

Muslim Women in the Bosnian Crucible

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ABSTRACT

Exotic tales and dramatic details about Muslim women's views of Bosnian society are uncommon. In fact, few Muslim women in Bosnia are overtly Islamic in appearance or action. Rather, they blend into a secularized society in which Islamic heritage provides traditions and values, not dogma. Despite this assimilation, 12 Bosnian women relate 3 different but connected features of their lives: the effect on sex roles of the political turmoil of the past century, the particular perspective women bring to questions of war and peace, and the rich prewar multiculturalism. Their overarching consensus is that women in Bosnia are equipped for leadership but stifled by an erosion of their status in society. During the communist period, women gained a greater level of freedom and became independent thinkers, even though the communists didn't allow them to exercise the leadership they'd assumed during World War II. With the demise of communism in the late 1980s and the chaos of all-out war in the early 1990s, women were preoccupied with survival. Cultural tolerance emerged as a unifying factor for Bosnian women of different tradition, education, and socioeconomic status, although this was obscured by the outside misconception that the war was caused by "age-old hatreds." On the contrary, religion not only was far from a central identity, but, according to many Bosnian women, it simply did not matter. Yes, they were victims of a ruthless genocide; but Muslim women in Bosnia are also energetic, determined, smart, and savvy.

KEY WORDS: Muslim women; Bosnia; Islam.

Fahrija: When I was a refugee in upstate New York, since skin is my medical specialty, I worked as a cosmetics consultant, handling brands such as Dior, Clinique, Clarins. I dressed nicely every day for work, regardless of how I felt. That was my way of fighting back, showing I was alive, not broken. My clients, rich ladies, would ask, 'Where are you from? Paris?' I'd answer, 'No, I'm from Bosnia.' They'd say, 'But there's a civil war going on there!' I explained that it was not a civil war but a war of aggression. The women would say 'But aren't you fighting Muslims over there?' Then I'd say, 'I'm Muslim.' They were always surprised. Most people I spoke to in America thought all Muslim women were uneducated, repressed, and covered in black cloth.²

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²Fahrija is one of 26 women interviewed by the author whose comments are included in the paper.

A BACKGROUND WORD

Bosnian women have been my inspiration since July 4th, 1994, when, during a lull in the fighting, I flew down to Bosnia in the belly of a cargo plane, strapped in with 50,000 pounds of flour supplies urgently needed to feed the 200,000 Sarajevans trapped in the siege. As the American Ambassador to nearby Austria, I was bringing greetings from President Clinton to a few hundred Bosnians gathered in the new American embassy yard to celebrate our national day. On the patio next to the bare building (our flag flew over an embassy with no furniture or resident personnel), I met with seven women. In bizarre juxtaposition with the grittiness of war, they wore pearls, stylish high heels, and carefully applied makeup as they relayed accounts of hospitals with no anesthetics or medicines, and university architecture classes with no pencils. A cardiac specialist described how she had not seen her octogenarian parents for 2 years, even though they lived only a 15-min walk away, but across a war line she could not penetrate. This was the jagged disconnect of their lives: sophisticated, educated women coping with blunt barbarity.

For 8 years I was closely involved in Bosnia, including hosting negotiations during a key diplomatic turning point of the war. During that time, I met dozens of Balkan political leaders deciding matters of war and peace, as well as lawyers debating and crafting a new constitution. They were all men. This seemed particularly odd, since Yugoslavia had more women PhDs per capita than any country in Europe.

After my tenure with the State Department (1993–97), I continued to work with Bosnian women for several more years, organizing over a dozen initiatives and conferences, including three to encourage women to assume political leadership (a Bosnian League of Women Voters was thus born). My training in (Christian) theology led me to look particularly at the religious life; in 2001, I helped women from all the major religious traditions launch an NGO, which they named *Strength in Diversity*.

In these and hundreds of other ways, Bosnian women have been reassembling their lives, piece-by-piece, vacillating between hope and depression, their creativity and skills frequently outstripping the sluggish and uneven pace of postwar politics and society. To better understand their challenges and possibilities, over a 7-year period, I conducted more than 100 hr of taped interviews with 26 women with a 60-year age span, from all religious and ethnic affiliations, and different professional and educational experiences. The material for this article is from those interviews.

In 1981, Marshall Tito of Yugoslavia died without a succession plan, leading to a decade of political posturing among leaders in the six republics (Serbia, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Slovenia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina (referred to commonly simply as Bosnia). The census a decade later reported that Bosnia, with a population of 4.1 million, was the third largest of the republics by land mass and population. Citizens registered by ethnic group: 41% identified themselves as Muslim, 31.4% as Serb, 17.3% Croat, and 7.6% other. War broke out in 1992, in response to the plans of President Slobodan Milosevic in Belgrade, who wanted to create *A Greater Serbia*. Croat nationalists, who had declared independence from Yugoslavia, struck a deal with the Serbs to split Bosnia, annexing half to Serbia and Croatia, respectively. There was no place in this scheme for the almost 2 million Muslims, who had lived intermingled throughout Bosnia for centuries. The provincial capital, Sarajevo, was surrounded and under siege for three and a half years (Zimmerman, 1996). A policy of ethnic cleansing was launched by local Bosnian Serbs and supported by Serbs from Serbia, for a while by Croats as well. Massacres, torture, systemic rape, death camps, and other atrocities were inflicted on the Muslim population for three and a half years until the United States led a military intervention, culminating in the Dayton Agreement in late 1995. The Agreement ended the war but rewarded the aggressors by dividing the country in two parts, with Serbs controlling half.

Eleven years later, this volume of *Sex Roles* offers the opportunity to address Islam in Bosnia as women experience and describe it. The findings may be a surprise, because, despite the impressions of outsiders who assume the recent war was religiously and ethnically based, Bosnian women insist that it could not have been: religion whether Muslim, Catholic, Serb Orthodox, or Jewish was not a central identity. In fact, articles exploring Muslim women's views of themselves and their Bosnian society are rare for two reasons. First, there is no dramatic Islamic tale to tell; few women in Bosnia look, act, or speak in some particularly Muslim way. They do not quote the Koran, nor do they see their choices limited by Islamic teachings. The occidental compatibility of Bosnian Islam was nurtured by Tito, who established an Islamic Theological University in Sarajevo in the 1970s to counter the hope of fundamentalists to use Bosnia as a European foothold. Thus Bosnian Muslim women are for the most part assimilated in a secularized society in which Islamic heritage provides traditions and values, but not dogma (Friedman, 1996).

The second reason Bosnian Muslim women are rarely discussed is that there is a paucity of literature dealing with Bosnian women except as war victims. Most written reports deal with the systemic rape that took on genocidal meaning, as rapists taunted their victims saying, “Now you’ll have a Serb baby” (Stiglmeier, 1994). Still, as chroniclers of the recent Bosnian war have focused on the historical prelude to horrifying statistics, 150,000 dead, 2.3 million expelled from their homes, very few have cared about the ground-level story lived by well over half the adult population, the women who have worked ferociously to hold family and community together against overwhelming obstacles. Analysts have dealt instead almost entirely with the male political leaders and warriors; the experience of women at the core of the community has been stunningly ignored.

This assignment to write about Muslim women in Bosnia is problematic. Since before the war, very few Bosnian Muslims thought of themselves in ethnic or religious terms—to use ethnic labels now is to appear complicit with the divide and conquer methods of the nationalist politicians who fomented the conflict out of political greed. In fact, the appellation Muslim has become anathema to many Bosnian Muslims since the war; they use the term Bosniak instead, saying that in Bosnia ethnic background is not a religious matter. On the other hand, the reality of the Bosnian war is that the labels Croat, Serb, and Muslim did become commonplace in the parlance of the international community and were even essential to the political structure devised in Dayton. So we are left with an uncomfortable inconsistency: in even noting ethnic background to describe the women, we do them a disservice.

Nor, of course, can any observer be fair in generalizing across backgrounds, experiences, concerns, and hopes. But as lessons are drawn, generalizations are inevitable; an apology is therefore due to individuals as we strive for understanding of the collective experience. Nonetheless, in a broader sense, the study of these women offers a new perspective on the whole of contemporary Bosnian experience.

For this discussion, 12 Muslim women were joined by a few particularly relevant commentators who were also Bosnian women, but ethnic Croat, Serb, or Jewish. Such a mix is the only way to represent the Bosnian experience, which is embedded in the reality of and also a love of cultural diversity. The women discuss three distinct but related features of their lives: the effect on gender roles of the political turmoil of the past century, the particular perspective women bring to questions of war and peace, and the rich prewar multiculturalism. Those themes link into a bold thesis I have heard consistently expressed in scores of interviews: although women in Bosnia have been equipped for leadership, their status in the society has seriously eroded. Had they been in charge, there would have been no war, and the rich Bosnian tradition of multiculturalism would have prevailed.

GENDER ROLES AND SOCIOPOLITICAL IMPLOSION

Danica (*Slovene/Croat, living in Bosnia for 40 years*):

If we could transfer onto men the care of children and the house, which is part of the joy they’re losing out on, maybe they wouldn’t have time to create wars.

Greta (*Jewish, former professor and government official*):

Women play a very, very, very diminished role in our society now. The situation was much more balanced before. It was never equal; nonetheless women and men were equally paid.

Valentina (*young, rural Croat*):

All women are alike, no matter their tradition. In this war, we went through the same things. We suffered in the same way, and we were brave in the same way.

Women’s experience of the recent war is tied to the historical place of women in Bosnia. The roles and status of Bosnian women, Muslim or not, evolved as the country shifted through four political systems in the 1900s from the Hapsburg Empire through the inter-bellum Yugoslav kingdom, four decades of communism under Tito, and into the current, incipient multiparty system.

Traditionally, a woman moved into her husband’s parents’ home and accepted their authority. Even as new couples set up their own households in the twentieth century, a strong patriarchal expectation remained. Before World War II, women were subordinate to men in property rights, inheritance, and other family law. When Rebecca West made her famous 1937 journey through Yugoslavia, she described the illiterate Bosnian village women as having to wait on their husbands while they eat, take sound beatings every now and again, work till they drop, even while child-bearing, and walk while their master rides. But the picture was not totally bleak. Noting the way these tall, sinewy women held their bodies, and the expressions on their faces, she added, “but I will eat my hat if these women were not free in the spirit.”

Many of those free spirits became even freer, ironically, when Hitler reached the Balkans in 1941 (Südosteuropäischer Dialog, 2000). Women there had become involved in prodemocracy activism, and an Anti-Fascist Women's Front formed with some 2,000,000 members. War often brings benefits for women, sociologically speaking, as they advance into jobs vacated by men serving in the armed forces. World War II was no exception for Yugoslav women, who stepped into new positions in local government administration.

On the military front, women participated in the organization of supplies for the army, as well as recruitment, mobilization, and actual fighting. Students, teachers, and urban factory workers were the first to join the guerillas, but as the resistance shifted to the mountains, massive numbers of peasant women donned uniforms and shouldered rifles, becoming a radically new symbol for female equality. Some 100,000 women joined Marshall Tito's Partisans: 25,000 were killed and 40,000 wounded. Women were encouraged to be active, but in service to the cause. In return, the war brought the official proclamation of equal rights, including the vote (Hunt, 1997). Women's public image shifted yet again, to the political operative in a tailored suit (International Human Rights Law Group BiH Project, 1999).

Although women made great advances during World War II, moving essentially from feudal status to assure modern roles, this momentum was soon lost. After the war, there was little improvement, although official appreciation of women's new economic and social function was forthcoming. South Slav women organized to fight for a full voice in the social transformation, but representation in politics remained disproportionately small, despite a 30% quota for parliamentary seats (Weber & Watson, 2000). During the 60s their involvement in government posts at all levels declined from 15 to 7%, even though by the late 60s, women were receiving almost one fourth of the master's degrees, and 17% of the doctorates (Ramet, 1999).

Similarly, the number of women directors in large industry enterprises, already a tiny 1.3%, dwindled to half. Even small enterprises saw women's leadership decline from a little over 2 to 1.5%. This drop was part of a dreary picture in which women represented nearly half the employees, but usually less than 10% of the management. Women's academic training would have warranted at least double the number of high-level positions (Ramet, 1999).

In Bosnian culture, homemaking tasks are generally considered unmanly, and familial responsibilities remain significant obstacles for women in the workplace, including the political sphere (Denich, 1977). The socialist values of gender equality did not cross the home threshold, except to provide working mothers with generous maternity leaves at full pay. Abortion was legalized, but childcare was left to women to manage on their own. A huge gap developed between rural and urban women: in 1981, Yugoslavia had one of the highest rates of university-educated women in the world, but in contrast 17% of the women remained illiterate (Denich, 1977).

One reason women did not make more progress was a result of Tito's ambivalence. He equated the concept of feminism, with a bourgeois activism, which meant antisocialist thinking. Although he proclaimed support of gender equality, he insisted that broader reform had to wait while he attended to more important matters. Still, the Tito decades brought significant reforms, such as mutual consent divorce and pay equity (Ramet, 1996). Even though reality did not reflect rhetoric, being a woman under Tito had advantages that Biljana, a member of Muslim royalty who emigrated as a young adult, can reflect on from her home in the United States.

With communism, women became freer and independent thinkers;
more open and better able to express themselves. Yugoslav women had
strong opinions, and everyone in the neighborhood heard them. Still,
the communists didn't allow them to exercise leadership.

In the final two decades of the twentieth century, four powerful currents converged that would reverse the course of Bosnian women's slow sociopolitical progression. The first was Tito's death in 1980, which set the stage for political turmoil in the area (Ramet, 1985). The second was the implosion of communism, which abruptly changed the social rules for the entire region. The third was the nationalism that expanded into the vacuum created by the former two. And the fourth was the 1992-1995 war itself, during which upheaval women took on tasks they had not anticipated while debilitated by trauma and loss. An individual woman trying to stay afloat in the wild swirl of these four currents could hardly plan the next day, much less her life (Herman, 1997).

The first of the four currents, Tito's death, left behind a weak plan of rotating presidents from the different republics. In the decade that followed, virtually no significant legislation was passed. Instead, a general power shuffle among political leaders (all men) ensued. Given Tito's anti-Soviet stand, Western subsidies had poured into the Yugoslav economy; as they decreased, women's opportunities fell along with a softening job market. With the fall of the Wall in 1989, Bosnian women shared in the upheaval experienced by women across the former communist states of Europe, where the advent of democracy brought with it much promise and Western cold warriors were surprised to learn much peril. For tens of millions across Eastern Europe, the complexion of life evolved from red to rose-colored to raw. Hope surged with the political opening up of societies that had known enormous repression under communism. In Yugoslavia, however, the monolithic Soviet nemesis was replaced by a perplexing variety of threats to stability: long-time trading partners were suddenly bankrupt; labor markets were haywire; organized crime was booming; and, in that fragile scenario, expressions of progressive democracy were frequently drowned out by the noise of intolerance (Libal & von Kohl, 2000; Magas, 1993).

In this brave new world, the women of Eastern Europe might have been pivotal in building healthy social and political discourse, but they were not positioned to have influence. Instead, women faced huge obstacles as they attempted to move from the margins of democracy to carve out their rightful places in the mainstream (Cockburn, 2000). The dramatically low status of women in post-communist Europe became an issue of essential concern for some policymakers, whose focus reached beyond the well being of women per se to the fostering of economic development and democracy. The downward trend in women's status was more than an ebbing tide lowering all ships. What had changed? Life under communism was a far cry from the auspicious pronouncements of equality for all comrades, and the promise of equity was as empty as the grocery shelves in the Soviet Union. With the dismantling of communism, however, even the trappings of gender parity fell away, exposing an underlying discrimination against women that had persisted unabated within the totalitarian state (Cockburn, 1998). The shift toward the West was painful for most, but especially for women, who lost not only their life savings or jobs, but also even the pretense of an ideology that preached equality. A young Bosnian Muslim social activist, Amna looks back ruefully: *We were a socialist country. Some call it a time of darkness, but I had a much better life then* (Waller & Fabretti, 2001).

As it turned out, gender discrimination, which has historically riddled Western society, was a hallmark of the political left as well. Women had not really fared well under communism. In spite of enormous advances in education, neither the communist-imposed quota ensuring access to parliamentary charades, nor the ample availability of substandard health services were much of a boon. Yugoslav women, who had been living with much more exposure to Western ways than had women in the Soviet sphere, experienced less of a jolt when the system imploded than did women in Czechoslovakia or Ukraine. But while the particulars of women's status differed geographically across the communist states, stubborn patterns of marginalization for women existed: diminished labor market access; increased vulnerability to crime; loss of family-oriented social benefits; and a sharp drop in the already low parliamentary representation.

The striking feminization of poverty foiled the economic aspirations of many countries in the transition to a free market. In addition to the clustering of women in low-paying professions, ever more blatant gender-biased hiring and promotion became entrenched in the post-communist society; job advertisements frequently specified "attractive female receptionist" or "male manager." Under the weight of gender-based layoffs, lower pay, and meager career opportunities this downward spiral accelerated. In most of the new democracies, regulations prescribed earlier retirement for women, locking them into fixed incomes.

New free-market economies produced a huge gap between rich and poor citizens, creating class resentments. In the new political climate, women were not able to fuel their countries' economies as either reliable employees or innovative entrepreneurs. Just when their contribution was most needed to strengthen fragile economies, women stumbled on their way to the marketplace, overburdened with household responsibilities and reporting that, more than ever, they were preoccupied with just getting through the day, rather than building the future. With divorce rates on the rise, nonenforcement of fathers' child support contributed to the impoverishment of women. Holes in the government social net of pensions, childcare, kindergartens, and health care made life precarious for women, who were usually expected to shoulder 100% of their family responsibilities. In a reversal of communist demands that women work alongside men in fields and factories, women were being pushed back to hearth and home.

With their own particular variation, Bosnian women experienced the same forces that affected women in other transitional states. But in addition to Tito's disappearance and the demise of European communism, an ominous third current was developing in the vacuum: an increasingly vocal nationalist

ideology that intoned precommunist traditional values (religious and otherwise), reducing women to womenfolk, to serve and be protected by men. Women's work for the homeland was to be in the home. The implications were public and private. The drop in women's parliamentary participation from 20% under Tito to 2% when the communist quota was repealed was the most precipitous drop in Europe (Ramet, 1996). The place of the patriotic woman was no longer shoulder-to-shoulder with men on tractors or in factories, but in the nursery, regenerating the nation through mothering. Feminism was suspect, a sign, to some, of disloyalty to the nation. Not only jobs, but also reproductive rights were suddenly in jeopardy. Women were less inclined than men to support the new nationalism, but without positions of leadership or a system that allowed the organization of grassroots opposition, they were unable to stem the tide.

On top of these three major shifts, the dismantling of Tito's political structure, the drop in women's status and services with the demise of communism, and the increase in nationalist-condoned repression a fourth current emerged: the chaos of all-out war, which brought enormous disorientation and limitation to Bosnian women. With the gale force of the changes around them, women could only live one day at a time, inching forward or backward, trying to stay their course.

Here four Muslim women reflect on their upbringing as educated, trained, and influenced by exported Western culture after the fall of communism, speaking of a struggle familiar to women worldwide: the struggle for gender equity in political power, social roles, and basic rights. Now in her early 30s, Amna approaches those topics by looking back at her education, which was completed as the war was beginning.

When I was younger, girls didn't have the same opportunities as boys. In villages, they had only a primary education and they were expected to marry during their teen years, even though boys could do whatever they wanted. *Nevertheless, she is optimistic.* We girls had to be ten times better than boys to be recognised as equal. Fortunately, that's possible.

When I decided to go into technical engineering, I was told, "Oh, that's for men, not women. You won't be treated the same." I said, "Well, let's see." They said I would never finish, but I did. Then I also finished post-graduate studies in management and information technologies. It was Sarajevo, and the post-graduate class was about two-thirds women and one-third men. *For Amna, her experience is a call to action:* So a woman can be a leader! Still, women, hold themselves back women themselves! We've got to be tough!

Amna wants to distribute the responsibility for women's advancement.

The younger generation of men accepts women as equal or almost equal. But boys learn roles in their families, where the father is always the head, so it's hard for Bosnian men to accept women as leaders. Still, they're learning. At our radio station, for example, there were three of us working, and two were women. When one was low, the other said, "We can do this. I'm sure we can!" It's important that women support each other, because men will never really support us. They'll always say, "I'm behind you." And then when they're around other men, they'll say something completely different. It's like that in business too. When you show you're better than he is, he'll do anything to destroy your future.

For Amna, that grim scenario is confined to the work world. In a surprising twist, she notes that *friendship is completely different.*

I've always had men as best friends. For me, it's much easier to be friends with a man but only when there's no competition.

Amna saw herself as breaking into a male-dominated field computer science. In contrast, Mediha, twenty years earlier, chose medicine. As a profession dominated by women, the level of remuneration and

general status associated with the medical profession in Bosnia is much lower than in Western Europe. Women tend to dominate in gynecology, pediatrics, and internal medicine, while the more highly paid surgeons are more likely to be men. Mediha gives an interesting look into the choice process.

Upon completion of my basic schooling, I enrolled in the medical curriculum. My oldest sister was just completing law school, and she took over my father's office, but my mother said to me, "Study medicine. Let's have a doctor in the family. Go to dental school; it takes only four years." So, I did, graduating summa cum laude, and I fell in love with medicine.

Not only have careers offered personal fulfilment; conferences and study abroad have also given Bosnian Muslim women like Mediha opportunities to exchange ideas with peers from other countries. In her case, those opportunities included a year in Kentucky.

Immediately following the war, Mediha was the only woman elected to the National Parliament. She currently is Bosnia's Ambassador to Sweden. Still, reflecting on the complex role of women in Bosnian society, she sounds quite traditional: *A woman is important in giving birth and raising children. Nobody questions that. It's her biological right. There's no greater thing than being a mother.* On the other hand, Mediha has a sophisticated view of women's situation in society and of tactics to effect change.

I prefer to speak of "gender" and "gender equality," rather than "standing up for women's rights." The struggle for our rights was completed with the UN declaration. "Gender equality" is less threatening. As soon as people hear "fight for women's rights," a certain negative energy is created. "Equality" is gentler. What we need to fight for now is not to be left out of the game.

And what will happen when women are fully in the game? Mediha sees women in terms of potential productivity:

Perhaps America is successful, among other reasons, because women are so actively involved. As a nation, as people, Americans use almost all their gray matter. Countries that rely on only half the nation's intelligence work with only half of their capacity. Just imagine a country doubling its brains by including women.

The intellectual prowess of highly educated Bosnian women belies the caricature of Bosnia as a backwater region. Indeed, a Bosnian professorship is a highly respected position in the society. Although she is now engaged morning, noon, and night organizing refugees to return to their homes, Mirhunisa still identifies herself as an academic (Nikolic-Ristanovic, 1999).

I am a professor, and I worked at the Secondary Economic School. When I was 22, I graduated from the university then found a job in a group of quite mature people. A revolution started with my arrival, because I was so much younger. That was 1976. I was teaching a most demanding topic, accounting, and it was terribly difficult to establish my place as a young teacher there. I needed to prove myself to the students and my colleagues. I had to work diligently to demonstrate my competence. I thought knowledge could take one anywhere. I wrote a serious textbook, which is still being used.

Mirhunisa's academic work, even though she has left teaching, remains her primary identity, her grounding. Confirming that same education theme is the story of a fourth Muslim woman, Emsuda in western Bosnia, whose altruism seems like a steel rod, supporting her through whatever life serves up, and allowing her then to support others. Before the war, she and her husband took their life savings and started a garment-making cottage industry, employing hundreds of women so they could have the means to educate their children. That project ultimately bought Emsuda's life, since among those she employed was

the cousin of a soldier who later helped her escape a Serb concentration camp. The support she offered the women in her garment-making team she also extends toward the husband she describes as profoundly damaged by the concentration camp experience. Emsuda does not lose herself in that relationship; she is tremendously self-confident, moving between professional and private roles. In partnership, or alone, she is her own woman, and that is a value she wants to pass down as a mother.

When my daughter was only three, she was able to say: “I don’t want that pair of shoes—I want that pair, over there. And I don’t want you to choose my dress.” That’s why she’s so independent and successful now, in her 20’s. She knows what she wants in her life. She’ll be a leader in her family, if not in society as a whole; but she won’t impose her will on other people.

The spirit Emsuda personifies and admires in her daughter is reflected in values embedded in her current work, training others to start NGOs (including those led by Serbs). When she speaks about women’s roles in society, however, her self-assurance turns into impatience with women who don’t push through social obstacles.

Women should be taught to be independent, self-confident, self-reliant. But they often withdraw and leave matters to men to decide. Just as a woman has her own position and high status in the family, she can have the same in society. We have thousands of examples where women have been brought up to be confident. But take three sisters—each chooses a different life path. We can’t just blame a brother or a friend who didn’t believe in her. She could have pushed herself forward as the other two did. We’ve got to start thinking this way, not just blaming men, but teaching women as much as we can through NGOs, through the schools, through seminars. Women have to be willing to speak up and say “Not 60 men. We want 30 men and 30 women.”

Women in Bosnia need that encouragement as they face the difficulty of balancing careers and motherhood, without draining their capacity to serve their communities. No matter how advanced their educations and careers, basic to their understanding of themselves is the role of homemaker, mother, and organizer of the family. And so, against the backdrop of forceful and disruptive historical currents, how do Bosnian Muslim women chart their course? In a country not deeply religious, what is their compass? Some may be grounded in indignation over injustices they have experienced personally or their perception that women as a group are slated to suffer. For others, personal ambition is the driver. Certainly a love of their country plays a significant part for many; and for some, the impulse to respond to the pain of the vulnerable is the motivation. Beneath and around these other factors run a wellspring that is also the source of one of their most demanding obligations: mothering. Few of the women talked about their education, careers, or even country in the same idealized terms as they did when speaking of raising their children. That social role features dominantly not only as a training ground for nurturing their society, for many, it also permeates their basic understanding of the relationship of women, war, and peace.

WOMEN, WAR, AND PEACE

Valentina (*Croat, rural homemaker*): All women are alike, no matter their tradition. In this war, we went through the same things. We suffered in the same way, and we were brave in the same way.

Mirhunisa (*Muslim, refugee coordinator*): There was a well-known woman who, before the war, worked in the government. She wore thin, metal, spiked heels, and she’d hit the captured men in the stomach with those heels; they showed me the marks. That was a woman.

Maja (*Croat, physician*): Women never would have started this war, and if they had, they would have completed it much less painfully and faster.

Sabiha (*Muslim, entrepreneur*): Women didn’t start the war, but they’re the ones who suffer from it.

Alenka (*Serb/Slovene, engineer in Tuzla*): Women have smaller, but more concrete agendas: everyday life,

homes, children. We have a lot of common ground with women across ethnic identities or any other divide, like education levels or socioeconomic differences. We don't fight in the army, and we don't think hierarchically. We're not afraid to go to the other side maybe because everyone knows we weren't in the death squads.

Jelka (*Croat in the divided city of Mostar*): Men were in the armies and other military groups, so obviously their relationships with their former enemies will be more difficult to re-establish. That's why women are the solution.

Some of their statements are contradictory, others glib to easy platitudes. What evidence can these women produce to show that they, or any other women, would have behaved differently from men had they been in the seats of power from the late '80s to the mid '90s? How can they claim generalizations about females that stretch across differences of age, circumstance, and cultures? The women speak from their experiences, built on a foundation marbled, no doubt, with cultural stereotypes, rather than some statement verifiable by social scientists that women would or could have done it different. The statement that most of the speakers believe there would have been less violence and hardship had they and their sisters been in charge is important in and of itself, because the women's conviction not only is *informed by* their work to heal their country, but it also *fuels* their effort.

Three Muslim women reflect on this issue below (Jacobson & Jelincic, 1996). Alma's views are built on her years in the Muslim-led Bosnian army trying to lift the siege of Sarajevo. Despite complications from multiple wounds and post-traumatic stress syndrome, she has organized an employment initiative for women veterans.

If all soldiers were women, we wouldn't have wars. But if there were one, there wouldn't be so much bloodshed. I'm sure. Women had a far more difficult time during the war *in part because* we feel more, and we're more sensitive. Think about it: a woman can't rape.

For Alma, these differences are not merely academic; they translate into life and death.

In my time in the army, I saw how a woman gives much more weight than a man does to the decision to kill. It's more difficult for us. Maybe that's nature. You know, every woman is a potential mother, and mothers are the core, not only of our families, but the whole society, whether we want to admit it or not.

If women are at the core, why are they not at the head? Alma finds the decline in women's status patently unfair, since women worked extremely hard during the war and *they proved their capability*. She muses about the extent to which the bias against women's leadership is linked to religious traditions.

Society puts men in a superior position. That might be connected with religion. For example, a Muslim woman following religious rules should be only a homemaker. But here in Bosnia women are normal, and they work. It's quite different from Algeria or some other place, where they're now fighting for basic rights.

Alma then makes a remarkable suggestion, coming as it does from a young Bosnian whose life has been turned inside out: *We should help the women of Kabul. The example of a Bosniak woman provides strength for other women of the world*. And where does Alma get her idea of a Bosniak woman? Like each woman speaking in this section, her reflection is rooted in her immediate experience.

When I look back at my mother's life and what she went through. She was always there to meet us when we came home, and to see us off when we were leaving. She was the pillar of our home. My father was there in a different way, but she was always with us when we were ill across the years, to make us tea or put a compress on our foreheads. She'd come in a hundred times to check on us, and recheck. Sometimes I felt much better confiding in her than in other people. When my

brother was killed in the war, she lost a child. Now, looking at her, I see thousands of mothers.

That vision inspires Alma, for whom strength is intertwined with the capacity to suffer, and through that suffering connect with humanity.

During the war, when I was in the army and my brother had been killed, my mother used to tell me, "Every single mother cries in the same way." Probably she wanted to say that even though I was wearing a uniform, I had to be human that you shouldn't give up your honesty to steal a TV set or video recorder. "All mothers shed the same tears," she'd say. Croat, Serb, and Muslim mothers equally, it's true. They feel the same pain. Only women have that feeling. We're more moderate, in a way. If it had been up to women, this war wouldn't have broken out at all.

Women won the war in Bosnia, insists Irma, whose description from an adolescent perspective is rich in insights into how the theme of conflict shapes and is shaped by the social development of boys and girls. Fourteen years old when the Sarajevo siege began, she spent many months at a time in a cellar, with no electricity, hearing shells explode all around her.

The boys mostly wanted to fight. At the beginning, they said, "Oh, great! Now we get to prove ourselves." They went to war at 16. The only fighting they'd ever seen was on TV. They didn't even know how to hold a gun. They didn't know why they were fighting. We had a neighbor; he was maybe 16. I asked him what he needed to prove. He had his mother and father and brother. He should be happy to make them happy by being alive. Why fight?

So what is this all about? Irma wonders.

Sure, everybody's different. I'm not saying we're all the same. But in general the girls were more afraid, even though some boys were scared, too. The girls, lots of girls I knew, tried to tell the boys they were doing wrong that fighting wasn't the solution, but they were determined. Once they'd tasted war, they understood it wasn't like the movies. Everybody said, "This is never going to end!" I'm not stupid. My friends are all dead. What the heck am I doing? A lot of them ran away from the city when they could. As soldiers, they could go through the escape tunnel under the airport, and they just didn't come back.

Irma sees the issue in terms of social learning.

When I was playing with Barbie dolls, the boys were playing war and shooting and something like that, because they saw it in the movies. Maybe girls don't have to prove themselves so much. I mean we don't have to compete. Boys say, "Oh, I've had so many girls, blah, blah, blah . . ." But girls don't go on and on like that.

Irma begins to think relationally, wondering what it must have been like not just for her and her friends, but also for their parents.

It was hard for fathers, because they knew what their sons were faced with. The mothers didn't know for sure, because they'd never been on a front line. But lots of dads tried to get their sons out of the army, especially after the first year. It was a big mess. Some of the boys I knew were hiding from the army, their parents helping them try not to get drafted.

Irma broadens her view to women and men in general. *In the war, women were calmer. Yeah, they were calmer. They faced it: Okay, we're in a war now. We have to survive. We have to eat. We have to find water. We have to figure this out.* And what was her primary source of data? Her own family. Irma's portrayal of her parents during the siege of Sarajevo belies the expectations of women and men in times of danger.

During the war was the first time I really got to know my Dad. When you're together every day with someone, you get to know every little detail, so I got to know him well. He was so afraid. He was afraid for me, for my Mom, for everybody. I know he was doing the right thing when he forced me to go to the shelter every single minute, but he made me panic. He made my life more complicated, because he was so upset all the time. When we heard a shell somewhere, he'd say "Oh God, it's a shell!" He just kept drumming it in. My dad was angry and always yelling at us. You know, he didn't mean any harm. He just wanted us to survive. He loved us, so he wanted us to be in a safe place. But it was exhausting to go through. I hated it. My Mom was much tougher; she concentrated on getting us something to eat. We had some family problems. I mean, I know it was only in our heads.

What family, of course, would not have problems, living under siege, listening to tales of carnage, risking life and limb to fetch some water, deciding whether to dare to go to school? Still, Irma's personal account peels back the cover of everyday life to reveal men and women struggling with stereotypical family roles that may or may not fit their truest feelings of love, fear, courage, or determination.

The intensity of violence functions as an emotional magnifying glass, as life experiences burn straight through academic query about the importance of gender. One may emerge from the struggle a feminist, another not. One woman may be stronger, another damaged. For every philosophical Mediha, professionally competent Mirhunisa, fervently advocating Amna, front-line-tested Alma, or progressive young Irma, there is another Bosnian Muslim who would like nothing more than to return to life as it was before the war, with traditions and roles and expectations intact life as it used to be, with security, order, and predictability (Kumar, 2002). And so this section ends with a poignantly ironic response to the question of gender and war, from Kada, a brave Muslim woman left picking through the rubble of her life as a survivor of a massacre that killed every man and teenage boy in her rural community. After a long reminiscence on cherished past times with her murdered husband and son, she brings herself to the question at hand.

Do women see things different from men? I don't know. Where I live, we're mostly women mothers, sisters, and wives. I don't speak much to men. You know there aren't any men left. Sometimes I wish I was standing in the shade of a man. It's the traditional way for a Bosnian woman. Sometimes I wish I had someone to protect me at least for a minute.

THE RICHNESS OF BOSNIAN MULTICULTURALISM

Alenka (*Serb/Slovene engineer*): What happened here never was about ethnicity or religion. That's an artificial element used by the politicians who started the war.

Kristina (*Serb school teacher*): I've never in my life wanted to divide people into groups.

Jelka (*Croat cultural center director*): My grandmother used to say, "God is one. It's people who become whores and divide into religions."

No subject unites Bosnian women more solidly across differences of tradition, education, and socioeconomic status than the question of cultural tolerance. Life in prewar Bosnia was comparable in many ways to an American state like New Hampshire or Colorado, although Sarajevo was far more ethnically mixed than Manchester or Denver. Traditional rural social values blended with avant-garde urban thinking. People in villages worked their fields and tended livestock, enjoying country living.

Meanwhile, city dwellers enriched their thinking by traveling frequently outside the country (Burg & Shoup, 1999).

This cultural complexity was obscured as the international media thrust the barbarity of the Bosnian war on the world. Bosnian women, who grew up in such a multicultural setting, view with impatience outsiders who ascribed great political import to religious symbols. Tanja, an ethnic Serb from Sarajevo, has this observation from her posting as a diplomat in Vienna.

Religion, to me, is like love Bit's intimate. In contrast to the way I grew up, among outsiders I've seen a fear of Islam, and particularly of the scarf. I was asked by a man in Vienna if the wife of one of our ambassadors wears a scarf to cover her hair. The wife of the person asking me was standing there, with a cross around her neck! I drew that to her husband's attention, and he apologized. These are just symbols; for one person, a scarf; for someone else, a cross. They don't mean anything. It's true, before the war, Muslim women wore headscarves for religious reasons, and during the war we had more scarves in the cities than we have now. But in villages, all women, Christian and Muslim, are scarved. That's not for religious purposes—just a village custom.

The fact that more scarves appeared among Sarajevo pedestrians during and immediately after the war was reported in intelligence reports and interpreted as a clear indication that extremists had a foothold in Bosnia that would threaten European security. In reality, outside observers could not know if scarves indicated increased religiosity, or simply the presence of farm women taking refuge in the capital.

Indeed, political leaders perpetrating the war played on the world's ignorance of Yugoslavian society to convince foreign powers to stay out of what the leaders portrayed as a civil conflict, based on internal enmity (Silber & Little, 1996). The grandest success of indicted war criminal Slobodan Milosevic was his persuading outsiders that the people of Yugoslavia had been fighting for centuries and would always be fighting. The Serb president was mirrored in that effort by the nationalist President of Croatia, Franjo Tudjman, who parroted the concept of fault lines dividing the Balkans from his favorite book, *The Clash of Civilizations* by Harvard professor Samuel Huntington to paint the conflict as an inevitable result of Roman Catholics, Serb Orthodox, and Muslims occupying the same land (personal communication with Miomir Zuzul, Tudjman's Ambassador to the United States, June 2001). World powers followed Milosevic and Tudjman's lead, using the well-packaged excuse of age-old hatreds to absolve themselves of intervention.

Bosnia's population, the most ethnically diverse of the six Yugoslav republics, did not, in fact, support this explanation. The women interviewed here saw the war's fracturing of their society as incompatible with their multicultural values. Their rationale begins with the basic fact that, given the large number of mixed marriages (up to 40% in the cities, but in rural areas as well), many people were not clearly of one ethnicity or another. Nurdzihana, a middle-aged journalist, leads off passionately.

I've never accepted ethnic divisions! I've thought a lot about this war, written about it, tried to explain it, but it's a great puzzle to me. My common sense says, "There was no reason for the war, no rationale. It was just robbery, theft." The way I was raised, we didn't say someone belongs to this or that ethnic group. Religion is a private matter.

Nurdzihana is a Muslim from Sarajevo, a city that prided itself on an extraordinary amalgam of cultures, with Mosques, Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches, and a synagogue sharing a few square blocks. It was chosen for this reason as the perfect setting for the 1984 Olympics. Her voice grows even quieter as she begins to speak of the savagery in her upscale, high-rise neighborhood near the airport built as the Olympic Village, which was all but demolished by Serbs in the early days of the violence (Bringa, 1996). She tries in vain to reconcile the barbarity with her highly cultured life. *The things I witnessed didn't have an ethnicity, or a religion. War is very primitive. I've seen brains blown out.*

The hardships and atrocities Nurdzihana witnessed were rampant in the eastern rural region of Gorazde, the hometown of Sabiha, who was living abroad as a foreign correspondent. She could hardly believe the news of violence breaking out back home. *People were not prepared for this war.* In fact, even

now Sabiha is not prepared. As she tries to sort through the categories of identity that surfaced during the war, she stumbles:

Especially Bosniaks, the people I belong to. Cal though I've always felt I was a Yugoslav, a Bosnian, a European and a citizen of the world. This war has damaged Bosniaks the Muslims a lot, but it hurt Serbs and Croats too. Well, they're not Serbs and Croats but Bosnians of a different religion. *Sabiha's own family is a case in point.* My brother is married to a Croat, my uncle, to an Austrian. My second husband was French. My daughter is married to an American, my aunt, to a Serb. One cousin is married to a Hungarian, another to an Italian. So who am I? There are seven nationalities in my family. What could be more beautiful? Bosnia has four religions and many ethnic groups. No one can convince me we can't live together, have tolerance towards each other, understand each other, and love each other. Who thinks of a meadow with only one flower? How boring. More flowers mean more colors, more smells, and more excitement. Bosnia is a country of so many flowers a mixture of oriental Europe and something else that comes from this soil.

The connection in Bosnia between ethnicity and religion adds further nuance. To speak of Croats does not indicate practicing Catholics. The same is true of Serbs (with a Serb Orthodox tradition) and Bosniaks (with an Islamic tradition). So was this a religious war, built on religious passion? Hardly. Yugoslavia was a communist country for 50 years, where religion was underplayed if not downright discouraged. The war in Bosnia was no more about religious faith than the Troubles in Northern Ireland were about the authority of the Pope although the exigencies of war drove some people toward religion, either for solace or for a group identity. If villagers were Muslim enough to be tortured and driven from their homes, they may have felt an increased identification with Islam.

War cries emanated from Belgrade politicians, and 10 years of inflammatory propaganda warned of the Turks (meaning Muslims) committing atrocities against Serb women and children. But such slogans were manipulated by power-grabbing nationalists and did not reflect contemporary reality. The temptation to develop a thesis of prayers devolving into war cries is repeatedly and resoundingly quashed by the women; religion did not guide most Bosnians in their decisions and actions. That being said, religious institutions took on a prominent position within the new nationalist movements throughout the Yugoslav republics, with priests appearing at pre-election rallies and often using (or abusing) religious ceremonies to advise their flock for whom to vote. Despite this, although they spoke extensively of religious differences, not one woman of the 26 interviewed named religious identity as a dividing element in Bosnian society. One home might have a crucifix on the wall, another a picture of a girl in a head scarf praying; but instead of credos, religion had its strongest manifestation as folk customs, many of which had roots in Slavic traditions transformed to fit contemporary religious practice.

In pre-war Bosnia, Sabiha reminds us:

No one ever forced anyone to go to a church or a mosque; every individual decided how much they would believe. My mother and grandmother didn't raise us to act differently to Serbs and Croats, or teach us they are our enemies just that they have their own religion, which we needed to respect. Our Koran accepts and acknowledges all religions that have Holy Scripture. We loved the differences among us. My friends came to my grandmother's during Ramadan [*a Muslim holiday period*] and participated in our religious traditions. We never asked questions about the religious base of each other's names, or whether a friend was dating a Muslim or a Croat.

For Sabiha, the mix of religions evoked much more than tolerance. Appreciation for diverse traditions was distilled in the sounds of faith.

When I was in Sarajevo at Christmas, although I was not Christian I went to church for Midnight Mass. Wherever I travel, I love to listen to a church organ or the bells. But to hear the voice of “muezzin” from the mosque at the same time that’s really something! It’s fantastic! You hear an echo as if it’s coming from the sky. I never understood why Serbs wanted to destroy mosques, because this is wonderful music for me, the muezzin’s voice asking people to pray and to respect God, nature, and each other. Who’s so crazy that they hate church bells? It’s priceless, spiritual food. You’ll never hear the organ and bells and crier together anywhere else. It’s uniquely Bosnia: that blend of sounds taught me to respect and embrace all religions. I thought people living next to each other and knowing all those cultures were so fortunate. That’s why I was crushed when the war started and one community attacked another. I thought we loved each other. I didn’t think we disrespected each other. I couldn’t understand how they hated.

Not only is the notion of a religious war impossible for Sabiha; she goes further to stake out a claim for Bosnians as the European paragon of tolerance:

It’s not true that Bosnians have always been fighting each other; we’ve known how to live together for centuries. When Jews were forced out of Spain, Bosnians took them in. The Sephardic language they brought with them still exists in Bosnia, and they still sing in the dialect, Ladino. I’ve been involved in many Jewish activities; they’re carrying their culture across generations. A rare copy of the Jewish Haggadah was kept in Sarajevo through the First World War, the Second World War, until today. It was saved by a Muslim man, who hid it from the Nazis.

Sabiha recounts how Jews inside and outside Bosnia extended support to Bosnians during the recent war through political, intellectual, and direct actions. Perhaps, she imagines, this was the result of Bosnians sheltering Jews during their expulsion from Spain or in the Nazi era. After all, *what goes around comes around*, she muses. *It may be that Bosnia is the only place where Muslims and Jews are working together towards peace and preserving culture. It’s not happening in the Middle East.* Then she adds with a smile: *Maybe we should go to Jerusalem: Bosnian Muslims and Jews to help them out.*

It is puzzling to try to reconcile tales of cross-ethnic cruelty with customs grounded in diversity. As in the United States, where lynching was contemporaneous with jazz clubs, polarities of social tolerance coexisted in Bosnia. American society has not seen integration among Blacks, Hispanics, Asians, and Whites comparable to the Bosnian mix across ethnic lines; the same woman might move from talking about how Croats did this, or Muslims thought that, to emotional stories with which they asserted the unity among people from different religious traditions. As an example, Biljana, a Muslim now converted to Judaism and living in Colorado, describes her childhood: *I was born “Sabiha,” but when I was about two, my sister began to call me “Biljana,” just because she liked the sound. Soon everyone, including my mother, picked it up. Nobody cared that I was Muslim with a Serb name.*

The same theme comes through in her description of herself as a schoolgirl struggling with Latin and math. *The theological seminary for students preparing for the Catholic priesthood was close to my school. That’s where I went as a young woman for free tutoring, and no questions about my religion were asked.* A priest-in-training, Metodje, was assigned by his professor to be her tutor; he came home for meals with Biljana’s Muslim family, since he was from a small, distant village. Biljana lights up when she describes *his round face, tiny round glasses. I loved his gentleness.* When it was time for Metodje to leave for his parish assignment in Germany, Biljana’s entire family escorted him to the train station, *because he’d adopted us or we’d adopted him.* The tutoring had ended, but Metodje was part of the family. His leaving was an emotional occasion for all.

Metodje was a big influence in my life. I asked him one time how could he exist in a communist state with such a strong belief in God. (I was

really nowhere, because I was not committed to God, and I was not committed to communism; I was just having a good time, I guess.) He told me, "What's most important is that I respect you as a person, who you are, what your beliefs are. As for this communist state, I expect them to feel the same way about me. So, if they believe there is no God, that's their own choice. I'll respect it, but I won't believe it." He appeared to be comfortable with that arrangement, very much at peace with it.

Biljana credits her mentor with teaching her tolerance not only of atheism, but also of other faiths. The tolerance, she insists, was not based on ignorance. Everyone knew everyone else's religious tradition, and even helped them celebrate the holidays. She says that although she knew everyone in her Sarajevo neighborhood, *I truly cannot tell you that I knew a communist, because the Communist Party forbade their members celebrating religious holidays. I don't remember any family in my neighborhood that didn't celebrate religious holidays.* In Biljana's family, that meant new clothes for Ramadan. But no other celebration compared with the Catholics. Although she did not attend the church service, Biljana would wait outside the homes of the Catholic girls, running up to walk with them to church, caught up in what she calls *infectious excitement*.

We were so proud of the young girls, in their white dresses, with white gloves and a little white cloth, like a hankie, on top of their heads. We walked alongside them, holding their hands-so proud that they were celebrating their First Communion. *She has a Serb Orthodox version of the story as well:* My neighbor would fill my little skirt with colored eggs. Eggs were a rarity, unless you had your own chickens. I walked home with a whole skirt-full! We were happier than the people celebrating Easter!

The notion that the Bosnian conflict was essentially an age-old religious war becomes thinner and thinner as Biljana compares other cultures with the Bosnia she knew as a child. Years before the conflict started, she would ask her American friends, "*Why do the Irish have problems? Where I grew up, all people were respected.*" And the United States? She is appalled by the zealotry of true believers. *In Colorado Springs, someone comes for a facial, looks up at me and asks "Do you have Jesus in your heart?" That would never have happened in Bosnia.*

The point is made more poignantly by Kada, from Srebrenica in eastern Bosnia. The town swelled from 12,000 to 40,000 as Muslims fled their farms ahead of encroaching Serb forces. Kada endured several years with no electricity or running water, braving landmines to search for food in the neglected fields. Despite the massacres of some 8000 Muslim boys and men, she speaks of the past without bitterness: *Why did they destroy mosques?* (Bosnian Serb forces razed all 16 mosques in Banja Luka, now the capital of the Republika Srpska, and destroyed another 207 Islamic structures in that Serb entity.) *Basically, if we believe in God, we believe the same way Orthodox and Muslims. Before the war, it wasn't like this. We didn't hate each other. We were simply all together, and we had mixed marriages. It made no difference if someone was Serb, Muslim, or any other group.*

"*Who cares about these categories anyway?*" Irma asks defiantly. As a young adolescent on summer break just before the war started, she remembers hearing about the conflict brewing in Slovenia. *They were talking about "Serbs," "Muslims," "Catholics," and "Croats," and I couldn't understand it. Then I started to recognize among my friends: this is Muslim, this is Serb, and this is Catholic. I'd never thought my friend's name wasn't Muslim or Croat or anything else. Who cares? And of course with mixed marriages, you have mixed names.* And now, after all she's been through, with 3 years of shelling and then life as a refugee, she has a simple request: *I just want to respect my friends who have another religion, and I want them to respect me, too. We're all just human.*

As a doctor who fled with her children just as the war was breaking out, Fahrija chafed at being on the outside of the need as her husband served as a member of the seven-member, multiethnic Bosnian presidency. A member of Albanian royalty, she insists that growing up in Yugoslavia meant having friends of different religions, both at home and at work. *Ethnic distinctions were never an issue, to me or my children.* She describes a project she undertook while a refugee in upstate New York.

I went to the hospitals and spoke to my colleagues, asking for donations of medicines. I told them that earlier, when I worked as a volunteer in a public hospital in America, I never cared whether a person was Black, Hispanic, or Irish. I helped everyone. Now my people needed help. All I asked for were samples of medicines you get from drug factories. I hadn't known what to do with them when I worked as a doctor in the U.S., but now my people needed them badly. You wouldn't believe how much we were able to collect. And one colleague wrote a check for \$10,000; others brought instruments and other medical supplies. Twice we collected several tons of aid for Bosnia. We paid for two doctors and four nurses to come to the U.S. to learn cardiac surgery and brought over children needing medical treatment that couldn't be provided in the war situation, making it possible for many, regardless of their religious or ethnic background, to have surgery on their eyes, arms, and legs—giving them another chance for a happy childhood.

Eventually, Fahrija managed to recruit 40 doctors to go to Sarajevo.

My husband made arrangements with our Ministry of Health, but the doctors ended up stranded outside Sarajevo with their large supply of medications and equipment, unable to enter the city because of the constant bombardment. They could have waited there for months, so I told them to give the equipment to the hospital in Zagreb, the capitol of Croatia, and come back even though at the time we were fighting the Croats. I just made sure the people in Zagreb didn't know I was behind it. I figured the medications weren't for politicians; they were for people who were victims of this madness, no matter what ethnic group they belonged to.

In our interviews, the women had as many such stories of cross-cultural experience as we had hours to spend. Each reinforces the other, adding to a compelling argument that for most everyday Bosnians—whether educated or not, rural or urban, Serb Orthodox, Catholic Croat, Muslim, or Jewish—life at both public and private levels was not built around differences. Mediha adds a sixth Muslim voice:

My best friend, with whom I shared a school desk for eight years, was Catholic, but I was as happy during Christmas as she was! I used to wait for her in front of the church when she sang in the choir. Our parents were also friends. She always used to come to my house; you couldn't pull us apart. *Mediha becomes reflective.* Difference shouldn't be a source of conflict, just of richness. After all, the thinking of others can't make you poorer; it only lets you see problems differently. There's no reason for people not to be able to coexist even under the same roof. My mother had three children. We're totally different, but that doesn't mean we love each other less.

Although she is a political figure, Mediha's only child has joined a different political party, with his mother's blessings.

I fully respect his political stands, as well as his views of life, love, and science. I love him more for our differences. I learn from him because he has his own vision, and we can augment and enrich each other.

Mediha is facile at applying personal lessons to professional situations, and vice versa:

As an orthodontist, over the years I've looked at thousands of children's mouths, and I haven't seen two the same. That doesn't mean

this mouth isn't pretty, or that smile isn't beautiful. The difference is part of the beauty. *From the dental chair to the halls of parliament*: I'm convinced people can find a mutual language for every issue. That's how I approach my political work. I'm sure we'll rebuild and find a way to live together, as we always did. I can't remember feeling negative towards anyone because he or she was 'this' or 'that.' I approach people based on their way of thinking. If I can accept it, I build a friendship with those people; if not, I move away. But I would never consider destroying that person. I'm certain the majority of people think the same way.

She ends with a touch of comedy. Just before the war broke out, the father of one of her close friends died. She went to the funeral service, which was being held at a local cemetery. The cemetery had a large plaza, surrounded by seven chapels: for Jewish, Orthodox, Catholic, atheist, Protestant, Adventist, and Islamic services. Mediha stood, in a respectful pose, at the back of the crowd gathered in the Orthodox chapel as the funeral went on and on. Finally, someone from another chapel saw her and came over to tell her that she had been at the wrong service. In all the years they'd been friends, she had not realized he was a Catholic. *You see, in Bosnia, religion just didn't matter.*

The appreciation of multiple cultures did not flow only from Muslim women outward. The final three women in this section are not Muslim, but Jewish, Serb Orthodox, and Croat Catholic, each reflecting on personal experiences with the Bosnian Muslim community. While the story of the first, Greta, is dramatically linked to World War II, she is unwilling to conclude that war is somehow symptomatic of the Balkans. At twenty, Greta was deported to Auschwitz in 1944. Although the end of the war was anticipated, she lived at the edge of death.

At first the camp was crowded, with hundreds of thousands from Hungary, Greece, Egypt. Then they transported most people by rail to other camps, like Bergen-Belsen. The train had open wagons in January. A lot of people died en route. When winter started, we were only several thousand left in the camp. I had a good friend; she died from cold. I didn't even know D-Day had happened. Then one morning, they told everybody who could walk to come forward, because the camp was to be evacuated and burned. The gas chambers and crematorium had already been destroyed because the Nazis didn't want people to know they had existed. I went to the "hospital," which took some courage; if you said, "I'm sick," you never knew where you'd end up. I simply had no strength. To everyone who could walk, they gave a blanket and loaf of bread. I said to the girls with me, "You know, if they burn this place, at least it will be warm. If you leave, you'll be cold." They didn't even have time to set the camp on fire, because the Russians came in about two hours.

Greta made her way back to Yugoslavia, one of a tiny proportion of Jews to have lived through the deportation to camps. At home, she found herself in a quandary when it was time to get an identity card. *Even though Israel did not yet exist, I said, "My nationality is Jewish." Later on, Yugoslav identity cards had no nationality, which is another way of saying we could not imagine something like this war.* In that fluent move between her reminiscences and the present, Greta juxtaposes the improbability of both wars.

After 60 years, I still can't explain World War II, because we did not feel animosity among us. Returning from the concentration camp, I went to Belgrade to study. There was no hostility among people. In '52 I came to Sarajevo, an entirely different surrounding, because I'd never lived around Muslims. Even the Jews are different in Sarajevo: I'm Ashkenazi, and they're Sephardic. But in all this time, I've never felt any difficulties, any difference. I speak a dialect, but nobody has said,

“Why do you talk like that?” Yugoslavia was a solid political state. For 50 years, I experienced no trace of nationalism.

That sentiment is echoed by Karolina, who begins with a declaration that

Sarajevo has always been “multi” in every way. I married a Muslim from an old family. The house in which I live is hundreds of years old, and I entered as a young Catholic girl. According to my husband’s family’s tradition, they would slaughter a sheep for celebrations, but we also had Christmas trees. I bought eggs for coloring, because I wanted my children to know my customs and my religion. When my husband died, I buried him according to Muslim customs; that was his life and origin. But I made sure our children knew both religious traditions, and then the choice was theirs. My son wanted to be a Muslim; he wanted to continue where his father left off. That’s how he feels, and I respect that. If I go to the cathedral, that’s my choice.

Karolina lives in the part of Sarajevo that is steeped in Islamic culture. *During the war, we shared a basement shelter. Across the street from me there was a highly respected Muslim man. Somebody from an Iranian organization visited him* (Turkovic, 1996). Western political leaders were concerned that the hardships of war would give Iranian extremists, operating under cover of humanitarian missions, a foothold in Bosnia, and, therefore, Europe. That fear was not strong enough, of course, to make them intervene to stop the war in the first several years. Ironically, abandoning the Bosnian Muslims could have led to the very extremism (out of despair) that the West feared (Turkovic, 1996, p. 91).

They were writing down names of people to be given food in the afternoon. He put my name on the list saying, “You’re part of our family. You mustn’t be hungry. When we eat, you have to eat with us, even though you’re not Muslim.” Of course the organization took my name off the list. I didn’t belong to Muslims or Catholics, so I didn’t get anything from their organizations. But my neighbors didn’t forget me. While the war was going on, my daughter got married, then had a baby. It’s the custom here that when you give birth, people bring presents. My next-door neighbor came in the afternoon. He’s from an old Sarajevan family. He was in his mid-fifties, too old to be drafted into the army, but he was active in the local community. He called me “Lina Hanuma,” (using the Muslim title for the lady of the house) and said, “I can’t buy anything, but every day at six o’clock, I’ll bring 25 liters of water for the baby.”

The neighbor had difficulty walking because of problems with both hips; Karolina’s home was on a steep hill.

It was really far for him. He had to go down, cross the river, fetch water and come back up the hill. It took more than an hour, but he would bring that water for my granddaughter every day, until he was killed when the market was shelled.

And finally, Rada, a professional documentary maker from a Serb Orthodox family, has memories reaching back to childhood with her best friend, Kika, the younger daughter of the Muslim family next door.

We were always at each other’s house, and she has remained my friend all my life. When she and her husband were expelled from Pale [*the Bosnian Serb stronghold just outside Sarajevo*], my mother and brother took them into our home. It was an awful risk for my brother. It could

have meant death, because our house was surrounded by the strongest Serb extremists.

I developed a love for Islamic culture and tradition in Kika's house. Silk runs in my veins. That something silky in her veins is the Islamic–Oriental influence on Bosnian life whether rural or urban. In the home, guests were invited to make themselves comfortable and enjoy their coffee with dignity, while others tended to the water pipe (Heuberger, p. 13).

In my mother's house, coffee was always gulped down, then everybody left. But I'd go to Kika's home. Her mother made coffee and served it on beautiful copper trays. We'd sit for hours on the "sinija" the settee that goes all the way around the walls and drink that coffee. Kika's family never said things like, "Don't lean against that starched cushion." The setting was always warm and quiet, typical of Muslim homes, where life was slow and peaceful, like the local saying, "No worry, no hurry." In those houses there were rooms upstairs called "chardaks," with high windows so there's a view all around. When I had my own flat, my house was full of all that oriental furniture, as well as copper plates, prayer beads, and other typical Muslim things.

Before the war, different ethnic groups coexisted. Especially in the rural areas, people knew who was Serb, Croat, or Muslim. But it was just for identification purposes; the ethnic differences didn't affect our living together. There was an extraordinary amount of respect for one another. Sure, the most important thing was that a Serb girl did not marry a Muslim boy, or a Croat man. But the young did marry whomever they wanted, the world survived, and everybody was happy later and accepted it.

It's true, as a Serb staying in Sarajevo, people sometimes called me names. I could somehow understand. People who were suffering so terribly had to express at least a bit of resistance. Apart from the Serbs, there was nobody toward whom they could direct that feeling. I didn't let it touch me or offend me.

I was doing a documentary story. It was 1993, a spring of hunger. I went to a neighborhood at the edge of Sarajevo where all the houses had been destroyed. The people were mainly Muslims; now they were living underground, in holes they had dug only 200 meters away from the front line. It was a dangerous place, with bitter people who didn't want to set eyes on a Serb. We were a symbol of evil, of crime, and all the horrible things that had happened.

I understand people especially country folk so I was ready for what was ahead of me. The first five minutes were always crucial. Often, people didn't want to shake hands when they heard my Serb name, "Radmila." They'd keep silent or just walk away. I was met by a group of people in the street. Among them was a 70-year-old man, wearing an old, shabby, but clean suit. He stared at me. Then he shook my hand and said, "When you've finished, please come visit me. They call me 'Hadjija.' Where do you come from?" I should have said "Sarajevo." I wanted to. But then I thought twice and imagined someone might tell him otherwise, so I said, "I am from Pale" [the Bosnian Serb headquarters]. *He said "No problem! You're mine."*

The cameraman and I completed our assignment then went to see him. He was highly respected; despite his age he had joined the army with his son, to try to defend their community. Now he was living in a space he had dug under his house, which had been burned. He had even managed to run a phone line into that hole! When we arrived, he had a fire going. It was Ramadan, when no Muslim eats during the day, but his wife had made big plates of pita and sauerkraut. Sauerkraut! It was unimaginable at that time! My God, that aroma! And the beauty of the place! It has stayed in my soul. It was difficult; I was the only one eating. He asked me, "How do you manage? Do you have a family?" I told him, "have two children and a husband. Nobody is earning money." I was being honest; we didn't have any money for five years. Then he said, "why didn't you say so? I have plenty of flour!" I told Hadjija, "can't take anything." The old man worked in his garden every night, with his wife. They had managed to grow onions and potatoes. They wanted to pack something for me to bring home. There was nothing in town not even salt not even bread only hunger; but I left empty-handed. I didn't want to take anything from him.

I broadcast this story on the radio. I polished it, as a work of art, with all my love. He heard it, and then he called me, saying we had to meet the next day. He told me to wait outside the studio. He had no transportation, of course, and it was a long way. He got up at five that morning to walk two-and-a-half hours. I was waiting for him outside the building. He was carrying a rucksack on his back. He was a small man, and the heavy load dug into his shoulders. He told me to take the rucksack. When I opened it at home, it was full of potatoes, beets, onions, sauerkraut, and smoked plums. Then I found, in a pocket, something more: a box of cigarettes! Cigarettes were only a dream during that time. That was unimaginable! And in the packet of cigarettes was a piece of paper, wrapped around some money. A few Deutsch marks. The note read: "Radmila, this is from Allah. Don't be offended."

I didn't cry even when my father died. But at that moment, I could have cried from happiness. We're still friends. I visit his home as if I'm his own child. I'm part of his family. That feeling has kept me going.

CONCLUSION

Many think of women in Bosnia as victims, focusing particularly on the systemic rape of tens of thousands women during the war; but the 12 Muslim women who speak in the prior pages are full of ideas, energy, and determination to restore their country (Infoteka, 1999; Stiglmayer, 1994). They are smart and savvy, a remarkably good bet for outsiders looking for inside partners to move an agenda for stabilization. The women's expertise spans commercial enterprise, journalism, political office, humanitarian initiatives, and beyond. Their aptitude is backed by attitude. Such women are the bearers of hope that prevails on a personal level, and therefore on political levels as well, with officials like Mediha insisting that *in the end, good will prevail*. Nationalists may lead their people into disaster, pilfering precious resources, sacrificing lives, and squandering opportunities. We outsiders may compound the madness with our misconceptions, conflicting agendas, and dawdling foreign policy. But at the ground level, where hope meets history, Mediha understands, and she reminds us: *Life goes on and life wins*.

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