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# *mag*DA

*Dialogue Academy Magazine*

We give voice to the stories that shape our future



**MAGDA 1ST EDITION**  
**•OCTOBER**

# From MagDA to you

Dear reader,

Welcome to the first edition of MagDA - Magazine of Dialogue Academy, which is born from the shared vision of the Dialogue Academy Alumnae, an inspiring group of women from Prishtinë/Priština and Belgrade. This magazine is not just a mere publication but the beginning of a continuous beautiful journey, fuelled by our belief in the power of young people to lead, drive and collaborate for meaningful change.

The name "Magda" often means "tower" or "elevated," which is linked to strength and dignity. We have embraced this symbolism to reflect our mission: just as a tower is built one brick at a time, we aim to raise awareness and understanding, one edition at a time. With each article, essay, poem, and illustration in this magazine, we contribute to its structure, creating a space where ideas can grow and connect.

In this first edition, we are thrilled to present a variety of content. You will find essays, articles, poems, and illustrations exploring topics from personal stories of resilience, transitional journalism and justice, body image to the broader societal issues. For each piece, we dearly wish to offer you moments of reflection and inspiration!

We look forward to seeing where MagDA takes us.

With strength and solidarity,

MagDa Team

Aida Fejzullahu, Editor, DA Alumnae 2023  
 Adea Dobra, Coordinator, DA Alumnae 2023  
 Dardana Fetahu, Editor, DA Alumnae 2017  
 Elona Matoshi, Coordinator, DA Alumnae 2023  
 Teodora Stojanović, Coordinator, DA Alumnae 2023

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## In this edition you will read

**From Anger to Action: Women's protests shaping political awareness in the Balkans**

Branka Blizanac & Elona Matoshi, p2

**Flipping the coin: The shšušshing word**

Amina Kaja. p5

**Unsung Heroines: Women's Essential Role in Transitional Justice Processes**

Lea Meraku, p7

**When You Hear Serbeze Haxhijaj, You Know It's About Transitional Justice**

Donjeta Rexhbogaj, p10

**wOMEN**  
 Girls' Talks, p12

# From Anger to Action: Women's protests shaping political awareness in the Balkans

Branka Blizanac and Elona Matoshi

***“If you're afraid of the dark, we'll set the city on fire”***

These powerful words became a rallying cry for women's protests across the Balkans in 2022. The following narrative explores the events in Prishtinë/Priština and Belgrade that ignited mass movements against gender-based violence against women, and the systemic failures of institutions meant to protect women and girls.

A city park is a place of simple pleasures – a place where an 11-year-old girl can play, ride her bike, or enjoy a picnic under the shade of a tree. In August 2022, this sense of safety was shattered in Prishtinë/Priština when a young girl was sexually assaulted in broad daylight. What should have been a time of simple enjoyment turned into a devastating nightmare, not only for her, but for every girl and woman who believed a park could be a place of peace. The incident was shocking not only because of the victim's age but also because some of the perpetrators were minors who were aware of it.

Public outrage intensified upon learning that just two months earlier, in June 2022, authorities knew that the same girl was a victim of trafficking but failed to offer protection. This gross neglect shocked society and caused women, men, parents and concerned citizens alike to take to the streets and demand accountability. By then, countless women had already been killed, and the devastating news about the young girl was the tipping point - the last straw. It became one of the most significant protests in recent history, with powerful slogans and messages plastered across the city, denouncing the failures of the institutions that had once again failed women.

*Rita Berisha, a feminist activist who joined the protest, voiced the anger of many, stating, “By neglecting this case (refers to the neglect of the trafficking case of the same victim in June 2022),*

*the institutions have only proven what feminists have long argued—that the justice system has failed women.”*

While Prishtinë/Priština was grappling with its tragedy, a similar atmosphere of fear and outrage unfolded in Belgrade. In early September of the same year, a particular atmosphere prevailed in Belgrade: an atmosphere of fear. For weeks, the media had been reporting on the release of a repeat offender rapist; on social media, photos of him moving around the city went viral—accompanied by warnings to women to avoid certain streets, neighbourhoods, which might very well be where they lived. Women were advised not to walk home alone late at night, and if they had no choice, to carry pepper spray, “just in case”. Then came the climax— one tabloid called “Informer”, announced an interview with the rapist, in which he talked freely about the crimes committed.

Within the informal feminist collective “Women's Solidarity” in Belgrade, women shared their reactions to the interview with each other. In a few messages that began with, 'Let's hit the streets tomorrow,' a protest was organized, and the call was shared on social media. Even though it was a Wednesday, and the call to action was made just the night before, a large group of women gathered in front of the tabloid's office.

These demonstrations were held four more times, including one at night. The media's decision to allow a rapist to describe his crime publicly highlighted its dehumanizing stance towards male violence against women. Women aimed to counteract harmful media practices, demanding the removal of the interview to prevent retraumatization and revictimization. Additionally, the protests occurred alongside the 25th femicide in Serbia that year, involving a man killing his two-year-old daughter, which was also reported in a sensationalistic manner.





PROTESTS IN NOVEMBER 2022, WITH THE MESSAGES THAT READ: 'WOMEN ARE UNITED IN SOLIDARITY', 'ANGER ON THE STREETS - JUSTICE FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS', 'SAFETY FOR WOMEN, PRISON TIME FOR RAPISTS' - WOMEN'S SOLIDARITY

During the five “Women's Solidarity's” protests, the largest number of women in recent Serbian history took to the streets. Women were chanting: 'Safe! Free!' 'We wish you a women's revolution,' 'Rage on the streets! Justice for women and girls!' and 'Women are united in solidarity,' they were burning the names of the abusers, reclaiming space, sharing their own experiences, crying, hugging, and shouting together. They kept the issue of media relativization of violence against women in the spotlight for almost five weeks. The final protest was the most radical of all—the “Informer's” office building was graffitied, with messages left saying that women were furious.

At these protests, a sense of unity and, specifically, women's solidarity was shared. The organizers created several banners to express solidarity with women across the region—one of the messages, inspired by the protest in Prishtinë/Priština, stated: 'If you're afraid of the dark, we'll set this city on fire,' to which an artist designed a visual of a woman's hand lighting the flame of resistance.

Shared experiences of fear, anger, and frustration have united women across different regions. The protests in Prishtinë/Priština and Belgrade were echoed by marches in Bosnia and Herzegovina, organized in response to a tragic incident broadcast live on social media. These movements addressed institutions, demanding systematic responses and protection for women experiencing violence.

### **If we are searching for (women's) history...we won't have to look far**

When we think about the past, it often feels distant, untouchable, and unrelated.

In that past, at least the one typically taught in schools and shared in communities, there is little room for what is called women's history. However, discovering women's past—through reading, learning, and discussing the rebellions of women before, sparks a change. One of the protests in Belgrade took direct inspiration from Take Back the Night—women's nighttime marches, first dating back to 1975, when the first march was organized in Philadelphia as a reaction to a femicide committed during the night. The idea is simple: women take over the streets at night, precisely during the time they have been taught from a young age is not safe, when monsters lurk in the dark. In this taught fear lies the key to female socialization, teaching girls to be afraid but also to feel at fault if they do not protect themselves. One such nighttime protest was held in Belgrade in 1995, with women carrying lamps, making noise with various instruments, and lighting their path loudly, directly opposing the teaching that they should be quiet. The message of the 2022 protest was similar: we are loud, we are angry, and we will take over the same streets that you tell us aren't safe—we will make the streets safe for us.

Local women have consistently shown the will to fight for social issues with dedication. Their activism is now consistently evident in the annual “Marshojmë, s'festojmë” (“We march, we do not celebrate”) protests, which address ongoing concerns like domestic violence and gender-based discrimination.



"WE MARCH, WE DON'T CELEBRATE" ORGANIZES THE TRADITIONAL MARCH FOR WOMEN'S DAY - RADIO DUKAGJINI

This commitment extends back to their involvement during the conflict, for example by the “Bread for Drenica” protest on March 16, 1998. Post-conflict, too, their drive continued as they joined political parties, engaged in political processes, and established women's forums,





THE START OF THE 'BREAD FOR DRENICA' PROTEST MARCH IN PRISHTINË/PRIŠTINA ON MARCH 16, 1998. PHOTO: EPA-PHOTO/EPA/ANJA NIEDRINGHAUS.

demonstrating their proactiveness to resolve and advance social justice and equality. Despite patriarchal norms and pressures, they have been proactive in pushing for social justice and equality. As we look at the broader concept of what we call women's history, and within it the history of feminist movements, we will see a series of women's protests, strikes, and said No's. Whether in small gatherings or large mass movements, on streets, in schools, buses, or any other public or private spaces; women fought. Women's history has been shaped by the rebellion.

### **In this embroidery, the common thread is Women's Fight**

When thinking about the women's protests in late 2022, the connection lies in what feminists describe as a universal female experience- that gut feeling of recognition that women across the world share upon hearing of somebody's experience of violence and/or fear of it, the simple and undeniable understanding. Protests in Prishtinë/Priština, Belgrade, and Sarajevo united women in their shared feelings of tiredness, anger, frustration, and fear as they confronted pressing issues like the rape of a young girl, media relativization of sexual violence, femicides, and insecurity in both public and private spaces.

The case in 2022 in Prishtinë/Priština became a turning point, bringing thousands onto the streets to demand justice and greater accountability from authorities. It sparked public outcry, leading to the rapid adoption of new laws designed to improve protection for women and girls. This pressured the government to impose tougher penalties for sex offenders and create comprehensive support services for survivors, including counselling and legal assistance.

Although immediate systematic responses were lacking after the demonstrations in Belgrade, these actions became part of a growing movement. In the following years, waves of women's testimonies broke into the public sphere, leading to more protests—against femicide in 2023 and obstetric violence in 2024. In May of 2024, female students at the Faculty of Political Sciences protested and succeeded in preventing the election of a dean with a history of harassing female students.

A similar success through activism happened at the University of Prishtina. After numerous student reports of sexual harassment were brought to light through protests and activism, the university now has a formal sexual harassment policy in place. Another example is when a professor at the University of Prishtina was expelled for sexual harassment following numerous protests led by activists from the Student Feminist Movement. If we seek optimism – it is not hard to find it, despite the lack of systematic change. With each act of speaking out, women have brought the issues they face daily back into the public spotlight, simultaneously building a new kind of political consciousness—one that drives the fight forward.



GRAFFITI ON THE STREETS OF PRISHTINË/PRIŠTINA BY AN ANONYMOUS ARTIST. SEPTEMBER, 2024  
SRB: 'DEVOJKE, VAŠA POBUNA NAS INSPIRIŠE', ENG: 'GIRLS, YOUR REVOLT INSPIRES US'.

### **"Girls, your revolt inspires us"**

As one of the members of the "Women's Solidarity" collective, Jelena Riznić, said during the protest: "When women gather, magic happens". The potential of a single expression of women's rebellion surpasses the moment in which it occurs—magic of it extends further, by paving the way for the women who made that first step with their rebellion, and leaves a legacy for future generations of women and girls, a path marked by defiance, combativeness, strength, and courage. With this in mind, collective memory of such a past builds political awareness in the present that keeps inspiring us for a better future, for a world tailored to women.



# Flipping the coin: The shšušshing word

Amina Kaja

***I am Heads. I am Tails. I am both—or neither?  
Who decides?***

I spent the beginning of my life mid-flip, nothing but a coin twirling through the air, tossed by a prejudiced figure. Those years were also marked by my mother's shušing, lest the "other" language be heard falling from my lips, provoking the wrath of strangers. As such, until some time ago, my effort was spent running away from my languages and the dreadful coin flip. It was easy to perceive, even as a child, that the name I carry aroused questions, that my sometimes clumsy handling of languages elicited confusion, and that I was always teetering on the precipice of investigation. Introductions were tainted by fear and uncertainty, never quite knowing which accent to pronounce my name with, never being sure of the figure tossing the coin. Would they notice? How would they react? Heads or tails were inevitable, though. What does not catch up today will tomorrow; the truth always has a way of dragging itself back to the surface. You cannot escape who you are.

Childhood is tough; it consists of deciding whether you like bugs, investigating how often you'll get scolded before you are grounded, and challenging yourself to hold eye contact with your crush. Childhood is even tougher when attempts to fit large feelings into a tiny body are mutated by insecurity and fear of your identity - like Spider-Man, but more anxious. Despite my avoidance, there was no escaping the coin flip. There was no escaping the šušing, which, just like a worried mother trying to keep you safe, served to silence my voice, minimize who I was and erase the threat a mere stranger perceived me to be. As a Kosovar, I was the Sh-word; my friend probably heard it from his parents, and transgenerational hate found its new target. Born of a Bosniak mother from Serbia, I was called the Š-word by peers who did not know that I, just as they, had not lived through the war and had no finger in it. I was neither of the shušing words, but somehow, I was both. Schrödinger's child, I would think comically, years later.

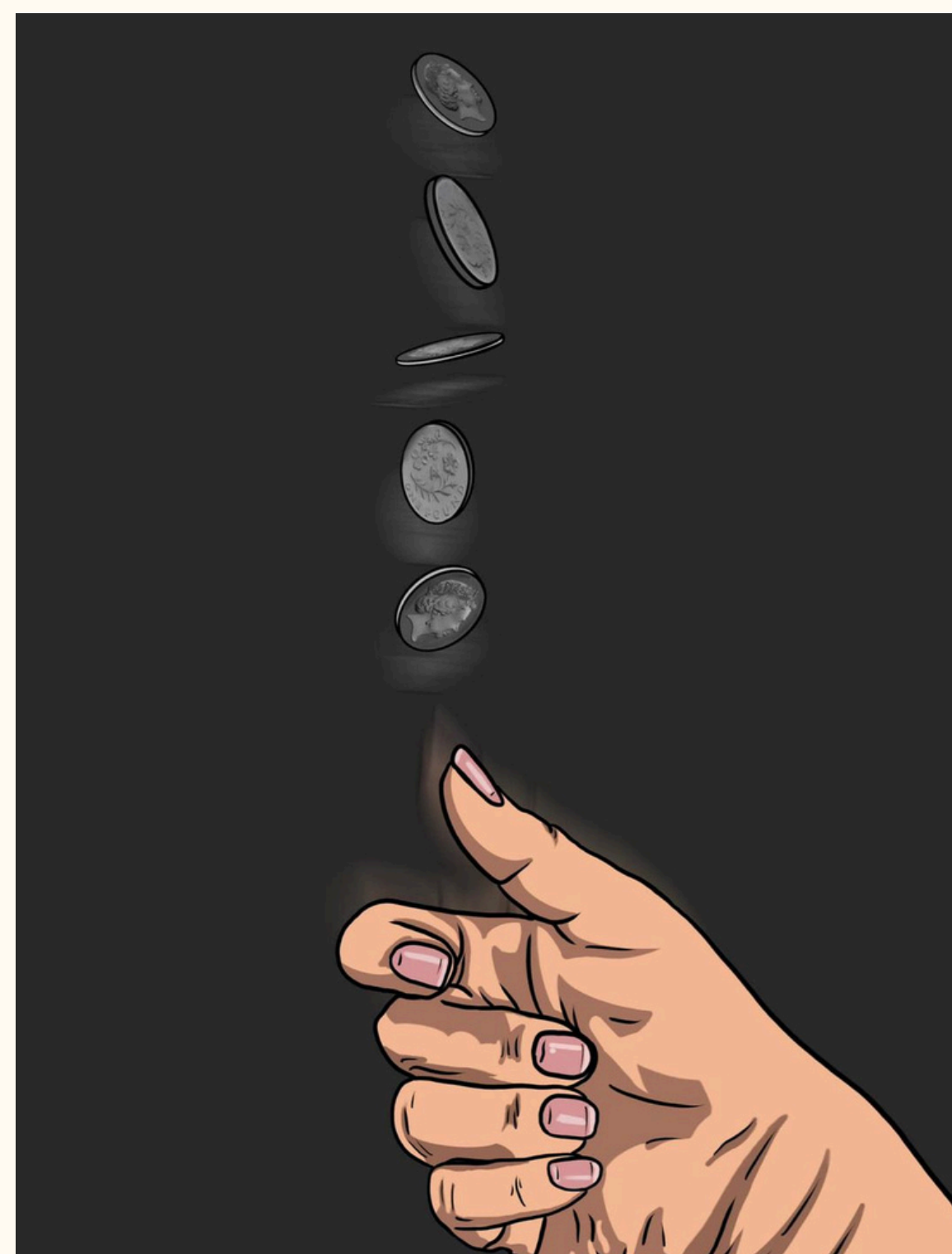


ILLUSTRATION BY SUKIS.ART

But until I could joke about it, I was but a flipped coin, whooshing upwards, knowing that depending on the side it landed on, I would be branded friend or foe. Nothing else would matter at that moment. Heads. Or tails. Lamb to the slaughter. A bit dramatic, yes, but little old me never knew how to approach this situation. I felt defensive; it was not like that. I felt anger because, how dare you? I felt grief - who am I? Who should I be? Do I even get to decide?

I was either too much of a minority or not convincing enough of a minority. Each introduction was plagued by anxiety—curly-haired, chubby me doing my best to show the peaceful, soft underbelly of whatever the coin landed on.

Trying to convince them that it's not that serious – I'm on their side. Heads - my mother is a Muslim from Sandžak, she is not Serbian. I speak Bosnian, not Serbian. Tails - I am from Kosovo, but not Albanian; I just speak Albanian; I just speak Albanian because I learned it in kindergarten. Back and forth, my identity was questioned, scrutinized, offended. I got to learn early on the vocabulary of hate and was a victim of šshššshushšing long before I knew which nationality to select on an application form.

As it turns out, a coin flip is not truly a fifty-fifty proposition. Scientists call it the same-side bias, meaning there is an inclination towards the side facing up, so it is more likely to fall on it. That is unfortunate; it means I never stood a chance. It means the coin flip did not matter. Despite hoping, I can never be more than a two-dimensional personification of their hate and scary boogeyman stories told by parents. The decision is always the stranger's and which side they choose to see. A coin flip cannot change much when they have already decided who I was and what I represented. They never got to know me, but I was a foe. And a foe can never be a friend.

It does say a lot about us, though. Different nations—two sides of the same coin. Both victims of propaganda and hate spread by politicians, parents, teachers, journalists. Individuals stripped of the personalities, smiles, and tales that make them unique, reducing them to nothing but a hurtful slur. Boiling them down to a language or nationality, God-given things you have no say in. There is nothing like shušing words to keep you trapped in a devastatingly silent system.

Eventually, I did figure everything out. I decided I liked bugs and that they deserved more respect. I could get scolded plenty of times before getting grounded - perks of being the oldest and most spoiled. I did manage to hold eye contact with my crush - after cowardly running away from him at first, but nothing a pep-talk and deep, brave breath couldn't solve. And I did get to explore and discover my identity, after all.

Years later, I would make friends who had no coins in their hands. I will learn they weren't interested in tossing in the first place; language does not matter when the words Kafa and Komshija are the same in both languages, and nationality is just a team to pick in football games.

I would learn that sometimes it only takes a pinch of kindness and a gentle word to disintegrate the uncertainty and cruelty you're used to. My dear Albanian friend's mutters of "Why do people feel the need to shove you in a box?! Your nationality doesn't matter!" echo daily in my head. I have never thought of it that way before. People are used to categorization—the sharp demarcation between "you" and "I," as though we're safer that way. Nothing good has ever come of separation—only alienation from the humanity we each carry.

Quite a while later, I would befriend a Serbian activist - a behemoth of a man, as scary as he is inspiring. After a training where I detailed my identity crisis, he silently walks over to me, extends his arm and drops a random fistful of paper clips in my hand. "You are Amina," he concluded. And that was it. No more relying on faulty probability and the mercy of strangers. I decide.

Luckily for me, it happens that people are as good at fixing things as they are at breaking them, and more often than not, they right wrongs they didn't commit. There is hope. There is kindness. And sometimes, we will find them in the weirdest places, in the seemingly unlikeliest of humans, like I did. In the grand scheme of things, drowning in our worries about the past and future, we forget that the world is beautiful, and despite humanity's shortcomings, we're doing pretty well. We just have to take in a brave breath, put the coins down, and see each other. A smart child taught me that.

Oh, and now I can finally introduce myself properly. Hi, I'm Amina, and no boxes for me, please!



# Unsung Heroines: Women's Essential Role in Transitional Justice Processes

Lea Meraku

In the year 1993, world-renowned and celebrated activist Maya Angelou recited the following words: "History, despite its wrenching pain, cannot be unlived, but if faced with courage, need not be lived again." The ideas of remembrance, acknowledgement of the damage suffered by conflict, and a collective desire to maintain a society of harmony and peace lie at the heart of transitional justice- often termed as, quite literally, 'dealing with the past'. At the inter-governmental level, the United Nations' Secretary General defines transitional justice (a.k.a., "TJ") as a path to "ensure accountability, serve justice and achieve reconciliation. Given the broad aims and cooperative nature of TJ, it is also understood that in order to achieve substantial and enduring peace, such processes must represent as well as reflect all groups of society - including women. Yet, women have more often than not been overlooked and sometimes even intentionally excluded from positions of power throughout the TJ process.[1] This paper highlights the various successes stemming from women's meaningful participation in this field, as well as recognising the challenges remaining and areas of improvement. Above all, this article intends to inform and generate discourse on the importance of women as not only valuable members but also irreplaceable negotiators and leaders within the transitional justice process.

## International and Regional Framework on Women and Transitional Justice: Key Principles

Collective efforts are being made at both the international and regional level to employ a gender-sensitive approach to transitional justice - mainly as a response to the topic of inclusion of women in post-conflict processes gaining traction both in academia and on the ground since the beginning of the 21st century. While these instruments vary greatly in terms of their background and context, several key principles can be drawn from their joint efforts to strengthen the role of women in TJ.

The first, and perhaps one of the most fundamental as per UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000), is recognition of the "special needs of women and girls...[for] post-conflict reconstruction". While conflict by its very nature devastates all parts of the population, alarming trends show a disproportional effect on women, whereby existing inequalities become heightened during conflict and lead to disrupted access to reproductive and health care, forced displacement, and conflict-related sexual violence, among others- with the latter accounting for more than 95% of UN-verified cases. As a result, if effective redress is to be achieved for the post- conflict society, it is essential for women who have experienced these violations to have a say in the forms of redress given and the measures taken by states through the peace-building process. Accordingly, resolutions continuously emphasize the need to provide opportunities for survivors of sexual and gender- based violence to be included in all stages of TJ processes in both facilitative and decision-making roles.

Another crucial consideration is taking proactive measures towards women's involvement in TJ. Merely accepting the importance of the role of women, in theory, is not sufficient; meaningful participation of women in post-conflict processes can only be ensured through positive action, ideally accompanied by a monitoring and enforcing system. As an example, member states of the OSCE voluntarily report on concrete measures being taken to implement their commitments to women, peace and security through information exchanges provided to the organization on a yearly basis. Furthermore, the Toolkit on Inclusion of Women and Effective Peace Processes urges states to appoint more women members in negotiating delegations and increase the number of women security experts through creating opportunities and providing active financial support for women in the field.



Non-state actors such as the International Center for Transitional Justice have also stressed the need for inclusive language practices, as well as outreach programmes that stretch beyond “elite civil society groups in urban capitals” to include less developed areas, which in some cases are home to the most affected groups of women. At the domestic and regional levels, Alba Jakupi, MA in Transitional Justice and Human Rights, explains that Western Balkans have formally committed to UNSC Resolution 1325 by adopting national action plans, the region has struggled with taking concrete steps to translate these formal commitments to practice. In fact, by and large, women remain underrepresented at negotiation tables, with exceptions such as Edita Tahiri, who participated in high-level political dialogues in the region, remaining few and far between.

Thus, challenges remain both in Southeast Europe and internationally as to the enforceability of broad international and regional frameworks in practice- particularly in the absence of a standardized enforcement mechanism for these obligations. Nevertheless, practice has shown promising developments for women in TJ at both institutional and societal levels, as per the case studies to be discussed below.

**Women as significant contributors to the transitional justice process and societal challenges: Case Studies**

In the practical sphere, there have been multiple instances of women at the forefront of transitional justice initiatives- with the vast majority successfully contributing to the aims of post-conflict peacebuilding.

A striking example of the mobilization of women in civil society leading to concrete impact on the national level is the post-conflict legal reforms in 1990s Colombia spearheaded by women’s organizations in the area. Consistent advocacy from these organizations led to several important changes in the post-conflict legal framework of the state, including but not limited to legislation requiring government agencies to create programs for women forcibly displaced by conflict, adding gendered provisions to include women in the reparations facilitated by the Victims Unit, and guaranteeing women’s participation in public administration. While the implementation of these measures has not been without criticism, the substantial impact of the abovementioned laws on Colombian society is undeniable.

The long-term effects of this involvement also extended to the 2010s Havana Accords, where women were given a seat at the table to advocate for policies in their favour and sexual violence was categorised as a non-amnestiable crime, as “the first peace agreement to do so” in history. Similar initiatives are present in Bosnia and Herzegovina; one such example is the formation of women’s associations such as the Women’s Court Initiative, which according to Alba Jakupi “have been pivotal in the advocating for the recognition and redress of war sexual violence”.

On a cross-border scale, the UN Women Global Programme on Gender Sensitive Transitional Justice, funded by the EU, was also credited with bringing significant process to multiple affected governments. The project gave life wide-ranging list of good practices, including innovative strategies to uphold the ‘do-no-harm’ principle by prioritizing the safety of survivors and helping them navigate societal backlash. This initiative was also successful in providing technical support to Prishtinë/Priština in establishing reparation commissions as well as establishing a micro-grant project which helped 177 survivors fund their small businesses and work towards achieving financial independence. Indeed, the impact of this form of empowerment has been instrumental in strengthening women’s position in post-conflict societies- including in the Western Balkans. The Sundance Festival awarded film “Hive” directed by Blerta Basholli, which quickly entered the cultural zeitgeist, showcases the entrepreneurship of women as a path towards a societal transformation and acceptance in post-conflict societies.

Notwithstanding women’s undeniable potential to steer communities towards reconciliation and stability, practice has shown that some difficulties also linger on a societal level. As pointed out by Furtuna Sheremeti, Lecturer of Law and transitional justice expert, women have done and will do very much for transitional justice- yet despite this; society often paints them as victims rather than fighters or providers of support. This narrative of victimization makes it increasingly difficult for women’s vast contributions to be seen and duly recognised, which then leads to a vicious cycle of their exclusion from decision -making roles in future reconciliation and peacebuilding processes.



Therefore, it is vital that both governmental and non-governmental actors invest in awareness campaigns showcasing their potential and successes in the field, with a view to changing the inaccurate perception that women are present in conflict only as victims.

### Conclusions

Collective efforts are being made at both the international and regional levels to employ a gender-sensitive approach to transitional justice, both through international and regional legal instruments and national plans. However, there is still a long way ahead for women in TJ, particularly in the Western Balkan region, where they remain underrepresented and underestimated at the negotiating table. On a global scale, it is evident that women from all regions have shown us time and time again their potential and success in fostering meaningful dialogue and facilitating transitional justice processes: now, all that is needed is for the world to listen.



ILLUSTRATION BY SUKIS.ART



# When You Hear Serbeze Haxhiaj, You Know It's About Transitional Justice

## Donjeta Rexhbogaj

In the world of investigative journalism, rare voices are as impactful as that of Serbeze Haxhiaj.

As a young woman, I am grateful to have had the chance to meet and discuss with such an inspiring person. With over 25 years of experience in reports on war crimes, corruption, and human rights, Haxhiaj has earned significant recognition, including the prestigious 2020 EU Award for Investigative Journalism. Her ground-breaking work in transitional justice has cast a revealing light on some of the most shadowy chapters of the recent past, exposing the complexities of the region's history.

Yet, her journey has been filled with significant personal and professional challenges. At her workplace, Haxhiaj, as she explains, has faced severe hostility, including disturbing remarks from a superior who belittled her achievements with derogatory comments such as, "You have made a name for yourself with Roma lice".



SERBEZE HAXHIAJ, ILLUSTRATION BY SUKIS.ART

This comment targeted Haxhiaj due to her work with the Roma community and reflects a prejudiced view, implying that her achievements were not genuinely earned but were instead a result of her work association with them. And other comments such as "*Freedom has come to you on a plate*". This was not an isolated incident; she has also endured vicious attacks including being labelled "*Serbia's puppet*" and questioned with, "*Maybe your father is not Albanian*".

Haxhiaj's journey into journalism began during the violent period of the Kosovo Conflict in 1999. At the time, she joined *Bujku* newspaper, an initiative formed by journalists dismissed from the daily *Rilindja*. The conflict was not just a backdrop but a defining moment that shaped her career. "*The war left a significant mark on my life and professional path,*" she recalls. This early exposure to conflict and its aftermath ignited her passion for investigative reporting and her commitment to uncovering the truth.

### Winning Awards for Reporting Transitional Justice: But at What Cost?

Reporting on transitional justice comes with emotional and professional burdens that can be overwhelming. For journalists like Haxhiaj, the challenges are not just about the stories themselves but also about the personal toll. Intimidation, threats, and constant exposure to suffering are part of the job. As Haxhiaj puts it, "*Covering sensitive topics exposes us to issues that can damage our emotional well-being.*" The personal cost of investigative journalism can be expensive.

Handling sensitive and traumatic topics requires careful management. Haxhiaj uses various strategies to cope with the emotional burden of her work while maintaining professional integrity.

An example is her investigation into children born of rape during the conflict. The emotional impact was significant, particularly when a survivor expressed suicidal thoughts due to fear of exposure. *"This experience made me anxious for months,"* she recalls, highlighting the psychological toll of covering such subjects. Independent journalism in Kosovo, on the other hand, is fraught with obstacles due to political influence and a fragile media market. Reporting on sensitive issues like corruption and organized crime involves significant personal risk, with journalists often facing stigmatization and dehumanization that make them targets for criticism and intimidation. In addition to the struggle, gender adds another layer of difficulty. *"Being a woman has given me unique experiences,"* Haxhijaj explains, highlighting the discrimination, harassment, and double standards she endures. She recounts a troubling incident where a superior used racial slurs against her, illustrating the intersection of gender and professional challenges.

Despite these hurdles, Haxhijaj's gender has both challenged and enriched her career. As she faces persistent issues such as discrimination, pay disparities, and barriers to promotion, her unique perspective enabled her to address complex topics with depth and insight that might otherwise be overlooked or missed. The combination of gender-based challenges and the brutal realities of covering issues like rape and violence in conflict intensified the personal and professional difficulties she endures.

### **Reporting transitional justice in an unbalanced society**

Reporting on transitional justice in Kosovo is especially complex. The society often promotes a one-sided narrative that highlights internal heroism and external victimization, skewing the historical perspective. *"Reporting on transitional justice remains somewhat taboo,"* Haxhijaj explains. This biased narrative makes it difficult to present a balanced view and often results in media coverage that caters to political agendas rather than seeking the truth.

Another challenge is the societal divide based on conflict participation. Those who were not involved in the conflict, or whose families weren't, may find themselves at a disadvantage and perceived as being on the "wrong side." This divide adds an extra layer of complexity to reporting on transitional justice, influencing how stories are received and reported.

Haxhijaj's work in transitional justice has profoundly shaped her perspective on peace and reconciliation. The experience of war and its aftermath has taught her about the deep-rooted nature of ethnic hatred and the long path to healing. "There's no alternative to peace and reconciliation," she asserts, reflecting on the necessity of confronting historical grievances to move forward.

Serbeze Haxhijaj's career is a testament to the power of persistence in the face of overwhelming odds. Her work illuminates the forgotten corners of the past, but more than that, it is a call to action for truth, for justice, and for reconciliation in a world where silence too often reigns. In a society that is still healing, her reporting is not just an act of journalism; it is an act of courage.

As I reflect on her journey, I am filled with a profound sense of fulfillment. Twenty-five years ago, I was a 4-year-old refugee, displaced by the conflict Haxhijaj now bravely addresses. Today, 25 years later, I have the opportunity to write about her and her remarkable contributions. This full-circle moment is a testament to the power of perseverance and the transformative impact of confronting difficult truths.



# wOMEN

Written by the participants of OSCE “Girls’ Talks” programme:  
Sara Çeshko, Drena Keqa, Mia Mema, Elmedina Bylykbashi

*In a society where*

Women are sexualized when needed, and stigmatized when not,

*In a society where*

To be treated as a human being, let alone a woman, means that you must not speak, you must not do what a man does.

*In a society where*

If a man is not beside or in front of you, you are labelled as “worthless” and treated differently, just because you cannot please a man.

*In a society where*

If you bleed, you are disgusting, and if you do not, you are not an option to breed.

*In a society where*

You are shamed for taking care of your body and giving it what it needs.

*In a society where*

You are always too fat, too skinny, too young, too old—where you are always too much but never enough.

In this society, please dare to speak because **we** are listening;

Dare to need because **we** will help;

And dare to take action because **we** believe you can.

*Inspire us, young girls, to do so!*



SKETCHED BY THE PARTICIPANTS OF OSCE “GIRLS’ TALKS - DRENA KEQA, ELMEDINA BYLYKBASHI  
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**Instagram: @dialogueacademy**  
**Facebook: Dialogue Academy**  
**dialogueacademy@osce.org**