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Gendering Environmental Insecurity: the case of Serbia
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Gendering Environmental (In)Security: the case of Serbia

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Abstract

This research project aims to contribute to the theoretical literature on Critical, Feminist, Environmental, and Human Security Studies by synthesizing the approaches and applying them to the case study of Serbia. This thesis will “broaden” and “deepen” the agenda of Security Studies by considering environmental degradation as a human security threat through the lens of post-structural Feminism. Semi-structured interviews with female environmental activists and document analysis have been used to gather data, on the basis of which key concepts have been developed using Grounded Theory (GT) methodology. These concepts will be used to answer the research question: What processes contribute to women’s environmental insecurity in Serbia? The data revealed the existence of security-enhancing processes and security-degrading factors that interact to create a situation of environmental human insecurity for women living in Serbia. Security-degrading factors existing at the political and societal level currently severely impede the capacity of nascent processes to enhance women’s environmental security. The results of this study will contribute to a scholarly understanding of the gendered dimensions of environmental insecurity, often rendered invisible in Security Studies. It will also supplement existing research on climate change and pollution, typically confined to the Global South, by using a case study from the Western Balkans, a region currently experiencing extreme environmental issues.

Keywords: Critical Security Studies, Feminism, environment, human security, Serbia, Grounded Theory, climate change, gender mainstreaming

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

CSS- Critical Security Studies
EC- European Commission
ECF- European Climate Fund
EIA- Environmental Impact Assessment
ESM- Environmental Social Movement
ESS- Environmental Security Studies
EU- European Union
FDI- Foreign Direct Investment
GEI- Gender Equality Index
GT- Grounded Theory
HUGE- Human, Gender, and Environmental Security
FSS- Feminist Security Studies
MNC- Multinational Corporation
NERP- National Emissions Reduction Plan
NGO- Non-Governmental Organization
OSCE- Organization for Security and Co-Operation in Europe
PM- Particulate Matter
SEPA- Serbian Environmental Protection Agency
SLAPP- Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation
UMIC- Upper Middle Income Country
UN- United Nations
UNDP- United Nations Development Programme
UNECE- United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
WHO- World Health Organization

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Introduction

“What can I do? I have to live in it, to show solidarity in order to fix it.”- Zaklina, 27 March 2023, Belgrade

The devastating impacts of the global climate crisis are not gender-neutral. It is now widely acknowledged within international organizations and the academic literature that gender is a structure through which environmental degradation is experienced (Floyd 2013). The patriarchal system creates layers of marginalization and inequality that not only determine how women experience the climate crisis but also their capacity to adapt to its consequences (Detraz 2017, 202). Consequently, to tackle environmental issues without considering gender is “insufficient, unjust, and therefore unsustainable” (MacGregor 2017, 124). Yet the IR academy and the sub-field of Security Studies have thus far been slow to incorporate analysis of the intersection of environmental degradation and gender inequality into one coherent theoretical framework.

This thesis will attempt to coalesce insights from several strands of Security Studies, including Critical, Human, Feminist, and Environmental Security Studies, into one theoretical paradigm in order to understand the gendered manifestations of environmental insecurity. This research began from the idea, central to Critical Security Studies, that insecurity in today’s globalized world originates from more threats than purely inter-state war and affects humans as much as states (Booth 1991, 318). As a result, the traditional realist paradigm in Security Studies, with its top-down, statist, and militaristic perspective on security, misses many manifestations of insecurity evident in the lived experience of the world’s inhabitants (Booth 2005, 13). Indeed, it also obscures how in many cases the state itself is a security threat to its inhabitants rather than a security guarantor (Booth 2005, 3). Additionally, this research project will draw on Feminist Security Studies to particularize who is taken as a referent object in security analysis and to incorporate the gendered dimension into theorizing on the environment.

A significant security threat, which is not considered in traditional Security Studies, is the environmental crisis. While this affects every country worldwide in various ways, this study will concentrate on the Western Balkans and specifically Serbia. With the highest rate of pollution related deaths in Europe, Serbia’s inhabitants are suffering extreme insecurity as a result of environmental degradation (Global Alliance on Health and Pollution 2019). The environmental situation in the country has reached a critical level, with category III air pollution in most major cities, an insufficient waste management system causing hazardous soil pollution, and significant water pollution from industrial sources (Stojanovic 2021, 263). While the government has adopted some environmental legislation, an ongoing pattern has emerged whereby polluting industries and financial gain are given precedence over environmental concerns (Pavlovic A. 2021). However, thus far work in IR on climate issues has almost exclusively focused on the Global South (Schaefer 2015, 254). Evidently, there is room, and a need, to expand this work to include Serbia and the rest of the Western Balkans as a consequence of the severe environmental issues in the region.

As a result of the environmental crisis and government policy, there has been a boom in grassroots environmental activism in Serbia in recent years (Pesic 2023, 1). Starting from 2018 in the small town of Pirot and culminating in the well-known Rio Tinto protests in December 2021, grassroots activism in Serbia has experienced an unprecedented growth in numbers, knowledge, and experience (Radonjic 2018, Goranovic 2021). However, there are obvious tensions at play between the expanding environmental movement and the current Serbian Progressive Party (Srpska Napredna Stranka) regime, which is unwilling to acquiesce to their demands. Women have been an integral part of the cadres of these new environmental movements and are seeking ways within environmental civil society to advocate for their own security demands (“I razum i osećajnost” 2022). This provides an access point for ascertaining the gendered dimension of environmental security concerns in Serbia.

This thesis additionally questions the focus on states as the referent object for traditional Security Studies and instead aligns itself with Critical Security Studies in maintaining that human lives should be at the center of academic work on security. This allows for a more comprehensive and holistic view of security by studying how it manifests in the daily lives of human beings (Hudson 2005, 163). It is here that there is scope to bring gender into Critical Security Studies and to consider the gender dimension to human insecurity. By particularizing which human lives we look at in the study of security, we can illuminate how structures of inequality render some more insecure than others.

While there does exist scholarship combining Critical, Feminist, Environmental, and Human Security Studies (see: Oswald Spring 2020, Detraz 2009 and 2017, MacGregor 2009 and 2017, and Dankelman 2010), this thesis will go further to work to synthesize them into a single approach. This will be achieved through using Grounded Theory methodology to extrapolate theoretical concepts from interview data, based on interviews with female environmental activists, and document analysis. In such a way, the research project will address the below research questions in order to generate concepts which can be applied to other studies of gendered environmental human security and tested on other case studies.

Research Questions

Primary: What processes contribute to women’s environmental insecurity in Serbia?

Secondary: What barriers exist in enhancing women’s environmental security in Serbia?

Structure

Chapter 1 will provide a literature review of contributions made to the sub-fields of Critical, Human, Environmental, and Feminist Security Studies and outline the theoretical approach taken in this research project.

Chapter 2 will illustrate the contextual background of this project, relating to the environment, gender equality, and environmental activism in Serbia.

Chapter 3 will outline the overall approach taken to analyzing the data collected from interviews and document analysis and how the data was then used to generate theoretical concepts.

Chapter 4 will present the findings of the study, namely the concepts extrapolated from the data, security-enhancing processes and security-degrading factors.

Chapter 5 will summarize the study and will include some of the possibilities for potential future research.

Chapter 1: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

This chapter aims to review the existing literature in various sub-fields of Security Studies with the intention of developing a novel theoretical framework that will be used to understand women's environmental insecurity in Serbia. This chapter will start from Critical Theory and Critical Security Studies, which will form the backbone of the approach to rethinking the analysis security used in this research project. It will then discuss the subfields of Human, Environmental, and Feminist Security Studies with a view to "broadening" and "deepening" the agenda of security studies (Booth 2005). Focus will then be narrowed on post-structural Feminist approaches to environmental and human security (see: Bell 2016, MacGregor 2009 and 2017, Detraz 2009 and 2017, and Oswald Spring 2020).

I. Critical Security Studies (CSS) and Human Security

Critical Security Studies

The foundation of the theoretical framework utilized in this paper is based on scholarship within Critical Security Studies (CSS) as a sub-field of Security Studies. In this section, CSS will be linked to the Human Security approach as a way of rethinking the referent object in security studies.

CSS as a sub-discipline originated in the early 1990s. At this time, it was noted by scholars that, after the end of the Cold War, the human experience of suffering and insecurity came more as a result of extreme poverty, environmental degradation, and economic crises than from interstate war. Insecurity was therefore also more the result of state domestic policy than threats originating from outside the state (Booth 1991). At the same time, scholars, considering new perspectives on international relations as part of the Third Debate or "critical turn" in IR during the 1980s and 1990s, began to reflect on the concepts and paradigms that had dominated the discipline (see: Booth 2005, Smith 2005, and Fierke 2015). Robert Cox (1981), in his seminal article on Critical Theory, drew the distinction between problem-solving theory, which referred to the traditional, positivist theories used in IR, and Critical Theory. According to Cox, a problem-solving theory is one that unquestionably accepts existing social and political institutions and uses them as a starting point for scholarly analysis. In this way, this theory tries to make these institutions work and, in doing so, reifies them. On the other hand, Critical Theory sets out to question the existence of such institutions and asks how they may be changed for the better. Cox maintains that theory is not a value-neutral endeavor, as it either upholds existing structures or seeks to problematize and change them. This is the central idea that underpins Critical Theory in IR, including CSS.

In his work, one of the founders of CSS, Ken Booth, argues that CSS has a "deepening" and "broadening" agenda in how it views the study of security (see: Booth 2005, Booth 1991). In this case, "deepening" refers to bringing the insights of Critical Theory into the study of security. This

is achieved by moving away from the traditional realist paradigm and incorporating new theoretical thinking in such areas of scholarship as post-structuralism, constructivism, and feminism. Whereas, “broadening” means bringing in new causes of insecurity and referent objects that moved beyond state-centric conceptions of security (Fierke 2015). Consequently, CSS is a complex and multi-faceted approach to security, as there are numerous ways of “broadening” and “deepening” how we approach security. As a result, there is no single vision of CSS (Booth 2005).

There is also no universal and objective definition of security in the sub-field. It is not the aim of CSS to provide such universalizations but rather to connect meanings of security to political theory and to reveal the significance of security as a contested concept. This links back to CSS’s critique of the realist orthodoxy as Booth (2005) argued that the state-centric, masculinized, militarized, and top-down view of security did not work to the benefit of the majority of the world’s population. Linking security to political theory means that it is possible, and in the case of CSS an imperative, to reconsider what security means from the perspective of both a different paradigm and from the perspective of those who are marginalized by current structures of power. In practice, this means theorizing security “from the bottom up” and “deepening” the study of security (Booth 2005, 14).

Security as a contested concept feeds into the CSS perspective on how security should be studied and what the aim of the study of security should be. Firstly, the agenda should be “broadened” and “deepened” to move away from the traditional approach, indebted to realist assumptions on what constitutes a security threat and what the referent object should be in Security Studies (see: Booth 2005, Smith 2005, Fierke 2015). Secondly, there is a normative aim to the study of security from the critical perspective, which is emancipation. Taking Booth’s (2005) conceptualization, emancipation means to “free individuals and groups from structural and contingent human wrongs” (12). Critical Theory is predicated on questioning existing institutions with the aim of effecting positive change and, in CSS, this is envisioned as emancipation.

CSS is not without its critics. Some assert that CSS has made the study of security too amorphous and that, by viewing security as a derivative, contested concept, it has lost all analytical utility. However, CSS scholars respond to this argument by asking: who benefits from keeping the definition of security narrowly focused on the state? (Smith 2005). Smith cites Booth in his refutation of this critique by saying that the security of humans should always be privileged in academic study rather than that of the state (2005). The normative goal of emancipation has also been questioned for being too ideational. It is claimed that for this reason CSS will only have a limited policy impact and therefore will be unable to effect the structural change it hopes to inspire (Bilgin 2011).

Human Security

There are a variety of ways to consider security threats within CSS when moving away from state-centered perspectives (see: Booth 2005, Smith 2005, and Fierke 2015). This paper seeks to incorporate the Human Security perspective to understand what should be viewed as a

security threat. Human Security is a non-traditional approach to security, which centers human lives and experiences, similarly to CSS. Human Security is considered analytically useful in this research project in understanding how to conceptualize a security threat, considering that there is no common understanding within CSS.

Many Human Security approaches have built on the UNDP 1994 Human Development Report in how they think about security (see: Fierke 2015, Newman 2010, Hudson 2005, Elliot 2015, and Oswald Spring 2020). This report took humans rather than states as the referent object for security analysis. As a result, it presented a new conceptualization of security as “freedom from fear and freedom from want” (United Nations Development Program 1995, 230). This definition has since been used to challenge what constitutes a security threat and what the referent object should be in the study of security. The report, in line with this new conceptualization, then presented seven categories of threats to human security: economic (the presence of an assured basic income); food (physical and economic access to basic food); health (absence of disease); environmental (access to a healthy physical environment); personal (absence of crime); and community (United Nations Development Program 1995).

Since this publication, scholars have been considering security from a Human Security perspective. In practice, this means to consider how humans may be made “insecure and unsafe even in the absence of violent conflict or social unrest” (Elliot 2015, 13). It is a holistic and comprehensive understanding of security that looks at the everyday experiences of human beings. It involves critically interrogating the sources of human insecurity and how these are embedded in global structures of power (Hudson 2005). Human Security therefore shifts emphasis from “a security dilemma of states to a survival dilemma of people” (163). Therefore, at the core of Human Security is the idea that human needs are met, in terms of food, shelter, education, and healthcare, and that human dignity is realized, meaning that people have autonomy over their own lives and are able to participate freely in their community (Smith 2005).

The concept of human security has been criticized for being analytically weak and difficult to deploy in scholarship. Envisioning any critical threat to human well-being and livelihood as a security threat stretches the concept of security beyond all analytical utility (see: Smith 2005 and Newman 2010). There is therefore a need to combine Human Security theorizing with a more concrete understanding of security threats, such as by using Environmental Security Studies.

Edward Newman (2010) attempted to bridge the gap between CSS and Human Security by theorizing Critical Human Security Studies. The “broadened” approach to security threats in Human Security would be complimented by a “deepened” approach to theoretical debates that incorporates insight from Critical Theory. This would require thinking critically about existing structures and institutions rather than taking them for granted (Newman 2010). This paper will therefore consider security threats from a Critical Human Security perspective by considering human security through the lens of a critical theoretical paradigm. Furthermore, security threats will be seen as threats to human life, well-being, prosperity, and dignity that occur in the absence of violent conflict.

II. “Broadening” and “Deepening” The Study of Security Through Feminist and Environmental Security Studies

This research project will “deepen” the agenda by utilizing insights from post-structural Feminist Security Studies (FSS) with a basis in Critical Theory. However, it will “broaden” the agenda by combining insights from Human Security and Environmental Security Studies (ESS).

Feminist Security Studies

Feminist Security Studies (FSS) can be seen as a corollary of CSS as it is also connected to Critical Theory and it also seeks to challenge the dominant realist orthodoxy in Security Studies. Similarly to CSS, FSS questions the “top-down” approach to security taken by realist scholars. However, FSS differs from CSS in that it uses the lens of gender to understand international processes (Sjoberg 2012). Feminist IR scholars view international relations as “gendered in its consequences and in the forms of identities and subjectivities it constitutes” (Smith 2005: 46). In other words, gendered constructions are seen as a “structural feature of social and political life” (Sjoberg 2012, 3). Yet, these scholars argue that IR, as a discipline, has been blind to gender. This has rendered several important aspects of social reality invisible in IR theorizing. Consequently, the feminist project in IR originated with the intention to bring gender into the study of international relations.

Particularly in reference to security, feminists seek to “deepen” the agenda in the same way as CSS by looking from the “bottom-up”. In this case, this requires looking at security from the perspective of the everyday, gendered manifestations of insecurity (Gentry 2018). This often means looking at the specific security concerns of women and their experiences of insecurity (Hudson 2005). Ultimately, the justification for FSS is that gender is an omnipresent structure in social life and so it matters for understanding security, including the causes of insecurity, the outcomes of security practices, and the solutions to security issues (Sjoberg 2012).

Gender can be defined in many ways and indeed, there is no universally agreed definition of gender. This research project rests on definitions of gender from Critical Feminist perspectives such as Heidi Hudson’s (2005) argument that gender is “socially learned behavior and expectations that distinguish between masculinity and femininity” (156). Similarly, Laura Sjoberg (2012) defines gender as a “system of symbolic meaning that creates social hierarchies based on perceived associations with masculine and feminine characteristics” (3). Sjoberg asserts that therefore gender is a set of discourses that structure social meaning. Both these definitions emphasize that gender is a social construction, not a fixed variable that can be measured. Therefore, it is a complex phenomenon that determines how we view and experience the social world. Looking at gender from a critical perspective also means understanding that gender is not experienced by everyone in identical ways. Rather, “each person lives gender in a different culture, body, language, and identity” (Sjoberg 2012, 3). Moreover, it is important to avoid universalising the experience of gender and to situate it within contexts.

Feminist security scholars take gender as a lens to view international processes. However, this has led to a vast diversity of approaches since Cynthia Enloe published *Bananas, Beaches, and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics* (1989). This has since been considered a landmark text in FSS and is considered emblematic of the liberal feminist perspective on security. Enloe sought to make women visible in the study of security by focusing on marginalized women in missionary work, military bases, and banana plantations (Enloe 1989). Following on from Enloe, J. Ann Tickner presented a different approach to FSS in her 1992 book *Gender in International Relations: Feminist Perspectives on Achieving Global Security*. This has since been labeled the standpoint feminist approach in FSS (Peoples 2020). These two approaches have been criticized for utilizing the same positivist ontology and epistemology as realist approaches. Later, more critical approaches have argued that this doesn't allow for the understanding that women's experiences of security differ according to different social and geopolitical identities, including race, class, and ethnicity (Peoples 2020).

This research project will take a post-structuralist feminist approach to security rather than a liberal or standpoint perspective. Since the foundation of this theoretical framework rests on insights from Critical Theory, it is considered that liberal and standpoint feminist perspectives do not question enough problem-solving assumptions in Security Studies. Post-structural feminism, like CSS and FSS, is also a broad church with many strands. However, there are some important commonalities that will inform the framework taken in this research project. Poststructuralists differ from liberal and standpoint feminists by arguing that there is no unique and universal male or female experience of security (Peoples 2020). Rather, this perspective is "geared towards addressing the politics of multiple overlapping identities" by contextualizing analysis (Hudson 2005, 157-8).

One of the central texts of poststructural feminist security studies is V. Spike Peterson's book *Gendered States: Feminist (Re)Visions of International Relations Theory* (1992). Peterson argued that FSS should be about "transforming ways of being and knowing" rather than making women visible or centering women's experiences (Peterson 1992, 20). This requires a complete rejection of the ontological and epistemological assumptions of positivist theorizing. It is important to note that women's lived experiences are still the central component of constructing post-structural feminist theory. However, experiences are placed within contexts and are understood to be contingent. Poststructuralists do not acknowledge that there is an objective social reality separate to human interpretation. Moreover, knowledge can be neither objective nor universal, as it does not exist independent to the intervention of the researcher. As a result, the knowledge produced by poststructuralists is always situated within the context of both the researcher and the research subject (see: Peoples 2020 and Peterson 1992).

This research project will use poststructural contributions to FSS to "deepen" the security agenda and think critically about security. It will rest on ontological and epistemological assumptions that originate in Critical Theory and will construct situated knowledge from the lived experiences of women. It will analyze how gendered structures and identities are constructed in a particular context and how this shapes the insecurity of particular women.

Environmental Security Studies

Environmental Security Studies (ESS) is another sub-field of Security Studies, aiming to discuss environmental issues using the language of security. However, this has also been done in a variety of ways and today ESS is a fragmented field with a diversity of different approaches. If there is a shared idea in ESS, it is that “there is a connection between the health of our natural environment and the security of individual persons” (Floyd 2013: 3). However, the environment can be considered from various security perspectives. The referent object can vary from the state, as in traditional approaches to security, but can also be humans or the biosphere. ESS can be approached from the perspective of Critical Theory or theories more connected to the positivist tradition (Floyd 2013).

It is important to clarify here that when this research project discusses “the environment”, this means “the habitat or living space surrounding all living things, but mostly human” (MacGregor 2017: 3). Like “security” and “gender”, environment is also a contested concept (MacGregor 2017). This definition has been chosen because it specifically links the environment to humans and therefore environmental security to human security.

From its outset, the main body of work in ESS attempted to “broaden” the agenda rather than “deepen” it. This meant taking into account new security threats, such as environmental threats, rather than questioning the underlying theoretical assumptions used to analyze international relations. In this regard, it used problem-solving theory to assess unconventional security threats. As a result, most of the scholarly work concentrated on environmental stress as a cause of violent conflict. Consequently, the referent object of analysis remained states. For example, researchers sought to connect the scarcity of natural resources with the outbreak of violent conflict (see: Homer-Dixon 1994). In this way, ESS “became increasingly divorced from its potentially heterodox and critical roots in human security” (Elliot 2015, 11).

Therefore, critical scholars in ESS have sought to bring humans back into environmental security. In this approach, environmental security is defined as reducing human vulnerability to environmental degradation by addressing both the causes of environmental stress and human insecurity. Security is therefore equally about the absence of violence as it is the presence of basic human needs (Floyd 2013). Jon Barnett (2003) defined security in relation to environmental change in simple terms as “the condition of being protected from or not exposed to danger” (7). The correlations with this view of security and the Human Security perspective are evident; in both approaches the referent object is humans and a security threat is something that infringes on the “freedom from want” or “freedom from fear”. Barnett’s definition of security provides an interesting dimension to the study of environmental security as it implies insecurity is caused by the absence of protection or the exposure to danger. This links human environmental security to the state, as the state must play a role in protecting its inhabitants and must not put them in danger in order to ensure their security.

A critical approach to environmental human security involves an understanding of the structures, values, and processes that emanate from environmental change and how people’s experience of these are determined by geographical location (Floyd 2013: 26). Furthermore,

environmental security is also not experienced universally across the globe. However, it is important to connect daily life and lived experiences with global economic and political processes. For example, experiences of environmental change are often influenced by a person's position in global patterns of poverty and dependence (Dalby 2013). Poverty exacerbates threats to human security caused by environmental damage as it reduces a person's ability to adapt to changes (Elliot 2015). It is also key to take into account globalization as a cause of environmental disruption, which manifests itself in divergent ways at the local level (Dalby 2013). Consequently, there are discrepancies in vulnerability to climate change.

However, ESS thus far has not gone far enough in accounting for these discrepancies by looking at the global and local structures that have led to differing "social and economic entitlements available to particular people in specific circumstances" (Dalby 2013, 128). This is where the security agenda needs to be "deepened" by incorporating insights from poststructural FSS to account for differing experiences of insecurity on the basis of gendered identities.

III. Theorizing Feminist Environmental Human Security

Several scholars have developed novel theoretical frameworks to bridge the gap between Feminist, Human, and Environmental Security studies, in order to draw attention to the gendered causes and consequences of environmental insecurity for women across the globe (see: Oswald Spring 2015, Detraz 2009, Detraz 2017, MacGregor 2017, MacGregor 2009, Gaard 2017, Bell 2016, and Dankelman 2010). In this section, these frameworks will be critically analyzed and synthesized to form the theory that will underpin this paper. However, this section will first demonstrate the need for such a theory by revealing some of the gendered dimensions of environmental insecurity.

Climate analysts, policy makers, and academics are in wide agreement that people who are more socially and economically marginalized will be more vulnerable to the impacts of environmental damage (see: MacGregor 2009 and Dankelman 2010). Gender can be used as a lens to analyze critically the social and economic marginalization of women, which leaves them more vulnerable to environmental stress. In terms of economic marginalization, Feminist scholars identify the "global feminization of poverty", meaning women are more likely to live in poverty than men (Dankelman 2010). More generally, gendered structures create asymmetries of power between masculinity and femininity that act as "social stratifier", leading to the increased social marginalization of women (Dankelman 2010: 11).

Poverty and marginalization mean women are generally less able to adapt to or avoid environmental problems as well as able to choose a healthy working environment or living conditions. In times of resource scarcity, women are less likely than men to be able to afford food, energy, and access to parks and green spaces. Households headed by women are also more likely to be located in polluted or environmentally damaged areas (Bell 2016).

Empirical scientific research has also been done that highlights how women suffer more negative health effects from pollution. For example, women may be more susceptible to

polychlorinated biphenyls, dioxins, and other harmful chemicals that collect in fatty tissues. There are other health issues, which may affect women more than men, such as ozone exposure (Verchick 2004). In addition, environmental damage has a significant effect on a woman's ability to care for and nurture her children. The gendered division of labor within households means that women are given the roles of provisioners and carers. This increases their vulnerability to climate change as women are tasked with provisioning a household with increasingly scarce resources and caring for those who are more susceptible to the health impacts of climate change, such as children and the elderly (MacGregor 2009).

The above analysis demonstrates that there are “gender-differentiated causes and effects” of climate change (MacGregor 2009: 130). Therefore, climate change is not gender-neutral and it is important to develop theorizing within Environmental Security Studies that considers this (see: MacGregor 2009 and Detraz 2009). Otherwise, any attempt to tackle environmental damage will be “insufficient, unjust, and therefore unsustainable” (MacGregor 2009). This paper will therefore utilize scholarship from Critical Human Security and poststructural Feminist Security Studies to “deepen” the agenda of ESS.

Several scholars have linked gender with the environment and human security in various ways. Scholars such as Karen Bell (2016) and Sharilyn MacGregor (2017 and 2009) elaborate on the structural factors that lead to the oppression of women with differing experiences of climate change. For example: Bell argues that women are disproportionately affected by environmental injustice, meaning an unhealthy environment, unequal access to resources, an unequal distribution of environmental burdens, and unequal participation in environmental decision-making, because of their social and economic marginalization. In her critical work on gender and the environment, Sharilyn MacGregor (2017 and 2009) takes a more eco-feminist approach in her work, which equates the oppression of women, as a result of capitalism and the patriarchy, with the oppression of the natural environment. Both scholars therefore take a poststructural Feminist theoretical approach to the environment but neither applies this explicitly to environmental *security*. This paper will take Bell and MacGregor's theorizing on the “non-material and discursive aspects of climate change”, meaning the systems and structures that have led to different experiences of climate change, and apply them specifically to the study of environmental security (MacGregor 2009: 137). This will allow insight into the underlying causes of gendered experiences of insecurity.

Nicole Detraz (2009 and 2017) developed a novel post-structural Feminist theoretical framework to understand environmental insecurity, which she has called a “gender-focused environmental security perspective” (2009, 109). Detraz's approach takes a “multi-level” approach to security and the environment that pays attention to those in society who experience insecurities as well as the causes and impacts of environmental insecurity (2009, 109). An analysis of security therefore involves valuing and seeking out local knowledge. Detraz argues that this is achieved through “site-specific explorations”, which concentrate on the “specific situation of women and environmental degradation” (2009: 120). As a follow-on from this approach, Detraz takes the post-structural Feminist perspective that not everyone experiences environmental insecurity in the same way. Perspectives on security can therefore be multiple (2017, 206).

Detraz's post-structural Feminist approach to environment security "deepens" and "broadens" the security agenda, as is the intention of this research project. Yet while Detraz incorporates some ideas from Human Security, such as defining insecurities as "incidents that increase one's likelihood of experiencing danger, injury, or a decline in personal well-being" (2009, 109) and emphasizing that humans are the referent object in her analysis (2017), there is still room for a more explicit connection with Human Security approaches. It is useful here to bring in Ursula Oswald Spring's (2020) theorizing on Human, Gender, and Environmental Security (HUGE) to complement Detraz's work. Oswald Spring argues that HUGE combines a wider, gendered concept of security with a "human-centered focus on environmental challenges" (257). In this way, it also "deepens" the agenda by using the lens of gender and "broadens" it by bringing in environmental security and Human Security (15).

HUGE is a theoretical perspective which takes a "bottom-up" approach to environmental security but Oswald Spring emphasizes the importance of studying from the "glocal" (global and local) level (258). This allows us to understand how threats to human security are linked to both micro-level and macro-level systems and institutions. For example: the lens of gender illuminates how threats originate in both the patriarchal system as well as established social relations within families and communities (261). Oswald Spring presents environmental vulnerability as a "dual vulnerability", in which environmental and social vulnerability exist in a dialectic relationship (259).

All four scholars that have been studied in depth (see: Bell 2016, MacGregor 2009 and 2017, Detraz 2009 and 2017, and Oswald Spring 2020) take a poststructural Feminist approach to theorizing on environmental security. In this way, this work allows insight into how to understand women's unique experiences of environmental insecurity by connecting it to both macro-level systems, such as capitalism and the patriarchy, and micro-level gendered social and economic relations. This leads to situated, contextualized knowledge of gendered environmental insecurity. While the referent object for all approaches is humans (specifically women), it is implied that human security is understood from a gendered perspective. This means that "humans" and "women" are not taken as universal constructs but rather the concept of environmental human security is particularized (Hudson 2005).

Chapter 2: Contextual Background

This chapter will illustrate and analyze the context within which environmental human security issues are experienced by women living in Serbia. It will first detail how environmental security issues have originated in the country but also how they have been intensified by government policy. It will move on to describe the patriarchal system working in Serbia and whether environmental policy has been able to act as an effective instrument to improve the human security of women in this context through gender mainstreaming initiatives. Finally, it will touch upon the current situation in regards to environmental activism in Serbia, considering that the experiences of female environmental activists will later be discussed in detail. This chapter will overall demonstrate the appropriateness of the Serbian context for constructing a theory of Critical, Human, Feminist, and Environmental Security Studies.

I. Environmental Security Issues in Serbia

Environmental Insecurity

Firstly, this section of the chapter will look at how Serbia's residents are currently exposed to environmental danger. Considering Barnett's (2003) aforementioned definition of human security in an environmental context as "the condition of being protected from or not exposed to danger", these environmental dangers represent threats to human health and well-being. The central environmental issues in Serbia include category III air pollution in major cities, inadequate water and waste management systems, and the degradation and pollution of soil (Stojanovic 2021, 263).

Starting from air pollution, the poor classification of the air over major cities is mainly a result of excessive quantities of suspended particulate matter (PM), which is damaging to human health (Republic of Serbia Ministry of Environmental Protection 2019, 45). The most recent study done by the Global Alliance on Health and Pollution (2019) indicated that Serbia has the highest number of pollution related deaths in Europe and ranks 9th in the world for the number of pollution related deaths. It has been estimated that today nearly 2.5 million inhabitants of Serbia are exposed to excessive quantities of suspended PM (Coalition 2022, 43).

It is not only PM that contributes to air pollution in Serbia but also excessive quantities of sulfur dioxide. In 2019, Serbia had the highest level of sulfur dioxide emissions in Europe and three times the emissions of the highest EU emitters, Poland and Germany (Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air 2019). The situation with regards to sulfur dioxide is particularly poor in the city of Bor, where the latest report on air pollution by the Serbian authorities stated that the volume of sulfur dioxide in the air regularly reached levels "considered extremely poisonous" to humans (CEE Bankwatch 2022, 19). This is because of the Zijin copper mine and smelting complex located near the town, financed by Chinese investments. Residents of Bor have reported experiencing health issues as a result of the air and are even able to see the sulfur dioxide with their naked eyes. In 2020, the townspeople of Bor filed a criminal complaint against

Zijin when the sulfur dioxide levels in the city reached ten times the EU's legal limit (Shehadi 2021).

Moving onto water management, Serbia has inadequate infrastructure for treating wastewater. Less than 15% of Serbia's wastewater is treated, meaning that a great deal of groundwater is polluted by chemicals from household sewage systems and industry (Stojanovic 2021, 265). In the city of Radinac, located near the Hesteel steel mill, also financed by Chinese investors, wastewater released by the facility causes noxious red rain to fall on the town (Dordevic 2020).

Similarly, Serbia does not have adequate systems of municipal and hazardous waste management (Stojanovic 2021, 269). Landfilling represents a huge problem in the country and waste is often dumped in illegal and unsanitary landfills (Coalition 27 2022, 58). The European Environmental Agency (2021) reported that only around 25% of municipal solid waste is sent to one of the 11 sanitary landfills in Serbia (5). These landfills are reaching capacity and the three largest cities in Serbia are not currently covered by sanitary landfills (5, 14). It is estimated that today there are over 3000 illegal landfills in Serbia and the practice continues of mixing municipal waste with hazardous waste from industry due to high costs of treating hazardous waste (Coalition 27 2022, 64, European Environmental Agency 2021, 14). Inadequate waste management is contributing to dangerous levels of soil pollution for human health. For example: the Serbian Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA) found 709 sites where the soil was classed as contaminated or potentially contaminated, primarily at waste disposal sites but also at sites of intense industrial activity (Republic of Serbia Ministry of Environmental Protection 2019, 32).

It is clear that Serbian residents are currently exposed to environmental danger, in the form of excessive levels of air, water, and soil pollution with hazardous effects on human health. However, they are also not being sufficiently protected from such dangers by their government and indeed state elites are increasing the level of danger faced by Serbia's inhabitants.

Government Response to Environmental Issues

The difficulties of the 1990s, including the devastation wrought by the Yugoslav wars, meant that environmental issues were not placed on the Serbian political agenda until the intensification of the European integration process (Vukelic 2021, 1, 4). Indeed, today most of the impetus for the development of environmental policy comes from Serbia's obligations to harmonize with EU legislation (Muric 2015, 6).

The European Commission (EC) releases a yearly report assessing Serbia's harmonization with EU environmental legislation. The 2022 report concluded that Serbia had made limited progress through adopting important legislation and strategic documents as well as increasing environmental funding (European Commission 2022, 122). Key legislation introduced in 2021 and 2022 includes: a national waste management programme for 2022-2031, a National Emissions Reduction Plan (NERP), a waste action plan for 2022- 2024, and the Law on Climate Change in March 2021 (European Commission 2022, Coalition 27 2022). Serbia also committed itself to reaching the EU Green Deal's goal of decarbonization by 2050 (Kamberovic 2022, 175).

According to the EC report, Serbia has also achieved “good alignment” with EU *acquis* in the areas of air quality and waste management alongside “moderate alignment” in water quality and nature protection and “early stages of alignment” in industrial pollution. Serbia is also party to a number of international environmental treaties, which informs the state’s environmental obligations (Dakic 2022). These are listed in Appendix D.

Yet despite these legislative achievements, the EC as well as most other observers (see: Kamberovic 2022 and Coalition 27) repeatedly emphasize that the implementation and enforcement of environmental policy must be improved. Environmental legislation is insufficiently put into practice and financed in Serbia, institutional capacity is lacking to implement legislation, and monitoring and reporting systems are severely inadequate (Stojanovic 2021, 263). This signifies that, although there may be underlying structural issues affecting the government’s capacity to implement and enforce environmental policy, the state is also not sufficiently protecting its citizens from environmental damage by working to ensure the efficacy of environmental legislation. In fact, particularly in regards to foreign investments, the actions of state elites work to put Serbia’s inhabitants in greater environmental danger.

Firstly, an issue that is repeatedly highlighted is the gaps in pollution monitoring systems due to both inadequate funding, expertise, and equipment but also deliberate policy decisions (see: Coalition 27 2022, European Commission 2022, European Environmental Agency 2021, CEE Bankwatch 2022). The Serbian authorities have significantly reduced the number of reliable and available air quality monitoring stations since 2011 as well as decreased the budget for the monitoring of water quality (Stojanovic 2021, 264, 267). Even when monitoring stations are available, the data is not always usable (Dordevic 2020). The lack of quality data makes it extremely difficult to estimate the health impact of environmental degradation or even the accuracy of nationwide data (Stojanovic 2021, 263). For example: most locations in Serbia classified as having category I air pollution either don’t have a monitoring station or do not have sufficient monitoring (Momcilovic 2022).

Secondly, environmental laws are often inconsistently or ineffectively implemented by the government. Serbian Environmental NGO Coalition 27 produces an annual “Shadow Report” following on from the aforementioned annual EC report. In the 2022 report, the organization details how environmental policy introduced in Serbia is not followed by sufficient implementation. For example, at the present moment the Law on Climate Change cannot be fully implemented as the vast majority of its by-laws have yet to be adopted. The Law says that the by-laws must be adopted within a year of it coming into force but so far, only two by-laws have been adopted- a Regulation on greenhouse gas use and a Rulebook on reporting greenhouse gas emissions (155). The Law also stipulates that a National Climate Change Strategy and a National Energy Climate Plan will be developed but this has also yet to take place (154).

Coalition 27 also details how very limited progress has been made towards integrating climate change policies across other sectors. The 2021-2035 Draft Spatial Plan for the Republic of Serbia, for instance, came under heavy criticism from other sources due to its violations of

Serbia's commitments under both the Paris Agreement and the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans (Ciuta 2022). The Coalition 27 report mentions several other legislative achievements in the field of environmental policy that have been adopted but not implemented sufficiently such as the NERP (38) and the Water Management Strategy (74).

Importantly, the Coalition 27 report also details several trends and concrete occasions where the government itself has worked to violate environmental legislation and limit its efficacy. Emissions in Serbia regularly exceed the levels stipulated by the NERP with little to no consequences for polluters. There are large loopholes in the Law on Nature Protection that allows construction in protected areas if projects are declared "projects of special or national interest" (81). The government regularly violates the Law on Strategic Environmental Assessment by using the "salami slicing strategy", which involves splitting projects into smaller ones, which do not require Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs). Coalition 27 noted that this has happened three times: at the copper mine in Bor, at the LingLong Tire Factory in Zrenjanin, and at the Nikola Tesla B thermal power plant (18).

Yet Coalition 27 also recorded how the government has interfered with environmental oversight by continually shrinking the space for public participation in environmental decision-making and limiting the information available to the public. Public consultations on environmental legislation are consistently too short and scheduled during major holidays in order to limit public oversight, the specific examples here being the cases of the Spatial Plan of the Republic of Serbia and the Law on Environmental Protection (13, 20). By law, Serbian public authorities are required to regularly inform the public about the "development of pollution that could cause danger to the life and health of people" as well as developments in the environmental decision-making process and the issuing of permits and licenses for activities with a significant environmental impact (Dacic 2022). Many observers argue that the government works to deliberately conceal or limit the information available to the public about the environmental situation (see: Vuksanovic 2021). For example, SEPA is meant to publish annual reports on the state of the environment but these reports are regularly released with a one-year delay. In addition, SEPA is not sufficiently staffed (European Commission 2022, 123). SEPA officials are also expected to adhere to government demands or face retribution, such as when the head of the air quality department was fired after objecting to changing the air pollution thresholds (Vuksanovic 2021).

The two primary sources of PM pollution in Serbia are household heating and thermal power plants. These account for around 80% of total emissions (Daul 2019). Energy poverty and the use of poor quality heating fuel is actively worsening the air quality in Serbia. It is estimated that 36% of households in Serbia use wood-burning stoves to heat their homes due to energy poverty (Momcilovic 2022). According to Coalition 27, the government is not working adequately to combat energy poverty, meaning that those affected by it are "neither able to provide sufficient comfort in the household nor to cover heating costs" (Coalition 27 2022, 49). Consequently, a significant source of extremely harmful PM emissions is not being actively addressed.

Another issue that remains unaddressed is Serbia's reliance on thermal energy. SEPA reported that the largest amount of hazardous waste in Serbia comes from "thermal processes" (Republic of Serbia Ministry of Environmental Protection 2019, 16). Serbia has committed to the goal of carbon-neutrality by 2050 under the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans (Regional Cooperation Council 2020). Yet there are currently several signs to indicate that Serbia's reliance on thermal energy is not decreasing. A report by the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air (2019) found that coal emissions from the Western Balkans are not reducing alongside their counterparts in the EU (2). Serbia mainly exports products that require a lot of energy in the production stage, such as automobiles, insulated wire, tires, and electric motors. In order to produce such large quantities of electricity, Serbia uses lignite or "brown coal" which is abundant in Serbia and cheap. It also has the advantages of rendering Serbia relatively energy independent as well as being a resource that the Serbian workforce already knows how to work with (Banovic 2019). Therefore, there is an incentive to prop up the coal industry.

The WHO concluded in their report on the health impacts of air pollution in Serbia that there is "evidence that a significant number of premature deaths and Years of Life Lost could be prevented... if policies and measures are put into place to reduce air pollution" (World Health Organization 2019, viii). As the above discussion of energy poverty and thermal energy demonstrates, the government is currently unwilling to put such measures into place. This exacerbates an already existing human security threat alongside the ineffective implementation of legislation and the frequent violations of such laws. A lack of information available to the public means the government lacks oversight for such damaging actions.

Serbia as a "Pollution Haven"

An underlying theme of the Serbian government's policy is sacrificing environmental quality for economic development. This is primarily done through soliciting investments from foreign investors for environmentally damaging projects. Aleksandra Pavlovic et al. (2021) conducted research on the impact of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) on environmental degradation in Serbia between 1998 and 2019 and concluded that Serbia represents a "pollution haven" under the Pollution Haven Hypothesis. This Hypothesis argues that Multinational Corporations (MNCs) "flee" to host countries that have weaker environmental legislation due to higher pollution costs in their home countries and therefore bring these negative environmental costs to their hosts. Pavlovic concluded that, since there is a "positive and statistically significant" correlation between FDI and increased emissions, Serbia is a pollution haven and that it provides "shelter for foreign polluters." This is because Serbia is an Upper Middle Income Country (UMIC) according to the World Bank and therefore does not accumulate enough capital for investment domestically. Therefore, the government views FDI as central to economic growth and to keeping up with the highly developed countries of Western Europe. Rapid globalization has also led to an increase in energy demand within Serbia, creating the dilemma of how to increase energy supply to ensure social and economic development.

The case of Chinese investment in Serbia will be used to demonstrate the relevance of the Pollution Haven Hypothesis to Serbia. This chapter has already mentioned several polluting projects financed by Chinese funds in Serbia including the Zijin copper mine in Bor and the

Hesteel steel mill in Smederevo as well as their effects on pollution. The relationship between China and Serbia in regards to these infrastructure projects is mutually beneficial and intensifying. China is suffering from high pollution, creating an incentive to “flee” to host countries. Beijing also needs Serbia as a crucial link in its Belt and Road project to connect to European markets with the added benefit of accessing Serbian natural resources. For example, copper from the Zijin facility comprised the bulk of Serbia’s exports to China in 2020. From Belgrade’s perspective, Chinese investments are an attractive prospect for a quick and easy influx of cash. Unlike European investors, Beijing is willing to prop up outdated and debt-ridden industries that can quickly meet Serbia’s growing energy demands. Such as, in 2014, when China stepped in to finance the Kolubara B coal plant after the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development refused (Vuksanovic 2021).

Chinese investments are severely damaging the environmental situation in Serbia, indicating that it has become a “pollution haven”. Chinese-funded industries regularly flout environmental legislation and they are largely given license by the Serbian authorities to do so. For example: the contract detailing the takeover of the Zijin mine included a clause giving the corporation a “free pass” on any environmental damage done during the transition period following the sale of the mine. This period was undefined, meaning Zijin can largely act with impunity moving forward. Since the takeover, the production capacity has been increased to the extent that pollution cannot be kept under control but Zijin has continually postponed making upgrades to the facility to decrease emissions (Shehadi 2021). Similarly, construction of a new unit, the Kostolac B3 Power Plant, proceeded without an EIA after it was funded by the China Machinery and Engineering Corporation (CEE Bankwatch 2020). Chinese investments in Serbia are largely concentrated on facilities that rely on thermal energy, ensuring Serbia’s dependence on this type of energy will not end in the near future (CEE Bankwatch 2020).

The case of Chinese investments therefore confirms that Serbia has become a “pollution haven”. This is due to the deliberate policy of state elites of soliciting investments in polluting industries and violating environmental legislation to ensure their completion. The government is therefore actively increasing the environmental insecurity of Serbia’s inhabitants. Therefore, investments in Serbian industry and government actions are exacerbating existing hazards to human health and therefore increasing environmental human insecurity.

II. Gender and the Environment in the Serbian Context

The purpose of this section is to detail the context with regards to gender within Serbia, specifically how this creates a patriarchal system that affects the experience of the severe environmental human security issues listed above. This section will also note the efforts being made towards gender mainstreaming in environmental policy to try to ameliorate the gendered impact of environmental issues. It will be concluded that, like other areas of environmental policy, limited achievements remain mostly on paper with little commitment to truly implementing gender mainstreaming.

Gender in Serbia

In her classification of forms of patriarchy, Sylvia Walby (1989) distinguishes between “public” and “private” patriarchy. In her definition, private patriarchy rests on the “exclusion of women from arenas of social life apart from the household” whereas a public patriarchy “does not exclude women from certain sites but rather subordinates women in all of them” (228). Under a public patriarchy, women enter into the public sphere and engage in paid work but there are significant gaps in economic power, women’s concerns make up a negligible portion of the political agenda, and violence against women is decreasing but there is still a lack of penalties for the crime (228-9).

The concepts of public and private patriarchy can supplement an explanation of enduring gender inequality in Serbia, alongside an understanding of weaknesses in existing gender equality legislation. At the level of the private patriarchy, gender stereotypes and a patriarchal culture remain strong in Serbia (Babovic 2021, 52). Irena Petrovic and Marija Radoman (2020) conducted a study of changes in value patterns in Serbia between 2003 and 2018 that highlighted an enduring prevalence of private patriarchal values. They concluded that the private patriarchy is still a “dominant value orientation in Serbia” and part of a “traditionalist value system” that is “characterized by structural stability”. Data shows that in the household, 67.9% of women and only 11.5% of men do household chores (Babovic 2021, 37). Violence against women unfortunately remains high. In 2021, Serbia recorded the highest number of femicides in the Balkan region (Kalan 2023). Anti-gender actors in Serbia do not only exist on the margins of politics and society but are able to influence the public sphere, for example when right-wing political actors lobbied the Constitutional Court to strike out the Law on Gender Equality in 2021 (The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation 2022, 104). There is a growing anti-gender movement in Serbia that believes the introduction of gender concerns to the public sphere represents a war on family values imposed by Western Europe (Zaharijevic 2018). All this evidence highlights that “modern beliefs of sensitivity towards gender and sexual identities have not taken root in Serbia” and that there is still a traditional mentality within the private sphere (Kalan 2023).

In regards to public patriarchy, in 2022 Serbia ranked 23 out of 146 countries on the the World Economic Forum’s annual Global Gender Gap Report and above several EU members such as Denmark, the Netherlands, Latvia, Slovenia, and Portugal as well as above the EU average score (World Economic Forum 2022). Serbia was the first country outside of the European Union that started to compile and publish a Gender Equality Index (GEI) in 2016. The GEI measures Serbia’s progress across six key areas of gender equality: health, power, time, knowledge, money, and gender-based violence.

The most recent GEI, released in 2021, stated that Serbia has made “continuous but slow progress” since 2016. Yet this obscures a much less hopeful reality. Looking at GEI data, there was a significant slowdown of progress between the second (2018) and third study (2021) compared to the first (2016) and second study (2018). This highlights a “further decelerating tendency of already slow progress” (Babovic 2021, 10). The 2021 GEI projected that gender equality in Serbia will take 59 years to achieve but this is optimistic considering that progress in

several areas such as money, knowledge, time, and health progress has been deemed stagnant (Ladjevac 2021, 10).

The slowdown of progress towards gender equality in the areas measured by the GEI can be attributed partly to delays in adopting key pieces of legislation as well as the ineffective implementation of existing policies (Babovic 2021, 52). Taking the example of the National Gender Equality Strategy 2016-2020, it can be observed that, like environmental legislation, the implementation of legislative achievements has been severely lacking. In this case, the Gender Equality Strategy was not supported by sufficient financial mechanisms or a strong institutional structure. At the local level, mechanisms for enhancing gender equality under the Strategy were found to be weak and dysfunctional (22). The National Gender Equality Strategy represents the “umbrella policy for improving gender equality in Serbia” and the example of this major piece of gender equality legislation reveals dynamics that are evident in all areas of gender policy (22).

In the areas of political and economic power and gender based violence, Walby’s concept of public patriarchy illustrates how, despite certain achievements, women in Serbia remain subordinated and vulnerable. Anti-gender, patriarchal, and discriminatory attitudes remain strong and influential at the public and private level. Therefore, the patriarchy exists as an enduring influence on the lives and experiences of women living in the country. In addition, the patriarchy remains a context in which women experience environmental human security issues.

Gender Mainstreaming in Environmental Policy

This section of the chapter will examine gender mainstreaming efforts in Serbian environmental policy. An understanding is growing that environmental policies at the national level may have gendered effects as they arise from a patriarchal context (Bacanovic 2018). As a result, gender mainstreaming at the policy level can be seen as a mechanism for increasing the environmental security of women and ameliorating the negative effects of the patriarchy. Consequently, it is analytically useful to briefly consider the success of gender mainstreaming initiatives taken in Serbia in regards to environmental policy.

Gender mainstreaming in this section will be understood according to the definition provided by the United Nations Economic and Social Council in 1997:

“Gender mainstreaming is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action... It is a strategy for making women’s as well as men’s concerns and experiences an integral dimension of... policies and programmes in all political, economic, and societal spheres... The ultimate goal is gender equality.” (United Nations Economic and Social Council 1997, 2).

Gender mainstreaming therefore involves scrutinizing legislation to understand what its gendered impacts may be as well as including the specific concerns of both men and women in the policy-making process. Approaches to gender mainstreaming involve: empowering women in terms of gaining skills, knowledge, and opportunities; increasing the visibility of women’s

knowledge and skills; neutralizing structural inequalities through the introduction of affirmative measures; and working to deconstruct gender roles and patterns (Bacanovic 2018, 40).

The progress of gender mainstreaming in Serbian environmental policy is more advanced than other states of the Western Balkans, as a result of the introduction of gender mainstreaming objectives into national legislation and several institutions working within the country to promote gender equality (UN Economic Commission for Europe 2022). It is notable that Article 42 of the new Law on Gender Equality is specifically dedicated to Gender Equality in the Area of Environmental Protection. Article 42 explicitly commits the Ministry of Environmental Protection to “implementing the procedure of gender mainstreaming during the planning, management, and implementation of environmental protection plans, projects, and policies” (Council of Europe 2021, 47).

Up until this point, most of the initiatives towards gender mainstreaming in Serbia have been conducted with the cooperation of UN agencies such as UNECE, UN Women, and UNDP, as well as the OSCE. These projects have primarily been trainings for decision-makers but have also included mapping gender-sensitive data regarding climate change (with UN Women) and creating a draft gender-sensitive framework for monitoring climate change (with UNDP) (Lalic 2022). This gender-sensitive monitoring framework would bring the “human-centered perspective” back into climate change monitoring and would provide sex-disaggregated data in several areas including participation in climate change, decision-making, and attitudes towards climate change (Babovic 2019, 7).

However, in her analysis of gender and climate change policy, Seema Arora-Jonsson (2014) argues that gender mainstreaming can become a “formalistic ritual” (295, 301). That is to say, states often choose the “add women and stir” approach to gender mainstreaming in environmental policy. This means that women are “expected to join organizations and accommodate themselves to existing norms and structures rather than the structures be changed to accommodate their subjective positions, needs, and ideas to redress disadvantage” (303). Arora- Jonsson posits that concrete change requires more than simply including women in existing programmes and policies (301). Additionally, Arora-Jonsson points out that, under gender mainstreaming initiatives, “women” are included as a “singular and naturalized category” without understanding of the differences that may exist between women and their experiences of environmental change (303-4).

At the current moment, it can be concluded that gender mainstreaming remains a “formalistic ritual” in Serbia. As a result, the particular environmental human security concerns of women in Serbia are not being adequately addressed at the legislative level. The impetus towards gender mainstreaming is not organic as it primarily stems from international organizations. Therefore, at best gender mainstreaming is not well understood in Serbia but at worst it is seen as something “imposed” by external forces (Bacanovic 2019, 8). Despite the commitments made by the Ministry of Environmental Protection, climate change mitigation measures are currently being introduced in Serbia that do not take gender into account and women are still heavily underrepresented in climate change policy-making (Muric 2015, 15). There is an ongoing

problem with sex-disaggregated data, especially on sanitation, meaning it is difficult to develop gender-sensitive policies (UN Economic Commission for Europe). Many of the plans of the Ministry of Environmental Protection in regards to gender mainstreaming have yet to materialize, including the aforementioned gender-sensitive monitoring framework (Lalic 2022). In summary, gender mainstreaming in Serbia is introduced reluctantly, partially, and only at the behest of international organizations.

III. Environmental Activism in Serbia

The final section of this chapter will provide context for the operation of civil society and particularly Environmental Social Movements (ESMs) in Serbia. Changes in activism have created new dynamics in the ability of environmental civil society to affect change in Serbia and a new milieu in which female activists must operate.

Environmental activism began in Serbia in the post-2000 transition when Serbia was opened up to foreign investments. This meant both an influx of funding for polluting industries as well as for expanding civil society, including ESMs. This increased the need for environmental activism and allowed for the growth of nascent movements (Pestic 2023, 2-3). However, at this time environmental activism was mainly conducted by professional groups funded by external donors. These groups established connections with the government and acted to affect change through formal procedures. Professional organizations in Serbia largely worked without much input from society and were heavily influenced by European environmental policy. As a result, their advocacy work did not resonate with the local population and they were seen as artificial imports from Western Europe (Vukelic 2021, 1).

However, the following decade saw a growth in participatory activism as the regime in Serbia has grown increasingly authoritarian and institutions are perceived as unresponsive to citizens' demands (Pestic 2023, 5). Grassroots ESMs have emerged and gained momentum in this context and have proven able to mobilize residents of Serbia across ideological cleavages (6). Their discourse tends to focus on condemning the extractivist agendas of foreign MNCs and opposing government policy of privatizing and mining natural resources, which transcends a broad swathe of the ideological spectrum in Serbia (8). Two key turning points in this trend towards critical grassroots direct action were the Stara Planina protests in 2018 and the Rio Tinto protests in 2021. These two significant events helped turn environmental activism into the "backbone of civic activism in Serbia" (Pestic 2023, 6).

The protests around Stara Planina were the first time grassroots environmental activism had seen such a surge in Serbia and were the first sign that a stronger grassroots environmental civil society might be developing (Vukelic 2021, 12). In September 2018, thousands of locals gathered in the small town of Pirot to protest the construction of small hydropower plants amid concerns of their effects on local rivers of the Stara Planina area (Radonjic 2018). What originated as a local movement soon gained a national character as the grassroots movement gained momentum in Serbia's urban areas and protests moved to Belgrade in January 2019. Activists were able to stop the construction of the planned plants, highlighting the efficacy of

environmental activism (Jovanovic 2019). Activist groups from Stara Planina later joined forces with other movements for the Ecological Uprising protest in April 2021, representing a significant milestone for environmental civil society in Serbia as groups came together for the first time in Belgrade (Kendrick 2023, 100).

Large-scale environmental protests once again erupted in Serbia in 2021, perhaps as a result of successes in Stara Planina. Starting from November 2021, tens of thousands of people from across the ideological spectrum took to the street in Serbia's major cities in order to protest the construction of a \$2.4 billion lithium mine in the Jadar valley. The project was led by Anglo-Australian mining company Rio Tinto and it was speculated that the proposed mine could cause irreparable damage to the Jadar valley's natural environment and water supplies. During the protest action, activists blocked main roads in major cities such as Belgrade and Novi Sad (De Launey 2022). In New York, Serbian expatriates protested the Rio Tinto project by gathering in front of the United Nations building ("Environmental Protests" 2021). The effective organization and unity shown by the movement as well as the broad support it garnered was a surprise to the Serbian authorities (De Launey 2022).

It became increasingly clear that the protests represented the biggest threat to the Serbian Progressive Party regime since its initiation. The regime was also facing elections in April 2022. Consequently, the government was forced to try to acquiesce to activist demands, first by suspending two key laws essential to helping Rio Tinto secure permission for the project in December 2021. However, protests remained ongoing in January 2022 (Goranovic 2022). As a result, President Aleksandar Vucic went even further and suspended the Law on Expropriation, a move that meant the Rio Tinto project could not proceed (Burazer 2022).

The success of grassroots ESMs in the Stara Planina and Rio Tinto protests has led to the unprecedented inclusion of environmental issues on the national political agenda. In the 2022 elections, green-left coalition We Must (Moramo) won seats in parliament and the Belgrade city council for the first time. This indicates the growing relevance of environmental issues for the electorate as they become increasingly visible in civil society. For the first time now, "the struggle once fought with placards and megaphones now takes the floor with arguments and proposals informed on the ground by real life problems of citizens" (Simovic 2022). It is also interesting to note, in regards to the gender dimension of this project, that We Must was one of only two parties that addressed gender equality issues in their 2022 campaign (The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation 2022, 18). Media coverage of environmental issues is also increasing, heightening the awareness of environmental degradation and indicating how environmental issues are being highlighted in public discourse (Pavlovic V. 2021).

However, there are still obstacles towards the success of ESMs, primarily presented by the institutional dynamics of the Serbian Progressive Party regime. Freedom House in 2022 classified Serbia as a transitional or hybrid regime, in which civil society operates in an "increasingly hostile environment" (Burazer 2022). Since the state has been captured by the Vucic regime, institutional channels are not effective in seeing demands realized. Despite recent successes, this is a difficult context within which to achieve results, especially as the

government actively works to suppress critical voices (Tadic 2023). For example: the authorities also frequently use Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPP) lawsuits against ESMs and individual activists (Amnesty International 2023). Both Freedom House and Amnesty International recently highlighted the violence faced by environmental activists, both in the form of excessive force used by the police and by groups of armed thugs with suspected connection to the regime (Burazer 2022, Amnesty International 2023).

Additionally, although it appears the environmental movement is growing in influence and success, the regime still has the upper hand. Although Rio Tinto did not get permission for the lithium mine in the Jadar valley, local organizations report that there is ongoing activity in the area (Amnesty International 2023). Given gaps in EIA legislation and past government actions, it is highly possible that the government can violate the law and begin construction on projects that are the subject of protests. In addition, even though We Must has entered the political arena, this does mean it has much political power as an opposition group in a hybrid regime. Currently, the political debate is dominated by geopolitics in Serbia, meaning there is little inclination to address the We Must platform (Simovic 2022).

Jaime Kendrick (2023) argues that ESMs in Serbia constitute a real democratic alternative to the established regime (97). As activists have taken on a larger role in the wider Serbian political context, they now represent a significant opposition force to the regime (99). This, however, creates a new obstacle for ESMs as it renders dialogue with political elites difficult and fraught with tension. Consequently, moving forward environmental civil society, with its new role as an opposition actor, may find it more difficult to shape the policy process.

There are additional problematic dynamics within environmental civil society in Serbia. ESMs are still primarily financed by external donors, which allow them political autonomy in the context of a hybrid regime. However, this funding is limited, which causes fierce competition between ESMs and inhibits inter-organisational cooperation (Vukelic 2021, 3-5). A lack of trust and coordination makes it difficult to achieve the critical mass needed to affect concrete change (7). ESMs also represent a broad coalition from across the ideological spectrum, leading to success in mobilization but making it difficult to present a unified front (De Launey 2022). International donors are also more likely to fund groups that are not critical of state institutions as they aim to increase cooperation between the state and environmental civil society (Vukelic 2021, 5). In the Serbian context, this means environmental groups risk being co-opted by the regime in order to secure much needed funding. Although the growth of grassroots ESMs in Serbia has led to unprecedented success in affecting change and increased the visibility of environmental issues, the current nature of the regime will always impede progress.

At the moment, environmental civil society in Serbia is largely characterized by growing grassroots movements, who struggle to influence government environmental policy. These ESMs face violent and non-violent persecution by the government and struggle to work cooperatively. It is within this context, as well as the aforementioned policy and patriarchal context, female activists operate and try to affect change.

Chapter 3: Methodology and Research Design

This chapter will outline the methodology that will be used to answer the posed research question(s) and the justifications behind choices made in research design. Firstly, brief reasons will be given for the choice of Serbia as the case study to construct a conceptual framework for theoretically linking poststructural Feminist, Environmental, and Human Security Studies. The choice to select female environmental activists as interlocutors will also be expanded upon here. Next, the discussion will move to the choice of Grounded Theory (GT) as the methodological underpinning of this research project and the chapter will go on to expound on the research process. Finally, the chapter will set out some limitations of the research project.

I. Case Study

This section will justify the choices made in selecting the case study of Serbia for the generation of theory. In writing on climate change and environmental degradation, there exists a characteristic “dichotomy” between the Global North and South (Schaefer 2015, 254). In this comparison, the Global North is depicted as environmentally secure compared to the environmental insecurity of the less developed Global South. The theoretical works on gender and the environment reviewed in Chapter 1 (see: Bell 2016, MacGregor 2017 and 2009, Detraz 2017 and 2009, and Osmond Spring 2020) exclusively use case studies from the Global South. For example, Detraz (2009) applies her framework to wildlife conservation in Tanzania and water security in India whereas Osmond Spring (2020) works in Latin America. There is not seen to be a need for theorizing in the same regard based on case studies from Europe and the environmentally secure Global North (Arora-Jonsson 2014, 296).

As another example, Scott Taylor (2004) wrote an explanatory text on the Pollution Haven Hypothesis that described the Global North and South as completely dichotomous. Taylor wrote that the Global North has more access to human capital than the Global South and so the North specializes in “clean goods” whereas the South must focus on “dirty goods” for trade. Taylor also describes the “tight [environmental] regulation North” and the “lax regulation South”. However, as Chapter 2 laid out, this dichotomy does not fit so comfortably in the Western Balkans where human capital is lacking and environmental regulations are known for being extremely lax. After the collapse of communism, states in the Western Balkans underwent a prolonged and fraught transition process, which was deeply impacted by the turmoil of the Yugoslav Wars, and even now still lag behind many states of Central and Eastern Europe in several indicators of transition (Kozcan 2016, 7). This has made them less developed today and less able or willing to adapt to climate change, like many of the states of the Global South. Therefore, in overarching descriptions of Europe’s developed approach to environmental issues, the Western Balkans are often hidden or excluded, obscuring the severity of environmental insecurity in these states.

As a result, the Western Balkans are an interesting and fruitful place to apply theorizing on environmental security. The focus was narrowed to Serbia because of, firstly, the intensity of its

connections with China. As highlighted in Chapter 2, Serbia is now a hub of Chinese influence and investments that cause significant environmental damage (Vladisavljev 2022). Serbia has also had a recent upsurge in grassroots environmental protests (see: Pesic 2023 and Vukelic 2021). However, Serbia remains a country engaged in accession negotiations with the EU, meaning it must still implement a measure of EU environmental policy (see: European Commission 2022). It seems interesting to note from a theoretical perspective how these evident tensions at the state level impact the lived experience of Serbian inhabitants, particularly women.

Consequently, there are several prominent phenomena operating in the Serbian context that make it an interesting place to study environmental security. Any theory developed from poststructural Feminism or Critical Environmental Human Security Studies will link lived experiences with a particular context, therefore these strong contextual dynamics will help develop theory.

The choice was also made to use female environmental activists as interlocutors in this project. When conducting theoretical sampling using Grounded Theory methodology (which will be explained in detail later in the chapter), it is recommended to select “a series of cases... in which the phenomena under investigation is likely to manifest in a significant manner” (Tarozzi 2020, 124). A study done by Tracy E. Perkins (2012) on women’s environmental activism in California found that typically women enter activist struggles because of their personal experiences of local environmental degradation (76). Other observers also posit that environmental movements result from disruptions to everyday life caused by environmental destruction (see: Sicotte 2017, Schaefer 2015, Perkins 2012, and Rossdale 2016). These serious environmental issues are more likely to affect the poor and marginalized and so these members of society are more likely to form the cadres of movements.

Following on from this research, it seems apt to assume that women who have joined movements will have had direct experience of environmental insecurity or will have a strong sense of how environmental insecurity manifests itself in Serbia. They also may be more able to articulate the reasons for their own environmental insecurity as they are actively working towards social change, or more specifically to enhance environmental security. Lastly, for practical purposes, these are women who are prominent enough in the public eye that they can be identified and reached without local knowledge.

II. Methodological Framework

This methodology of this study was informed by the poststructural Feminist paradigm, which holds the assumption that the researcher is not describing a world that exists independently of human meaning (Fierke 2015). Rather, the researcher works with research subjects to create knowledge and the researcher’s positionality affects the outcome. Knowledge and “truths” are therefore local rather than universal and the research subject is decentred and multiplied (Daigle 2018, 121). Methods are therefore aimed at exploring phenomena “from the interior” and

providing an “in-depth and interpreted” understanding of the social world that research subjects inhabit (Ritchie 2014, 4).

The selection of methods was also dictated by the central assumption of FSS that security knowledge must be “grounded in the life world of women” who are often placed in an epistemologically subordinated position in Security Studies (Aradau 2015, 13). FSS therefore focuses on the “micro-level, lived, and relational experience” of security and there is a need for interpersonal methods that engage “with the micro-political, the intimate, and the relational” (Daigle 2018, 119, 117, 120). In this way, fieldwork is able to challenge the state-centric and masculinised perspective on security inherent in traditional security studies (119).

This research project will utilize the methodological toolkit from Grounded Theory (GT). GT is the process of creating theory out of the data generated by the research process, typically through interpersonal methods (Bryman 2016, 381). It is a strategy of analyzing qualitative data that rests on segmenting the data into parts based on what appears in the research and then reassembling it into a coherent whole in the form of concepts and theory (Boeije 2012, 76). Theory produced using this methodology will therefore be “grounded”, meaning it has a clear empirical basis and is based on lived experience (Tarozzi 2020, 6). GT is used to “capture and explain context-related social processes” by looking into how context influences the key events, incidents, and behaviors arising in the data (Timonen 2018, 1, 6).

GT was selected for use in this project because of its fit with the central tenets of FSS and its appropriateness to the research aim. It is worth noting that several Feminist scholars have noted that GT is highly congruent with Feminist research (see: Plummer 2010 and Eastlick Kushner 2003). This is because, as Kevin G. Corley (600) argued, “the heart and soul of GT methodologies lies in engaging a phenomenon from the perspective of those living it” (600), in line with the Feminist maxim to start from the lived experiences of women. This is because it primarily utilizes semi-structured interviews to generate data. In social science research, interviews are primarily used “where it is important to set the perspectives heard within the context of personal history or experience” (Ritchie 2014, 56). Experience is therefore taken as the starting point for GT and data from interviews allows for producing information about “context-related social processes”, such as environmental insecurity. Many scholars have argued that GT is a useful methodological tool to construct theory about a setting or social relations about which little is known in the literature, hence its appropriateness for this project (see: Tarozzi 2020, Eastlick Kushner 2003, and Hense 2016).

III. Research Process

Data was primarily generated using semi-structured interviews. GT advocates for the use of semi-structured interviews rather than unstructured because it aims to study a specific phenomenon in order to construct theory and so more defined questioning is required (Tarozzi 2020, 94). A literature review was conducted ahead of the interview design in order to get an understanding of the critical issues under study and provide “sensitizing notions” to the research (Timmermans 2012, 173). However, it is important in GT to remain open to any insights that

may be generated by the data and to not be rigidly attached to theory (Timonen 2018, 4). Prior to interviews, a topic guide was created in order to loosely guide the process while still allowing for the flexibility to pursue details relevant to each participant (Ritchie 2014, 149). For the interview guide, please see Appendix A.

Six interviews were conducted, two in Belgrade and four online over Zoom. Interviews were conducted between March and May 2023 with a research trip to Belgrade in March. Participants were sourced because either they had published about their activist work online or their contact details were provided with their permission by another interviewee. The activists represented a range of ages and locations, but were all ethnic Serbian women with a high level of English. The interviews lasted around one hour and were recorded with permission. Interviews were conducted in English. GT advocates for flexibility and adapting the interview guide as the data emerges and this was done throughout the research process (Tarozzi 2020, 94). Questioning was done responsively during the interviews.

The research subjects chose a pseudonym and will be kept anonymous in this study. In later analysis, interviewees will be referred to using this pseudonym. Appendix B contains a list of each pseudonym and the corresponding date and location of each interview.

GT does not have a rigid methodological procedure and indeed, there have been multiple strands of GT since its inception (see: Hense 2016, Eastlick Kushner 2003, Glaser 1968). However, it typically has three basic stages, which were followed in this study. The first stage is initial or open coding, where data is meticulously and repeatedly looked through in order to assign codes (Tarozzi 2020, 102). Coding is the process of “giving names to component parts that seem to be of particular theoretical significance and/ or that appear to be particularly salient in the social world of those being studied” (Bryman 2016, 573). The codes that emerge are constantly compared, reviewed, and then grouped into macro-categories during the second stage, called focused coding. This is when codes are analyzed for shared conceptual elements or connections to theoretical literature and concepts subsequently emerge from the data (Bryman 2016, 581, Tarozzi 2020, 102). These two processes can happen simultaneously and are also used to either edit the interview guide or expand the theoretical sample.

The third and final stage is theoretical coding where a core concept is identified by connecting categories and integrating them into a theoretical framework (Tarozzi 2020, 118). Having progressed through these three stages, the resulting concepts and theory are deeply “grounded” in the data. However, creating a robust and saturated theory is a daunting task and studies often result in concepts or a conceptual framework rather than theory (Bryman 2016, 577). Indeed the most common outcome, and the outcome of this study given its scope and depth, is “greater conceptual clarity” that falls short of a fully elaborated and integrated theoretical framework but provides a better conceptualisation (Timonen 2018, 4). Achieving conceptual clarity is sufficient for a GT study, which is a highly ambitious undertaking.

In conducting a GT study, researchers often consult two or more sources of data in order to corroborate their findings (Bowen 2009, 28). GT holds to the principle that “all is data” and can

be used to generate theory, or achieve a higher level of conceptual clarity (Glaser 1968). As a result, this research project will use document analysis to supplement the interview data. Documents will be used to provide contextual richness and to enhance the credibility of the researcher's insights (Bowen 2009, 36). The researcher can be creative in the documents they choose for GT analysis and, once their suitability for the project is assessed, they can be used like other primary data in GT methodology (Thomas 2009, Denscombe 2017).

The documents that were used to supplement interview data in this study are the descriptions of Serbian activist organizations published on their websites or "About" pages. A master list of organizations with websites updated in the last four years was created from which to source documents. For the master list, please see Appendix C. It is important to note that the list did not contain organizations that prioritized a single group, location, or issue. This is because it was thought that these groups would be less likely to discuss the environmental situation in general terms and with scope for including gender concerns. Additionally, only Serbian organizations were chosen rather than including some of the many foreign groups active in the country, in order to demonstrate the local perspective. Many Serbian grassroots organizations use social media to organize and publish materials but this study was limited to professional websites. Organizations were sourced by looking at news articles about environmental protests as well as through the websites of fellow organizations, who often mentioned their local partners.

This research project analyzed the content of the "About" pages of activist websites by looking at how organizations present themselves, their goals, and values. Specifically, content was assessed according to whether gender is mentioned as a lens, a fundamental value, or a priority in the organization. Out of the 14 organizations, nine had an "About" section in English. Only these sites have been used in order not to lose data insights through translation. In document analysis research, it is key to keep in mind that documents are created by a party for some purpose (Bryman 2016, 553). However, this research project seeks to research the activist perspective rather than an objective account of the state of affairs in Serbia and so these documents can be useful for analysis. Documents were overall chosen because of their ability to reveal whether gender is a priority in environmental activist movements and how gender is considered from an activist perspective in order to supplement interview data.

IV. Limitations

There are several limitations to this study including: the size of the interview sample, the nature of online interviews, and the language barrier. Firstly, the theoretical insights generated by this study could certainly have been richer with a greater number of interlocutors. Although, it is worth noting that in GT the relevance and richness of the data collected matter more than the quantity of interviews conducted (Tarozzi 2020, 95). The success of GT is more dependent on the researcher's ability to find theoretically useful insights in the data. Small samples can be useful as long as there is a relatively homogenous sample and participants are knowledgeable about the subject matter. Additionally, there seems to be relative agreement that six interviews is sufficient for coding (Guest 2006). Using women involved in environmental activism helped

negate the potential negative effects of a smaller sample size, as the women interviewed were highly knowledgeable about the given subject.

A second limitation was the fact that some interviews were conducted over Zoom. Online interviewing means the researcher cannot observe the participants' physical responses to questioning, such as body language and complex facial expressions (Bryman 2016, 485). Non-verbal communication could have been extremely useful considering the language barrier in this study. In addition, it is difficult to build rapport and collect contextual data over Zoom, which is important in this kind of research (De Villiers 2022). FSS research also emphasizes collecting contextual data during the research process, such as on the environment of the interview (Daigle 2018, 121). This was rendered difficult by doing interviews over Zoom. Circumstances prevented more in-depth research across Serbia so Zoom interviews were used to supplement the existing data and include a wider range of participants in the study. Despite the fact that Zoom can provide some benefits for interviewing, like participants feeling more comfortable in their own homes or bringing in participants from more rural areas, it still presents some limitations in losing some of the nuances of in-person interviews, which are highly valued in FSS research (Oliffe 2021, 1).

The third limitation is related to the language barrier. None of the participants were native English speakers, although all had a high level of English sufficient for these purposes. However, considering this research rests on analyzing interview data for codes, the impact of using a second language must be considered. Some meaning may have been lost in how the participants recounted their experiences given that they were not using their native language (Squires 2009, 278). In regards to gender, perspectives are deeply shaped by language usage (Young 2023). Additionally, some of the vocabulary such as “gender mainstreaming” is not well understood in Serbian translation. Some of the participants required clarification during the interviews on what the questions were asking, such as what was meant by “taking gender into account”. This could be because of language differences when discussing gender and implies the existence of a language barrier, which could lessen the richness of theoretical insights.

Chapter 4: Presentation of Findings

The key finding of this chapter is that environmental human insecurity occurs when security-degrading factors are able to negate or severely limit security-enhancing processes. These processes and factors are deeply gendered as well as influenced by and intertwined with the Serbian political, social, and economic context

This chapter will first assess how the environment is viewed through the lens of human security by the interviewees and the available documents. It will then move on to a discussion of the novel concepts developed from the data, namely the existence of security-enhancing processes and security-degrading factors for women's environmental human security.

Security-enhancing processes were evident at the activist level and were found to be dynamic and in a constant state of development, hence the choice to consider them as "processes". On the other hand, security-degrading factors were observed to be more static and less subject to change. Therefore, they were classified as "factors". Security-degrading factors were revealed as operating on the political and societal levels. As a result, security-enhancing processes at the activist level are severely limited and at times even negated by security-degrading factors operating on much broader and more influential levels. The result was gendered human environmental insecurity.

Prior to presenting the findings, it is important to state that, while the interviewees were all women and environmental activists, their approach to activism and their involvement differed significantly. The interviewees were involved in different types of organizations with different ways of doing activist work. They also held different positions in these organizations; some were leaders and mobilisers whereas some were participators and some considered themselves solo activists. In addition, the documents used as primary data, while all published by environmental NGOs, were composed by different authors with different purposes and with different audiences in mind. The concepts elaborated below arose from the commonalities within the contradictions and differing experiences. However, it must be stated that this is not meant to be a generalization of women's experience of environmental insecurity in Serbia and women may have different experiences of security-enhancing processes and security-degrading factors.

I. Environmental Damage as a Security Threat

It was clear from the interview data that environmental degradation is viewed by the research participants in existential terms, meaning as a threat to the survival of humankind. Several interviewees mentioned their major preoccupation with the future and especially the future of children. For example, Jelena A¹ argued that we are "*heading towards an apocalyptic scenario*". The word "*apocalyptic*" implies the gradual intensification of the current insecurity to a critical level.

¹ Interview on 5th May 2023 over Zoom

However, it is not just future survival that was presented as a major concern by interviewees but also current threats. FruskaForest² described her activist work in this way:

“It is the last defense of our life because the political ruling party is not sensitive to local environmental issues.”

Similarly, when asked about what she viewed as the most severe environmental issues in Serbia, Jelana A answered:

“Pollution of everything... all the essential things that are needed for us to survive.”

What arises from these statements is the way activists view their own insecurity. In basic terms, they view not only their health and wellbeing but also their very lives as under threat. Activism is seen as a struggle for survival, therefore suggesting that a serious security threat is perceived. In addition, this threat is recognized as stemming from the deliberate actions of state elites, who facilitate the pollution of essential resources and disregard local environmental concerns.

It is notable that, when asked about their personal experiences of environmental damage in Serbia, every interviewee mentioned experiencing negative consequences as a result of air pollution. Zaklina³ asserted, *“It is really affecting my breathing”* while MNOL⁴ said, *“I know that I will have a shorter life”*. FruskaForest described how a large corporation had been given permission by the municipal government to build an industrial facility close to her home, with serious consequences for her family:

“Air pollution is very high. We personally, my family and all the other people who live fifteen minutes from the corporation, feel that because when we go out then you can smell the dirty air pollution... so we are suffering.”

Aside from the effects that the activists feel themselves, Jelena A quoted the statistic that 6000 people die annually in Serbia from air pollution and said, *“Air pollution is really taking a personal toll on a lot of people”* and *“everyone personally feels the consequences”*. She went on to mention the respiratory conditions that children living in Serbia are developing. Therefore, in the perception of activists, air pollution is having a profound effect on environmental human security. This is because it affects the ability to live free from “fear and want” (United Nations Development Program 1995, 230).

However, in all the discussions of their own environmental insecurity, the interviewees did not mention that they had had a different experience as a result of their gender. The separation seemed to exist between adults and children, with children experiencing more harm from environmental damage, rather than between genders. Moreover, the women interviewed did not view themselves as more or less insecure than their male counterparts.

² Interview on 21st March 2023 over Zoom

³ Interview on 27th March 2023 in Belgrade

⁴ Interview on 24th March 2023 in Belgrade

Therefore, women involved in environmental activism do consider environmental degradation as a human security threat. To them, it represents a threat to their lives and wellbeing as well as the future survival of humankind. However, they do not view their experience as gendered. There was no expressed understanding that as women they are in a greater position of socio-economic vulnerability than men and that this might render them more insecure. Despite frequently mentioning children and families, it was not considered that there might exist dynamics that would lead women to have a different experience of environmental insecurity. Consequently, in the eyes of these activists, environmental damage was a security threat but not a gendered one.

II. Security- Enhancing Processes

1. Growing Grassroots Activism

As mentioned in Chapter 2, the last few years have seen a surge and rapid development in grassroots environmental activism in Serbia (see: Vukelic 2021, Pesic 2023, De Launey 2022, Goranovic 2022, and Dimoski 2022). This has had several positive effects on the activist activities of the women interviewed.

The first was that it elevated environmental consciousness in Serbia. Two of the women who had been active for over a decade mentioned the change that has taken place. Jelena A stated that the general awareness of environmental issues has increased since the mid-2000s, as a result of the increased visibility of environmental activism. She said that the *“major happenings”* of the last few years have *“escalated the topic in the public eye”* and *“created momentum for the green political option”*. Zaklina echoed these sentiments and said that, before the boom of grassroots activism, environmental issues were not on either the *“value-base”* or the *“policy-base”*. She added, *“It wasn’t understood among citizens or institutions, not a lot of people knew how bad the situation was”*

Therefore, an increase in public consciousness has provided women with more opportunity and space to advocate for their own security through activism. An increase in public awareness and concern should also logically lead to environmental concerns being given more attention at the political level, meaning it is more likely that human security issues will be addressed.

The second effect of intensifying grassroots activism has been that it has provided more opportunities for women to engage in activism. What has been significant about this surge of activism has been the growth of local movements, led and coordinated by the local inhabitants themselves. FruskaForest is the leader of such a local movement and described herself as the *“front man”*. Shifting away from professional, centralized environmental civil society organizations has provided women with the opportunity to be a part of growing a movement. They are no longer required to seek entry to organizations through formalized recruitment structures. In addition, Zaklina mentioned that there are now over 100 initiatives and organizations in every city and municipality in Serbia, operating on a variety of issues.

Therefore, women now have more opportunities to join environmental movements as a result of the nature of new organizations and their proliferation. This provides them with a greater ability to advocate for their own environmental security and to put forward the unique concerns of women living in Serbia. A publication by Pravda Na Vodu (“I razum i osecajnost” 2022) on the women of Serbia’s environmental activist movement, written by a female activist, argued that:

“Such conditions have opened up space for women... Many local ecological initiatives and nascent green movements are being led by women... The positive impact [that grassroots organizations] continue to have on other women is by inspiring them to get involved and encouraging them to be more vocal.”

This suggests that this process is exponentially increasing women’s activity because as more women succeed in these movements, more women are motivated to join.

The final effect of growing grassroots activism is that it has led to significant success for environmental movements. Zaklina maintained that the government was less equipped to repress a decentralized movement that grew spontaneously from the bottom up. She said, “*Maybe if it was organized it would be easier for the government to destroy it.*”

Women also played a significant role in the recent successes of the grassroots movement. The Pravda Na Vodu publication (“I razum i osecajnost” 2022) asserted that:

“I am confident that this entire struggle would have looked different had it not been for all these women... Women activists were the ones who did the research, filed the complaints and objections, wrote memos and petitioned institutions, organized protest activities, prepared meals, did the canvassing and recruiting. They have been the very backbone of our activities.”

Environmental movements therefore found unprecedented success during the last few years with women playing a key role. This firstly further ensures that environmental issues will be brought into the political sphere. Secondly, it means that women have become integral to the machinery of environmental activism. This increases their influence over advocacy and enhances their ability to ensure women’s environmental security concerns are included in the agenda of organizations.

2. Forming Networks

Activists are forming and maintaining both international and domestic networks to help augment their capacity to campaign for their own environmental security. These networks have been crucial to providing material support, knowledge, and solidarity to activists. They have also been able to support the adoption of gendered perspectives in limited capacities.

International involvement is paramount for Serbian environmental activists, as Zaklina said: “*we really need international support*”. Firstly, given the political climate in Serbia and the attitude of the current government towards environmental issues, international donors are crucial to

providing material support for environmental civil society. . For example, Zaklina posited, *“A lot of funding for NGOs comes from the EU and lots of people are depending on these budgets.”* Additionally, Jelena A specifically mentioned that her organization is funded by the European Climate Fund (ECF). Without this international financial support, many organizations would not be able to continue.

International networks also help to transfer knowledge to Serbian activists. More than one interviewee mentioned the European Greens (Jelena A and Zaklina). Zaklina said her experience working within the party *“helped her to learn a lot, to meet people, and to learn about the environmental situation in Serbia”*. She added that her experience in the European Greens gave her knowledge that many people in Serbia do not have. Later in the interview, when talking about how other male environmental activists view her organization, which is run by two women, Zaklina said both of them worked with the European Greens and so are *“the only ones or one of the few that have long-term knowledge and experience”*. Therefore, their male counterparts *“respect us but only because they need us”*. As a result, knowledge gained from international networks help women in activism to gain knowledge and respect.

Knowledge on eco-feminism and gender mainstreaming in environmental policy also comes from international networks. Jelena A mentioned discussions happening in the European Greens on *“eco-feminism”*. Dunja⁵ works as a gender mainstreaming consultant for environmental policy in Serbia and she argued that only international donors and organizations are galvanizing this process. She specifically mentioned the OSCE Mission to Serbia, UNDP, and UN Women who have requirements in place for integrating gender perspectives in environmental policies. She is personally involved in a project called Gender Budget Border Network Volume 2, funded by the Swedish and Austrian Development Agencies, which involves *“monitoring of gender responsiveness of climate change actions.”* Indeed, Dunja only got into this field because she was invited by an international organization to conduct a workshop on the topic. Dunja explained that on gender mainstreaming:

“There is a very small knowledge market [in Serbia] to say the least... Knowledge is limited, experience is limited.”

In this way, international networks are crucial to help bring in the gendered lens to discussions of the environment in Serbia. They provide information and expertise to those working in Serbia in order to implement gender-sensitive policies.

Moving on to domestic networks, these are organized around providing solidarity on environmental issues. Zaklina described how this solidarity was particularly useful for her organization, which is led by women:

“A lot of these organizations and initiatives demonstrate a lot of solidarity...I think the trust between the movement, between people, is something that changed everything for

⁵ Interview on 4th April 2023 over Zoom

us, because we know each other and we did concrete stuff to help each of these organizations.”

Not only does solidarity help provide support for activist activity and facilitate a strong united front, but it also helps women involved in activism to gain trust and respect in a patriarchal society. Solidarity with other environmental organizations helps women to build the connections necessary to advocate for themselves in the domestic area.

There are also domestic solidarity networks in Serbia that exist purely for women. At the most informal level, FruskaForest described how women in local communities engage in *“environmental struggles”* not alone but *“as a wider group of fighters”*. She gave the example of organizing sit-ins to protect local resources. Forming groups in this way provides women with the grounding to defend their concerns, particularly in communities where women acting alone are more likely to be ignored or may even face threats.

However, there also exists a formal network for women environmental activists in Serbia, the Network of Women for the Environment and Nature. This group was formed in September 2020 by two female activists, one of whom was an interviewee for this project (Zaklina). As the founder, Zaklina described the network as:

“An internal mechanism for survival and empowerment... to support each other to be more visible, to be more active, to take more visible leadership roles.”

The Network meets once or twice a year at a place where protest action is currently being held. During the meetings, women share experiences and the organizers hold workshops on *“practical things that are useful for women members”* (Zaklina) such as public speaking, social media, and combatting SLAPP charges. After an incident of police violence against activists, the Network organized a self-defense class for its members. An activist who had been faced with several SLAPP cases, who is also an interviewee for this research project (FruskaForest), gave a talk for other members on how to manage them. Prior to this, the Network had gone to the court in order to support FruskaForest during her trial. FruskaForest said on the experience:

“The Network of women came to the court to be in solidarity with me and to send a picture to the public that I am not alone, that the women are with me... really it was very visible in Serbia.”

Zaklina said that during the first meetings they deliberately refrained from explicitly discussing feminism but that their next meeting will be purely on eco-feminism. This is because the organizers noted that women, who at the beginning *“didn’t see themselves as feminists”* (Zaklina), were coming back to the meetings more empowered and more willing to directly address gender equality issues. Zaklina described how Network members went back to their organizations and advocated for greater gender sensitivity and equality. She said these efforts were largely successful because the men in these organizations *“didn’t realize that they are discriminating because they all live in a patriarchal world so it wasn’t that visible to them.”*

More and more women are also joining the network and the membership has grown over the last three years from 20 to 100 women. According to Zaklina, these are women who have been active for years but were unsure at the beginning whether they wanted to join the Network. Zaklina explained that: *“When they see what we work on and how we communicate our messages, they feel more comfortable to join.”*

Now they have more members and women are feeling more comfortable with the message of the Network, Zaklina says, *“We really want to take one step further, because we now feel it is safe, that women will want to receive this knowledge.”* Consequently, the Network will not only introduce eco-feminist thought to their meeting agendas but also actively form connections with other Serbian Feminist organizations. For example, last year they took part in the International Women’s Day March in Belgrade.

The impact of the Network has therefore been to help improve women’s standing within environmental organizations and the movement as a whole. It has also equipped them with the practical skills to succeed in activism and to stay safe within the activist space. Additionally, it has started to help activists to incorporate a gendered perspective into their thinking and their work. This looks likely to intensify in future. This helps women gain awareness of their own situation of gendered insecurity and to actively work to ensure appropriate gender-sensitive solutions are implemented. Dunja, who is not directly affiliated with the Network, commented on the effect of the Network by saying:

“There is some kind of ownership of environmental protection issues among women and the women’s movement... It provides some kind of power and leadership to them.”

Therefore, the Network is directly helping women improve their own security by providing them with greater visibility as well as the power and leadership to put their experiences to the forefront.

3. Gaining Knowledge

The final security-enhancing process extrapolated from the data is gaining knowledge, specifically on gender and the need to use a gendered lens when considering environmental security. All the interviewees had some basic idea about applying gender to environmental issues. When asked about gender and the environment, some interviewees (MNOL, Jelena A, Jelena B⁶, and Fruska Forest) gave mostly very general answers. For example, *“We need to think about environmental policy from the perspective of everyone otherwise it is discriminatory (MNOL).”*

Gender, therefore, was seen as a marker of social stratification to be included when creating inclusive policy. FruskaForest remarked that environmental issues might affect men and women differently because:

⁶ Interview on 22nd May over Zoom

“We only think in a different way, but the experience is the same. Women are thinking about the future. They have a sensibility for growing and protecting.”

Therefore, men and women may think about the environment differently but they experience the negative consequences of environmental degradation in the same way. Jelena A described how they had begun to *“deal with the topic of feminism”* within their movement but that this was about opposing violence and sexual harassment among activists. In all these statements, there is understood to be a difference between genders in connection to the environment but not explicitly in regards to environmental security. Yet having a basic level of awareness that these differences exist is still a positive step towards enhancing women’s security.

However, in these general answers, there was an idea that environmental security is gendered. Jelena B said:

“Climate change obviously has different impacts on men and women and I think that, generally speaking, it is coming from their salaries and also their responsibilities after work and how they spend their time.”

Another activist (Jelena A) said that women *“are basically on the receiving end of most catastrophes, unfortunately, that are connected to climate”*.

Jelena B went on to discuss how women in Serbia are more affected by PM emitted by household stoves. Jelena B gave other examples of differing impacts but then she added, *“It is not something you always think about”*. This indicates that, although the awareness was there, it was not something that directly influenced her work.

Therefore, it is clear that there is growing awareness of linking gender and environmental security and how to use gender mainstreaming in environmental policy to enhance women’s security. Yet, as mentioned earlier, a lot of this comes from international donors. The interviewees that connected gender and environmental security were all those that had extensive contacts with international networks. Indicative of this trend, Young Researchers of Serbia (*“Gender and environment”*) published information on their website on how they were beginning to include gender in their work:

“Our activities initiated when we have recognised a need to promote gender equity in the environmental sector and when we were stimulated by donors and partners to do so.”

It is evident that these *“donors and partners”* are international because there are no such institutions working in Serbia on this topic.

Moreover, knowledge is being transmitted to Serbian activists, which will help increase women’s security. Awareness is growing within some groups that there are important differences in how different genders experience environmental security and this will help implement measures in

future to ensure women's security needs are met. However, as the next section will elucidate, this awareness is not having much concrete impact but it is the start of a developing process that will help enhance security.

III. Security- Degrading Factors

1. Government Policy

Every interviewee mentioned that government policy both exacerbates environmental human insecurity and impedes her work to try to remedy the situation. Firstly, a common theme was that the government makes commitments only on paper but then does not implement them adequately. FruskaForest said:

“Serbia accepted a lot of international conventions...but after that nothing happened in implementation. We have not made any steps forward in the last few years. We are going back or we have the status quo. Decision makers and institutions are very passive and if they are active, they are active in the wrong way.”

Several interviewees mentioned unfulfilled EU obligations, greenwashing, and inadequate rules when it comes to pollution (Zaklina, Fruska Forest, and Jelena B). Another connected theme was that the government lacks the capacity, particularly the financial capacity to implement laws or to improve infrastructure. Activists also mentioned the lack of available data on environmental issues. For example, Jelena A said:

“You cannot have the exact data because our government refuses to provide some and always downplays the effects of air pollution and doesn't even report on the actual state of air pollution on certain days.”

The idea of the government deliberately interfering in implementing environmental reforms was echoed by FruskaForest who said, *“Our state and government strategically did not make capacity in institutions because the focus was to have development with the companies.”*

This leads to another theme, namely the prioritization of international investors by the government over the environmental security needs of Serbia's inhabitants. This was voiced by every interviewee. Jelena B stated, *“The environment is not a priority for the government at the moment. Bigger players' interests are in front of simple people.”*

Similarly, FruskaForest said that:

“We have a lot of good law regulations and international conventions but institutions didn't develop environmental standards and because of that foreign companies are very happy to come to Serbia. With low environmental standards, our government enables [foreign companies] to make extra profit without any punishment if they cause some incident.”

Consequently, activists portray how government policy acts as a factor degrading environmental security because it prioritizes polluting investors over implementing much needed environmental reform. This renders inhabitants of Serbia more environmentally insecure because it exposes them to pollution.

Lastly, government policy towards activists also decreases their security. Zaklina described indiscriminate police violence towards men and women. As mentioned earlier, FruskaForest has faced several SLAPP charges. Out of the five brought against her organization, three were only against her. She said, *“I have been in the court 25 times.”* FruskaForest also added, *“I was under a big, negative campaign through the media and through social networks.”* Repression as a result degrades the security of women as activists and ensures their security concerns remain unaddressed.

2. The Nature of the Regime

Interviewees described the current regime in Serbia as *“populistic (Zaklina)”*; a *“one ruling party, autocratic regime”* (FruskaForest); a *“hybrid democracy”* (FruskaForest); a *“hybrid regime that is a dictatorship in fact”* (Jelena A); and an *“Erdogan/ Orban situation”* (Jelena A). In the context of the nature of the regime, political society is relatively closed off from grassroots civil society, especially those opposing the economic interests of state elites. Yet, almost all of the interviewees said their primary goal is influencing the government. Zaklina said, *“I am supporting institutions in doing the right thing.”* Similarly, FruskaForest said that her overall goal is to do something *“at the concrete level... meaning in communication with institutions... to put pressure on the decision-makers and institutions.”*

This dynamic, a closed political sphere but activism oriented towards state organs, severely impedes activist’s ability to enhance their own security through advocacy. FruskaForest said that the government thinks of civil society organizations as *“state enemies”* who are *“paid by foreign donors”*, especially the European Union. As a result, she said, *“the government doesn’t listen to us.”*

Since the government is relatively closed off to environmental civil society, activists have been obliged to limit their activism to influencing citizens. This means they are not able to fulfill their aims of influencing institutions, which would have the biggest positive impact on security. FruskaForest said:

“Because they cannot do anything at higher level institutions, people realize that the only thing they can do is organize at the local level.”

Jelena B said, *“We are an NGO... we work with citizens, we don’t have any projects that include the government.”* This statement seems to imply that to be an NGO and to work with citizens in Serbia precludes working directly with the government. The two are presented as mutually exclusive. This implies that environmental activists must choose between working with citizens

or working with the government, and thus being beholden to the interests of state elites rather than everyday people.

It is interesting that, considering the directly oppositional stance of all the interviewees towards the government, that only one organization, We Are Not Drowning Belgrade (Ne Davimo Beograd) engages in explicit criticism of the regime in their “About” page. Other organizations make their opposition implicit by saying what they are working towards, which implies that it does not exist already in Serbia. For example, the Renewables and Environmental Regulatory Institute (Regulatorni institut za obnovljivu energiju i zivotnu sredinu) says that they are seeking for *“the protection and preservation of the environment to be recognised as a public interest.”* The lack of open condemnation suggests that, in order to work with political society, organizations must temper their demands and not be too oppositional towards the regime. Belgrade Open School’s (Beogradska Otvorena Skola) “About” page even says that they work in *“partnership between civil society and public institutions.”*

The nature of the regime limits access to political society and therefore the capacity of activists to put their environmental security concerns on the agenda. Organizations must edit their own stance and demands in order to secure small amounts of political influence. If they are unwilling to do that, they must restrict their activities to the level of citizens.

This security-degrading factor, alongside the nature of the regime, also works to limit the impact of growing grassroots activism and forming networks as security-enhancing processes. Despite the growth of the environmental movement and the formation of solidarity networks, they are still unable to affect concretely the policy process as the regime remains closed to oppositional civil society groups and oriented towards polluting investments.

3. Lack of Societal Resonance of Values

A key barrier towards helping get women’s environmental concerns on the political agenda is the fact that environmental protection and gender equality are not values that are embedded in Serbian society. According to Jelena B, the environment is not seen as a primary concern to people in Serbia despite the recent boom in activism. She said that the environment has *“gained popularity in recent years but it is still not something that is on people’s minds.”* Jelena B also said, *“People in the Balkans are still not aware [of environmental issues] because I think they worry about other things.”*

The fact that environmental protection is not a primary concern among Serbia’s inhabitants means that it is difficult for activists to gain political influence.

Advocating for gender equality and women’s concerns in environmental issues and within activist spaces is limited by the prevalence of the patriarchy. Every activist mentioned the “patriarchal society” in Serbia but Jelena A elaborated by saying:

“The patriarchy is so within us and internalized and intricate that it is not possible to eradicate it. You would have to bureaucratize everything... to really structurally address

all the pockets of the patriarchy that come along with just the fact of how we are socialized... Like men are socialized to dominate and women are socialized to stay in the corner."

Dunja said progress has been made but it is very limited and only in certain areas. She said:

"There are prejudices and gender biases that are very strong. You find these roles everywhere, in schools, in kindergartens, public spaces, informal chats with friends and neighbors, everywhere."

The prevalence of the patriarchy affects the connotations of "feminist" action in Serbia. It was evident from the interviews that in Serbia there is a backlash and a resistance to using the term "feminism". For example, Zaklina, as the founder of the Network of Women for the Environment and Nature, said at the beginning of their meetings women would not define themselves as feminists. She elaborated by saying:

"They wouldn't say it openly because they didn't want to create a struggle within the movement... because male members would feel threatened."

Zaklina also described the reaction she has had from calling herself a feminist: *"We hear people are calling us extreme feminists who want to take men's power."*

Therefore, the prevalence of the patriarchy in Serbia means activism aimed at gender equality is likely to face a backlash and will not resonate with a wide section of society. This is connected to the fact that gender equality initiatives are often brought into Serbia by international partners rather than authentically arising from demand from a cross-section of the electorate. Jelena A talked about how their organization has refrained from incorporating gender into their work because it would be difficult to sell this to the public. Dunja also talked about the difficulties of "selling" gender mainstreaming reforms to the public. This security-degrading factor additionally works to restrict the impact of gaining knowledge as a security-enhancing process. Despite the transfer of knowledge on gender equality and gender mainstreaming, potential backlash is enough to stop it being put into practice in Serbia.

4. Gender Biases in Activism

The entrenchment of the patriarchy influences women involved in activist spaces, restricting their ability to determine the direction of activism and include their own security concerns. All the interviewees said that the leadership of Serbian environmental organizations tends to be dominated by men. Jelena A said:

"What is definitely a fact and this is something women know...women are the ones doing and men are the ones leading, ordering, talking, and all of this. And this is always the truth."

Zaklina contradicted this slightly but said that:

“When the environment wasn’t that popular it was mostly women that were active...but now there is so much prestige in it, we realized that it is mostly male leaders. Women are leaders in their movements, but they choose not to go to the media or be more visible, not to endanger this male struggle.”

The majority of men are leaders but even when women do get into leadership roles, they still face certain struggles. For example, FruskaForest said:

“If you are a woman [in the environmental movement] then you have to be more active, more visible, and a harder worker to be respected... and it is harder to be credible if you are a woman.”

These trends and tendencies are indicative of a patriarchal society in which women struggle in leadership positions. As Jelena A said, *“I think being a woman in an activist space is no different from being a woman in any other space.”*

The prevalence of a patriarchal society means that women find it difficult to become leaders within activist spaces and, even when they are able to, they contend with patriarchal dynamics. This hinders their ability to embed women’s specific concerns within the work of environmental organizations.

5. Absence of the Lens of Gender

The final security-degrading factor in this discussion is the absence of a gendered lens in viewing environmental issues in Serbia. It is evident from the aforementioned discussion on the Serbian context that this exists at the political and societal level, due to resistance from the government and a patriarchal society. Yet it also exists at the activist level.

All interviewees were asked what the overall aim of their activist activity would be and all responded that they would like a total and radical shift in society, rather than purely focusing on environmental outcomes. For example, MNOL said that they are *“advocating for radical systematic change.”* Zaklina argued that their goal is *“value-based change so that all citizens no matter their political beliefs or gender... live within a clean environment and within a more just world.”*

Several activists also discussed environmental justice and ensuring a just transition to a society oriented around a different set of values (Zaklina and Jelena A). These values were not detailed. Gender is included here, implicitly and explicitly, as an axis of inclusion around which a new, just society needs to be constructed. Yet it is in very general terms and it exists among other inequalities.

Activists also talked in general terms about working to help *“people”* (Jelena A and Jelena B) or *“citizens”* (Zaklina) in Serbia. Jelena A said that her aim is to *“bring people’s ordinary problems into politics and to bring people into politics in general.”* However, in all discussions of *“ordinary*

people” and educating them or involving them in decision-making, there was no awareness of gender as a construct, which may affect how citizens interact with the world around them. It is assumed that people can be brought into politics and environmental decision-making without sensitivity towards their gendered identities.

The “About” pages of activist websites were also notably gender-blind. None of the pages analyzed mentioned gender as a lens or a priority for activist work. The Sustainable Development Center (Centar za održivi razvoj) said that they work for *“the improvement and sustainable development of society, human, and minority rights.”* It is implied that women are included in *“minority rights”* but this is not explicitly stated. Similarly, the Renewables and Environmental Regulatory Institute states that they provide assistance to *“individuals... whose right to a healthy and preserved environment is jeopardized.”* Yet there is no additional information on who these individuals are and what structural factors related to their identity might have led to their environmental insecurity.

Most organizations discussed how they are working for *“communities”* with no awareness of the gendered power structures at play within them. For example, the Vojvodina Environmental Movement (Pokret Gorana Vojvodine) said that they are working for: *“The development of communities in which everyone is actively and responsibly participating in order to protect the environment.”*

The Belgrade Open School similarly said that they are advocating for the *“full participation of the citizens in the decision-making process.”* The “About” page also said they are actively working to create *“local developmental policies in accordance with the specific needs of local communities.”* There is scope for gender considerations in discussing *“communities”*. Participation in community decision-making in a patriarchal society such as Serbia is dictated by gendered perspectives. Furthermore, considering *“specific needs”* on a community, rather than an individual, level means women’s concerns are likely to be obscured, since they are less able to place them on the agenda due to the patriarchy.

Therefore, there is definitely scope for the lens of gender in activist work, in discussions of systematic change, a just transition, and expanding participation. However, at the moment this is largely absent. As a result, environmental activism risks strengthening the gender-blindness of the existing approach to environmental issues in Serbia. Women’s voices also are likely to be obscured or ignored in this general approach.

There are some efforts towards gender mainstreaming, yet as Zaklina said: *“There is no gender mainstreaming. It is really only on paper.”* FruskaForest echoed this statement saying that it only exists in a *“declarative way.”* All activists demonstrated an awareness of gender mainstreaming in environmental policy. Nonetheless, they all view it as nearly impossible to implement in practice in Serbia. Zaklina neatly summarized the situation by saying: *“We are still struggling to have general environmental policy and gender is one step further.”*

Gender mainstreaming is not widely understood in Serbia. Consequently, neither Serbian society nor political elites view it as a useful tool or priority. This makes it extremely difficult to implement in practice. Dunja, who directly works on gender mainstreaming with the government, said:

“They have heard about it but they don’t know anything and they see it as additional work, something that is just an empty requirement, formal...so you have a lot of this kind of resistance that you need to manage all the time... I get the feeling that we are guessing all the time and trying to push some kind of gender perspective into policies or projects that are fixed from the very beginning and designed in a way that it is very hard to integrate gender mainstreaming into something that is gender neutral or gender blind in its essence.”

Therefore, there are substantial barriers to gender mainstreaming environmental policy in Serbia that activists have been unable to overcome. This has had the effect of organizations making the conscious choice to be gender-blind in their work. When asked about the existence of gender mainstreaming in their organization’s outcomes, Jelena A said:

“We assessed that [gender mainstreaming] wouldn’t have a lot of rapport in public or resonate on a really large level and we don’t want to be talking to the bubble. It would resonate in certain intellectual circles but then we really want to generate some public interest... One day be a part of the government and actively make some significant change and impact.”

What arises from this statement is that making a “*significant change and impact*” means adapting to the resistance shown by the government towards gender mainstreaming and adopting a gender-blind approach. This trend means that growing awareness of the need for gender sensitivity may not lead to the adoption of a gendered lens. The gender blindness of activist organizations and their goals, mentioned earlier in this section, may in some cases be deliberate in order to see their environmental goals achieved. Therefore, the growth of knowledge as a security-enhancing process may be rendered negligible in its tangible impact on women’s lives by the need to work with the regime. As a result, gender blind environmental policy will continue to ignore the unique environmental security concerns of women and may even exacerbate them.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Through the research conducted for this study, it has been ascertained that women's environmental human insecurity results when security-degrading factors are able to severely limit or even negate the impact of security-enhancing processes. The consequence of this process, creating an imbalance, is that women are insecure both as a result of ongoing environmental degradation and their inability as activists to advocate for their environmental security concerns.

Consequently, this research project has contributed to finding a theoretical framework that will allow for understanding the gendered manifestations of environmental insecurity. It has done so by using Grounded Theory methodology to construct theoretical concepts to analyze gendered human environmental (in)security with analytical utility from primary data. In this way, it has been able to synthesize theoretical insights from various strands of Critical Security Studies, including Feminist, Environmental, and Human Security. Moreover, this thesis has "deepened" and "broadened" the agenda of security studies. The research process allowed for taking a "deepened" post-structural Feminist approach to security, using the lens of gender to start work from the lived experiences of women and then connecting them to macro-level structures (Oswald Spring 2020, 266). The agenda was "broadened" by considering environmental damage as a security threat and humans as the referent object for analysis.

In the case of Serbia, five security-degrading factors operating on the political and societal level exist in a dialectic relationship with three security-enhancing processes. It is clear that these processes and factors and the relationships between the two are deeply gendered. Considering the likelihood that the climate crisis in Serbia looks unlikely to diminish in the near future, it is paramount that gender is considered in analyzing its security impacts. The findings of this research project demonstrate that any efforts to adapt to its effects must take into account the lived experiences of women in order not to perpetuate existing inequalities and further damage their quality of life.

The identified processes and factors are also strongly influenced by the Serbian political, social, and economic context. For example, the nature of the regime has placed Serbian activists in the situation of being opposition actors, restricting their abilities to advocate for their own security (Kendrick 2023). In this research project, the case study of Serbia has been used to generate analytically useful theoretical concepts but concepts should always be adapted to context in future work in order to avoid essentializations. The Serbian case study also indicates that, while the academy is at the initial stages of finding ways to theorize gender, the environment, and security, it is important that this work is done in all locations deeply impacted by climate change, including in Europe and the rest of the Global North.

In regards to the specific findings in the Serbian case study, as security-enhancing processes were only noted on the activist level, they can be negated by the wider-reaching security-degrading factors. While these processes are promising and indicate there is hope for the future, at the current moment they are largely negated by security-degrading factors. The nature

of the regime and government policy as well as societal attitudes and biases remain constant barriers for increasing the capacity of women to put their security concerns on the political agenda.

Therefore, the security-degrading factors identified represent barriers to enhancing women's environmental security in Serbia as they work against the identified security-enhancing processes. The overarching influence of security-degrading factors implies that women in Serbia exist in a state of environmental human insecurity, largely as a result of both the deliberate actions of state elites and societal structures and biases.

The theoretical concepts of security-enhancing processes and security-degrading factors, which exist in a complex relationship and are deeply impacted by contextual dynamics, are a new contribution to the previous work done on gender, the environment, and security (see: Oswald Spring 2020, Detraz 2009 and 2017, MacGregor 2009 and 2017, and Dankelman 2010). These concepts are designed to be malleable to different contexts as they involve tracing historical structures involved in enhancing and degrading security. They also require engagement with primary data collected from women with direct experience of environmental degradation in a specific geographic location.

Therefore, these concepts can travel and there is scope for them to do so. Possible future avenues for research could include developing these theoretical concepts in different locations aside from the Global South. Other Western Balkans states are obvious candidates for future case studies as they experience similar environmental issues as Serbia and have similar gender equality track records. Another location that stands out is Central Asia, as another region largely left out of scholarship on climate change. The region also suffers from serious environmental degradation, which has led to extreme weather events, deforestation, desertification, and pollution (Akhmetkaliyeva 2020). Central Asian countries are also a key part of the Belt and Road Initiative, they went through difficult post-communist transition processes, and their gender equality record is worse than Western Balkan states. Unlike Serbia, they do not have the EU integration process to trigger developments in environmental and gender equality policy. They also do not have an environmental civil society like in Serbia and certainly not one with as many women involved. It would be interesting from a theoretical perspective to see what security-enhancing processes and security-degrading factors would arise from primary data collected in Central Asia and how this would compare to the Serbian case study.

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Appendix A

Interview Guide

Topic 1: Personal Experience (10 mins)

- Can you briefly summarize your experience with environmental activism in Serbia?
- Why did you become an activist?
- Do you think the government is actively trying to address environmental issues? *Which issues?*

Topic 2: Women in Activism (10 mins)

- What is it like being a woman involved in environmental activism in Serbia? *Is there a difference between your experience and that of your male colleagues?*
- Do you think your experience has been similar to other women? *Why/ why not?*
- Why do you think women in Serbia become environmental activists? *Common motivations?*

Topic 3: Gender and the Environment (10 mins)

- What are the most important environmental issues in Serbia today? *Why?*
- How have you experienced the negative impact of environmental issues? *Do you think your experience is a common one?*
- Do you think women in Serbia experience environmental issues in a different way to men? *Why/ why not?*

Topic 4: Gender as a Lens (10 mins)

- Do environmental activists in Serbia take gender into account in their work? *No: Do you think they should?/ Why not? Yes: In what ways?*
- Does the government take gender into account when they make environmental policy? *No: Do you think they should? Yes: In what ways?*
- What more could be done to help women in Serbia face environmental issues?

Topic 5: Summary (10 mins)

- What do you hope will be the impact of your activism? *What do you hope changes?*
- Is there anything else you think is important for me to know about women working as environmental activists in Serbia?

Appendix B

Interview Participants

Below is listed the chosen pseudonyms of the research participants, the dates on which the interviews were conducted, and the location of the interview.

1. FruskaForest, 21 March 2023, Zoom
2. MNOL, 24 March 2023, Belgrade
3. Zaklina, 27 March 2023, Belgrade
4. Dunja, 4 April 2023, Zoom
5. Jelena A*, 5 May 2023, Zoom
6. Jelena B, 22 May 2023, Zoom

*Two participants selected the pseudonym “Jelena” so A and B were added during analysis to distinguish between them.

Appendix C

Master List of Environmental Organizations

Young Researchers of Serbia (Mladi istraživaci Srbije)

<https://www.mis.org.rs/en/>

Vojvodina Environmental Movement (Pokret Gorana Vojvodine)

<https://pgv.org.rs/en/home/>

Polekol

<https://polekol.org/>

Renewables and Environmental Regulatory Institute (Regulatorni institut za obnovljivu energiju i životnu sredinu)

<https://reri.org.rs/en/>

Coalition 27 (Koalicija 27)

<https://www.koalicija27.org/en/home/>

Belgrade Open School (Beogradska Otvorena Skola)

<https://www.bos.rs/en/>

Institute for Nature Conservation of Serbia (Zavod za zaštitu prirode Srbije)

<https://www.zzps.rs/wp/o-zavodu/?lang=en>

Alliance for Sustainable Environment

<http://www.afsen.org/>

We Are Not Drowning Belgrade (Ne Davimo Beograd)

<https://nedavimobeograd.rs/english/>

Sustainable Development Centre (Centar za održivi razvoj)

<https://www.core-ns.org/eng/index.html>

Ekomar

<https://www.ekomar.org/>

Environment Improvement Centre (Centar za unapredjenje životne sredine)

<https://cuzs.org.rs/en/home/>

Appendix D

Key International Agreements on the Environment

Based on data from the United Nations Information Portal on Multilateral Environmental Agreements (InforMEA)

UNECE Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution (1979) United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

Serbia succeeded to the Convention on 12 March 2001.

Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer (1985) United Nations

Serbia succeeded to the Convention on 12 March 2001.

Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal (1989) United Nations

Serbia acceded to the Convention on 18 April 2000.

Espoo Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context

(1991) United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

Serbia acceded to the Convention on 18 December 2007.

United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (1992) United Nations

The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia acceded to the Convention on 10 June 2001. Serbia is now a non-Annex I party.

Convention on Biological Diversity (1992) United Nations

The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia ratified the Convention on 1 March 2002.

United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (1994) United Nations

Serbia acceded to the Convention on 18 December 2007.

Kyoto Protocol (1997) United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

Serbia ratified the Protocol on 19 October 2007.

Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (1998) United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

Serbia acceded to the Convention on 31 July 2009.

Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (2001) United Nations

Serbia ratified the Convention on 31 July 2009.

Paris Agreement (2016) United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
Serbia ratified the Agreement on 25 July 2017.