Fostering of Civil Society by Muslim Women’s NGOs in Bosnia and Herzegovina

MUHIDIN MULALIC

Abstract

Fostering of civil society is vital in multiethnic, multicultural, multi-religious and post-conflict societies such as that of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Therefore, this paper examines the role of Muslim women’s non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in fostering of civil society in Bosnia-Herzegovina. In this regard, this paper puts in the perspective present role of Muslim women’s NGOs by providing the theoretical background and a survey of NGOs in Bosnia-Herzegovina. In order to determine the role and function of Muslim women’s NGOs, the author examines main criteria of civil society functions such as control of political power, monitoring of political participation and elections, promoting of anti-corruption awareness, advocating values of human rights, tolerance and understanding, offering civic training, promoting civic education and public issues through media, and promoting conflict resolution and interfaith dialogue. By analyzing civil society functions, this paper answers a question of Muslim women’s NGOs involvement in socio-political aspects of a democratic state and fostering of civil society in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The author uses ethnographic methodology, written sources and interviews in analyzing two leading Muslim Women’s NGOs such as Nahla Education Center for Women and Kewser-Zehra Association of Muslim Women. The results of this paper indicate that although Muslim women’s NGOs in theory do not emphasize on several civil society actors, especially those of political and legal nature, they are significantly involved throughout their various activities in socio-political aspects of the democratic state and as such they have contributed significantly toward fostering of civil society in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Introduction

This paper introduces readers to the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in democracy and civil society building in Bosnia-Herzegovina. However, special emphasis is placed on the challenges and prospects of Muslim women’s NGOs and their possible contributions toward the emergence of socio-political aspects of a democratic state in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Therefore, the emergence and flourishing of NGOs have been particularly popular in Bosnia-Herzegovina and, as well as, in other emerging democratic states worldwide. This is especially the case with post-conflict states that are in the process of conflict resolution, peace-building and state-building, a process Bosnia-Herzegovina has been going through since signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement. Bosnia-Herzegovina has a long tradition of multicultural, multiethnic and multi-religious coexistence; and civil society values are deeply rooted in its history, culture and religion. Being at the crossroads of the oriental and occidental worlds and due to spreading of different cultures, civilizations and religions, Bosnia-Herzegovina reflects
diverse socio-political values. 1 The turbulent past historical experiences of Bosnia-Herzegovina also indicate that states, cultures, civilizations and religions, respectively, clash, meet and coexist; a process that is inevitable for historical progress and dynamism. 2 Therefore, it is significant to analyze recent notions and understanding of historicity of Bosnia-Herzegovina, the functioning of NGO sector and fostering of the civil society. There are numerous studies on the role of NGOs in Bosnia-Herzegovina, however very few studies have been devoted to the role of Muslim women’s NGOs in fostering of civil society. Besides, such exclusive studies have considered only religious, welfare and humanitarian role of Muslim women’s NGOs whereby their possible socio-political involvement in the democratic state has often been overlooked.

Methodology

Apart from clearly mentioned research objectives in the abstract, this paper aims to present the role of NGOs in Bosnia-Herzegovina toward the process of transition, democratization and normalization. An attempt has been made to remove widely spread war pictures that are often associated with Bosnia-Herzegovina and to put in the perspective of a multicultural civil society and positive role of NGOs in the final process of civil society building. Besides, the very notion of women’s NGOs and associations is a rather recent phenomenon throughout the Muslim world, especially in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Therefore, this pioneering paper attempts to articulate the significance of Muslim women’s active and organizational role in socio-political aspects of the democratic state. In order to put in the perspective of the main scope of the research, this paper also introduces readers to the role of NGOs in post-conflict states and describes objectives of two leading Muslim women’s NGOs in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

This paper is based on ethnographic methodology, written sources, interviews and direct observation of the local Muslim women’s NGOs. An attempt has been made to tackle key questions that would indicate Muslim women’s socio-political involvement in the democratic state. These questions, for instance, include: What are the similarities and differences between Muslim women’s NGOs, being “Islamic” and other NGOs, being “civil or secular”? To what extent Muslim women’s NGOs have been involved in analyzing, criticizing and opposing views and policies of political powers? In what ways and to what extent have Muslim women’s NGOs been involved in political participation and election campaigns? Had Muslim women’s NGOs been involved in interfaith dialogue and fostering of tolerance and understanding? Had Muslim women’s NGOs been involved in the promotion of civic education, human rights and civic training? Do Muslim women’s NGOs offer to the public trainings, workshops, seminars and conferences that could eventually contribute toward civil society building? 3

The Role of NGOs in Post-conflict States

From the mid-nineteenth century, the NGOs have been successfully operating and the term itself began to be used more frequently with successful establishment of the United Nations (UN), a period that indeed reflected the need of NGOs in fostering of the civil society. Since then NGOs, as independent societal organizations, began first focusing on assistance and social care services in terms of the distribution of food, shelter and medical assistance. In the following decades, due to various needs, NGOs expanded their scope from mere assistance to the capacity building in terms of education and training. In the past decade or so due to democratization process, NGOs promote
political and institutional changes and development at local, national and international levels. Therefore, globalization and democratization have contributed to the growing importance of NGOs worldwide and, as a result, the conception of the civil society was also popularized.

The above historical development of NGOs was presented in order to introduce readers to the development of NGOs in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Since beginning of the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, socialist structured NGOs sector began to change and transform rapidly. It is significant to mention that when the Yugoslav crisis emerged, the socialist civil society was unable to counter spreading of nationalism that was one of the major causes that contributed toward conflicts in the early 1990s. Newly established NGOs in Bosnia-Herzegovina with the assistance of the international organizations and actors in 1990s were emphasizing mostly on humanitarian assistance and social care services. However after signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement, NGOs began to play a significant role in the peace-building, postwar trauma and the reintegration of the country. Nowadays, NGOs take an active role in the monitoring of political leadership, political participation and elections, advocating anti-corruption awareness, values of tolerance and understanding, civic education and human rights, and promoting of public issues. Certainly, any postwar country, including Bosnia-Herzegovina, goes through three phases of development, namely: peace-building and elections, state-building and civil society building.

NGOs played a positive role in bridging the deeply divided ethnic groups, namely: Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs. For instance, prior to the beginning of war on 5 April 1992, NGOs organized peace demonstrations that were aimed at preventing the war; however, Serb paramilitary units fired on the protesters. Then, NGOs and civil society played a significant role in the final settlement in Dayton in 1995. Even after the war, quite many NGOs attempted to keep multiethnicity alive such as Circle 99, Young Bridge, Sezam, the Citizens’ Alternative Parliament and Tuzla Citizens’ Forum. Actually, such activities of local NGOs were supported by the UN and international organizations because they were not only significant for the development of a democratic culture of tolerance, moderation and compromise but they inevitably contributed toward the democratization process in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

NGOs in Post-1990s Bosnia-Herzegovina

Since the 1990s, NGOs in Bosnia-Herzegovina were heavily dependent on the international donors. Newly established NGOs were overemphasizing new western models in terms of organization, structure and scope. The role of NGOs that existed in Bosnia-Herzegovina before the war was entirely neglected. As a result, local NGOs were involved in staff training and development of projects that had very little connection with local social, economic and political realities. Quite often certain NGOs were accused of emphasizing more on international projects and demands of donors than on the demands of civil society. Priorities were determined by donors who were mostly applying their western perceptions without considering local conditions. International donors also conditioned local NGOs to integrate multiethnic representation, gender and activities within the scope of their organizations. As mentioned in the above, civil society was promoted by international donors as a path toward democratization and the establishment of a unified multiethnic and multicultural state of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

A period from 1990s saw excessive emergence of nationalism all over the Balkans and especially in Bosnia-Herzegovina where different ethnic communities for centuries were
living side-by-side. Yugoslavian “brotherhood and unity” and socialist political culture were replaced by ethno-nationalistic ideologies. Therefore, the early phase of the establishment of NGOs was characterized by ethno-nationalistic outlook of NGOs. Nowadays certain NGOs are also emphasizing “ethno-nationalism” that is further dividing and destabilizing the country. Such NGOs are often supported by ethno-nationalist political leaders whose nationalistic rhetoric and obstructionist attitude remain to be a serious problem for civil society state-building that foster multiculturalism and coexistence of different ethnic groups in Bosnia-Herzegovina.\(^{13}\) In fact excessive ethno-nationalism was a major obstacle for the consolidation of democracy in post-communist countries transition such as that of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

With regard to women’s organizations in Bosnia-Herzegovina, they have been in particular active in the protection function during and after the war. NGOs such as Women to Women, La Strada, the International Forum of Solidarity, Lara, Medica Zenica and the Future were helping women’s victims by providing shelter, healthcare services, counseling and legal assistance. Besides, their activities have also been aimed at the establishment of a stable multiethnic state of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Women were the first to cross the ethnic boundaries and contributed to reconciliation of ethno-national groups.\(^{14}\) Besides, donors have especially targeted women for projects of ethnic reconciliation and the reestablishment of cross-ethnic communication. For instance, Medica Women’s Association and Women to Women NGOs were directly propagating “men make war, women make peace”.\(^{15}\)

In the past decade, secular women’s NGOs have transformed their activities from mere offering of social and humanitarian services to offering range of activities that are dealing with the economic position of women, advocacy of women’s political and public life, domestic violence and human trafficking, discrimination against women, gender equality and women’s health and reproductive rights. Nowadays secular women’s NGOs play significant role in the implementation of the Gender Action Plan of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

*Contribution of Muslim Women’s NGOs*

The war in Bosnia-Herzegovina and the subsequent process of democratization created profound social, political and economic changes. In this regard, the Muslim women NGOs contributed significantly toward the construction and the development of the civil society. Such progress would have been impossible without the pressure from NGO sector as government is less capable of tackling alone socio-political, legal and economic issues and challenges faced by the society at large.\(^{16}\)

Prior to the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Muslim women were largely excluded from the affairs of the civil society. Actually, their representation in the religious institutions and associations was also very much limited. A widely spread stereotype of “backwardness” of the Muslim women also contributed toward the inactive role of the Muslim women in the civil society. During the socialist era, an “ideal” and “modern” woman was presented as uncovered, urban, educated and visible in the public sphere. This was contrary to the perceptions about the traditional Muslim women that were often presented as covered, uneducated, rural and anti-modern.\(^{17}\) However, newly established Muslim women’s NGOs have significantly transformed the picture about the Muslim women as one being covered, educated and well positioned in the society. Nowadays, visible Muslim women, characterized by their dress code, take an active role in the society and they could be founded working in schools, universities, state institutions and private sector.\(^{18}\) In Bosnia-Herzegovina, there are several publically known and
popular Muslim women who are characterized by their Muslim dress code and one of them is Mrs Aida Begic, a Director of the film “Snijeg [Snow]” that won the 2008 Cannes Critics’ Week Grand Prize. This and similar examples contributed toward gradual changing of the perceptions about the Muslim women.

In Bosnia-Herzegovina, Muslim women who complete religious high school or madrasah and Faculty of Theology work in schools, kindergartens and religious schools as teachers. Besides, some of them also joined Muslim women’s NGOs and are involved in religious education and training. However, quite many of them, especially those covered are being discriminated not only in the state institutions and private sector but also partly in the institutions of the Islamic Community. In this regard, apart from Muslim women’s limited role in the institutions of the Islamic Community, it is significant to mention that the Islamic Community in Bosnia-Herzegovina supports activities of Muslim women’s NGOs. For instance, the Islamic Community supported Nahla Education Center for Women to get actively involved in institutionalizing counseling services in order to tackle violence in the Muslim family. Then, the Islamic Community also supports Kewser-Zehra Association of Muslim Women to organize a cultural and religious event known as “The Musk of the Prophet”.

**Donor Support for Muslim Women’s NGOs**

Being religious, Muslim women’s NGOs were not targeting Western donors. Besides, Western donors entirely neglected religious NGOs considering them as being exclusive and against multiethnic state of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Therefore, Muslim women NGOs were forced to seek support from Islamic donors. However, Islamic donors as Western ones have their own agendas in terms of allocating donated resources and, thus, the promotion of specific objectives through Muslim women’s NGOs. As a result, Muslim women’s NGOs attempt to develop ways of self-sustenance through NGO membership and offering of services for the public at minimal cost. It is significant to mention that very often different state ministries, such as Ministry of Civil Affairs, provide small financial support for state NGOs including for Muslim women’s NGOs.

In the past two decades, Muslim women’s revivalism in Bosnia-Herzegovina was not articulated as the emergence of Islamic feminism, as perceived in the historical context in the West, but as a need of positioning a woman within socio-political, legal and economic aspects of the society. Therefore, feminism in Bosnia-Herzegovina has been mostly perceived within the religion of Islam. Besides seeking the position for the Muslim women within the society, Muslim women’s NGOs, as based on the Holy Qur’an, do not differentiate man from women. Being influenced by secular notion of gender equality quite many Muslim women’s NGOs in the Muslim world make news with their liberal views that often do not have basis in the religion of Islam. However, Muslim women’s NGOs in Bosnia-Herzegovina have not been involved in religious controversial interpretation of the religion of Islam and, as a result, such NGOs have received acceptance and support by the wider circles of the community. Muslim women’s NGOs attempted to position themselves as being religious within state’s secular socio-political context as much as it is possible. Considering the fact that family is the basis of the society, most of Muslim women’s NGOs in Bosnia-Herzegovina put special emphasis on an individual identity, a woman and traditional family values. Muslim women’s NGOs are not foreign to Bosnia-Herzegovina as the first such organization “Osvitanje” was established in 1919 and its establishment was initiated by Muslim women intellectuals. This earliest NGO aimed at cultural and educational revival and
active role of the Muslim women in public life; integration of Muslim women in economic aspect of life, women’s employability and financial independence; preservation of moral and Islamic religious upbringing and education and emancipation and affirmation of women’s rights and values. However, nowadays among many others two most influential Muslim women’s NGOs are the Nahla Education Center for Women and Kewser-Zehra Association of Muslim Women.

Nahla Education Center for Women

In 2001, Nahla Education Center for Women was established to provide the space for Bosnian women in which she could feel safe and accepted and get a chance to learn, socialize, broaden and enrich her knowledge and acquire different skills needed to efficiently perform the job and actively participate in social life.

With regard to its mission “Nahla is a Bosnian non-governmental organization dedicated to improve quality of life and promote positive values in the society providing education and support for women and family.” Since its establishment Nahla has provided education services for hundreds of young girls and women regardless of their race, color, nationality or religion. In order to fulfill its main program goals, Nahla Education Center for Women is organized around well-established departments such as General Education Department, Religious Education Department, Women and Family Department, Culture Department, Life Skills Department Arts and Crafts Department, Sports, Health and Beauty Department and Research Department.

Considering unemployment rate, women’s professional skills and women’s financial dependence, Nahla Education Center for Women offers a number of training programs. Such training programs provide comprehensive training courses in an area of administrative works, business correspondence and communication, book-keeping and accountancy, computer skills and foreign language courses. Religious Education Department aims “to enhance spirituality of the faith, and to promote dialogue between cultures and religions”. Therefore, in order to improve community’s very limited knowledge about the religion of Islam, this department offers courses and lectures on the teaching of Islam, exegesis, traditions, scriptural recitation and interreligious meetings.

The Women and Family Department aims “to contribute to women’s personality and harmonization of marital and family relations, in cooperation with experts and specialized institutions”. Therefore, this department offers individual and family counseling and seminars and workshops on parenting. Cultural Department aim is “fostering of the Bosnian culture, and establishment of different cultural institutions in Bosnia-Herzegovina and the world”. Some of the cultural events include Remembrance Day that marks Srebrenica genocide, exhibitions, book promotion and thematic evenings. Life Skills Department aims “to encourage women to develop skills needed in business and everyday life”. This department offers seminars and workshops on motivation, time management, stress management, presentation skills, communication, teamwork and marketing.

The Arts and Crafts Department is closely associated with the former department as it enables women to improve certain skills such as painting, calligraphy, jewelry making and sewing. Sports, Health and Beauty Department enhance psychological and physical fitness of the women through providing sports and beautification services such as aerobics, fitness, pedicure, aromatherapy, massage and sauna. Finally, Research Department aims to tackle socio-political and legal issues especially related to women.
The priority of this department is research and public advocacy that is focusing on women and family issues. As mentioned by its founder and the Director, Mrs Senija Dedic, on daily basis 150–180 people seek assistance from Nahla Education Center, which signifies degree of activities of this NGO. Nahla is also extensively involved in working together with other organizations in fulfilling its objectives.

Kewser-Zehra Association of Muslim Women

This Muslim women’s organization derived its name from the Arabic term “kewser”, which means spring. This organization was founded in 1994 during the war and its name, therefore, signifies a struggle for survival of the Bosnian people during very critical point of time in their history. The main aim of this NGO is to “help women and children in the field of education and growing up in the spirit of the Islamic faith and culture”. Kewser-Zehra Association of Muslim Women is involved in the publication of a bimonthly magazine Zehra, which derives inspiration from an ideal Muslim woman Fatime ez-Zehre, the daughter of the Prophet, a mother, a missionary of Islam, an activist, a supporter of the Prophet and of her husband Ali. Thus, this magazine attempts to portray accomplished modern Bosnian Muslim women.

In this regard, Zehra magazine deals with current topics, such as successful Muslim women, women and professional careers, family interviews, past Muslim women heroes and social–psychological aspects of life related to women in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Also, the Kewser-Zehra Association casts TV program named TV Zehra that is broadcast on 12 different channels in Bosnia-Herzegovina and 2 channels abroad. Radio Zehra that is casted two times a week on Radio Bir of the Islamic Community is also work of Kewser-Zehra Association of Muslim Women. This NGO also organizes seminars, roundtable discussions and lectures on various topics. Finally, each year Kewser-Zehra Association of Muslim Women organizes a cultural and religious event known as “The Musk of the Prophet”, to mark the birth of Hazrat Fatimah.

Muslim Women’s NGOs and Socio-political Aspects of a Democratic State

The above brief survey demonstrates the very active role of Muslim women’s NGOs. However, to what extent Muslim women’s NGOs have been involved in socio-political aspects of a democratic state and, thus, the fostering of civil society? This question will be elaborated further through examining the key functions of civil society organizations such as control of political power, political participation and elections, anti-corruption awareness, values of tolerance and understanding, civic education and human rights, civic training, promotion of public issues through the media, conflict resolution and interfaith dialogue.

NGOs should play a vital role in the process of monitoring the exercise of political power. In this regard, NGOs have been extensively involved in analyzing, criticizing and opposing views and policies of political powers that are directly involved in governing the state of Bosnia-Herzegovina. With regard to the Muslim women’s NGOs, monitoring of the political power, political participation, corruption and election campaign in Bosnia-Herzegovina are mostly excluded from the scope of their activities. Besides, even when religious political issues, gender and family issues are being publicly debated, the Muslim women’s NGOs often do not participate in the process of public debates and lobbying of political actors.
The Director of Nahla Education Center for Women, Mrs Sehija Dedovic, holds that Muslim women’s NGOs should take an active role in lobbying with state actors in order to adopt law on gender equality, law that regulates maternity, labor rights of women, domestic violence and family issues.34 Besides, Nahla Education Center for Women took an active role in the implementation of Gender Action Plan BiH (FIGAP). In 2010, considering the fact that significant numbers of women are still not aware of their rights and responsibilities, Kewser-Zehra Association of Muslim Women organized a seminar on the topic “Activism and Women”. Some of the themes of the seminar even included “Political Lobbying and Active Participation in the Political Parties”.

Kewser-Zehra Association also covers political developments in the Muslim world, especially that in Palestine. Titles on this NGO website such as “Our Freedom is Incomplete without Palestinian Freedom”; “Stolen and Occupied Land”; “Arab World: Revolutions or Counterrevolutions” and “US and Developments in the Arab World” indicate that this NGO takes an active role in promoting political agendas. Perhaps, international Islamic donors played a significant role in the appearance of such political agendas that are articulated also throughout this NGO’s magazine, radio and TV programs and cultural events.

Fostering Tolerance and Understanding

Obviously the role of civil society is to promote tolerance, moderation, compromise and respect for opposing views. Muslim women’s NGOs have been directly involved in fostering tolerance and understanding in Bosnia-Herzegovina. In this regard, Nahla Education Center for Women has been extensively involved in organizing lectures, workshops and seminars on interreligious dialogue.35 In 2009, Nahla Education Center organized seminar entitled “Interfaith Educational Meetings in Nahla”. Then, in 2010 TPO Foundation and Nahla Education Center for Women organized workshop on the topic “Violence Doesn’t Belong to Religion: Perspectives of Monotheistic Religions”.36 Thus, Muslim women’s NGOs frequently play the role of mediating and resolving conflicts by providing programs, trainings, debates, seminars and workshops aimed at resolving the socio-political differences among major ethnic groups in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Promotion of Civic Education

The promotion of civic education, protection of citizens against violence and advocacy of human rights is another aspect of activity where NGOs could play significant role. Through their activities, Nahla Education Center for Women and Kewser-Zehra Association of Muslim Women have been extensively involved the promotion, protection and advocacy roles. For instance, one of the program goals of Nahla Education Center for Women is “to be a shelter for all women who need help, counsel or just warmhearted welcome and friendly environment”. This NGO organizes professional counseling on various topics that deal with discrimination and family violence. In 2011, Nahla Education Center for Women began a research about the role of fathers in the raising of children entitled “Asserting the Role of the Fathers in Preventing Domestic Violence”.37 To cover these issues the Kewser-Zehra Association of Muslim Women frequently organizes seminars in the field of journalism and media.38

Civic training is another role of civil society organizations. In this regard, both Muslim women’s NGOs significantly emphasize on practically helping Muslim women to acquire
various skills. Such short courses, workshops, seminars and conferences enable women to improve their skills in, for instance, management, business communication, marketing, fine arts and painting, jewelry making and sewing.

Fostering of Civil Society

In spite of significant involvement of Muslim women’s NGOs in socio-political aspects of the democratic state and, thus, in their fostering of civil society in Bosnia-Herzegovina, there are widespread views that Muslim women’s NGOs are not active in fostering civil society. For instance, as Helms indicated “Terms like ‘civil society’, ‘gender’, ‘project proposal’, ‘networking’, etc. were conspicuously absent from these [Muslim women’s NGOs] organizations’ written and spoken rhetoric”.

Similar view is held by Zilka Spahić-Šiljak who declares:

Such organizations are, therefore, generally not visible in the public arena in the processes of lobbying and advocacy, nor in the demonstration of those principles to which they are dedicated. To give an example, such religious organizations were not seen to participate in the preparation and lobbying for the Law on Gender Equality of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Law on Protection from Domestic Violence, or other laws, as were numerous of the secular organizations, without whose participation and advocacy such laws would still today not have been adopted.

Being Muslim women’s NGOs it is obvious that such NGOs operate within the Islamic framework and are involved excessively in religiously colored activities that are often, in turn, socio-political and civic in nature. Therefore, the above-mentioned activities point to significant involvement of Muslim women’s NGOs in socio-political aspects of the democratic state and, thus, in fostering of civil society. This is contrary to an exclusive view that Muslim women’s NGOs were not at all involved in socio-political aspects of the democratic state and, as such, do not foster civil society in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Conclusion

This paper demonstrates that Muslim women’s NGOs in Bosnia-Herzegovina focus on gender-related issues within traditional Islamic context. Their main objective is to enable Muslim women to play an active and an autonomous role in society. Nevertheless, apart from emphasizing on Islamic identity and family role of the Muslim women, Muslim women’s NGOs in Bosnia-Herzegovina have contributed significantly toward civil society building. Indeed Muslim women’s NGOs do not directly articulate their socio-political contributions toward development of a democratic state and their fostering of the civil society. Socio-political notions are also excluded from mission statements, aims and objectives of the Muslim women’s NGOs. Besides, very often it appears that their activities, though being socio-political and civic in nature, are simply presented as religious and humanitarian. However, the role and functions of these NGOs clearly indicate socio-political involvement of Muslim women. Therefore, by operating within the secular context and through their active role in society the Muslim women’s NGOs contribute significantly toward civil society building in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

However, and in the long run, Muslim women’s NGOs are likely to undergo significant transformation from mere emphasis on religious and humanitarian activities to greater involvement in socio-political aspects of the democratic state. In fact, there is a need
on their part to articulate socio-political aspects because, in effect, many activities of Muslim women’s NGOs are already socio-political in nature. Therefore, as Muslim women’s NGOs operate within secular framework, there is room for articulating socio-political aspects of life without violating main principles of the religion of Islam. Such paradigm shift would inevitably bring to the forefront the socio-political concerns as well as contributions of Muslim women to civil society in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

NOTES

1. Robert J. Donia and John V. A. Fine, *Bosnia and Herzegovina: A Tradition Betrayed*, London: Hurst and Company, 1994, p. 86.

2. See socio-political, religious and cultural aspects of Bosnia-Herzegovina history in Muhidin Mulalić, “Multiculturalism and EU Enlargement: The Case of Turkey and Bosnia-Herzegovina”, in *The Islamic World and the West: Managing Religious and Cultural Identities in the Age of Globalisation*, ed. Christoph Marcinkowski, Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2009, pp. 109–126; Rusmir Mahmutečajević, *Bosnia the Good: Tolerance and Tradition*, Budapest: Central European University Press, 2000, pp. 183–190; Mustafa Imamovic, *Bosnia and Herzegovina: Evolution of Its Political and Legal Institutions*, Sarajevo: Magistrat, 2006, pp. 44–48; Mitija Velikonja, *Religious Separation and Political Intolerance in Bosnia and Herzegovina*, Austin, TX: Texas University Press, 2003, p. 19 and Malcom Noel, *Bosnia, A Short History*, London: Macmillan, 1994, pp. 27–42.

3. See key civil society functions in Ismet Sejfija, “From the ‘Civil Sector’ to Civil Society?”, in *Peace-Building and Civil Society in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Ten Years after Dayton*, ed. Martina Fischer, Münster: Lit-Verlag, 2006, p. 126.

4. See historical development and definitions of NGOs in John Boli and George M. Thomas, “World Culture in the World Polity: A Century of International Non-governmental Organization”, *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 62, No. 2, 1997, pp. 171–190 and Kerstin Martens, “Mission Impossible? Defining Nongovernmental Organizations”, *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, Vol. 13, No. 3, 2002, pp. 271–285.

5. See Sejfija, “From the ‘Civil Sector’ to Civil Society?”, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

6. Bob Deacon and Paul Stubbs, “International Actors and Social Policy Development in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Globalism and the New Feudalism”, *Journal of European Social Policy*, Vol. 2, No. 2, 1998, pp. 99–115.

7. Roberto Belloni, “Bosnia-Herzegovina: Civil Society in a Semi-protectorate”, in *Civil Society and Peacebuilding: A Critical Assessment*, ed. Thania Paffenholz, Boulder, CO: Lynne Riener Publishers, 2010, pp. 129–153.

8. See Roberto Belloni, “Civil Society and Peacebuilding in Bosnia and Herzegovina”, *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 38, No. 2, 2010, pp. 163–180.

9. See more details on two approaches, top-down and bottom-up peace and state-building, in David Chandler, “Democratization in Bosnia: The Limits of Civil Society Building Strategies”, *Democratization*, Vol. 5, No. 4, 1998, pp. 1–20.

10. Bruce Hemmer, “The Democratization of Peacebuilding: Democratic Exposure and Externally Democratic Ideology of Peacebuilding NGOs in Northern Ireland and Bosnia”, in *Pushing the Boundaries: New Frontiers in Conflict Resolution and Collaboration*, eds. Rachel Fleishman, Rosemary O’Leary, Catherine Gerard, Bingley: Emerald Press, 2008, pp. 71–111.

11. Sejfija, “From the ‘Civil Sector’ to Civil Society?”, *op. cit.*, pp. 134–136.

12. See influence of international donors on rise and development of NGOs in Bosnia-Herzegovina in Roberto Belloni, *State Building and International Intervention in Bosnia*, New York: Routledge, 2007, pp. 109–112.

13. Elissa Helms, “The Gender of Coffee: Women and Reconciliation Initiatives in Post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina”, *Focaal—Journal of Global and Historical Anthropology*, Vol. 57, Summer, 2010, pp. 17–32.

14. Elissa Helms, “Women as Agents of Ethnic Reconciliation? Women’s NGOs and International Intervention in Post-war Bosnia-Herzegovina”, *Women’s Studies International Forum*, Vol. 26, No. 1, 2003, pp. 15–33 and Elissa Helms, “The ‘Nation-ing’ of Gender? Donor Policies, Islam, and Women’s NGOs in Post-war Bosnia-Herzegovina”, *Anthropology of East Europe Review*, Vol. 21, No. 2, 2003, pp. 85–92.
15. Cynthia Cockburn, Rada Stakic-Domuz, and Meliha Hubic, *Women Organizing for Change: A Study of Women’s Local Integrative Organizations and the Pursuit of Democracy in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, Zenica: Medica Zenica, 2001, pp. 40–42.

16. James Lyon, “Overcoming Ethnic Politics in Bosnia”, in *Peacebuilding and Civil Society in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Ten Years after Dayton*, ed. Martina Fischer, Münster: Lit-Verlag, 2006, p. 67.

17. See perceptions of the Muslim women in Pamela Ballinger and Kristen Ghodsee, “Socialist Secularism: Religion, Modernity, and Muslim Women’s Emancipation in Bulgaria and Yugoslavia, 1945–1991”, *Aspasia*, Vol. 5, No. 1, 2011, pp. 6–27.

18. Interview with Mrs Dermana Šeta, [http://www.miztuzla.com/content/view/452/39/](http://www.miztuzla.com/content/view/452/39/).

19. See Senada Tahirovic, “Muslim Women Theologian in Bosnian Society: The Position and Role”, *The New Teacher*, Vol. 40, Winter, 2009, pp. 26–35 and Dermana Šeta, *Zaito marama? Bosanskoherzegovačke muslimanke o životu i radu pod maramom [Why Headscarf? Bosnian and Herzegovinian Muslim Women about Life and Work with Scarf]*, Sarajevo: Centar za napredne studije [Center for Advanced Studies], 2011, pp. 161–163.

20. Interview with Mrs Sehija Dedovic, Director of Nahla Education Center for Women, [http://www.islambosna.ba/Pitanja%20i%20odgovori/interviews/2136-intervju-sa-sehijom-dedovic-direktoricom-ecnahla](http://www.islambosna.ba/Pitanja%20i%20odgovori/interviews/2136-intervju-sa-sehijom-dedovic-direktoricom-ecnahla).

21. Helms, “The ‘ Nation-ing’ of Gender?”, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

22. See more details on the Islamic and secular conceptions of feminism in Margot Badran, “Between Secular and Islamic Feminisms: Reflection on the Middle East and Beyond”, *Journal of Middle East Women’s Studies*, Vol. 1, Winter, 2005, pp. 6–28.

23. See works of advocacy protagonists of women’s theoretical issues who seek the reinterpretation of Islamic sacred sources such as, for instance, Asma Barlas, Fatima Mernissi, Leila Ahmed and Amina Wadud.

24. See socio-political role of the Muslim women in Bosnia-Herzegovina in Zilka Spahic-Šiljak and Rebeka Jadranka Anic, *I vjernice i gradanke [And Believers and Citizens]*, Sarajevo: TPO Foundation and CIPS-Universität u Sarajevu, 2009, pp. 5–41.

25. See significance of family values for the social cohesion in Yvonne Y. Haddad, “Islam and Gender: Dilemmas in the Changing Arab World”, in *Islam, Gender and Social Change*, ed. Yvonne Y. Haddad and John L. Esposito, New York: Oxford University Press, 1998, pp. 12–21; Badran, “Between Secular and Islamic Feminisms?”, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

26. See Nusret Kujrakovic, “Osvitanje—The First Muslim Women’s Association in Bosnia and Herzegovina”, *Contributions*, Vol. 38, 2009, pp. 145–165.

27. See an overview of main activities of Nahla Education Center for Women at [www.nahla.ba](http://www.nahla.ba).

28. Djermera Šeta and Sehija Dedović, “Family Structure in the Balkans, Problems and Good Examples”, [http://www.family-resilience.com/english/wp-content/plugins/downloads-manager/upload/The%20Family%20Structure%20in%20the%20Balkans,%20Problems%20and%20Good%20Examples.pdf](http://www.family-resilience.com/english/wp-content/plugins/downloads-manager/upload/The%20Family%20Structure%20in%20the%20Balkans,%20Problems%20and%20Good%20Examples.pdf).

29. Interview with Mrs Sehija Dedović, Director of Nahla Education Center for Women, [http://www.islambosna.ba/Pitanja%20i%20odgovori/interviews/2136-intervju-sa-sehijom-dedovic-direktoricom-ecnahla](http://www.islambosna.ba/Pitanja%20i%20odgovori/interviews/2136-intervju-sa-sehijom-dedovic-direktoricom-ecnahla).

30. Interview with Mrs Sadika Avdíc, Director of the Kewser-Zehra Association of Muslim Women, [Oslobodjenje](http://www.oslobodjenje.ba), September 5, 2010.

31. See details about Kewser-Zehra Association of Muslim Women at [www.zehra.ba](http://www.zehra.ba).

32. Michael Edwards, *Civil Society*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009.

33. Zilka Spahic-Šiljak, “Ženska civilna scena, primjer (de)sekularizacije Bosne i Hercegovine” [Women’s Civil Scence: An Example of (de)Secularization of Bosnia and Herzegovina], in *Religija i sekularna država [Religion and Secular State]*, ed. Ahmed Alibasic, Sarajevo: Fondacija Konrad Adenauer, 2007, p. 204.

34. Interview with Mrs Sehija Dedović, Director of Nahla Education Center for Women, [http://www.islambosna.ba/Pitanja%20i%20odgovori/interviews/2136-intervju-sa-sehijom-dedovic-direktoricom-ecnahla](http://www.islambosna.ba/Pitanja%20i%20odgovori/interviews/2136-intervju-sa-sehijom-dedovic-direktoricom-ecnahla).

35. Spahic-Šiljak and Jadranka Anic, *I vjernice i gradanke*, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

36. See [www.nahla.ba](http://www.nahla.ba).

37. Šeta and Dedović, “Family Structure in the Balkans”, *op. cit.*

38. Interview with Mrs Sadika Avdíc, Director of the Kewser-Zehra Association of Muslim Women, [Oslobodjenje](http://www.oslobodjenje.ba), September 5, 2010.

39. Helms, “The ‘Nation-ing’ of Gender?”, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

40. Spahic-Šiljak, “Ženska civilna scena, primjer (de)sekularizacije Bosne i Hercegovine”, *op. cit.*, p. 204.