‘One Pair of Shoes, One Life’:
Steps toward Accountability for Genocide in Srebrenica

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Abstract

On 15 July each year, Women in Black, an antimilitarist and feminist organisation based in Belgrade, organize or participate in events in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina to mark the anniversary of the genocide in Srebrenica. In 2010, in collaboration with a number of artists, Women in Black blocked the main street in Belgrade; and under police protection, they laid about 500 pairs of shoes given to them by Serbian citizens. Each pair of shoes symbolically represents the life and death of a person killed in the massacre, and each carried a handwritten message from the person who gave them. We analyse the meaning and significance of this campaign as a civil society justice mechanism of moral reparations. Although criminal prosecutions for war crimes in the Balkans have been taking place for nearly two decades, they have not been able to address the on-going conflicts and animosities that still persist in the region. We argue that by participating in ‘One pair of shoes, one life,’ Serbian citizens have begun to take steps in publicly accepting responsibility for failing to prevent the crime of genocide perpetrated in their name.

Key words: civil society justice, moral reparations, genocide, Srebrenica, Women in Black
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Introduction

The armed conflicts that followed the breakup of Yugoslavia at the end of the Cold War were the most destructive and appalling that Europe has witnessed since World War II. The war in the former Yugoslav Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BH) culminated in and around Srebrenica, where a major genocide occurred in July 1995, concentrated over four days, 11 to 15 July. The Bosnian Serb army executed an estimated 8,372 men and boys while UN forces, specifically Dutch peacekeepers, stood by and watched but did not intervene. The massacre left behind mothers, sisters and widows of the dead, who established a non-governmental organization (NGO), Mothers of Srebrenica, in 1999. The group’s aim is to identify those who were involved in, and responsible for, the massacre and to bring them before local and international courts. Mothers of Srebrenica is the leading organizer for events that mark the anniversary of the genocide each year in Srebrenica and BH; it continues to keep memories of the genocide alive and to press for the punishment and accountability of those responsible. The group works across national

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1 For his involvement in the killings, Radoslav Krstić, a Serb officer was convicted for genocide and sentenced to 46 years of imprisonment by the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, the first conviction for genocide by the tribunal. See, Prosecutor v Radislav Krstić, Case No. IT-98-33-T, Trial Judgement, para 84 (2 August 2001). Estimates of the numbers killed vary. The number is controversial because Bosniak women and girls were raped and sexually abused during the genocide, but are often not counted in the number of victims during the genocide. Human Rights Watch, The Fall of Srebrenica and the Failure of UN Peacekeeping (October 1995); Beverly Allen, Rape Warfare: The Hidden Genocide in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); Nidzara Ahmetasevic, ‘Silence and Shame Shield Srebrenica Rapists from Justice,’ Worldpress, 8 July 2010, 5.

2 We use term accountability broadly to refer not only to individual criminal accountability, but also to the recognition by Serbs that the Srebrenica crime was a genocide.
borders with other NGOs to preserve memories of the genocide,\textsuperscript{3} and one organization with whom they work is Women in Black (WiB), an anti-militarist and feminist organization based in Belgrade, Serbia.

On 15 July each year, WiB Belgrade organizes and participates in events across Serbia and BH to mark the anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide. In 2010 and collaborating with a number of artists, the group initiated and led a street campaign called ‘One pair of shoes, one life.’ The campaign seeks to remember the genocide, to remind Serbian citizens of the people who were killed and the survivors who have been left behind, and to call for accountability of the UN forces as bystanders and the accountability of the Serbian government, whose officials and military officers gave the orders to commit the massacre. A long-term aim is to build a monument in Belgrade in memory of those killed in the Srebrenica genocide.\textsuperscript{4}

In this article, we locate the work of WiB in the transitional justice literature. We show that its activities and participatory approach in the ‘One pair of shoes, one life’ campaign is an example of a civil society and local justice mechanism, an emerging area


of research in the transitional justice literature. The campaign, which also involved a Belgrade theatre group (Dah) and artists’ group (Spomenik), was led by citizens and for citizens to recognize and remember a genocide, to honor the dead and to build ties and relationships across ethnic and religious groups. Although the war in the Balkans is over, at least officially, conflicts continue as people contest who is responsible for, and who are the victims of, the war and the Srebrenica genocide. In this context, a sustainable peace will require more than trials, prosecution and punishment of a relatively few high-placed officials; it will require more than state-sponsored or administered forms of truth-telling and reparations. If the work of WiB and other local NGOs is indicative, a sustainable peace may also require civil society justice mechanisms, which encourage citizens to reflect and remember the past in direct and meaningful ways and to participate in activities that can transform social relations in the places and societies they live in.

The ‘One pair of shoes, one life’ campaign is an example of a particular type of civil society justice mechanism: one commonly called ‘symbolic reparations,’ but which may be better termed ‘moral reparations.’ Other types of civil society mechanisms include (but are not limited to) art installations, literature projects, theatre, symbolic courts or popular tribunals, material reparations, remembrance and reflection activities, reburials and memorials. Some may be viewed as unofficial truth-seeking projects or as broader truth-

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seeking and educational measures;\(^7\) depending on the context and purpose, they can bring forward the complexities and complicities of the often overlapping and shifting categories of perpetrators, victims, and bystanders; they may seek reparations or to rebury and remember the dead; and they may combine and blend truth-seeking, multiple truths, reparations, reflection, reburial and remembrance.\(^8\) Such activities may ‘partly fill the vacuum when leaderships are reluctant to initiate’ them; and they may ‘tap into the agency of survivors …, foster the integration of cultural practices, promote participation and a sense of ownership,’ although they are not without limits or problems.\(^9\)

**Methodology**

As a qualitative case study, this research draws from documentary, media and interview sources. The senior author, who is fluent in Serbian, gathered and translated all the materials. These include a movie produced by WiB, ‘Ne u moje ime’ ['Not In My Name'], which documents visits to sites of crimes by WiB members\(^10\); local Serbian and BH newspapers; and a short clip about the campaign ‘One pair of shoes, one life’ produced by a local Serbian TV station, available on YouTube. With permission and consent from WiB and its individual members, the analysis draws from email correspondence between the

\(^7\) Louis Bickford, ‘Unofficial Truth Projects,’ *Human Rights Quarterly* 29 (4) (2007): 994-1035; Dudai and Cohen, supra n 5, respectively.

\(^8\) Laura Arriaza and Naomi Roht-Arriaza, ‘Weaving a Braid of Histories: Local Post-Armed Conflict Initiatives in Guatemala,’ in Shaw and Waldorf, 205-227.

\(^9\) Dudai and Cohen, supra n 5 at 234; Ibid., 207, respectively.

\(^10\) The movie was produced by WiB members in Serbian language in 2009. It shows how each WiB activist personally relates to the crime scenes visited. The movie is also a conversation between members of WiB and survivors of war crimes in BH on the meanings of justice and truth and the importance of visiting crime scenes across the former Yugoslavia.
senior author and WiB members, an interview with a WiB activist,\textsuperscript{11} photographs produced by WiB, internal WiB office documents on the aims and objectives of the campaign and campaign flyers.

\textbf{Transitional justice in transition}

Transitional justice has evolved from a top-down field of activity principally concerned with using international criminal law, prosecution and trial to address mass atrocities and state repression, to a field that is focusing greater attention to the ‘realities on the ground.’

There is a growing recognition that this relationship has ‘destabilised’ transitional justice.\textsuperscript{12} Initially, it was assumed that using international law and prosecution of state and military offices would promote and strengthen the rule of law in emerging democracies and post-conflict societies. However, this assumption is not supported by empirical research.\textsuperscript{13} As scholars analyze and reflect upon the diversity of what is occurring on the ground, many questions are raised. For example, Weinstein et al. suggest that ‘it is time to reconsider whether the term \textit{transitional justice} accurately captures the dynamic processes unfolding on the ground.’ There may be change, but the process from ‘a past’ of repression and

\textsuperscript{11} A phone interview was carried out on 23 November 2010 between Brisbane and Belgrade to gather background information from WiB on the shoes campaign. This research is a part of on-going and long-term relationship of the senior author and WiB: the materials gathered were either given to the author in WiB’s office or sent by email. We are indebted to WiB’s assistance and generosity in providing background material and visual images for this paper.


conflict to ‘a future’ of democracy and peace is not smooth or certain. Instead, ‘progress toward social reconstruction may be halting.’ Questions are also raised about whether ‘we have limited our array of options, prematurely becoming closed to other interventions.’

Other justice mechanisms include more localized or unofficial truth and reparations activities, local dispute and justice processes, and local initiatives to memorialize and rebury the dead. Depending on where a country is in a process of conflict transformation or social reconstruction, these activities may be part of hybrid justice mechanisms that combine national or international prosecutions with official (that is, state-led or administered) justice activities and those in civil society.

**Civil society justice mechanisms**

Meanings of justice, including what constitutes a justice activity, are also up for consideration. Justice should not be confined solely to legal processes and outcomes carried out by state entities, or even those of customary law or local courts, but can also be processes carried out by members of civil society. A well-known example of a civil society justice mechanism is the Women’s International War Crimes Tribunal, held in December 2000 to hear evidence on the crimes of rape and sexual slavery by the state of Japan and by Japanese military and political officials in the operation of its ‘Comfort Station System,’ which operated in the 1930s and 40s in the Asia Pacific. Evidence and testimonies were presented at the tribunal, drawing on historical records and the survivors.

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14 Ibid., 36.  
themselves, and a judgment was returned. Another is Courts of Women, which began in
the early 1990s, with over 35 such courts since convened throughout Asia, Africa, Central
and South America and the Mediterranean to address human rights violations against
women. Although these Courts were not initially established to address justice after mass
atrocities and state repression, their method and approach uses witness and victim
testimonies, and a jury of wise women and men renders a judgment. Court-like
deliberative atmospheres are one type of truth-seeking civil society mechanism. Another is
concerned with multiple truths, ‘the ambiguities, mixed motives, and shades of gray that
color most conflicts,’ which are not addressed satisfactorily by criminal courts or even by
court-like tribunals. These weave accounts of war crimes, sexual victimization and the
complexities and differing perspectives of culpability into a theatre production. This is what
the Dah Theatre, Belgrade, achieves in its play ‘Crossing the Line,’ which uses the
verbatim testimonies of women refugees, displaced persons and survivors of the Yugoslav
wars to reach audiences ‘on a verbal and emotional level’. 

Many types of human artistry and performance raise questions about war,
repression, morality, human conflict, suffering and rebuilding. How are we to distinguish
these from civil society justice mechanisms? It is difficult to draw a line, but we propose

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16 The Courts of Women, established in the early 1990s by the Asian Women and Human
Rights Council for the Asia Pacific region, expanded to other parts of the world by El
Taller, an international NGO based in Tunis. The courts aim to ‘define a new space for
women ... a new politics’ (‘Courts of Women,’ http://www.eltaller.org, [accessed 15 March
2011]). The courts are broadly concerned with human rights violations against women in
societies at war or relative peace; they have addressed US war crimes, and roundtables
have been held on conflicts and war, including that in the former Yugoslavia (‘Lawyers
Discuss New Ways of Justice,’ The Times of India, 31 March 2009).

17 Arriaza and Roht-Arriaza, supra n 8 at 217.

18 Olivera Simić, ‘Breathing Sense into Women’s Lives Shattered by War: Dah Theatre
three elements. One is that the activity focuses on questions of victimization and culpability for individual or collective crimes; and a second is that it focuses on disputes or conflicts among groups that remain unresolved despite criminal or administrative legal mechanisms or other measures such as truth commissions or reparations. Each of these elements, of reckoning with or accountability for ‘the past’ and of dealing with ‘the present’ (which may continue to be in conflict) is related to a third element: an activity aimed at repairing social relations and at social reconstruction. Like others, we are reluctant to use the term reconciliation as the term for this third element, in part because it means different things to people,\(^{19}\) and in part because it has ‘overtones of forgiveness and atonement’.\(^{20}\) In proposing these elements, we can narrow the range of activities we might term civil society justice mechanisms, but our aim is to spark discussion and research on the phenomena, not limit it.

**Reparations: a brief note**

We pause briefly to consider the terms *reparation* and *reparations*. In the transitional justice literature, the terms are not used consistently (that is, in the singular or plural); but in general, reparations refers to the particular types or mechanisms; whereas reparation refers to the desired aim or outcome.\(^{21}\) In practice, it is difficult to maintain the distinction, and at times, the usage is jarring to the ear. For example, Walker refers to truth telling as a

\[^{19}\text{Weinstein et al., supra n 13 at 41; Princilla Hayner, } \textit{Unspeakable Truths} \text{ (New York: Routledge, 2011, 2\textsuperscript{nd} edition), 182-190.}\]

\[^{20}\text{Arriaza and Roht-Arriaza, supra n 8 at 298 (chapter endnote 6).}\]

\[^{21}\text{Walker supra n 6 at 530-31 and fn 8, 542. This distinction is less apparent in the domestic criminal justice literature in analyses of restorative justice. See Kathleen Daly and Gitana Proietti-Scifoni, } \textit{Reparation and Restoration,} \text{ in } \textit{Oxford Handbook of Crime and Criminal Justice}, \text{ ed. Michael Tonry (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), forthcoming.}\]
‘kind of reparations’ or a ‘form of reparations,’ or to ‘reparations measures.’22 She makes a compelling argument, however, that we should not distinguish between material and symbolic reparations, as is common in the literature, because ‘reparations are all of them symbolic, and cannot be otherwise in being reparations.’23 A better distinction, she suggests, is material and moral reparations. This distinction recognizes the necessary symbolic dimension of all reparations while marking the difference between reparations that involve an exchange of monetarily valued goods from those that involve other interpersonal exchanges that convey respect, recognition, compassion, contrition, and so forth.24

What Walker terms the ‘expressive’ dimension of all types of reparations is the ‘communicative act of expressing acknowledgment, responsibility, and intent to do justice.’ This dimension of reparations distinguishes it from restitution or compensation, which do not have the expressive dimension or a ‘vindicatory communicative element.’25 Many types of activities are associated with moral reparations; they include apologies, changing place names, holding days of commemoration, memorialization and monuments, creating museums and parks, assistance in reburials, among others.26

22 Ibid., 525.

23 Ibid., 530 (emphasis in original) and generally at 529-534.

24 Ibid., fn 7.

25 Ibid., 529.

Transitional Justice in Serbia

For the war crimes committed by Serbs in the former Yugoslavia, two ongoing institutionalized legal processes exist in Serbia. The first is local, led by the War Crime Chamber in Belgrade,\(^{27}\) and the second is international, channeled through the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY).\(^{28}\) In none of the post-Yugoslav countries has there been a formal, state-led initiative to establish a national truth commission.\(^{29}\) However, hundreds of NGO representatives have had ongoing consultations about creating a regional body, which would document the war crimes committed on the territory of former Yugoslavia and enable victims to give testimonies about their experiences.\(^{30}\)

In most post-Yugoslav countries, the people convicted for committing war crimes cannot be elected to national or local bodies. Such measures are in place not because

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\(^{27}\)The Trial Chamber of the Belgrade Higher Court’s War Crimes Department was established in 2003. As of 15 March 2011, it brought final judgments in 12 cases; and there are seven trials before the Chamber. See Republic of Serbia Office of the War Crimes Prosecutor, [http://www.tuzilastvorz.org.rs/html_trz/index_eng.htm](http://www.tuzilastvorz.org.rs/html_trz/index_eng.htm) (accessed 22 March 2011).

\(^{28}\) The ICTY has indicted 161 persons since its establishment in 1993. See ICTY Key Figures, [http://www.icty.org/sections/TheCases/KeyFigures](http://www.icty.org/sections/TheCases/KeyFigures) (accessed 20 March 2011).


they committed war crimes, but because the law prohibits any person convicted for a crime above certain minimum sentence to work as an elected representative. In Serbia, the implementation of the law on lustration never began.\textsuperscript{31} Serbia has laws to compensate individuals for material damage inflicted by the ‘enemy,’\textsuperscript{32} but not by the Serbia as a state. Thus, those who allege victimization by the Serbian regime must initiate civil proceedings before Serbian courts to receive financial compensation for damage caused by the Serbian police or the Serbian army.

For moral reparations, Serbia erected the first and only monument to non-Serb victims in 2009 in Prijepolje, Serbia. The monument was dedicated to male Bosniaks, Serbian citizens who were abducted and killed in Bosnia by the paramilitary Bosnian Serb forces in 1993. All the other monuments have been erected to remember Serb civilian victims, police officers and soldiers who lost their lives in the Yugoslav wars.\textsuperscript{33} The former President of Serbia and Montenegro apologized for the crimes committed by Serb forces to the Croatian and BH people in 2003. The current president of Serbia, Boris Tadić also apologized to BH in 2004 and to Croatia in 2007. Tadić travelled to Srebrenica in 2005 and participated in an event commemorating the 10th anniversary of the genocide. On 31 March 2010, Serbia promulgated the ‘Declaration condemning the crimes in Srebrenica,’ in which it apologized to the victims of crimes committed in Srebrenica. However, the Declaration did not define the crimes committed in Srebrenica as genocide but rather as

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{31} Fond za humanitarno pravo, \textit{Tranziciona pravda u postjugoslovenskim zemljama} (March 2009) 19. Although the Law on Accountability for Human Rights Violations (referred by civil society organizations as the Law on Lustration) was promulgated in 2003, no case of lustration has been carried out.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{32} ‘Enemy’ in this context mean people who committed crimes towards Serbian civilians outside Serbian borders. ‘Law on Civil Invalids of War,’ \textit{Official Gazette} 52/96, article 2.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{33} Fond za humanitarno pravo, supra n 31 at 84.}
war crimes. Thus, it did not bring closure to the continuing public debate in Serbia about the nature of the crime committed.

Public opinion in Serbia remains divided. Although a minority accept and recognize the crime as genocide, most do not. Many citizens and those in the Serbian Parliament believe that Serbian politicians and military officials who have been accused of war crimes are national heroes. In February 2010, a month before promulgation of the Declaration, a Serbian news agency conducted a survey of 1,000 Serbian citizens, asking them if they would support a Declaration that condemned the crimes committed by Serbs. Just 21 percent said that they would support it, while 46 percent favoured adopting a single resolution that would condemn all crimes in the former Yugoslavia. One survey question asked, ‘What is your view of the crimes against Bosniaks at Srebrenica in 1995’? The results showed that 55 percent believed that this was one crime among others, ‘the magnitude of which has been intentionally overstated by our enemies and the media.’ The crime at Srebrenica was denied or perceived as invented by 7 percent of the respondents, while 22 percent said they had no views on it.\(^{34}\) Plainly, Serbian citizens, like those described by Dudai and Cohen in their analysis of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are attempting to deal ‘with the past when the conflict is still present.’\(^{35}\)

**NGOs and Local Participation in Justice**

Locally based NGOs normally contend with low pay, an unsafe environment and no direct representation in governmental bodies. Despite these obstacles, NGO activists play a vital


\(^{35}\) Dudai and Cohen, supra n 5 at 228.
role in transitional justice activities in the aftermath of repression and armed conflict. Their campaigns can intervene and assist states to address a range of social-political problems, which states either do not have the capacity to deal with or are not yet prepared to deal with. Such activities can offer meaningful forms of citizen participation in civil society justice processes, when as it is now commonly acknowledged, relatively few perpetrators of war crimes are prosecuted and punished.

Citizen participation also challenges the misconceptions held by some in the international community that post-war populations are traumatized victims who are unable to make decisions about their future, or people driven by destructive psychoses that make them incapable or morally unworthy of positive contributions to peacebuilding. As Lundy and McGovern argue, the ‘values and ideas informing justice may need to be articulated within and by each community, based on its specific realities and needs’ for practical and conceptual reasons.

Local NGO campaigns are often led by women, who form coalitions to end the violence and to build harmony and a sustainable peace. Although women are important peacebuilders, their contribution is often ‘informal, behind-the-scenes, unpaid, collaborative and unrecognized as actual peacebuilding’. Because women are ‘often willing to bridge divides across ethnic, religious and cultural divisions,’ their contribution to peacebuilding is crucial in forging alliances across groups in conflict. Women bear the burden of managing post-conflict relationships with war-traumatized family members in post-conflict societies, where households are disproportionately headed by women.

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37 Lundy and McGovern, supra n 5 at 102.

38 Elisabeth Porter, *Peacebuilding: Women in International Perspective* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 5, 4, respectively.
Although women shoulder caring and economic responsibilities, post-conflict conditions may open new opportunities that did not previously exist for them. In these contexts, women are often drawn together by common experiences, needs and goals; this is what occurred in the former Yugoslavia, with the emergence of women’s groups. One such group is WiB.

WiB was established in 1991 in Belgrade in the wake of the Yugoslav dissolution. It is a feminist, anti-militarist organization which demands a ‘permanent confrontation with the past’ by initiating actions ‘against the denial of the criminal past.’ WiB’s main activity is weekly vigils in the center of city each Wednesday between noon and 1 pm. The vigils are predictable: they always occur at the same time and place, and women wear black and stand in a circle, in silence. Instead of speaking or chanting, the women often hold placards saying ‘No more wars,’ ‘Remember genocide,’ among others.

One significant WiB activity is visiting the places of crimes committed in the name of the Serbian nation and state. According to WiB, the public expression of empathy with victims of crimes committed in ‘our name,’ coupled with the request before the state to


40 Joyce Kaufman and Kristen Williams, Women and War: Gender Identity and Activism in Times of Conflict (Sterling, VA: Kumarian Press, 2010), 66; Maja Korać, ‘Women Organizing against Ethnic Nationalism and War in the Post-Yugoslav States’ in Feminists Under Fire: Exchanges Across War Zones, ed. Wenona Giles et al. (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2003) 25, 30.

41 WiB, Belgrade is a part of a network of WiB groups that began in 1988 in Israel, explicitly refusing violence, militarism and war. WiB groups are present in Italy, Spain, Israel, Serbia, UK and other countries around the world. For more about WiB Belgrade, see Maria Lis Baiocchi, ‘Women in Black: Mobilization into Anti-Nationalist, Anti-Militarist, Feminist Activism in Serbia,’ CEU Political Science Journal 4 (2009): 469-500.

punish the perpetrators, represents ‘the most efficient way of achieving reconciliation, peace and solidarity.’ During a visit in May 2010 to Višegrad, a town in eastern BH where 3,000 Bosniaks were killed by Serb forces in May 1992, Staša Zajović, director of WiB, said to the family members of the victims who were gathered on the Višegrad Bridge to commemorate the anniversary of the killings:

Thank you for having trust in us. You show us respect by allowing us to take part in your pain, to giving you condolence, empathy and solidarity. Thank you for receiving this small, modest gift of elementary humanity and moral duty. We can critique the crimes of our or any other country, but we can be ashamed and feel guilty only for the crimes committed by our country … in our name. Thank you for helping us to decrease these terrible feelings of pain, shame and bitterness. Zajović’s words are the opening move of the ‘communicative act’ of moral reparations. The words convey a sense of felt shame and guilt, and at the same time, solidarity with the family members of the victims. If, as we assume, those gathered at the Bridge accepted and acknowledged Zajović’s words and apology, activities like this can begin to build ties and trust between Bosniaks and Serbs.

The ‘One pair of shoes, one life’ campaign aimed to establish a new ‘collective memory’ and to build a ‘culture of remembrance’ by dismantling the ‘culture of forgetting enforced by the state apparatus.’ WiB believes that ‘criminal responsibility for atrocities is always individual, but when it comes to moral responsibility, there should be some degree

43 Ibid.

44 Ibid. In May 2010, WiB visited Višegrad as a part of their on-going activity to visit the sites of war crimes and pay respect to victims and survivors.

45 Walker, supra n 25 and accompanying text.

46 Phone interview, WiB informant, 23 November 2010.
of collective responsibility of all those who voted for the regime of Slobodan Milošević, and all those who were bystanders to war crimes because non-acting is a form of acting.’ In other words, guilt should be individualized for genocide, but Serbian citizens bear ‘moral accountability’ for the crimes that were committed in their name.47

**Dealing with the Past and Remembering the Genocide: ‘One pair of shoes, one life’**

I believe they [the UN] are hoping that we eyewitnesses of the crime committed will die one day, so there will no longer be anyone reminding them of the global shame they caused.48

In June 2010, WiB invited the citizens of Serbia to participate in ‘One pair of shoes, one life’ by donating a pair of shoes, together with a written message for the survivors of Srebrenica, to mark the 15th anniversary of the genocide. This was the first time WiB had organized a campaign like this. They believed that by donating shoes, Serbian citizens could acknowledge that a genocide had occurred in Srebrenica. Ultimately, WiB would like to see the shoes used in building a monument to the victims of the genocide, with the messages rewritten in a register and later engraved on the monument. People were invited to bring their shoes to the Belgrade-based ‘Center for Cultural Decontamination’49 (the Center), which served as the main point for collection. In June 2010, after WiB sent out its

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47 Ibid. WiB draws a distinction between criminal and moral accountability: whereas criminal accountability is individual, moral accountability is collective; and in that sense each citizen of Serbia should bear moral accountability.


call for shoes, activists from WiB and other grass-roots organizations set up daily six-hour rosters at the Center, where they welcomed those who brought shoes and added them to the pile. People from all parts of Serbia brought their shoes and messages to the Center, although most of the shoes were brought directly by Serbian citizens to Knez Mihajlova Street on 8 July, the day of the installation.

On Wednesday, 8 July, a hot summer’s day, about 50 activists from WiB, along with the artists and activists from other local organizations, gathered at the Center. They packed the shoes, with the messages that people had written inside them, in plastic bags and made their way to the heart of Belgrade, to Knez Mihajlova Street. Although it was about 7 pm, it was still daylight, and the street was busy with people taking a walk, relaxing after work and participating in the installation. Knez Mihajlova Street has a long pedestrian mall and is normally closed to traffic. It is the heart of Belgrade’s commercial and cultural district and an iconic location in the city. The activists walked for about 15 minutes from the Center to Knez Mihajlova Street, each carrying a violet plastic bag containing shoes.

[Photo 1 about here]

Under police protection, which WiB always has, the campaigners blocked the main street in Belgrade; and together with other Serbian citizens and artists, they laid down a long black cloth with WiB slogans written in large white letters. These said ‘Solidarity,’ ‘Accountability,’ ‘Don’t forget the genocide,’ ‘Remember,’ ‘The 15th anniversary

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50 WiB must inform police about every action they undertake, and there were about 100 fully armed police officers on the evening. Although police are present because of a high risk of violence, the WiB informant said that it was more ‘repression than protection’ and that it seemed that the police ‘protected citizens from us, rather than us from the ultra-rightists.’

51 They included Dijana Milošević (Dah Theatre); Milica Tomić (Group Spomenik); Saša Stojanović, Biljana Rakocić and Branimir Stojanović (Center for Cultural Decontamination).
of the genocide in Srebrenica,’ and ‘For all victims of war.’ The cloth was about 500 meters long and 1 meter wide. It was laid in the middle of the pedestrian mall so people could approach it from both sides, read the slogans, look at the shoes and messages, or lay down their own pairs of shoes. On the edges of the cloth, the activists laid pairs of shoes collected in the Center, and other pairs of shoes were directly laid by some citizens during the installation. The WiB informant recalled a strong image of ‘an old man who was crying while he was laying down his pair of shoes.’ Many onlookers were curious, and they stopped to look at the shoes and read the messages.

[Photos 2 and 3 about here]

When WiB members were laying the shoes along Knez Mihajlova Street, several dozen members of local ultra-right, nationalist groups organized a counter demonstration to disrupt the campaign by shouting extreme nationalistic slogans and holding up images of Radovan Karadžić and Ratko Mladić. While these young men were shouting, several WiB members and other activists along Knez Mihajlova Street used megaphones to read out messages that had been placed in the shoes. A large contingent of police formed a wall of protection around the WiB activists, standing between them and right-wing demonstrators. At one point, a demonstrator stood directly in front of a WiB activist while she was reading and shouted slogans in her face. The police moved the young man away after a few minutes, although the WiB informant thought it took the police too long.

According to Jelka Jovanović, a campaign activist, ‘the need for fully armed police demonstrates the need for protection of activists and campaigns that are not initiated by the state and which create uncomfortable feelings.’ The installation was in place for an

52 Shoes are still being collected, and there are about 800 pairs as of March 2011.

hour. It ended at 8 pm when the activists started to pack up the shoes and long banner cloth, taking them back to the Center. By 9 pm that night all the shoes had been removed from the street.

Meanings and Significance of the Campaign

Each empty pair of shoes ‘represents the absence of a life,’ the WiB informant said. The aims was to ‘fill the public space with the absence of those killed people’ and to invite Serbian citizens to ‘imagine’ the lives so abruptly taken. For Ana Vilenica, a Belgrade artist who supported the campaign, ‘the shoe is a symbol of violently destroyed life in Srebrenica, but also a symbol of life that should accept the responsibility for this terrible crime and guarantees sustainable peace.’54 Although the pairs of shoes were not intended to be a strict numerical representation of the numbers killed, paradoxically, WiB’s goal now is to collect a precise number, that is, 8,372 pairs of shoes, to reflect each person killed in the genocide.

The campaign was important for WiB, both as individuals and an organization. It was the first time that they had stepped out from the space in the city square where they normally hold their vigils in a closed circle or semi-circle. The 500-meter cloth, all the shoes and messages, along with the activists and people intermingling with each other on both sides of the cloth, created a significantly larger and stronger public presence in the square. Further, and as importantly, it was first time WiB had communicated with other citizens during a public action. This social interaction between WiB activists, Serbian people and the installation created a more participatory dynamic.

54 Ibid.
Grassroots art projects like these are civil society justice mechanisms. They can help form social bonds between people by bringing forward commonly shared experiences, spreading awareness about the suffering of the families of victims and the communities who grieve for them and inviting communities to engage with each other.\textsuperscript{55} Such engagements have the potential ‘to generate solidarity ties.’\textsuperscript{56} They allow people to interact outside of fixed ethnic identities by promoting recognition and understanding; they are steps toward building trust between former enemies. Rather than focusing on what separates people, these activities emphasize what can bring them together; by exploring and acknowledging commonalities, they become building blocks to social reconstruction.\textsuperscript{57}

This was the goal of ‘One pair of shoes, one life.’ It invited Serbian citizens\textsuperscript{58} to stop denying the genocide, to call their governments to account and to show empathy with the survivors. As Staša Zajović says,

Shoes are the traces left by people from Srebrenica, and these are very important to me. Shoes are the symbol of life and movement, and we have an intention to make a space for each of pair of shoes because dead people are not just a bag of bones, but people whose dreams, wishes, love and hopes are killed.\textsuperscript{59}


\textsuperscript{57} Zelizer, supra n 55 at 62 and 64, respectively.

\textsuperscript{58} A similar campaign was created by Philipp Ruch and The Pillar of Shame Project in Berlin, but its focus is on the ‘UN betrayal’ in Bosnia. The goal is to erect a permanent sculpture in the Srebrenica cemetery, to be installed on the 2011 commemoration of the genocide. The sculpture will have two huge letters (‘U’ and ‘N’) filled with 16,744 shoes, representing 8,372 victims. See The Pillar of Shame Project, http://www.stubsrama.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1&Itemid=3&lang=en (accessed 18 March 2011). It is unclear if Ruch was aware of WiB’s campaign.
The symbolism of a pair of shoes with the life of a Bosniak, along with the laying of the shoes by a Serbian citizen in the center of Belgrade, together form the activity of moral reparations. The actions demonstrated empathy and solidarity with those killed in the genocide and a determination to share responsibility for the crime with other citizens and the state. The messages in the shoes are another set of gestures toward moral reparation. WiB sent us 184 messages that had been collected during the campaign. They contained a variety of thoughts and themes, which will be the subject of another analysis. Among them were empathy with the victims and survivors, a relativization of genocide (that is, putting the Srebrenica genocide on the same footing with war crimes committed against Serbs), feelings of guilt and shame, and calls for criminal prosecution and accountability of the Serbian state and Serbs who committed the war crimes.

The campaign also sought to re-define and change collective memories of the war. Collective memories are representations of important shared experiences by social groups, whether as families, communities or nations. They serve important functions in forming, maintaining or reinforcing a group’s identity. Such memories are most likely to be imprinted on a group’s consciousness when it encounters major threats and adverse events, or conversely, significant victories over adversity. Stories that contribute to collective memory can contribute to social dialogue by helping to create common values among citizens. For WiB, a new Serbian collective memory is needed, one that works

'against the politics of forgetting and denial' by 'imprinting accountability in our history.' The shoes campaign is a small step in attempting to change collective memory. As Staša Zajović says, 'the fact that citizens of Serbia donated their shoes means that they share the same values with WiB and want to work on correcting the moral order that is anomalous in this state.'

WiB’s long-term goal is to build a monument in Belgrade to the victims of Srebrenica. On 10 November 2010, they submitted a request to the municipality of Belgrade to provide a space in Belgrade where a monument made of the donated shoes could be built. On 17 March 2011, WiB received a letter from the relevant Serbian government commission, which declined WiB’s request. Their representative Stanimirović said that the commission turned down the idea because (translating from a radio interview in the Serbian language) 'this is an event that happened outside the borders of this state [Serbia].' He then asked rhetorically, 'Can you imagine that we erect monuments in Belgrade for all events?' His use of the term event not genocide demonstrates the collective memory that WiB is seeking to change.

**Conclusion and Implications**

We sought to document and theorize ‘One pair of shoes, one life’ as a civil society justice mechanism of moral reparations for the Srebenica genocide. The campaign was carried out by a Belgrade NGO in a political context in which a significant majority of government officials and Serbian citizens do not recognize the Srebenica massacre as a genocide. The

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62 B92, supra n 53.

63 The original document in Serbian language on file with authors.

64 Radio Slobodna Evropa, Odbije zahtev za spomenik žrtvama srebreniškog genocida,' [http://www.slobodnaevropa.org/content/srbija_begorad_srebrenica_genocid_spomenik/2341524.html](http://www.slobodnaevropa.org/content/srbija_begorad_srebrenica_genocid_spomenik/2341524.html) (accessed 26 March 2011)
dual meaning of each pair of shoes, as both a symbol of the past (the destroyed life of each Bosniak individual) and the present (the Serbian life that should take responsibility), coupled with the messages inside the shoes, are redolent of the potential for a future solidarity. Set in a busy pedestrian mall in the heart of Belgrade, the installation of about 500 pairs of shoes on a 500-meter long cloth lasted only a few hours. Ephemeral in time, the shoes and messages remain as physical artifacts that may be used to create a monument at some time in the future. Two implications can be drawn from our study.

First, it is likely that many more civil society justice activities like this have occurred in conflict and post-conflict zones, but they are not likely to be researched or theorized. In part, researchers may not have access to sites, local language, or contacts with local people to document the activities fully and accurately; in part, civil society and local justice mechanisms have only recently received attention in the transitional justice literature; and in part, civil society mechanisms are often overlooked in researchers’ analyses of reparation and reconciliation. For example, Olsen, Payne, and Reiter’s analysis of reparation (they use the singular) focuses only on ‘official state policy’ towards individuals (largely in the form of money, property or other forms having a monetary value). Although the authors recognize the importance of ‘collective and symbolic forms of reparation [to] promote societal reconciliation,’ their analysis excludes these forms ‘because of the difficulties in finding full and systematic accounting’ of a wide range of mechanisms.65 Likewise, Chapman’s otherwise comprehensive analysis of reconciliation in ‘deeply divided societies’ focuses on a repertoire of measures identified by truth commissions, not those of

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civil society, nor countries where truth commissions have not been established.\textsuperscript{66} As transitional justice research evolves and widens in scope, we propose that greater research and theoretical attention be paid to civil society justice mechanisms. These may center on a range of truth-seeking, reparative, and remembrance aims; and they may involve many types of activities.

Second, although civil society justice mechanisms can play an important role in societies in transition, they are not without limits. As discussed by Dudai and Cohen, they are not ‘a full substitute for official government mechanisms,’ although they may lay the groundwork for future official activities and are a ‘small niche of sanity,’ which shows that ‘a process of conflict transformation is possible.’ Dudai and Cohen believe that these mechanisms are better termed \textit{bottom-bottom}, rather than bottom-up because they may not ‘break from their immediate circles and influence society’s leadership.’\textsuperscript{67} That is how we would characterize the impact of ‘One pair of shoes, one life’ as of this writing (March 2011). A refusal by a Serbian government commission to build a monument in Belgrade to the victims of Srebrenica, coupled with the reasons given, suggest that the Serbian government is not ready to acknowledge the massacre at Srebrenica as a genocide. Nor indeed are most Serbian citizens. WiB’s desire to see a Serbian moral accountability for the genocide, and its efforts to develop alliances, empathy and understanding among the citizens of Serbia and BH reflect a minority view that will take some years to change.


\textsuperscript{67} Dudai and Cohen, supra n 5, 251-252.
Photo 1: Carrying the shoes, reproduced with permission of WiB
Photo 2: Laying down the shoes, reproduced with permission of WiB
Photo 3: Message in the shoes: ‘I remember because of myself, my children and all of us.’

D.B. (full name withheld), reproduced with permission of WiB