Western, liberal countries [...] are often sharply critical of the UN Agenda 'Women, Peace and Security'. The criticism is especially prominent with respect to how Resolution 1325 is implemented, emphasising that the states use this document as a smokescreen for other foreign policy interests, instead of dealing with the problem of women's safety within their borders" (Amila Ždralović et al, *Kojeg je roda sigurnost: 20 godina*

Namely, for the last ten years Bosnia and Herzegovina is continuously working on the implementation of the UN Resolution 1325 and the national plans for its implementation are continuously updated. The *Implementing the Women, Peace and Security Agenda in the OSCE Region* report finds that in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in Serbia the second and the third national action plan “sought to focus more on human security, in an attempt to make the plans more relevant to immediate, real security threats faced by the population, including for example responses to natural disasters”.<sup>52</sup> Still, all the shortcomings of this approach became apparent with the first signs of the looming Covid-19 pandemic. From the moment state of emergency was declared, the Agency for Gender Equality of Bosnia and Herzegovina (ARS B&H) issued warnings that the authorities in charge of pandemic-related measures must pay attention to the impact of their activities on gender equality, and in late April ARS B&H developed the *Recommendations for integration of the gender equality perspective into the process of planning, adoption and implementation of decisions, measures and plans in the combat against the COVID-19 pandemic*. Recommendations primarily relate to the area of prevention and protection from gender-based violence, women’s work engagement, economic position of women and equal representation of women in decision-making bodies<sup>53</sup>.

Needs assessments will certainly be required in the coming period, but in the context of this discussion we can also identify the problem of excessive focus on women’s ethics of care rather than gender mainstreaming in policy-making. So, in analysing Bosnia and Herzegovina’s action plans (i.e. the first two national action plans), Ebru Demir points out two weaknesses: first, the problem of excessive focus on descriptive representation of women - which is important but does not lead to substantive representation; and second, the absence of policy gender mainstreaming.<sup>54</sup>

Her conclusions about the weaknesses inherent in national action plans can also be indirectly interpreted in a broader theoretical context. Activities aiming to introduce changes into political and public life are primarily

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*Rezolucije Vijeća sigurnosti 1325, Žene, mir i sigurnost i njezina provedba u Bosni i Hercegovini*, Sarajevo: Sarajvski otvoreni centar i OSCE, 2020, p. 13).

<sup>52</sup> Henri Myrntinen et al, *Implementing the Women, Peace and Security Agenda in the OSCE Region*, 2020. Beč: OSCE, 2020, p. 56

<sup>53</sup> ARSB&H. (28/4/2020), *Preporuke za integrisanje perspektive ravnopravnosti spolova u proces planiranja, donošenja i provođenja odluka, mjera i planova u borbi protiv pandemije COVID-19*. Broj: 10-37-2-728-2/20. <https://arsbih.gov.ba/preporuke-za-integrisanje-perspektive-ravnopravnosti-spolova-u-borbi-protiv-pandemije-covid-19/>

<sup>54</sup> Demir Ebru, The role of the United Nations women, peace and security agenda in promoting gender justice in post-conflict societies: Is the agenda transformative. *International Journal of Rule of Law, Transitional Justice and Human Rights*, 7 (7), 2016

focused not on their fundamental transformation but on the matter of so-called “women’s” quotas. Moreover, women’s policy based on the ethics of care profiles female and male identities in a way that is similar to patriarchal approaches and thus results in limited change. Women’s activism in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the civil domain has articulated its demands, but it has also seriously shaken the belief in a homogeneous female identity and placed a stronger accent on the problems faced by women in marginalised groups. However, by being grounded in the ethics of care, different female identities remain trapped in patriarchally defined roles.

Ethics of care - although complementary to the ethics of justice in the political and public sphere - has transformational potential, provided that we treat it, same as the ethics of justice, as an ideal type model rather than as an a priori female and male model. This is not about potential that should be exhausted - in the form of personal resources of the women who provide care for their homes and household members, or activists’ care for the life of the local community and attempts to bridge the gaps in the social welfare system - instead, the potential of this approach should be used as part of public policy. Also, the ideal type constructs should be freed from the prefix of ‘female’ or ‘male’. However much empirical data validates the use of these prefixes, we can also find validation for the opposite. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, for example, feminisation of the legal profession and the resulting high percentage of women in the justice system<sup>55</sup> did not mean that a female/feminist paradigm was introduced into the judicial authorities.

This is not meant to negate the importance of ethics of care; it certainly remains a “corrective”<sup>56</sup> of the ethics of justice because it contextualizes the ethics of justice and implies a (gender) sensibility that considers long-term consequences of certain decisions and policies. However, feminist approaches based in the ethics of care at the expense of ethics of justice tend to follow strict patriarchal lines of gender division.

On the other hand, the integration of ethics of care and ethics of justice can be found in the strategy of gender mainstreaming, which arose in response to the shortcomings of specifically female policies. As Zorana Antonijević explains: “At the First World Conference on Women held in Mexico City in 1975, United Nations member states made a commitment to formulate national strategies, goals and priorities aimed at improving gender equality and eradication of gender-based discrimination”, but ten years later, “at the Third World Conference on Women held in Nairobi in 1985, it was acknowledged

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<sup>55</sup> Data on the gender structure of judicial authorities are available in Annual Reports of the High Judicial and Prosecutorial Council.

<sup>56</sup> Jasminka Babić-Avdispahić & Asim Mujkić, *Etika*, p. 142

that the programmes which focused on women and mostly treated them as a homogeneous group failed to provide adequate results”.<sup>57</sup> This was the reason for further development of the gender mainstreaming strategy, presented at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995.<sup>58</sup> Gender mainstreaming is an approach which embeds the gender perspective in all programmes and activities and at all levels of decision-making, planning and implementation of activities.<sup>59</sup>

Discussions in literature about the gender mainstreaming strategy and its transformation potential<sup>60</sup> abounded, but some authors warn that the changes it offers are slow rather than revolutionary:

We suggest analysing the transformative potential of gender mainstreaming with a different notion of change in mind. This means that the changes achieved through mainstreaming gender can simultaneously reproduce certain forms of gender inequality, while making small steps in subverting the power relations installed in this inequality, depending on the context. Gender mainstreaming strategies therefore might partly subvert and partly comply with existing power relations but certainly not bring the revolutionary change as might have been anticipated by the inception of gender mainstreaming as a global strategy. Rather they could be seen as little movements, steps forward, backward and sideways in a very, very slow revolution and process of change.<sup>61</sup>

We should take into account that this is a relatively new global strategy with a wide field of application, in which we talk about gender-mainstreamed policies, budgets, education, etc. Some authors also note that gender mainstreaming as a strategy is inconsistently applied in different states and even within a single state<sup>62</sup>, which certainly makes its interpretation more diffi-

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<sup>57</sup> Zorana Antonijević, Gender mainstreaming: urođnjavanje, In: Amila Ždralović i Saša Gavrić (pr.) *Uvod u rodne studije. Teorija, pravo, politika – za studentice i studente društvenih nauka* (p. 275-284), Sarajevo: Sarajevski otvoreni centar i Pravni fakultet, 2019, p. 275

<sup>58</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>59</sup> Zorana Antonijević, Gender mainstreaming: urođnjavanje, p. 275; Adnan Kadribašić, Institucionalni mehanizmi i javne politike za rodnu ravnopravnost, In: Amila Ždralović i Saša Gavrić, *Uvod u rodne studije. Teorija, pravo, politika – za studentice i studente društvenih nauka* (p. 137-150), Sarajevo: Sarajevski otvoreni centar i Pravni fakultet, 2019, p. 146

<sup>60</sup> See more in: Jane L. Parpart, Exploring the Transformative potential of Gender mainstreaming in International Development Institutions, In: *Journal of International Development*, 26, 2014, p. 382–395, 2014, Anouka van Eerdewijk, The Micropolitics of Evaporation: Gender Mainstreaming instrument sin Practice, In: *Journal of International Development* 26, p. 345–355, 2014

<sup>61</sup> Tine Davids et al, Feminist Change revisited: Gender Mainstreaming as Slow Revolution, *Journal of International Development*, Vol. 26 Issue 3, April 2013, p. 396-408

<sup>62</sup> Francesca Scala & Stephanie Paterson, Bureaucratic Role Perceptions and Gender Mainstreaming in Canada, In: *Gender, Work & Organization*, Vol. 24 Issue 6, p. 579-59., 2017

cult but also provides for the necessary contextualisation as required by the ethics of care. Many feminist theory writings are characterized by rejection of abstract universalities and objective standards, showing that “abstract statements about human nature inevitably ignore differences and ultimately are insensitive to those outside of the experience of the person making the generalizations.”<sup>63</sup> Theses such as this form the foundations of a large part of feminist liberalism based in the ethics of rights and justice. Considering that the gender mainstreaming strategy is more of a universal approach than a universal rule, it offers a response to the criticisms coming from the feminist theory based in ethics of care.

### **Instead of a Conclusion**

Ethics of justice and ethics of care can be broadly interpreted as the difference between the discourses of justice and fairness: justice formulates the universal principles, while fairness contextualises them. Gender mainstreaming as a strategy provides for contextualisation of universal principles in the design, implementation and evaluation of policies, programmes, measures, etc. The strategy is impact-oriented, which points to its continuous contextualisation. Broader interpretation permits us to speak about impact not on assumed unified groups (men – women) but on different individuals and different groups. A reasonable objection to this approach would be that it reverts back to the field of feminist liberalism and that its way of thinking is dominated by Rawls’ paradigm. However, it should be noted that all approaches directly or indirectly based in the concept of ethics of care also share a common feature in that they criticize (feminist) liberalism and subvert its fundamental values. Liberalism is an idea that seeks the kind of transformation that is offered by its subsumption under the feminist paradigm.

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<sup>63</sup> Linda J. Lacey, Introducing Feminist Jurisprudence: An Analysis of Oklahoma’s Seduction Statute, 25, In: *Tulsa Law Review. Volume Symposium on Feminist Jurisprudence*, Vol. 45, Issue 4, 2013, p. 775-798, <https://digitalcommons.law.utulsa.edu/tlr/vol25/iss4/4>, p. 781

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