

# Compassionate Society and Empathic Civilization: Utopia or Transformative Idea for Better Future

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## ABSTRACT

Humankind has been divided for thousands of years into diverse civilizations characterized by different, commonly irreconcilable views on the world and confronting ethical values leading to bloody wars from time to time. A global culture of empathy seems to be a key to the very survival of humankind and life on our planet. Good, creative, and empathic communication is a background of individual and collective mental health. To live healthily and enjoyably in multicultural and multinational environments, it is of the essential need to have empathy skills that allow people to better understand each other, their perspectives, opinions, emotions, and behavior, making life environment more harmonious, creative, and secure. Bosnia and Herzegovina, characterized by the deep crisis of identity associated with a severe epistemic, ethical, and dysempathic crisis, is the right place for applying the Strategic Harmony Model and promoting principles of brotherhood in humanity and empathic civilization. Empathically integrated sciences, arts, and religions in creative dialogues as allies can significantly contribute to the healing of the broken Bosnia and Herzegovina and promote ideas of a compassionate society and empathic civilization.

**Keywords:** Brotherhood in humanity, Compassionate society, Culture of empathy, Dysempathy, Mental health.

## SAŽETAK

Čovječanstvo je tisućama godina podijeljeno na različite civilizacije koje karakteriziraju različiti, često nepomirljivi pogledi na svijet i suprotstavljene etičke vrijednosti koje s vremena na vrijeme dovode do krvavih ratova. Čini se da je globalna kultura empatije ključ samog opstanka čovječanstva i života na našem planetu. Dobra, kreativna i empatična komunikacija temelj je individualnog i kolektivnog mentalnog zdravlja. Za zdrav i ugodan život u multikulturalnim i multinacionalnim sredinama od ključne je potrebe posjedovati vještine empatije koje omogućuju ljudima bolje razumijevanje jedni drugih, njihove perspektive, mišljenja, emocija i ponašanja, čineći životno okruženje skladnijim, kreativnijim i sigurnijim. Bosna i Hercegovina, koju karakterizira duboka kriza identiteta povezana s teškom epistemičkom, etičkom i disempatijskom krizom, pravo je mjesto za primjenu Modela strateške harmonije i promicanje principa bratstva u čovječanstvu i empatične civilizacije. Empatijski integrirane znanosti, umjetnosti i religije u kreativnim dijalozima kao saveznici mogu značajno doprinijeti ozdravljenju slomljene Bosne i Hercegovine i promicanju ideja suosjećajnog društva i empatične civilizacije.

*Science, Art and Religion* (2022): 10.5005/jp-journals-11005-0022

## INTRODUCTION

Progressive thoughts rest, first, on the value of empathy—putting oneself in other people's shoes, seeing the world through their eyes, and therefore caring about them. The second principle is acting on that care, taking responsibility both for oneself and others, the social as well as individual responsibility. The third is acting to make oneself, the country, and the world better—George Lakoff <https://cultureofempathy.com>

From time to time, there comes a time when we should seriously ask ourselves and ponder what authentic human nature is, what is new normality, whether wars are our fate and whether we must be prisoners of selfishness and hate. Many people believe that man is evolving, that science and technology will bring us to a bright future, and that the majority of humans deep inside tend and wish to do good,

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**How to cite this article:** Jakovljević M. Compassionate Society and Empathic Civilization: Utopia or Transformative Idea for Better Future. *Sci Arts Relig* 2022;1(2–4):143–148.

**Source of support:** Nil

**Conflict of interest:** Prof. Miro Jakovljević is associated as the Editor-in-Chief of this journal and this manuscript was subjected to this journal's standard review procedures, with this peer review handled independently of the Editor-in-Chief and his research group.

to experience nice and beautiful things, to think good and positive thoughts, and make decisions with positive aims. With the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemics and misinfodemics and additionally the war in Ukraine, our volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) Anthropocene world has fundamentally shifted into the zone of higher risk and dangers affecting our mental health. The widespread hope and belief that human beings had become increasingly "civilized" was shattered. Volatility means that the world is not steady due to different and multiple crises related to the COVID-19 pandemic, rapid climate change, air pollution, deforestation, political clash and wars, decivilization, and rebarbarism. A recent example of volatility is the war in Ukraine, claimed as a special military operation that has changed world politics dramatically. Wars all over the world are a significant source of mental health problems and disorders, but also consequences of the diverse collective psychopathology.<sup>1-3</sup> Today, it is clear that warfare is associated with collective psychopathology in different ways. Over 200 million people were killed in the 20th century, the century of megadeath, as a result of the sick political mind. Former Secretary-of-State Zbigniew Brzezinski states that the twentieth century was dominated by the "politics of organized insanity."<sup>4</sup> According to Friedrich Nietzsche, in individuals, insanity is rare; but in groups, parties, nations, and epochs, it is the rule (<https://www.goodreads.com>). "Pathocracy (Greek pathos=evil, pain, suffering; Kratos=rule) or kakistocracy (Greek Kakistos=worst, superlative of Kakos=bad; Kratos=rule) is an illness of some political, social and religious movements followed by entire societies, nations, and empires. Pathocracy, kakistocracy, and kleptocracy feedback on each other. According to Lobaczewski, all pathocracies of the world are and have been so similar in their essence.<sup>5</sup> Ponerogenesis (Greek Poneros=evil), the process of the genesis of evil, is usually associated with dark tetrad personality features, a sense of being better than others, having the historical right to rule over them, and political ideologies that identify and create enemies.<sup>6</sup> People with dark tetrad personalities are characterized by self-aggrandizement (narcissism), manipulative behavior and taking advantage of others (Machiavellianism), impulsivity and lack of empathy (psychopathy) and sadism (cruelty for pleasure). Although these four personality characteristics describe persons who are prone to cruel behavior and abusing others, each one has a distinct profile.<sup>7</sup> Narcissism is characterized by grandiosity, pride, egotism, and a lack of empathy. Machiavellianism is characterized by the manipulation and exploitation of others, and absence of morality, unemotional callousness, and a high level of self-interest. Psychopathy is characterized by impulsivity, selfishness, lack of empathy, callous and unemotional traits, and remorselessness. Spellbinders are powerful speakers, very talented at charming and leading large ponerogenic groups of people and indoctrinating the public.<sup>5</sup> A pathocracy is created when an ever-strengthening network of psychopaths takes over control of a society

or state, and during history, pathocracy has affected different social, political, and religious movements with tragic consequences.<sup>5</sup> In order to prevent tragedies during periods of identity and social/political crisis, understanding the ponerogenic factors and ponerization processes is fundamental.

Empathy is a basic human capacity that manifests itself in different ways in different cultures, contexts, life scripts, and stories.<sup>8-10</sup> It is a way of creative, sensitive, and meaningful being in the world, a vital quality of civilized life, and a powerful agent of positive transformation when practiced daily. However, the sad fact is that intergroup empathy bias is still common, and many people feel less empathy for strangers who belong to a different racial, political, social, or religious group in comparison with strangers who belong to the same group.<sup>11</sup> What is more pathological is intergroup dyspathy manifesting in feeling pleasure in response to out-group members' adversity (schadenfreude) and displeasure in response to their success (Glueckschmertu) and which is commonly associated with discrimination and readiness to harm the others.<sup>11</sup> What we need now is VUCA empathy solution: (1) vision of compassionate society and empathic civilization as a transformative idea for the better future, (2) understanding and mutual respect at intercultural, local, and global level, (3) cooperation in creating well-being and health for all, and (4) agile activity in promoting empathy, trust, cooperation, partnership, and friendship. Good, creative, and empathic communication is a background of individual and collective mental health.

## THE EMPATHY TRIAD, MENTAL HEALTH, AND SANE ALTRUISTIC COMPASSIONATE SOCIETY

"There is a nobility in compassion, a beauty in empathy, a grace in forgiveness"—John Connolly. Empathy based on love is the most essential and basic core element in human communications, which leads to healthy, creative, flourishing, and well-functioning families, communities, nations, societies, and civilizations. The human tendency to care about and share other people's mental experiences is very important in dialogue, peacemaking, negotiation, mediation, education, cooperation, and creating social networks, communities, and identities. Through empathy, we discover our joint humanity, and we are aware of who we are; we are aware of other peoples, our and their mental states, inner experience, and identity. Human beings are biologically wired to need connection, attachment, recognition, validation, and belonging. It involves empathy for difference and openness to diversity. Education for love, empathy, and compassion are pillars and foundations of a better future for all. Compassionate society as the final and the noblest result of empathy is an esprit de corps of the empathic civilization of love and peace.<sup>12</sup>

Empathy in human relationships is not something ready-made. We live in a world of ideas, and we are creatures of ideas that provide the impetus for our behavior. A culture



of empathy begins as an idea or principle that human beings must somehow develop and live up to in their life views, behavior, and communication. Establishing a connection between empathy, mirror neurons, and brain neuroplasticity indicates that empathy, mentalization, and emotion-sharing abilities as qualities can be learned. The statements mentioned in the first issue of our journal *Science, Art and Religion*<sup>13,14</sup> that all that is important come in triads may be applied to empathy. There are three different processes related to empathy: (1) feeling what another person is feeling, (2) knowing what another person is feeling, and (3) having the intention to respond compassionately to another person's distress.<sup>15</sup> Empathy has cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and narrative dimensions, so we can speak about cognitive empathy, emotional empathy, behavioral (compassionate), and narrative empathy.<sup>16</sup> Cognitive empathy is the ability to recognize and understand how and what other people are feeling and the ability to see situations from their perspective. Emotional empathy is the capability to feel what and how other people are feeling. Compassionate empathy is the desire and readiness to help other people deal with their problems and emotions. Empathy drives many behaviors that enable us to gain and endure love, power, trust, and respect to benefit from the wisdom of others.<sup>17</sup> Trust is usually established when people understand, empathize, wish, and try to help each other. There are also three levels of phenomena related to empathy: the individual (experience of emotion), the interpersonal (communication of empathy), and the representational (ideas about empathy). Humans are storytelling beings. Storytelling is an important way for people to communicate, connect and collaborate with each other. Narrative empathy represents one's ability to enter and tune another's frame of reference, mental model, inner/mental world, and life story. Narratives and stories have the power to elicit and foster empathy at the individual and collective levels. The story teaches how to behave and live in general as well as, with the experience of the traumatic events, discovers the true values that should be followed and the meaning of life in adversary and happy times. Finding a new, true individual or collective/national self is associated with a re-authoring life story, personal or collective growth, self-actualization, and reaching one's individual or collective full potential. A culture of empathy is an essential determinant of moral behavior and a fundamental cornerstone in creating moral communities and global ethics. In our world, much more connected and interdependent than ever before, human success relies more and more on large-scale cooperation among a diversity of cultures and political systems.<sup>18</sup> Intercultural empathy or interpathy is a transcendental expansion of empathy that relates to "thinking with," "feeling with" and "cooperating with" those whose cultural context is very different from one's own. When we cross-cultural, national, or political boundaries, we enter into strange territory where new languages are spoken, new epistemic and laws are practiced, and different values are followed, so the possibility of misunderstanding,

miscommunication, alienation, and conflicts are high. Interpathic understanding, "thinking and feeling with" another across cultural and political boundaries, requires a willingness to bracket one's own epistemology and life philosophy and enter another.<sup>19</sup> Interpathy as empathy for different cultures, ideologies, and politics, even for enemies, is crucial for humankind's survival and peace in the world.

## THE HATRED AND FEAR OR THE COMPASSIONATE SOCIETY AND EMPATHIC CIVILIZATION

"All wars derive from lack of empathy: the incapacity of one to understand and accept the likeness or difference of another"—Marya Mannes

Wars, hate, and mass killings of the Dark Ages appall us but continue to take their toll today.<sup>20</sup> Many peoples in Bosnia and Herzegovina are still prisoners of hatred, hostility, and fear. In a short story entitled "A Letter from 1920" (published in 1946), Nobel Prize winner Ivo Andrić<sup>21</sup> wrote: "Bosnia is a wonderful country, fascinating, with nothing ordinary in the habitat or people. And there are mineral riches under the earth in Bosnia, so undoubtedly are Bosnians rich in hidden moral values, which are rarely found in their compatriots in other Yugoslav lands. But, you see, there is one thing that the people of Bosnia, at least people of your kind, must realize and never lose sight of—Bosnia is a country of hatred and fear ... but it is precisely this that needs to be recognized, confirmed, and analyzed. And the real harm lies in the fact that no one either wants or knows how to do it. The fatal characteristic of this hatred is that the Bosnian man is unaware of the hatred that lives in him, shrinks from analyzing it, and—hates everyone who tries to do so...."

The hatred which sets man against man and casts both into misery and misfortune drives both opponents to the grave; hatred is like cancer in an organism, consuming and eating up everything around it, only to die itself at last; because this kind of hatred, like a flame, has neither one constant form nor a life of its own: it is simply the agent of the instinct of destruction or self-destruction...

So your love remains inert, but your hatred is easily spurred into action. And you love your homeland, you passionately love it, but in three or four different ways which are mutually exclusive, often come to blows, and hate each other to death...

Perhaps in Bosnia, men should be warned of hatred—of innate unconscious, endemic hatred. Because this poor, backward country, in which four different faiths live cheek by jowl, needs four times as much love, mutual understanding, and tolerance as other countries.

This uniquely Bosnian hatred should be studied and eradicated like some pernicious, deeply-rooted disease...

And in a country like present-day Bosnia, the man who does not know to hate or, what is still better and harder, consciously does not want to hate, is always a foreigner and freak, often a martyr...

"I wish you and our Bosnia the best of luck in its independent life in the new state."

Our history is filled with periods of war and peace, and both wars and peace begin in the minds of men. Founded on a double bind situation of falsified history, false democracy, illusory humanism, false fraternity, and unity for a long time Yugoslavia by the time became a politically sick society and was destroyed in the bloody wars in the 1990s.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, during the former Yugoslavia wars, Bosnia and Herzegovina really became a dark villa-yet, a country of hatred and fear. Now 27 years after the war, it seems that people in Bosnia and Herzegovina live in the parallel worlds of "moral strangers" and "epistemic strangers" who divided themselves into "good people" and "bad people" because they do not believe in the same things and understand them differently, even if the same or very similar words are used. When human beings and people are divided into the "good" and the "bad" both are prone to lose their humanity, and life is treated as a zero-sum game. Cultural and political differences are not seen as an opportunity for growth but rather as a battleground for selfish interests: the gain of the one is the loss of the other, "there is only one truth, namely ours," "guilt is always on the part of others," war criminals have become national heroes... In sick societies, moral monsters and dark empathis characterized by Machiavellianism, psychopathy, narcissism, and sadism often hold important positions and power. The leading political parties in Bosnia and Herzegovina, unfortunately, are tempting fate and seem to be, as Thomas Hobbes metaphor describes, in "the state and posture of Gladiators; having their weapons pointing, and their eyes fixed on one another."<sup>22</sup> In Hegelian style human history can be described as a struggle for recognition, dignity, respect, and identity. Bosnia and Herzegovina has been challenged by a deep crisis of identity. Identity is an important issue from the perspective of the individual, public, and global mental health and human behavior. According to Fukuyama "identity can be used to divide, but it can and has also been used to integrate."<sup>23</sup> What we can do now is to be more aware of the fatal risks and promote a culture of empathy to make Bosnia and Herzegovina more resilient and antifragile, some kind of little Switzerland on the Balkan.

## **TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF EMPATHY: EMPATHIC CIVILIZATION AS A WORLD WAITING TO BE BORN OR A CLASH OF CIVILIZATIONS IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA**

"Empathy is the medicine the world needs" —Judith Orloff.  
"Either man will abolish war, or war will abolish Man" —  
Bertrand Russell.

Humans are social beings who survive and thrive on empathy. The relevance of empathy shows itself, particularly where there is pain, suffering, and despair. How to increase empathy in a fractured world and unite society in Bosnia and Herzegovina? How to end the culture of wars or culture wars? How to create a win-win story in Bosnia and Herzegovina?

Human beings are creators of ideas and worldviews and storytellers, narrators who live their lives in relationship networks connecting one another and cooperating through the stories they create, tell and live. We give meaning to our lives, our families, our nations, and the world through the stories we tell ourselves and others; hence we define our experiences, history, culture, civilization, and destiny at both material and symbolic levels.<sup>24</sup> The stories people in Bosnia and Herzegovina tell about themselves not only describe themselves, their history and experiences, their life values, mindset, and philosophy but also divide themselves into national, epistemic, empathic, and ethic gaps. Sad to say, many people have still believed war is glorious both in itself and in its aims. An important source of wars is the view that war is either of the need for self-defense or that conflict cannot be peacefully resolved through agreement, compromise or cooperation.<sup>6</sup> Due to our narrative self, enduring collective resilience, coherence, and power come from telling stories that gather and unite. Our personal, national, religious, and civilizational identity and meaning in life are based on the stories we tell over the course of our lives.<sup>17</sup> In Bosnia and Herzegovina, there is a choice between a clash of nations belonging to different civilizations on one side and the culture of empathy and a story of an empathic civilization on the other side.<sup>8</sup> From the public mental health perspective, one can say that Bosnia and Herzegovina is suffering from divided self (us versus or against them in many forms) and multiple identity disorders with multiple identifying confrontations at political, religious, economic, and psycho/cultural levels.<sup>25</sup>

Despite the intensive globalization and an attractive idea of a global humanistic mind and empathic civilization, our world is still divided into rival nations, religions, states, and alliances with confronting ethics, empathy deficits, empathic gaps, and dyspathy. In 1993 Samuel P. Huntington identified eight civilizations the "Western, Confucian, Japanese, Islamic, Hindu, Slavic-Orthodox, Latin American, and possibly African, and stated that civilization would clash in the future and that dominant conflict would be between 'the West and the rest.'<sup>26</sup> According to Zakaria<sup>22</sup> "the West and its values were sweeping the planet, but it turned out that not everyone was happy about this." The wars in former Yugoslavia in the 1990s could be described as a clash of civilizations at the local level as well as the war against Ukraine has some elements of the clash between the Slavic-Orthodox and Western civilizations with some reflections on to present situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina where the Western, Slavic-Orthodox and Islamic culture meet each other.

Transformative empathization offers hope and solution for broken relationships and stuck institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as for its salvation and progress. As Mahatma Gandhi, who was Hindu said, "I am a Muslim and a Hindu and a Christian and a Jew so every empathic man in Bosnia and Herzegovina may say " I am a Serb and a Croat, I am a Bosnjak and a Jew." Homo empathic who lies within each of us may quell the savage beast that dwells within all



of us. Education for love, empathy, and compassion are pillars and foundations of the individual as well as of the collective mental health and an esprit de corps of the empathic civilization of love.<sup>14</sup> Promoting dialogue among nations and religions and creating an empathic humanistic cooperative political psycho-culture may contribute to the development of a global civilization of love and peace.<sup>27,28</sup>

What guidelines can be recommended to address the broader manifestations of the hatred and fear that tear apart Bosnia and Herzegovina today and to escape the new clash of the Western, Ortho-Slavic, and Islamic civilizations? What can the academic community, policymakers, and ordinary people do to establish a little Switzerland on the Balkan evolving to its fullest human potential of "hidden moral values?" Envision a future in which nations and religions are infused with more empathy and compassion, transforming our world into a brotherhood in humanity.<sup>29–32</sup> In search of a compassionate, sane society, intercultural empathy and public mental health in Bosnia and Herzegovina we need a critical mass of harmonious leaders in all segments of our life, such as politics, science, religion, business, culture, education, and sports.<sup>14,33,34</sup> The aim is to break the cycle of hatred and fear. According to Srica<sup>33,34</sup> harmonious leaders see through the eyes of others; they are generous, love consensus, and want everyone to win. Bosnia and Herzegovina is the right place for applying the Strategic Harmony Model and promoting principles of brotherhood in humanity and empathic civilization. Empathically integrated sciences, arts, and religions in creative dialogues as allies can significantly contribute to the healing of the broken Bosnia and Herzegovina and promote ideas of a compassionate society and empathic civilization.

## CONCLUSION

The crucial message of this paper is that we should reexamine and improve our basic understanding of challenges, historical paradigms, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Empathy, as a cognitive, affective, and behavioral response to the situation of others and the source of individual and collective creativity, is an ideal that may transform our personal lives as well as our society and global world.<sup>35</sup> COVID-19 pandemic and misinfodemic and particularly the war in Ukraine, are wake-up calls for greater global empathic solidarity, better international respect, trust, and cooperation, and the promotion of public and global mental health.

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