LIVING IN W AR ZONES:
THOUGHTS ON W AR AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

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I would like to dedicate this speech to my mother, Marguerite Armatta, who died, last Friday at just about this time. It was through her that I came to know about domestic violence first hand. And though she never left my father in all the years of alcohol and abuse, she was proud of my work against domestic violence. I know she forgives me for being less present to her because of my Balkan experience. I cherish her memory and her last words to me, "I will hold you in my heart." Me, too, Mom.

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Being a luncheon speaker on the topic of domestic violence is nearly as much of a challenge as discussing surgical procedures at afternoon tea. You '11 be happy to know I didn't bring slides.

Last spring, I returned from three years in the former Yugoslavia. It took me 10 months and some forthright counseling to recognize that I' d been living in a war zone. Now, I may seem a bit obtuse, but I come by it honestly. I grew up in a war zone right here in the U. S.: the dysfunctional, alcoholic, violent family. Then I worked for 20 years with victims of domestic and sexual violence. So it sometimes takes me awhile to recognize abnormal. On the other hand, I have a lot of coping skills. I needed all of them in the Balkans.

In June of 1997, the American Bar Association's Central & East European Law Initiative sent me to be the first rule of law liaison in Serbia. Now I did know there’d been a fair amount of fighting over the break up of Yugoslavia and that many journalists and policy makers saw Serbia as the primary aggressor. I' d seen photos of living skeletons in concentration camps and heard stories about rape camps. I' d read a good deal of the political literature that was available. Though Milosevic, Tudjman and Izetbegovic were all still in power, the wars were over. The U.S. had brokered a peace agreement in Dayton, Ohio at the end of 1995. So I could reassure my mother with some confidence when she asked, “Are they still shooting over there, dear?"

At that time, they weren't shooting very much. But it was, as a group called Women In Black For Peace said, only a temporary ceasefire. Within a year, fighting would escalate in Kosova, Serbia' s southern province. Less than a year later, it would erupt in war.

While Eastern Europe, Russia and the former Soviet Republics mostly made peaceful transitions from communist totalitarian dictatorships toward some form of democracy, Yugoslavia' s transition has been long and bloody. The country's break-up into five separate states and an international protectorate

was occasioned by war in four of them. The carnage left more than a quarter million people dead and sent four and a half million fleeing their homes. Despite relative peace at present, neither the process of disintegration or the violence is over.

I landed in the middle of this historical moment. It has become part of my history in ways I still do not fully understand. As I sat down to write this speech, a process I have done countless times over my professional career, I found myself blocked over and over again. I would write a dozen pages and suddenly I couldn't go on. My hands would fall from the keys, my thought processes would close down and I would become overwhelmed by what I wanted to say, what I needed to say, what I could not say and what I felt.

On the one hand, I wanted to tell you about domestic violence work abroad. The similarities with our work here and the differences. I wanted to talk about how war affects domestic violence and how incredibly courageous people worked against both, while they helped to heal and protect the victims. And I wanted to say that domestic violence is only one form of violence against women, that the root causes are the same whether violence is perpetrated by a husband or an enemy soldier. And that it is impossible to draw boundaries between domestic violence and stranger rape; between domestic violence and war and sexual slavery.

I also wanted to talk to you about the existential questions that have been plaguing me. What is the nature of evil? How does it happen? How does a human being cross that moral boundary between human failings and inhumanity? How does a society? And what is my part in it? What is required of me when a man beats a woman in front of me? What is required when he does it behind closed doors, down the street? What is my obligation to inquire? And once I know, then what? And how does that apply to what goes on thousands of miles away?

I also wanted to share with you some of the successes --in addressing domestic violence abroad and at the international level, and in making peace and justice between individuals, ethnic groups, victims and perpetrators.

I expect I will touch on some of this. But first I have to address this huge elephant who kept sitting in front of my computer screen. The elephant of my emotions.

Now, as legal professionals, dealing with emotions is not necessarily our forte. We are not trained to it. We are trained to be objective and to solve problems, not sit quietly while someone pours out a horror story which we can do nothing about. That makes us decidedly uncomfortable.

There are many of these stories in the Balkans. Those of you who work with victims of domestic violence and other cruelties here at home know stories, too. We carry around the images. They affect us. There's even a term for it: secondary trauma. Despite all my training and experience with secondary trauma, it somehow got past me in the Balkans. After all, as I told my counselor, I wasn't shot at.

Once I was "safely" back in the U.S., the trauma of the Balkans began leaking out in unexpected and obtrusive ways. All the emotions that I could not permit myself to deeply feel and continue to function while I was there had compressed themselves in my body and soul. They built up that hard shell I recognized from childhood, creating a grand canyon-sized chasm between me and the rest of the world, while I remained in a frozen state.

I was home after nearly three years absence, but I found I was hesitant to call my friends. When I did, I often felt I was speaking from behind a glass barrier. I didn't know how to connect. Their lives had gone on while I was away. They had children, new jobs, new homes. What was most horrifying to me was that I found it all meaningless. I literally could not find a reason for doing anything. . .whether having a child, writing a symphony, trying to get a candidate elected, or caring for an elderly parent. "To what end?" I found myself muttering as if it were my personal mantra. It wasn't long before Ben and Jerry's, English language bookstores and movies, and Thai restaurants lost their novelty and diversionary power, and I found myself slipping into a deep depression.

Fortunately, I recognized it and called my counselor of many years. She pointed out a few things that helped move along my process:

1. I had been in a war zone for nearly 3 years.

2. I had been helpless to stop the war, to assuage the suffering and to protect the people I loved.

3. I was grieving.

4. It was not unlike my experience as a child.

"But why isn't anyone else experiencing this?" I whined, having the tendency to look for my compass outside myself. " Many of them are," she answered. "But people pretty much keep it to themselves in our culture."

Some months later, I read a book of essays by women therapists who had worked with survivors of war and ethnic cleansing in the former Yugoslavia. It was the first thing I' d read, among hundreds of books and articles by journalists, witnesses, politicians, peacekeepers and human rights activists, where the authors wrote of their own trauma. All those others seemed to operate under the illusion that they could hear horrible stories of inhumanity and suffering and remain unaffected by it. How have we gotten to a place where this is even a goal? If we stop our feelings, how will we ever stop the brutality?

While my rational mind tries to make sense of human hatred, I weep for those who died so savagely, for those who were so brutalized and betrayed by people they thought were friends, for the ones who bargained with the devil and gave up their souls, for those who turned their faces away and refused to know, and for the survivors in this scarred and ravaged land. It is impossible to live there, to listen to people's stories, to share the apprehension of yet one more inevitable war, to feel the palpable shock and depression of a people whose expectations of life have been so shattered and not take it in.

I know that many of you have struggled with this and found ways to de-traumatize yourselves without killing your emotional responses. I hope you will share some of them with me during the conference. One way I have found is to talk about what happened. Now, that does not necessarily make me the most sought after dinner guest. So I have to take other opportunities. . .and this speech has become one of them, thanks to the elephant. It is also not entirely off the topic I was asked to speak on.

With your indulgence, I will share some of the war stories --in the home and on the battlefield --filtered through the lens of my experience.

I find I cannot approach this logically. While there are lessons to be learned, in the end it doesn't make any sense. It doesn't make sense for a man to kill the neighbor he has shared coffee with every afternoon for twenty years because he belongs to a different ethnic group, anymore than it makes sense for a man to beat and torture the woman he has sworn to love.

When I landed in Belgrade on that summer day, I found a busy, cosmopolitan city. People were shopping, sipping coffee, strolling along the sidewalks. By the next weekend, I was sitting in a room a little shabbier than this one, listening (through an interpreter) to women discussing domestic violence, sexual assault, discrimination against lesbians, gays, minorities and people with disabilities. I might have been in a space warp, it was so familiar. I learned that Belgrade and a few other cities in Serbia had a hotline, a shelter, counseling and minimal legal aid for women who had been subjected to violence. There was a small, but dedicated group of women lawyers working on women's human rights. In fact, there were two such groups totaling about five people; they sometimes collaborated and sometimes not. I was privileged to work with both of them.

While so much was familiar, more than translation made me aware I was no longer in 'Kansas.' The aftermath of war, the fear of renewed war was a supra-text, coloring conference topics as much as it colored the activities of the feminist community. A group of presentations addressed "Law, War and the Female Body," "The International Tribunal in the Hague and Rapes of Serbian Women," and "Women's Rights and Exile." The Autonomous Women's Center was founded in 1993 to assist women war victims and the SOS Hotline answered calls from a large refugee population, as well as long-time residents of Belgrade.

It was also at this conference, my first week in Serbia, that the specter of Kosovo made its threatening appearance to me. Over lunch, I met two Kosovar Albanian women. Shukrije, a journalist in her early thirties, had just been released from four years in prison for publishing treasonous articles. In prison, she had been beaten and tortured. Her passport was taken and had still not been returned. Nazlie, about 10 years younger, was quieter with a haunted intenseness. I learned later that her fiancee had been murdered in prison a few years before. Both talked about the increasing tensions in Kosovo, police harassment, arbitrary arrests, the daily curfew. They were decidedly uncomfortable being in Belgrade, even at this feminist conference where they obviously had some friends and allies.

I met Nazlie again in Kosovo about six months later. She was trying to start a legal aid project for women, including victims of domestic violence --still a taboo subject in the traditional patriarchal Albanian community. She was doing this in keeping with Albanian efforts to create a parallel society after Milosevic ousted Albanians from official institutions in 1990 .At the same time, violence was increasing in the province, amid rumors of a shadowy Kosova Liberation Army.

Two months later, I received a call from Nazlie asking me to return to Pristina. Serbian police had massacred nearly 100 people in a four day assault on the Drenica region, allegedly a Kosova Liberation Army stronghold. Most of those massacred were civilians, including women and children.

In Pristina, I sat next to Nazlie on a couch as she handed me photographs of the exhumed bodies of those who had been murdered. Some were clearly recognizable as children. One figure Nazlie said was a pregnant woman. I couldn‘t tell because she had been machine-gunned in the face at close range. Nazlie said her young son had been standing in front of her at the time. She solemnly put down the photographs and said she no longer had the luxury of working on domestic violence issues. All her energies were needed to defend her people. While I don’t consider domestic violence work a luxury, Nazlie was only speaking from her experience. It was not the time to argue or speak of the four year old boy in Portland, Oregon, who hid in a closet while his father murdered his mother.

I looked at the photos several times and promised to put her in touch with investigators for the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. I was aware that I was not crying. I had learned as a child to be very still in the face of horror, to pull back some essential human part of myself in the face of incomprehensible evil. I would function rather than feel.

Back in Belgrade, I continued organizing a conference on judicial independence, rescheduling everything after our local partners, the Lawyers Association of Yugoslavia, had, inexplicably, for the third time, manipulated a postponement. I also continued working with the Women Lawyers' Group for Human Rights on a regional conference we were planning for delegations of women lawyers and judges from all of the former Yugoslav republics. This would be their first official meeting since the war and break-up of Yugoslavia. It was this conference that launched campaigns in Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro to draft legislation to address domestic violence.

ABA/CEELI and the Open Society Institute, our funder at that time, were both supportive of my working on women' s issues, though my primary focus was supporting judicial reform. Other Washington bureaucrats considered it a luxury they could not afford given the political situation in Serbia. Domestic violence, so the thinking goes, is a minor issue, to be addressed after the big, important issues like war, oppression, totalitarianism and economic dysfunction have been resolved. For women, this is not new even in peaceful, democratic countries. The Women's Movement and its allies have been struggling for decades to put domestic violence on the agenda in the U.S. In a way, that's why we' re here. To talk about where and whether it fits in law schools.

If you have experienced domestic violence or known people who have, you know what war is like. To see domestic violence as unimportant in the face of war is to see with the eyes of the ignorant or the perpetrators.

Ivana, a lawyer with the Women's Human Rights Group in Belgrade, told me about one of the women she worked with:

Ljiljana was in an abusive marriage for many years. Her husband, Milutin, monitored all her activities and those of their children. He kept the family isolated and allowed Ljiljana to see her mother only twice while she was dying. The physical abuse was severe. In 1983, he scalped her in front of her daughter. While hospital officials informed police, they merely took Milutin' s statement and left. On several occasions, Ljiljana started to initiate divorce proceedings, but backed down when he threatened to kill her, their children and himself She unsuccessfully attempted suicide more than once. In addition to watching their father beat and abuse their mother, the children were also brutalized. They were beaten

with cables, a rubber hose, a pitchfork and a bicycle chain. The daughter left home at 17 and the father directed his wrath at his son. For lending his bicycle to a friend, Milutin beat him with a cable, hit him in the testicles with a wooden shoe, put out a cigarette on his lips and knocked him unconscious. He then sent him to retrieve the bicycle. When he returned without the bicycle key, Milutin beat him again. When the boy left a second time and did not return, Milutin beat and raped Ljiljana. He then fell asleep, after threatening to kill her if she didn't find their son. She picked up his 357 magnum, pointed it at her head, then at his and pulled the trigger. Ljiljana was charged with first degree murder. War could not have seemed any more frightening, painful and horrible to Ljiljana than her twenty year abusive marriage to Milutin.

Fortunately for her, the prosecutor dismissed the charge after a psychiatrist testified that she was "irrational and unable to appreciate the significance of her acts" due to years of abuse and fear for the life of her son. It seems to me she was very rational and did indeed appreciate the significance of pulling that trigger. She achieved safety for herself and her children when her society would not provide it.

Lepa Mladjenovic started and runs the SOS Hotline and the Autonomous Women's Center in Belgrade. A co-founder of Women In Black for Peace, she is also an "out" lesbian in a seriously homophobic society, and a founder of Labrys, an organization for lesbians in the former Yugoslavia. In 1995, she was beaten up for writing lesbian graffiti on a wall in Belgrade. Her attacker shouted, " You dirty lesbian, I can throw you in this door and kill you. Clear off! The mosque is the place for you." Lepa is not a Muslim, but being lesbian she fell into the category of' other.

Reflecting about this incident, Lepa describes a connection she sees between war, domestic violence, racism and homophobia:

> "I was slowly becoming whole thinking about the forms of violence and how they cross over me. Until not only the theory of fascism told me, but my own body also made it clear that the face of the guy who attacked me can be a face of a killer in a war, killer in the family, batterer of his wife, rapist, lesbian hater. And how this face is not always male and not caused by biology but rather by conditioning, and can therefore sometimes, although very rarely, be female."

What does it mean to a woman being beaten or raped whether her attacker is a stranger or her husband? Is one worse? Each situation dictates the degree of violation. But when your attacker is someone who is pledged to love you, there is deep violation of trust. . .in him, yourself and the world. Even women held captive in rape camps did not remain there for 15, 20, 30 years as many women tortured by abusive husbands do.

I do not mean to establish a hierarchy of suffering, but to challenge the one that patriarchal thinkers arbitrarily erect. The impulse for war and

domestic violence come from the same source: a socially conditioned impulse for power and control over others. Throughout the world we have made a pathology into a value system.

It's for that reason that living in a war zone seemed " norma1" to me. Reality is distorted. The power to name it is held by the dictator, as it is by an abusive husband. Walking down Knez Mihailova in Belgrade' s old town, I watched fathers playing with toddlers near the fountain, teenagers meeting at the horse statue, old folks conversing on benches under a warm sun, the flower sellers surrounded by

buckets of bright colors, the old violin player making beautiful music for a few dinars. Who were the warriors here? Who the assassins? Who the rapists and wife beaters?

At that time the unreality was assisted by the fact that Belgrade had not been bombed as Sarajevo and other Bosnian cities and villages had. Yet despite the everyday ambience, I often felt a certain tension just as I did as a child during those intermissions from violence. It was the worse for its invisibility, for being unacknowledged. It made me feel crazy. If everything was so normal, what was the matter with me?

I remember the first evacuation in October 1998. Increasing violence in Kosova, the rise of the Kosova Liberation Army, followed by Serbian police massacres of civilians got the belated attention of the International Community. They'd been "negotiating" with Slobodan Milosevic, then-president of the rump Yugoslavia, only to find the massacres continued despite his solemn promises. Under threat of NATO bombing, I was sent to Sofia, Bulgaria, where I languished in a hotel room. It was a four star hotel with room service and a t. v. with a movie channel, but in the end these luxuries weren't useful for addressing my trauma. After a few days of stalwartly attempting to work at the CEELI office and see a bit of the city, I gave up, pulled the curtains, ordered room service and stayed glued to the half hourly CNN reports. It was October and turning cold and rainy in Kosova. Already there were several hundred thousand internally displaced persons, living in makeshift shelters in the hills. I was sinking into that old feeling of powerlessness in the face of great harm and impending disaster. Though a friend and CEELI colleague from Sarajevo continued to call daily and urge me to come there where there would be more emotional support, it was 10 days before I could gather strength and initiative to do it.

Eventually, I made my way to Sarajevo, aware of the irony of being evacuated FROM Serbia TO Sarajevo, whose three-year long siege by the Bosnian Serb Army had only ended two years before. Despite cleaning and clearing, Sarajevo's destruction was everywhere evident in bummed out buildings, pock marked facades and the bright yellow plastic ribbons announcing "land mines." Yet it did provide me refuge for awhile, time enough to decide I needed to leave Serbia and the growing atmosphere of quiet hysteria leading up to war. As an adult, I could choose to leave a crazy situation. It was not necessary for me to suffer to do good work.

In mid-February, I moved to Montenegro where I set up CEELI' s first office to assist the new progressive government with its ambitious law reform agenda. I was relieved and delighted to be working on something positive. I could almost forget that Montenegro was also a part of the rump Yugoslavia and, therefore, under Milosevic' s control, and that it shared a border with Kosovo.

In January, there was another massacre of Kosovar Albanian civilians, followed by more threats from NATO and internationally dictated negotiations between the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Kosovar Albanian representatives. We' d been in Montenegro only two weeks, when the State Department urged U.S. citizens to evacuate. I stubbornly refused, having experienced too many negative repercussions from the last one. Within a few days the other internationals returned and I continued planning for a regional conference of judges' associations. In another reflection of my childhood, planned events were infrequently realized. On March 23, 1999, after the Montenegrin Foreign Ministry said they could not assure my exit any longer, I called my partner, Kate, and told her to pack a bag. We left within the hour and were not to return for 3 months.

On the evening of March 24, 1999, NATO dropped the first bombs on the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. We watched it on CNN from a luxury hotel suite overlooking the heartbreakingly beautiful Adriatic Sea. All those people I'd fallen in love with were on the other side, under the bombs. They were not all guilty. Some, like the women and men in Women In Black, had actively opposed Serbia's aggression for nearly a decade, at great personal risk. NATO bombs could not distinguish between the guilty and the innocent.

Yet I did not automatically oppose NATO bombing of Serbia and Serbian forces in Kosovo. I didn't know how else to stop the bully, to stop the killing. Just as you can't mediate with a batterer, you can't negotiate with a war monger. Of course, that does not mean the only recourse is violence. It isn't. But it was incredibly frustrating to watch the international community repeatedly accept Milosevic' s promises to withdraw forces from Kosova while he repeatedly escalated attacks on Kosovar civilians. The body count climbed weekly from 1997 on. The failure to hold Milosevic to his promises gave him the message that there would be no real consequences to his military operations in Kosovo. It's the same message we give batterers when there are no or minimal consequences for beating their wives.

In the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, the only way to stop the bullies was to send in a bigger bully. Or so it seemed and so the policy-makers kept saying. Women In Black and the Autonomous Women ' s Center in Belgrade never believed that. They continued to reach across the ethnic divide, to support and maintain contact with the Albanian women from Kosova, and to urge Serbian draft resistance. Yet even when a Serbian friend wrote imploring me to speak out against the bombing, I could not. I was appalled at the concept of a casualty-free war, where only soldiers are considered impermissible casualties while dead civilians are acceptable collateral damage. But I could not oppose intervention to stop the massacres and the ethnic cleansing of the province. To say it was an internal matter for the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was like saying the state shouldn't interfere in the family to stop domestic violence. In both cases, if there is appropriate intervention when problems first surface, deaths and serious injuries can be avoided. If not, the violence escalates.

For nearly a decade, Kosovar Albanians followed a strategy of non-violent resistance to Serbian oppression. If they had received adequate support from the international community for their peaceful efforts, war might well have been avoided. Certainly, the costs, in lives and resources, would have been substantially less.

I did not languish in Dubrovnik throughout the war in Kosovo. After six weeks, CEELI sent me to Macedonia, where nearly a half million Kosovar Albanians had taken refuge. During my two months there, I set up and ran a project to document war crimes in support of the work of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. This task saved my sanity. I no longer felt completely powerless in the face of the human tragedy unfolding -unlike when I was a child.

Yet even as we heard stories of torture, theft and destruction of property, forced expulsion, rapes and murders by Serbian police, soldiers and paramilitaries, we also heard stories of refugee women being abused by their husbands. It became such a problem in the refugee camps that I worked with a local women's activist to develop a protocol for international governmental and nongovernmental organizations to use. Our project, however, focused on refugees who were staying with friends and relatives, which presented a different problem.

Many of the women refugees we interviewed were from isolated rural villages, where a woman "once married" is not allowed to leave her husband's house or be addressed by any name but the generic "bride." These women could not speak Macedonian. They did not know how to get help. Indeed, medical care, counseling and legal assistance were mostly unavailable to refugees who did not live in the camps. They feared the police and Macedonian authorities and did not want to subject their menfolk to further police brutality or to deportation back into the war zone.

One day, Edmond, one of my Albanian-speaking staff, approached me with a problem. He had spoken to a woman on the telephone who disclosed that her husband had beaten her. She was frightened and wanted assistance, but when he asked where she was staying, she had no idea. She had come with her husband to his relatives' home, but she didn't know where it was. Nor could she identify any landmarks because she had not been out of the house since she arrived there six weeks before. This woman had fled war and ethnic cleansing only to be beaten and held prisoner in her land of refuge by a man who claimed to be her protector .

War, political oppression, ethnic cleansing, poverty, homelessness, democracy, professional status, wealth are all overlays to domestic violence. They color it in a variety of ways, sometimes exacerbating it, sometimes lessening it. Violence against women by their husbands and mates is the ground. It exists regardless.

According to a United Nations report:

> "The most pervasive form of gender-based violence against women is reported to be abuse by husband or intimate partner. National studies in 10 countries estimate that between 17 and 38 per cent of women have been physically assaulted by an intimate partner. " "There appears to be no part of the world where it is unknown. "

It is estimated that 60 million women who should be alive today are not because of domestic violence.

While it can take different forms in different cultures from dowry murders to public stoning, throughout the world it includes physical assault, psychological and emotional abuse, sexual abuse, confinement and murder. It is part of the larger field of violence directed at women for the purpose of controlling them and insuring their subordination.

The United Nations has recognized that violence against women is a fundamental human rights violation. In 1992, the UN Committee on the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women specifically linked violence against women with gender discrimination, stating:

> "Violence against women is both a consequence of systematic discrimination against women in public and private life, and a means by which constraints on women's rights are reinforced. Women are vulnerable because of disabilities imposed on them in economic, social, cultural, civil and political life and violence impairs the extent to which they are able to exercise de jure rights. "

In the former Yugoslavia, as in many other former communist countries, a severe housing shortage and lack of economic means prevents many battered women from leaving abusive husbands--even after they divorced. There is simply nowhere else to go. As in the U.S., in Serbia, male battering

increases in severity when a woman attempts to leave or divorce. Divorced women all too frequently find themselves sharing flats with their abusers, while the abuse they seek to escape worsens.

The fall of socialism, as well as economic disruption due to war and international sanctions, increased the precariousness of women' s economic situation in Serbia and Montenegro. Nationalist ideology promoted traditional roles for women, limiting their options and increasing their dependence on men. As the economy went into a tailspin, women became the majority of the unemployed. It was a common sight throughout the cities of Serbia and Montenegro to see women sitting all day behind cardboard boxes selling black market cigarettes, even in bitter cold and rain. War and economic sanctions gave rise to a criminal elite and a nearly lawless society. In such an atmosphere, there is very little safety to be found.

Women's vulnerability is increased during times of war, as the situation of the woman refugee in Macedonia illustrates. Women are also a target in the run-up to war. Despite prevailing myths, I am not convinced that all or even the majority of men are eager to fight and die for a symbol. Nations make warriors. They create the climate for war by idealizing an aggressive and violent masculinity and a weak, dependent femininity. Women ' s role is reduced to bearing soldiers for the nation. Perhaps more than in peacetime, she is seen as male property.

In this hyper-masculinized environment, the Belgrade crisis line heard from women who had been beaten by their husbands for the first time. As Lepa Mladjenovic says,

> "SOS hotlines around the world show that generally a husband in the family revenges his anger on his wife. It can be any anger launched by any frustration, ranging from the wrong meal to the wrong political situation. We have seen that women have called [the] SOS hotline to tell us that husbands beat them up after watching [the] TV News. Their pride was touched by the scenes of the 'enemy' attacking 'their' people, so men had to [take] revenge: the wife is there if not the battlefield."

I might add that the wife is the battlefield. She is the quintessential "other" and as such became a stand-in for the enemy.

The ethnic character of the Bosnian war also impacted women in their homes. Having lived in a joint state for nearly 80 years, many people considered themselves Yugoslavs rather than Croats, Serbs or Muslims. There were numerous mixed marriages. The war not only divided families. It also provided yet another excuse for husbands to beat and abuse their wives. As my friend and colleague Vesna found in her interviews of refugee women,

> "The ethnic divide most deeply affected. . .so-called mixed marriages, because it was impossible to take sides, so that what frequently happened was that women were abused by their ethnically different husbands. Milica talked to us about a couple that lived in her neighborhood. The husband, a Serb, took the reproaches of his fellow Serbs seriously when they criticized him for having married a Moslem woman. He began beating his wife, while telling her, You Moslem one, you can return to your village but you can't take the child with you because she's Serb. '"

The end of war also brought increased violence to some women. Gabriele Kramer is a German psychologist who went to Bosnia during the war there, where she founded and worked in a counseling center for women and children. She writes,

> "[H]usbands began slowly to trickle into the Tuzla area, many having not seen their wives for well over two years. Not surprisingly, this was often the source of considerable tension, since both wives and husbands had undergone significant traumatic experiences, and many women were loathe to give up the relative autonomy and independence they had enjoyed during the war years. In this way, spousal abuse rapidly became a serious problem within refugee families, as men sought to compensate for their low self -esteem by assaulting, raping and sometimes even killing their marital partners."

All over the former Yugoslavia, men returning from war brought home their weapons, their psychic woundedness and their rage. Violence throughout Yugoslav society increased, as returning soldiers and paramilitaries formed into criminal gangs. Abuse of mothers by their adult sons doubled between 1991 and 1993. According to Zorica Mrsevic, lawyer, human rights activist and researcher, the "level of violence and the use of military weapons in domestic locations was previously unheard of." One of the weapons men brought home was rape. According to the SOS Hotline, rapes of all types increased --marital & acquaintance rape, stranger rape, rape of refugees in their places of supposed refuge.

Aleksa, my dear friend and colleague in Montenegro, told me the following story. One day he received a phone call from his close friend, Ljubisa, who is a judge in Herceg Novi on the Montenegrin coast. A woman, a relative, was sitting on Ljubisa' s couch. She had been badly beaten by her husband, a veteran of the Bosnian war, after she confronted him with a rumor about his having participated in gang rapes of Muslim women. He had threatened to kill her if she told anyone. She could not go to the police because he had friends among them. Ljubisa asked Aleksa if he would come and sit with her while he made arrangements for her protection. Aleksa soon found himself sitting on Ljubisa' s couch, facing the door with a rifle across his knees and a pistol in his hand. Aleksa, a gentle, thoughtful soul who actively opposed all of Milosevic' s wars and refused conscription, gravely told me that he would have shot this man if he had walked through the door. Fortunately, he didn't and the woman was able to find refuge.

It did not turn out so well for a woman in Croatia. Her husband walked into a court hearing for a divorce, took out a gun, shot and killed her, her lawyer and the judge, all women. When I heard this item on the news, it reminded me of Candace Duboff, a classmate of mine at Lewis & Clark Law School who was shot and killed by a client's abusive husband under similar circumstances in an Oregon courtroom. Guns are as available in the U.S. as they are in a war zone and with similar lethal consequences. Many U. S. men have also experienced the brutality of war .My father was a soldier in WWII and his experiences colored the rest of his life. Did it teach him to hit women? I don't know. But it trained him to use violence.

I often wonder what it feels like inside after you kill or seriously hurt someone. Does it make it easier the second time? If that killing violates one's own moral code, where does that leave him? Has he crossed a border into some shadowland, where everything is distorted, where wrong is right and right is wrong? Does it help if his society calls him a hero? Does it help if the person he has killed is dehumanized, so the killing is of little consequence or even considered useful and praiseworthy?

In Bosnia and Kosova, rape was a tactic of war used to further the goal of ethnic cleansing. It is not a new war tactic, but has been used to frighten and punish the enemy for centuries. In Bosnia, an estimated 20,000 Muslim women were raped by Serbian forces. Serbian women were also raped by Muslim and Croat soldiers, though in lesser numbers. Recently the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia convicted three Bosnian Serbs for war crimes and crimes against humanity for their participation in the rape of Muslim women held at the Foca rape camp. One of these men, Zoran Vukovic, was convicted of raping and torturing a 15 year old girl. When he returned home from the war, he looked at his own daughter and realized she was the same age. What does a person do when he comes face to face with his own evil, when denial and justification no longer work to cloud the picture of what he's done? Is there a way back for him or are his only options suicide or a return to denial? Vukovic was sentenced to 12 years in prison. Can that be part of his way back?

There are degrees of guilt and responsibility. Those of us who have not killed, raped, tortured an enemy, their partner or their child are not wholly innocent. For we belong to a human community where these things happen every day. While no individual alone can stop them, it does not mean we are powerless or excused.

As I grow older, I become less judgmental and more aware of life' s complexities. I still struggle with my desire to "make nice," to try to take people's hurt away from them, whether deserved or undeserved. Yet I remember reading years ago what Julian Beck, an early creator of counter-culture and street theater, said, "When we feel, we will feel the emergency: when we feel the emergency, we will act: when we act, we will change the world." So I know I must step back, feel my own pain and allow others to feel theirs.

My small child self could not stop daddy from hitting mommy, just as my individual adult self could not stop the massacres, war or ethnic cleansing. But being informed of the pain of our fellows, whether next door, in the next room or across the ocean, allows us to judge what is required of us and what is possible. That' s for ourselves, really. So we can live with ourselves and live meaningful lives.

There were many heroes in the former Yugoslavia, ordinary people who made extraordinary choices. Their stories rarely make the news, just as the incredible accomplishments of the domestic and international women' s movement remains an untold story in the mainstream press. It seems we prefer villains to heroes. Yet in those stories lie our healing and hope for the future. I would like to share a few.

First, I would like to honor the tremendous achievements of the women's movement at the international level. I remember a photo on the front page of the Oregonian shortly after the UN' s Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, where more than 30,000 women had gathered at the NGO Forum. The photo had nothing to do with the Women ' s Conference, which seemed only to make the news as a subtext to U.S./China relations. The photo, taken for the 50th anniversary of the United Nations, showed heads of state from 160 nations. Only two were women. Yet despite this lack of official political power, women have changed the international discourse on human rights. Women have forced the United Nations and its member states to recognize the tremendous violence directed at women simply because they are women. A decade ago, when violence against women was seen at all it was considered a private matter, certainly not an issue for diplomats, heads of state and international bodies.

In 1993, while war was raging in Bosnia, the United Nations' World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna officially recognized that violence against women is a human rights violation. It was

followed by the UN General Assembly's adoption of the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women and the appointment of a Special Rapporteur who is responsible for investigating and reporting on violence against women in UN member nations.

In 1995, the UN Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, China declared violence against women to be a critical area of concern throughout the world. The Platform for Action, issued by the conference delegates, calls on states, nongovernmental organizations and the international community to take specific actions to address the many forms of violence against women. Last spring, delegates gathered to review progress at Beijing Plus 5. In the opening session, the Secretary General noted that violence against women is now an illegal act in almost every country. Following the conference, the General Assembly adopted a Political Declaration and Outcome Document which identifies violence against women and girls as one of the areas requiring focused attention.

International recognition that violence against women is a fundamental human rights violation is a powerful tool for women' s advocates to use to change local laws, practices and attitudes. In many countries, including the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, international treaties, once ratified, are the law of the land. Thus, international instruments can be used to secure rights in local courts in addition to acting as leverage for legislative and institutional change. In Montenegro, for example, the importance the international community places on women's human rights provided the support women's activists needed to convince the government to make domestic violence a priority in the legal reform program.

We have not been so lucky in the United States, where reference to international treaties and standards is often ridiculed. Even when the U.S. signs a human rights treaty, it remains unimplemented as the Senate refuses to ratify. Such is the case with the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women, initially passed by the UN General Assembly in 1979, and the Optional Protocol which came into effect last December. The Optional Protocol, a significant milestone in the protection of women's rights, provides individual women or groups of women in ratifying states an international remedy for violation of their rights, when they have exhausted all national remedies.

Women activists have also succeeded in getting the international community to accept rape as a war crime. Rape has been a part of war for centuries--so much so that it was invisible. At most, it was seen as the aberrant act of individual men or accepted as the spoils of war .

That changed with the war in Bosnia. According to Human Rights Watch: "The unprecedented attention to rape may also reflect a change in the public perception of rape, due largely to the efforts of the international women's movement to condemn rape as a weapon of war and ensure accountability for those responsible!' (p. 10) In February of this year, the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia sentenced three former members of the Bosnian Serb armed forces to a total of 60 years in prison following their convictions on charges of rape and sexual enslavement of Muslim girls and women in Foca in 1992. All three were found guilty of crimes against humanity and violations of the laws and customs of war. This is the first conviction by an international court for sexual enslavement and the first trial to deal exclusively with sexual crimes per se rather than grouping such offenses with killings and similar war crimes as the "accompanying phenomena" of war.

What is increasingly evident as one travels abroad is the incredible network of women that reaches across borders, religions, ethnic groups and classes. Through this network women learn from one another, share their successes and receive support. Despite the unceasing nationalistic propaganda

and the war fever that gripped people from throughout the former Yugoslavia, some women maintained contact across the boundaries of hatred. They supported one another emotionally and practically.

In October 1991, Stasa Zajovic gathered a group of like-minded people and started Women In Black Against War in Belgrade. Women In Black held a public vigil in Belgrade' s main square every Wednesday throughout the wars. They were one of the few groups in Serbia to show solidarity with Kosovar Albanians. They are strongly anti-nationalist. They collected food, clothing and other necessities and sent them into Sarajevo throughout the three-year siege by Bosnian Serbs. As soon as they could, they traveled to Sarajevo even as the war continued. As women of the same nationality as the aggressor against Sarajevo, they worried about their reception. Lepa Mladjenovic writes about that journey:

> "When we went to visit my former neighbor Pika, I was nervous, what will Pika think of me, what will she say. After ten years, Pika opened the door and said, ‘My lepa.’ Then we climbed the stairs, and Jadranka knew that she would now have to talk with Pika, because due to the tears, I simply couldn't speak."

In their visits, these Serbian women sat with their friends who had suffered deprivation and horror at the hands of their countrymen, in their name. They listened in silent anguish to their stories, held their hands, put their arms around them, believed them.

Stasa addressed their Croatian sisters at a meeting in Zagreb in 1996 :

> "In our language, the language of our mothers, I wish to share with you
>
> tenderness, pain and hope. I also wish to share with you the networks of disobedience to all militarists: fathers of nations, keepers of traditions, morals and nations, keepers of states and borders. Let us be disobedient to all . . . militarists of all colors and nations. Friendship and tenderness will save us from them."

Nor did they forget the connection between public and private violence. The following is from a statement issued by Women In Black in 1992:

> "Don't let yourself be deceived by your own people. Women equally fear husbands who have gone wild, just as they fear their enemies. Is there a difference between the aggressor and defender of the homeland? When they return from the front where they have raped women of other nationalities, warriors harass and rape women in their own homes."

Women In Black also counseled and assisted draft resisters. Over 200,000 men left Serbia and Montenegro rather than fight their former fellow citizens. During and leading up to the war in Kosova, as conscription increased, so did draft resistance. We read in the newspapers on more than one occasion about parents marching to army headquarters to demand the return of their sons. An article in a Serbian newsweekly, Vreme, in June 1998 reported:

"Divna Babic arrived and pulled from her purse a picture of her late son Bojan who was killed on the Macedonian border at Prizren in September of last year. ‘They told me that it was an unfortunate case, ' said Mrs. Babic. ' What you are doing doesn't help, but go to the barracks, take your child by the hand, and go home, she appealed to women who tried unsuccessfully to hold back tears. ' But they'll go to jail,

' said one old woman, upset with protesters. Divna Babic calmly answered, ‘They'll get out of jail, but never from the grave. '”

My stories tell of people like you and me. Ordinary people whose small and large choices redeem a share of the universal cruelty. That's from Czech philosopher Jan Patocka, writing about universal responsibility. In more detail, he writes:

> "[Universal responsibility] is a sense of solidarity in participation and in truth. ... What then does this responsibility mean in a universal sense? ...To want to take up and redeem one's share of the universal cruelty. Not to want to escape into a realm of privacy, games, and esthetics. To want to take part in universal justice as being the only state in which a soul like this --i.e., an existence whose Being is an up-swing out of decay--can exist."

In small and large ways, we can all redeem a share of the universal cruelty. We do it by working for human rights, to alleviate suffering, to end war and to build a new life- affirming paradigm. We do it by interrupting the bullies, embracing those who are different from us, being aware of what is happening in our community and the global community, and by questioning prevailing value systems. That' s especially true in the U.S. where we' re swimming against the tide of an untempered individualism which encourages behavior destructive to the rest of the world. From those who are given much, much is required.

I know that many of you have given much and continue to do so, often at great personal cost. I would like to thank each one of you from my heart for the peace and justice-making work you do everyday. As a child trapped in a violent home, I was terribly alone. There was no one to intervene. There was no one to bear witness to the pain of myself, my sister, my mother and father--which might have been enough to save us. So I grew up bearing that pain alone, believing I was alone in trying to make it stop--for myself and the rest of the world. It' s taken me many years to realize that isn't so. It' s an incredible relief to see that I have only one small part in redeeming the universal cruelty. And that I am not alone.

Thank you.