Hierarchical Sisterhood
Supporting Women’s Peacebuilding through Swedish Aid to Bosnia and Herzegovina 1993-2013

av

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Abstract


This dissertation examines possibilities and challenges faced by international interveners in a post-socialist and violently divided area. The study object is the Swedish foundation Kvinna till Kvinna, formed in 1993 during the Bosnian war, originating from the peace movement and supported by the Swedish government aid agency Sida. The aim is to contextualize and analyze Kvinna till Kvinna’s two decades of engagement in peacebuilding in Bosnia. The encounter with domestic women’s NGOs is of particular interest. By focusing on rhetoric, practice and silences, the ambition has been to understand the international/local relationship from the perspective of both actors.

In terms of methodology, this study combines a hermeneutic approach with that of oral history. The empirical material utilized consists of both written and oral sources, the majority of which appear in research for the first time. To capture the complexity of the peacebuilding endeavor, critically scrutinize it and discern its benevolence, this research draws inspiration from postcolonial and semiperipherality theories, as well as influential theorizing on peacebuilding, sisterhood and solidarity.

This study shows that even well-intentioned, locally-focused external efforts, constrained by donor agendas and circumstances on the ground, contain problematic characteristics common in the era of liberal peace. While subscribing to the idea of transnational sisterhood, Kvinna till Kvinna also presented a belief in Swedish supremacy and demonstrated a lack of interest in local knowledge. It sought to educate and change its Bosnian counterparts by using soft methods. Further, the findings challenge idealized images of the ‘local’ as a peace-loving force for change and a powerless victim of Western domination. The hierarchical sisterhood that over time evolved between the two actors, founded on basic shared values related to women’s situation, was driven by mutual benefit. Acknowledging advantages of this type of transnational encounters in peacebuilding contexts, the study raises questions about dilemmas in them and underlines the importance of rhetorical listening.

Keywords: sisterhood, Kvinna till Kvinna, international intervention, women, peacebuilding, Sida, local NGOs, Bosnia.

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