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# Women, Religion and Peace Leadership in Bosnia and Herzegovina

EWI Fellowship Programme



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### Introduction

*Moral leadership has to do with finding a way for oneself, pointing a way for others. (Robert Coles)*

Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) is a post-war, post-socialist and ethnically divided country. The war (1992-1995) is ended, but ethnically divided citizens still struggle to live peacefully. Negative peace, in terms of the absence of war, is achieved but with unviable state institutions and ethnic divisions imposed by the Constitution, which was coined in Dayton in 1995. The constitutional framework of BiH imposes and reifies ethnic divisions. Furthermore, the ethno-nationalist political parties have not done much to make the changes necessary to improve the social and economic well-being of their impoverished and anguished people.

Positive peace, in terms of restoration of individual relationships, the creation of social systems that serves the needs of the whole population and the constructive resolution of conflict, is incredibly fragile and compartmentalized among the different organizations and groups that have been striving to bring normalcy in daily life. These organizations work to heal the physical and spiritual traumas of war. They attempt to re-knit the fragile web of inter-ethnic and inter-religious solidarity in BiH. However, most of them work in virtual isolation from the state. Civil society organizations, which focused on peace and inter-ethnic reconciliation in BiH have primarily been supported by international donors (Helms 2013, 93-94). The BiH state has shown little interest in supporting these organizations and has occasionally actively blocked their efforts.

Women have been and continue to be on the forefront of peacebuilding activities in local communities. They were among the first to establish civil society organizations and to initiate the promotion of women's human rights, minority rights, peacebuilding and reconciliation during and after the war (1992-1995). Some of them started working in the midst of terror and destruction to make life easier for those who were marginalized and oppressed. (Slapšak 2011, Helms 2013, Spahić Šiljak 2013) Peace scholars emphasize that peace starts at the same moment as conflict (Galtung 1969); some very courageous women of different ethnic, religious and non-religious backgrounds initiated peace activities to protect their friends, neighbors and fellow citizens during the war. These same women continued this peacebuilding work after the war in more formal ways, often by joining the non-governmental sector.

In this paper, I will first contextualize the role of religion in peacebuilding in post-war BiH. Then I will discuss the key teachings in religion that motivated some women to become activists and leaders. Finally the paper considers how religious women understand peace leadership and how they perceive themselves as leaders.

I argue that religion was not a conversation starter in the first civic and peacebuilding initiatives in BiH, and that religious women engaged in non-governmental organizations, including the three women I interviewed, started more profoundly to use religion in peacebuilding in the last decade. I

also argue that only a few women's organizations have a clear faith-based agenda and programs, while all others operate as secular organizations, employing religion as one argument for peacebuilding.

For the purposes of this paper, I conducted semi-structured interviews with three prominent religious women from two civil society organizations in Sarajevo and one in Bosansko Grahovo. After my research on women and peacebuilding in BiH, which clearly shows that religion was not a conversation starter in the first civic initiatives in peacebuilding and reconciliation (Spahić Šiljak 2013, 15; Merdjanova and Brodeur 2009, 108-124), I decided to interview a few religious women who use religion either as one of or the most relevant argument in their peacebuilding and explore more closely the intersection of faith, activism and leadership. All three organizations run by the women work on peacebuilding, but the profiles and images of their organizations differ

Amra Pandžo is a Muslim woman who runs the faith-based peacebuilding organization 'Small Steps' in Sarajevo. She is an observant Muslim woman without formal theological education and like the majority of Muslim women in BiH she does not wear hijab nor find it crucial to her faith (Spahić Šiljak 2012, Funk forthcoming and 2013). Her faith is one of the most important motivating factors in her peace work and she started her organization to use Islam as a tool in peacebuilding.

Sehija Dedović is an observant Muslim woman with formal theological education and she does wear hijab, which she explains as a sign of her personal piety and choice, which is similar to other hijabi women in BiH (Spahić Šiljak 2014). She leads the woman's organization 'Nahla,' (in Arabic, bee), which she did not portray as religious or Islamic, but as a civil society organization inspired by the teachings of Islam. Sehija clarified that although Nahla was inspired by religion, they started using a faith-based notion after 2004, when that concept became more familiar in the BiH context. Nahla is open to all women, but draws mostly Muslim women with and without hijab, which reflects the current population in cities where they work. Sehija underlines the inter-religious openness of her organization and the availability of their programs to all women while some specific religious programs are designed primarily for Muslim women.

Danka Zelić, a Catholic woman, is a leader of the woman's association 'UG Grahovo.' She is a former police officer and agronomist who dedicated her life to the reconciliation of her neighbours. She is an observant believer, but she does not portray her organization as faith-based; rather as a secular organization that sometimes organizes faith-based activities and interreligious encounters. She uses religion as a tool in peacebuilding, not as the key argument.

## **Religion in peacebuilding**

The ambivalent role of religion (Appleby 2000) to divide and reconcile, to destroy and heal, to imprison and liberate has produced ambivalent feelings about the role of religion in the public realm both in non-believers and believers. Many believers were aware of the politicization of religion during and after the war by ethno-national elites, therefore most of them have been cautious to use it for peacebuilding initiatives and thus distanced their first civic initiatives from religion.

Religion is an important part of ethnic/national identity in the Balkan region for all three major ethnic groups and since religion and ethnicity overlap it is sometimes hard to view religious actors as neutral. Only when they emphasize core common values, such as social justice, compassion, empathy, forgiveness and reconciliation, are they able to transcend ethno-national divisions (Clark 2010, 675)

The fact is that religion was marginalized in public life during socialist Yugoslavia and religious revivalism in the 1980s brought hope to many that they would in future freely practice religion without being ostracized or marked as backward. However, the coalescence of ethnicity and reli-

gion at the beginning of 1990s resulted in the harsh reality of the war in which religion was used as a tool in empowerment of ethno-national agendas and goals and to increase distance between the three ethnic groups.

Scholarship in the last two decades about the Balkan region shows an enormous politicization of religion (Andjelic 2003; Sells 1996; Mojzes 2011), and the nationalization of religion and God (Babić 2000; Abazović 2006; Cvitković 2012) that reduced religions to mere nationalized symbols that celebrate a God who loves and prefers one nation over others and who assists in others' defeat. Some religious authorities went so far as to bless warring activities that resulted in persecution and killing and most were silent about crimes committed in the name of their ethnic and religious groups. As Clark (2010, 679) found in her research in BiH, denial was present everywhere and the most prevalent was 'interpretive denial', which means that people denied the facts, even assigning them different meanings and sometimes replacing facts with myths as counter-memory – for instance how the ethnic group suffered in WWII. Mitja Velikonja has described the role religious communities as antagonizing and confronting rather than inclined to peace and reconciliation (2003, 290).

The lack of an open and honest approach to suffering and victimhood by the highest religious authorities has distanced many from institutionalized religions, but not necessarily from religions per se, as the spiritual and ethical foundations of their lives.

Another reason why religious leaders were not more involved in peacebuilding was a lack of human resources in religious communities to undertake peacebuilding activities and also a lack of understanding of peacebuilding and reconciliation concepts in general. Clark presents an example from her research, when one Orthodox Christian priest in Sarajevo said that there 'are no mechanism that can alter time and make people to forgive and forget. They can only give people faith' (2010, 683). But having in mind the authority they enjoy and the relevance of their work, they can do more than giving faith; they can do what Appleby concludes: build coalitions across ethnic and religious and non-religious lines and invest time to 'channel the militancy of religion in the direction of the disciplined pursuit of justice and nonviolent resistance to extremism.' (2000, 283). For Appleby, peacebuilding is a comprehensive process, which entails collaboration and the involvement of different actors, both religious and non-religious; and since religion is often used to justify warfare, it should be used also to build peace and heal wounds.

However, there is a different dynamic between the clergy at the highest level and the clergy in local communities in terms of possibilities for action. John Paul Lederach (1997, 40) distinguishes the role of highest religious leadership from local religious leaders, because religious leaders 'are generally locked into positions taken with regard to the perspectives and issues in conflict. They are under tremendous pressure to maintain a position of strength vis-à-vis their adversaries and their own constituencies.' While local leaders have more freedom for interaction and collaboration, their voices are not heard, nor strong enough to bring about more profound change (Spahić Šiljak, Bavčić and Spahić 2012). Their own communities very often oppress them, as Paul Mojzes found in his research, because they go against the nationalists (1998, 97).

With all obstacles mentioned above, religion still remains as powerful source for peacebuilding and reconciliation. It gives meaning, identity and spiritual strength to believers who are thereby more resilient and confident in facing adversaries. Religious institutions for many believers are still trustworthy authorities and the credibility they have can be used to overcome divisions and bring people together around common causes in local communities. However as the three religious women from BiH show, not everything is up to the religious leadership; believers also can initiate and act as agents, inviting religious communities into partnership. I therefore decided to interview local

women leaders who are religious and who use religion as an argument for peacebuilding. However, these women also collaborate with religious leaders and faith communities because they know how much authority these institutions still have for many in BiH.

### **Religious women and peacebuilding**

Important things to explore in this research were: the understanding of peacebuilding among religious women, how they reflect on their peace work and how it is linked with religion. As mentioned earlier, women in BiH have been engaged in peace initiatives mostly within secular, local non-governmental organizations. At the beginning of their work they were inspired to do something for their neighbors, friends and those less privileged or excluded from society. One of the peacebuilders in the book *Shining Humanity* described the beginning of her work as merely a desire to bring people back together and to rebuild destroyed houses: ‘We did not know what projects were.... For us projects were like literally building a house...’ (Spahić Šiljak 2013, 177). As such, women tend to use a broad definition of peacebuilding that includes various kinds of activities, such as psycho-social therapy, the protection of wartime rape survivors and survivors of other gender-based violence, conflict resolution and conflict transformation, peace education, humanitarian aid, the empowerment of women in politics, and any action that would bring one human being closer to another human being and reconcile neighbor with neighbor.

For some of the women whom I interviewed, peacebuilding is not work; rather it is a life calling. For example, Amra Pandžo does not divide her life into private and professional spheres; she is not a peace worker in the office and a mother in the home. Amra does not believe that it is possible to divide her life into these two halves because peacebuilding is not merely a profession; it is her identity and her way of being in the world, her ‘vocation’ as she calls it. She emphasized this at the very beginning of our conversation to underline the importance of peacebuilding, which is usually a hard profession to grasp. One of the world’s greatest contemporary peacebuilders, John Paul Lederach (2005, loc. 01-20) explained the same conundrum: ‘When I say I work in support of conciliation processes, it is rarely sufficient to give people a sense of what I do.’ Amra is faced with the same questions and inquiries to clarify what exactly she does professionally.

Sehija, like Amra, does not describe her activism as something separate from her being, her life and her work, because her understanding of Islam requires searching first for an inner peace which should be reflected in her actions, her relationships with people, and convictions. Many Muslims do not separate their lives into religious and secular spheres and living Islam as a path, a way, they tend to be fully involved and present as believers with consciousness of God’s presence (*taqwa*) (Wadud 1999, 36-38). When I asked her when she started peacebuilding, Sehija told me that all of her work was peace work, and that peace is an inseparable part of what it means to be a Muslim. However, she said that after 2004, her organization began to formally use the language of faith-based peacebuilding initiatives, although their work from the beginning was inspired by faith.

Danka Zelić does not formally elevate her peace work to a life calling, although everything she has been doing is indispensably related to both her private and professional lives as a human rights activist and conciliator. She also does not perceive her peacebuilding as a career or profession, because she does not separate her life from the destiny of the people with whom she works, which is primarily a returnee population in western BiH. For her, peace is about proper communication and building relationships between people. Peace is repairing broken friendships and mending torn families. Peace is learning how to build trust among neighbors because sustainable relationships require trust.

These three women as well as many other activists whom I have interviewed were not aware of the academic theories about peace, feminism and gender equality when they started their work. They were not concerned with naming and theorizing, because they did what they thought was right to make life easier for people who suffered and to answer their immediate needs. Later, when they started attending various educational seminars and training sessions, they learned that their work falls under the theoretical category of ‘peacebuilding’ in the broadest sense. However, in the beginning their approaches were genuinely grassroots – do it first, theorize about it later. All of them are women of action.

Sehija, for instance, elaborately explained that upon her return to BiH after the war, she was searching for something she could do to help women, primarily religious women whose concerns and needs were overlooked by existing secular NGOs as well as different Islamic organizations. She found that Muslim women tended to be marginalized and reduced to some sectors and logistical activities. They were passive members of these organizations, waiting for men to offer them some role within these predominantly male organizations:

I understood that the empty space was the space for women... I saw that various organizations – humanitarian, educational, and religious – employed similar methods in terms of marginalizing their female members... they decided what they would do with women in their annual plans... I was unhappy being perceived as a marginal part of these organizations...and I thought that many women would also be unhappy, and that we needed to offer a kind of alternative to that.

She did not want to replicate the work of numerous organizations in BiH, but to offer something that was missing in the tapestry of women’s organizational work – to provide a kind of sanctuary and safe space for Muslim women, but also for other women to be accepted and recognized with their full religious and non-religious identities and needs in tact.

Amra was engaged in secular organizations right after the war, but she also noticed that something was missing – a faith-based approach to peacebuilding – therefore she decided to start Small Steps, an organization that gathers volunteers and not professional peacebuilders. She wanted to bring up an important argument of religion in peacebuilding but also to deconstruct the media image of Islam, which is of terrorism, oppression and backwardness.

Danka’s work found her when she started her new career as a police officer in Bosansko Grahovo. When she encountered the faces of her returnee Serb neighbors she could no longer follow the dictates of politics and government, but she succumbed to the dictate of her heart – she decided to help returnees and over time she quit her job in the police in order to fully engage with peacebuilding and reconciliation work.

All three peacebuilders recognized the needs of their communities and begin to work what they found themselves relevant and useful. They created small islands of peace everywhere they worked and contributed to building a culture of peace that remains fragile and underdeveloped because different social actors have to fulfill their roles and are being obstacles for peace and reconciliation.

### **Religious motivation?**

What is the role of religion in the peacebuilding work of these three women? How did religion inspire them and what are the key teachings in their traditions that guide their lives?

Amra, Sehija and Danka have different experiences and social settings in which they operated, but religions have remained important parts of their identities, worldviews and work. While Amra approaches peace work exclusively from a religious perspective, Sehija, although primarily inspired by religion, does not portray her organization that way because it offers a variety of programs,

faith-based and non. And as previously mentioned, Danka's religiosity is not her main motivation for engaging in peacebuilding. Amra and Danka did not refer to religion at the beginnings of their activism because it was not the right time to raise religious arguments, so they approached it first and foremost as humanists who were willing to help their fellow neighbors and citizens. Both emphasized listening and recognizing every voice.

I have already mentioned some of reasons for this exclusion of religious arguments, such as the politicization and nationalization of religion. However, I would like to discuss more what teachings in their faiths motivated them to become activists and how these teachings shape their worldviews and ethical values.

As observant Muslim woman who wears hijab, with her faith as an inseparable part of her life and work, Sehija was committed to serve her community and her country with the knowledge and skills she gained in several countries where she studied. She wanted to help women, especially Bosnian Muslim women who have not had space for activism within the regular structures of the Islamic community and Islamic organizations. When she finally founded Nahla, her primary goal was to offer a space for women where they could come, learn, grow and help each other to be better human beings as well as to provide support and comfort for each other.

Nahla is registered as a secular civil society organization for educating women, inspired by religion. At first it was intriguing why a Muslim woman wearing hijab established an organization that primarily gathers Muslim women but does not call itself a religious organization. The answer lies in Sehija's understanding of her faith and the role of religion in public life. She makes a clear differentiation between religious organizations established under the special Law on Freedom of Religion and the Legal Position of Churches and Religious Communities (2004) and organizations inspired by faith.

As a believer and observant Muslim woman, she does not find it necessary to emphasize the religious roots of her organization, because everything they do, as she explains it, they do as responsible believers and human beings for the benefit of women, families and society. Being a responsible believer for Sehija means being first and foremost an accountable human being. The two should go hand in hand, and as a Muslim, she runs her entire life according to her faith and the key principles of Islam, therefore she does not divide her life and work into religious and non-religious compartments. Her motto for activism is derived from the Qur'anic teaching: 'Act! And God will behold your deeds, and [so will] His Apostle, and the believers' (Qur'an 9:105).

Sehija is particularly inspired in this work by the Islamic principle of *ihsan*, which means that a Muslim should strive for excellence, kindness and compassion in all actions and interactions. For Sehija, *ihsan* is the highest state of faith, and she is striving to attain that level. In her explanation of *ihsan*, she notes that honoring contractual obligations is an important part of her faith. According to Sehija, one cannot be a true believer if he or she violates contracts. **Ihsan means full accountability**, both before people and before God, because believers are conscious of God's presence in every moment of their lives (*taqwa*). With this intellectual and spiritual approach to her faith, Sehija did not feel it necessary to distinguish peacebuilding as something separate. She believes that being a righteous, accountable and compassionate Muslim consequently means being a conciliator – somebody who practically lives peace with every breath and step she takes. This is, however, a very high standard for most believers who usually do not reflect upon their faith in this way, but Sehija does no less than that – to seek to attain a state of tranquility and peace inside her heart, which will be reflected in everything she does.

Amra's entire work is faith-based; religion is the prime motivator of all of her actions. She finds it important and relevant to emphasize the religious roots of her activism because, as she explained:

The [Bosnian] civil sector was separated from anything that was this ethno-national mainstream. In other words, these were the organizations that mostly inherited some of the socialist and communist and atheist ideas. Everything related to nationalism or, God forbid, religiosity was removed from civil society (Spahić Šiljak 2013, 248).

However, by religion she does not mean a rigid scripturalism or an unthinking adherence to ritual, although she observes Islam's main rituals (fardh). Rather, for Amra, religion means conscious prayers and the ethical principles of honesty, kindness and justice that help her to reflect God's love and spirit in her peace work. She does not mention the concept of *ihsan* like *Sehija*, but everything she strives towards is to attain that state of being – balance and peace with God and people. Being exposed to variety of teachings of Islam, she has come to understand that the principles of her faith should not be wrapped into strict rules for the sake of rules; for Amra only an open heart can reflect mercy towards people. Dialogue is therefore the best channel to open the heart to others and to act out of love. Love is the greatest gift for Amra, and she thinks that only those who manage to encounter life with recognition for the needs of other human beings will reach fulfillment and happiness:

The key issue for peace for me is love and... [being] able to love, because the happiness of other human beings is important to you. Love is crucial because today many are restless and the reason for this restlessness is that modern civilization makes us turn the reflector [searchlight] away from ourselves. It encourages us to think only about our own needs and wishes... and we became lost in this self-analysis, and we become unhappy... Therefore, spiritual hygiene is important... a spiritual life encourages us to look around us, and to value the needs of others as highly as we honor our own needs. Only in this way, with this paradigm, can peace come about.

Amra also mentioned the human heart, which is, according to a famous hadith of the Prophet Muhammad, the most important temple: 'It is a lesser sin to break the Ka'ba than it is to break a human heart.' Driven by these principles, she is determined to take untold risks and to go into the unknown in order to attain peace. Amra wants all voices to be heard, because every voice is a sign of God's creation; to neglect or exclude the different or the marginalized is to deny a part of God's creation. This approach to religion inclines towards a Sufi understanding of faith that is not restricted to mosques and holy sites. As Amra explained, the holiest site is one's heart, which is the beginning and the end of everything.

Although Danka does not use religion as the key argument in her peace work, a critical foundation of her work is the Bible and its Ten Commandments alongside compatible secular humanist values and norms; because serving her fellow human beings for her means serving God. She specifically mentioned the relevance of the messages of Jesus Christ, who showed the path for all people:

We should all be equal, we should respect each other regardless... we should not envy, but rather strive to be of help and to appreciate the good qualities that people have... We should live our own lives the way Jesus preached and recommended and not interfere in the lives of others unless we want to help them. If we cannot be of help, we should at least try to not cause pain or distress!

Danka's motivation for peacebuilding comes from the Christian teaching that one must act in the service of others because God is watching. Danka believes that she should give if she wants to receive and in that dialectic of giving and receiving she creates moments of happiness and peace. She does not use religious vocabulary to explain this, but moments of happiness and peace are moments of spiritual experience that are sometimes hard to explain with words.

All three women seek to live what their faiths teach and preach and they are determined to do their work and not so much to explain why they do it, on which premises and with which motivation.



## Understanding Leadership

The next issue explored was leadership: how do these women understand leadership, do they consider themselves leaders, and did they become leaders by choice or by accident? In the past couple of decades, many studies were conducted suggesting different models of leadership: 'command-control type,' 'heroic' leadership, and 'transformative' or 'collaborative' styles. At first, leadership studies emphasized the qualities and traits of the so-called great man, a 'born' leader and with an innate capacity and talent for leadership. Over time, organizations have moved from this trait-centred approach to more inclusive and collaborative leadership styles. Assertiveness, authoritative and decisiveness were once characteristics assigned to men, while care, compassion and collaboration were assigned to women. This binary assignation of traits is rife with errors and unnecessary essentializations, and can be as harmful to women as a total denigration of their leadership abilities.

Therefore, in order to avoid the intellectual straitjacket of gender binaries, we need to approach women and their leadership styles with flexible, open and contextualized lenses. Leadership is always contextualized, and as Jean Lau Chin says, 'we need to examine the contexts in which they lead. Behaviour occurs within a context and is influenced by the power relationships among the participants'. (2007, loc. 236-238) The context of BiH is very complex, and in the process of transition between two differing social, economic and political systems in the last two decades, women have experienced a 're-traditionalization' of gender roles. Women were faced with the challenge of positioning themselves between and within the competing discourses of local cultural and religious traditions, Marxist socialist values, and neo-liberal capitalist values wrapped up in the democratization process.

Given this complicated context, it should be of little surprise that the three women whom I interviewed had a complex and often ambiguous understanding of their own relationship to leadership. For example, Danka explained to me that she did not plan to become a leader. It happened spontaneously over time. Because she trains other women to use their leadership skills, she considers herself a leader, but she also views this term with doubt and uncertainty. She admitted to me, 'somehow, I always think that everything has happened spontaneously with me.' As she worked with other peace-builders, over time she appeared to be somebody who was trusted and perceived by her colleagues as leader. She set moral example for her colleagues and friends, and they trust her. As Robert Coles explains: 'a leader is someone who knows how to persuade others to keep others company, to stand for what she believes in, the good, the one hundred per cent right thing to do' (2001, loc. 09-22).

Sehija also depicted her leadership as something spontaneous. She became a leader over time, with the growth of her organization. However, she has reservations about the use of the term 'leader' when describing her work with Nahla.

As a leader, if I may call myself that... [is] somebody who leads with something in a certain moment. Actually I work and try to show by my own example how something should be done... but I also leave enough space for everyone in her/his own domain of responsibility.

Her moral leadership is recognized by women in Nahla and more broadly because she has stood firmly for what she believes and she encouraged others to join her in work for the cause of peace.

Whereas Amra is the leader of Small Steps, her understanding of leadership is more oriented toward facilitation and collaboration. She does not like the word leader, particularly because its translation into Bosnian (*voda*) resonates for her with bolshevist images of a dictator and strong (patriarchal) hierarchy. She would prefer to be a facilitator:

If a leader is a person that affects somebody's life and is able to lead him/her from one to another moment of life then I am a leader, but this means that every one of us is a leader in certain moments of our lives. When I say leader, somehow I think more in terms of a structural system led by somebody.

Amra believes that women exercise leadership every day, but that they are not aware of this because many associate leadership with (male) authority and power in public life. Similarly as Robert Coles points out: 'leadership isn't only something in you, in a person—your personality; leadership depends on where you are as much as who you are, and it depends on the company you're keeping.' (2001 loc. 09-22). Therefore, Amra understands her role more as a facilitator of the process and flow of actions and reactions between parties and groups.

Although all three women can be described as prominent leaders of their organizations for at least a decade, all of them claim that they had no ambitions toward leadership as such, and were not formally trained for leadership roles. Their assumption of these roles occurred spontaneously. Regardless, these women had the vision, courage and faith to act within their communities, which distinguishes them as leaders, notwithstanding how they themselves understand their leadership roles and whether they like the term.

## Leadership styles

Although all three women spoke about spontaneous leadership and that they have never planned to be leaders nor had formal training for that role, they did elaborate on the leadership traits of women and men and even essentialized female leadership qualities.

The leadership traits that these three peacebuilders exhibit can be explained with the IDEA-based leadership model developed by Mary Lou Decosterd (2013). In this leadership model, the key traits are intuition, orientation, directive force, empowering intent, and assimilative nature and they stem from the traditional socialization of women as the 'caring' sex. Intuition is about looking at life with vision and embracing the whole picture instead of just a piece of it; directive force refers to an innovative spirit that can get the task done while focusing on the outcome; empowerment means giving authority to make others more confident; assimilation is about bringing people together in constructive ways as well as transforming situations in the sense of solving conflicts. Both males and females, however, can learn and use these key traits effectively with proper education and socialization.

The peacebuilders interviewed spoke from a background of patriarchal socialization in BiH with certain expectations about both sexes as well as an emphasis on femininity and feminine traits. Regine Birite (2010, 264) clarifies that 'the feminine presence also stems from women's greatest weakness, their long exile from positions of authority inside mainstream institutions.' All of them, however, reject winning and losing paradigms, and they rather refer to collaboration, listening and understanding – qualities that are taken as weak in traditional, male-dominated leadership. They were not ashamed to show vulnerability. They sometime risk their lives and their security, but not out of fear, but from love, compassion and care, especially for those who have suffered or need help.

These women's work includes challenging the existing norms, family traditions and local authorities that discriminate against minorities and oppose reconciliation. Danka, for instance, peacefully challenged the local authorities in Bosansko Grahovo who were against the return of Serb refugees. To overcome fear and stand for the needs and dignity of other human beings one needs courage and vision. Katherine Martin (2010, loc. 200-203) adds that 'it takes far more courage to challenge unjust authority without violence than it takes to kill all the monsters in all the stories told to children about the meaning of bravery.'

Amra and Danka clearly bring their feminist identities into their peace work, with IDEA leadership

traits, because they are determined to empower women and to give them a voice. Sehija does not use feminism as her identity or discourse, but her entire work and activism falls under that category because she is also determined to empower women and to stand for equality, equity and justice.

In responding to my question about their leadership styles, Danka describes herself as a democratic and collaborative leader. This is clearly a feminist leadership style because, as Decosterd (2013, loc. 139-140) explains: 'Feminist leaders do not want to reproduce oppressive hierarchies by exerting command-and-control leadership over subordinate groups. Therefore, democratic, web like, collaborative relationships seem more attractive than autocratic, hierarchical relationships'. Danka mentioned that her colleagues expect her to make final decisions so she tends to consult others: 'I want to hear other opinions, and for me it is important to make just and good decision, and to be sure that we will have benefits from that decision.' She believes that leaders are made, not born. In the context of BiH, leadership traditionally connotes patriarchy and male-led dictatorships. Danka suggests that women should develop counter-spheres of power and leadership:

Women in leadership positions have to find different ways of work... Women do it differently... we engage in a kind of democratic leadership in which everybody is involved, where the majority makes decisions and the leader on the top is there to give some guidelines and to enable all opinions and voices to be heard.

Danka attributes some of the reasons why women tend to be more collaborative, open and focused on communication and networking to a feminine disdain for the trappings of wealth and power. She says: 'a woman does not value economic power as the most important thing in her life, but rather peace, love, respect and appreciation. If a woman wanted something else, she would probably struggle to get paid for jobs she does in her home.' Danka tends to essentialize some of these qualities based on the innate biological characteristics of women because, as she explains, some of the psychological and neuro-scientific research confirms that women use the left and right parts of the brain simultaneously. Therefore, as she explains, they are better at multi-tasking in communication than their male counterparts. Furthermore, Danka believes that these neural differences only underscore the different ways that men and women are socialized within patriarchy. Women are taught to take care of the family and men are taught to be leaders and to prove themselves in front of other men and women: 'Men do not deal so much with problems as women do. Men are preoccupied with goals and results and to promote their work, while women first and foremost think about needs and how to help somebody.' All of these factors, according to Danka, make women subtler and more oriented to the needs of people than to acquiring power. (Danka seems to be ignoring, however, that female brains may differ from male brains in adulthood because men and women are socialized differently during childhood.)

Similarly, Sehija essentializes female qualities and differentiates women from men in their approaches to life, war, stability and peace: 'They [men] react faster and in a hurry, and do not take consequences into account. A woman cares much more about everything that comes after an action, because war will stop one day and life will start from the beginning.' For Sehija, women are more instinctually driven than men, especially towards safety, which may be related to their role in child rearing. She also mentioned another important reason why women tend to work more for peace: women are often the first victims of war and conflict, often in circumstance which they had no hand in creating and no power in choosing. For Sehija, this suffering makes woman more inclined to peace and more focused on life-affirming activities and ideas. She expressed that women, perhaps more than men, are aware that war causes suffering and pain, loss and fear, and they know that war can cripple future generations. Men, on the other hand, she thinks, seem to care much less about the pain and suffering that their actions will inflict upon often innocent bodies. Instead, they tend

to concern themselves with ‘big goals,’ ‘strategies,’ and winning against all odds. Sehija concluded by saying she would rather have a female leader in situations at the edge of conflict: ‘I would rather choose a woman, because she will try all recipes before war and to prevent war.’ But, as mentioned earlier, leadership is situational and contextual, and while a woman might want to try all solutions before war, her decision may depend on what the majority around her say, and the majority in leadership are males.

Amra joins these two in essentializing gender differences. Her criticism of men, however, is even more trenchant. She is particularly bitter about those men who have a moral double standard: in public they claim to be egalitarian and inclusive, but reinforce patriarchal familial relations in their homes.

I have not seen this same inconsistency in women. If she is a ‘bitch’ and does not have family and children and decides to dedicate herself to a career to be the manager of a big company, she is fully into that, and you know what to expect from her. There is no hypocrisy and boxes in which she functions, adjusting herself to situations.

However, Amra is also aware that the hardships of being a woman in a man’s world can make women cruel. She thinks that women work hard to succeed in a world where the deck is stacked against them, and the emotionally exhausting struggle can drain women of their compassion and empathy. This emotional exhaustion is one of the reasons that Amra is ambivalent about expanding the role of women in leadership position in politics: in the greedy and exploitative current system (created by men and for men) it is not fair that women should suffer all of the burdens of both power and powerlessness, and at the same time share none of the rewards.

## Conclusion

Amra, Sehija and Danka are the faces of a new type of female (and occasionally feminist) leadership, particularly in the arena of peacebuilding. Informed by their similar goals, occupations, and cultural and historical contexts, each woman nevertheless has a unique understanding of her own relationship to leadership and femininity. All three are religious women and follow the ethics and dictates of their faith, but their religiosity in peacebuilding is reflected in different ways, either as the key argument for peace (Amra), or one of the arguments (Danka), or without emphasis of religious identity as something separate from her life and work (Sehija).

Although all three peacebuilders exhibit a discomfort with the term ‘leader,’ given that it connotes patriarchy and dictatorship, each woman is unquestionably a leader in the post-war BiH peace movement. Their femininities are inseparable parts of their leadership styles; for Amra, Sehija and Danka, female leaders are more compassionate, group-oriented, better communicators and are unwilling to sacrifice their moral principles for success. For these women, female leadership in post-war BiH, but also in the world at large, offers a viable alternative to the patriarchies of the past, which have led us mostly into war and destruction.

The three peacebuilders rely on essentialist notions of gender in order to explain their understanding of female leadership: women are ‘naturally’ more compassionate than men, women’s brains are ‘naturally’ better at multitasking, women are ‘naturally’ more future-oriented than men. But in truth, women are as ‘naturally’ capable of cruelty, small-mindedness and warmongering as their male counterparts, and men are as capable of care and compassion as women.

Compassion, care, a nurture-orientation, communicativeness — any leader, male or female who is able to harness these traits will be effective and admirable. In other words, the future belongs to people, regardless of gender, who embrace this ‘feminine’ style of leadership. Following in the

footsteps of Amra, Sehija and Danka, we need to continue moving in a direction that emboldens women to speak their truth to power in a world begging for a different kind of leadership.

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