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The Kolo: Women's Cross Cultural Collaboration

## **A Story and A Face about Domestic Violence with Bosnian Refugees and Immigrants**

"One of the most pronounced shortcomings in this area, with the most damaging effects, appears in the collection of data disaggregated by sex and of data focusing on gender issue," expressed Jose Antonio Ocampo, the United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs.

A female face is rarely reported alongside a statistic that catalogues rape,



Novi Travnik, Bosnia, Grandmother

poverty and violence such as domestic violence or abuse issues. Since most rapes and acts of domestic violence thrive on women's silence to protect the males, many such crimes go unreported and therefore not considered within statistical data. Since the unreported crimes are not reflected in statistics the policies and rule of law the violence towards females never enters into the language of law, human rights issues or humanitarian aid programs.

It has been uncovered in traumatic stress studies and research that telling first person stories as soon as possible after the catastrophic event heals and actually prevents the development of Post Traumatic Stress.

In a patriarchal world, accountability is avoided by not hearing years' long females' first person stories that faced crimes against their humanity. Instead violence against the female gender is repeated and endlessly ad nauseam in violent perspective hues. Since putting a face to her first person story is not included in the androcratic systems of governing bodies, medical schisms, and humanitarian aid agencies this domestic violence article takes on accountability by writing down and interviewing for first person stories of two women, one elderly immigrant from former Yugoslavia to Canada and a middle-aged immigrant also from former Yugoslavia to the United States.

Luce Irigaray, fresh and poignant French feminist and psychoanalyst noted how female identity is boiled down to "empirical patterns" statistics on the marital status, of: your father's name or husband's and the number of children. <sup>1</sup> The empirical patterns do not invite in the female face and her first person story, a reality that is the foundation of cataclysmic crimes statistics based on the violent crimes against females.

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Irigaray sources a definitive self-perpetuating violence cycle built on the social space that requires females' sacrifices in religions, governments and the rule of law. <sup>2</sup> Using the mythology of Oresteia- Luce Irigaray articulates the message of that story to be endlessly reenacted.

The myth according to Irigaray follows as: "Thus the murder of the mother is rewarded by letting the son go scot free, by burying the madness of women- and burying women in madness- and by introducing the image of the virgin Goddess, born of the father, obedient to his laws at the expense of mother."<sup>3</sup>

The Balkan war in former Yugoslavia simply unleashed for the third time in one century unrestrained hatred of females- murdering their mothers in their homes and wombs. Since WWI and WWII along with the Balkan war in 1990's the home, the family, the social space dictated by religions and patriarchs as the place or prison that will accommodate her, has been systematically the battlegrounds and the targets both during the wars and in-between wars for centuries.

"The vast majority of [Bosnian-former Yugoslavs] casualties (approximately 250,000 killed) were civilian. An outflow of refugees resulted with approximately 800,000 Bosnians displaced to other countries and more than 200,000 coming to the United States."<sup>4</sup>



Kolo Sumejja Trauma Training in Kindergarten classroom 2003, Novi Travnik, Bosnia Organized by the Kolo: Women's Cross Cultural Collaboration—All the women are war survivors

Acute observation about the war statistics again reveals the absence of gender. Civilian casualties are known to be the women, the elderly and the children left behind when the patriarch marches off to war. No accurate statistic has been compiled to determine the truth about civilian casualties.

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If anything, the sacrifice from women to be silenced in not being reported in statistics is in effect her 'patriotic duty' to protect her family.

And what of the Bosnian immigrants to the United States and North America after the Balkan war-did the domestic violence well honed in former Yugoslavia flourish in 'the land of the free?' Is it an illusion in 'the land of the free' that women are free from domestic violence?

Raw denial in the illusion that since it is not reported it must not be, morphs into the sacrificial martyr who gains a smidgen of superiority over mans' inferiority complex of his gender. The untold number of causalities through the generations is not recoverable in statistics.

Putting a face to first person stories is bearing witness to the 200,000 refugees to the United States return back to WWII with Bosnian immigrants to Canada and the United States. We discover the memory of those unreported crime statistics through the ages in the first person stories of Theresa Marija Milicenvich and Silvana Hoitt.

### The Inter-weaving Interviews

Stunning, short pure white hair simply combed back, **Theresa Marija Istvan** was born in Oscek, former Yugoslavia 1936. The year was 1950- at the age of seventeen when she immigrated with her sister to Hamilton, Canada.

"I saw Hitler in the camp for Germans married to Serbians when I was seven," acknowledges Theresa Marija.

Theresa was more afraid of the Americans and the bombs. In actuality, everyone was gunning for her family due to her Bavarian step-father. Theresa's mother worked as a housekeeper for the Countess Olga of former Yugoslavia. Partisans were loyal to educated Croat Tito while Countess Olga was a member of the royal monarchy in former Yugoslavia.

A partisan's bullet sailed through the window of the Countess Olga's villa in Oscek less then an inch past Theresa's mother's head. Theresa, seven years old, was privy to a front seat as she sat in the wood bin next to the pech

(stove) watching the partisan's bullet nearly kill her mother.



Photo by Salgado Bihac  
1999- Balkan War

Running away to nowhere since violence was targeted to homes filled with mothers and children eventually led to the camp where Hitler visited. Describing how the trains were shortened so as to not be bombed by Americans, guided the memory to evoke the fear of Americans as well as distrust of anything in a uniform for Theresa.

The train her mother and Theresa's siblings were on had the train's box cars separated shortening the train and displacing her from her siblings. Flight or fear is not a luxury for the women and the children, Theresa would have abandonment scars for the rest of her life from having had such a forceful violent imprint at the tender, impressionable age of seven.

Her sister needed a babysitter and did not want to immigrate alone without family to Canada after the war. Pressed into sacrificing her nursing school dreams, Theresa did not want the experience of separation from her siblings again. At the age of fifteen she immigrated and at seventeen she was married to another Serbian immigrant who came to Hamilton Canada to work the Steel Mill- DeFasco.



Theresa imprinted with intergenerational trauma from WWII learned at a young age about isolation and displacing females from their homes as bullets whiz passed her mother near the hearth. The potent warning can not be erased since the isolation, the displacing females and bullets foretold how there is no safe place for women on the face of the earth.

Repeating her WWII childhood into her adulthood as a mother in the Serbian Orthodox community in Hamilton, Canada took on a different form but remained the same since domestic violence took place in her home near the hearth. The women in the kitchens and Sunday school of the Serb Orthodox Church would never discuss it as it would extend shame to the family.

Shaking her head and with piercing alive dark eyes, Theresa articulates the series of domestic violence events that started shortly after their marriage. Her husband would appear in the afternoon at home expecting her to be there to satiate his demand for sex. One afternoon she was at a neighbor's home collecting a recipe. Returning home meant she would face an outraged husband jealous and incensed at her inability to submit under his rules.

Theresa was beaten for that at a time when the sixties women's liberation was already in full swing. Marital rape was taboo and of course never discussed amongst women. Even in the United States marital rape is hardly

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prosecuted and as of 2006 only three cases were ever brought into the courts.

When Theresa was deciding about an unplanned pregnancy in her forties she ran away to Germany. To contemplate an abortion against her husbands' demand and male entitlement to sex was a major step for her own empowerment as a female who does have the right to choose life every month with her menses. She returned and never regretted not having her last child. The cost emotionally was extravagant for Theresa but it was a sacrificial South Slavic practice amongst the women to do so.

Since her first name Theresa was more Croat than Serb, her husband made her change her name to Marija. The intergenerational hatred follows intergenerational trauma twinning the forces of rage against females into a most mighty war campaign on the battlegrounds called home and marriage.

Warping into ethnic hatreds to mask the true hatred of women, the former Yugoslavs have the psycho-biological imprint of trauma in their genes. The last century of wars destroyed homes, farm fields along with the raping and mayhem against women doused the South Slavic women in maternal fright and destructive martyrdom against their own gender.

Research and documentation of the long psychopathic history of South Slavic males is presented in the work of Alenka Puhar. Puhar writes:

*"In short, the traditional life in Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia, Montenegro, as portrayed in fiction (and on stage and film), can be described as life of enormous hatred, vindictiveness and cruelty, with sexual expressions of aggression a common component. The traditional Balkan man rapes for power, he is extremely insecure and the best way he can find to make himself feel better and in control is to get drunk and violent, to make others feel even worse, to humiliate, to degrade, to inflict as much pain as possible. This makes him gain some self-respect and at the same time makes him respected in the eyes of other; less daring and violent men. As women are treated with a mixture of reverence and resentment, to conquer them is accompanied with an appropriately mixed response: the conqueror is a criminal and a hero at the same time; he is hated with awesome respect. Sexual triumphs in various forms produce tremendous guilt and pride at the same time."*<sup>5</sup>

Her husband would often volunteer her baking abilities to the Hamilton Serb Orthodox church which assaulted Theresa's sensibilities. In reality, most South Slavic married men enjoy a slave labor pool under their domination even in present day Canadian and United States Serb Orthodox communities which is sanctioned by what Serb Orthodox communities call the Mother church.

Use of the Mother Church cunningly disguises their patriarchal abuse and slave labor agenda and to this day many Serb Orthodox Churches have

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women sitting on the left and men on the right. Women uphold the patriarchy's unnatural laws which is significantly researched by author Robin Morgan in her chapter on *Token Terrorism*, "the woman trapped in this position must not only pledge her fealty but defend her commitment-and defend her denial of herself-with vehemence sufficient to convince her own troubled soul as well as her vigilant male colleagues."<sup>6</sup>

Immigration of Bosnian refugees and WWII former Yugoslav refugees imported the well honed domestic violence sanctioned as South Slavic culture. The important factor is that domestic violence in Canada and the United States are also in the same context as that of the South Slavs without a century of wars found on backyard soil.

Theresa does not have a computer or email. Her daughter wrote her mother's responses to the interweaving interview queries.

Danica: Did she feel held hostage to the economics of being in a foreign land, not knowing the language as well in the beginning and having children to support? Was it about having no way out or not seeing a way out?

Theresa: She felt she had no way out as she did not have the education & she had her children already by that time. She says what she should have done right from the start is tried to complete school but that is looking in hind sight. Her sister who brought her to Canada did not encourage her to get an education and as a 15 year old at that time she did not know what she knows today.

Danica: Did this lead to an internalized pattern of oppression within ourselves? What I mean by this is how at the Serb Church I would hear the women in the kitchen talk about the males as either being mad or joking about them but never the real story. In fact the gossip amongst women especially the young women main lined (like heroin) the women's horizontal hostility (violence to each other but not to those in power). It was about saving face and that everything was just fine- perfect. Carrying the shame on their shoulders, these women preferred being martyrs, servicing the Church, their males- husbands and sons as gods. The silence on the domestic violence on behalf of the women colluded with the men's violence. Audrey Lorde wrote: "The silence will not protect you." Do you think the silence by the women was to protect themselves but sacrifice their daughters to another generation of abuse? And why is it that some of the daughters become what Robin Morgan describes as 'wanna be males' or their father's daughter despite a knowing of the abuse towards their own mother? Is it that they do not want to become that target- and not become the mother?

Theresa: Mom said they never discussed this amongst each other. What you wrote in your opinion is partly true for her. She does not want to dwell upon it as it is in the past for her. She has moved forward with her life & feels that she is content to see her granddaughter & daughter perhaps stronger as a result of her struggles. She also said she has continuously told her sons to treat their wives with respect & honor or else they will have to deal with her.

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Despite having a lifetime of domestic violence with her husband and having survived WWII witnessing her mother's life with her Bavarian step-father, Theresa feels the statistics and the violence noted is just the author's 'opinion.' Theresa's reliable bias, her first person story is an impressive eulogy for women enduring domestic violence and marital rape yet the imprint of trauma has seeded a deep psychological scar for Theresa to believe in the patriarch illusion that it is culture or only a female's opinion.

### ***Silvana H.***

Upbeat and modern, Silvana has owned her own business and raised her family as she moved through her life experience of domestic violence with a Bosnian Muslim Male. Silvana contacted the Kolo: Women's Cross Cultural Collaborations (the Kolo: WCCC) non-profit after reading the website guest book. In the guest book was a scathing letter from the nephew of Danica Anderson, forensic psychotherapist and executive director of the Kolo: WCCC. The Serbian nephew spewed threats and recriminations towards Danica's trauma work with Muslim women and her use of Bosnian instead of Serbian. The visceral hatefulness of this young eighteen-year-old nephew shocked and incensed Silvana. It was also something that she was very familiar with.

Silvana's email signaled a beginning of discovery rather than recovery mode as a victim and encountered synchronicity. Her mother, a WWII refugee was born in Zenica Bosnia. Zenica is only a half hour from Novi Travnik, Bosnia where Danica Anderson does trauma treatment and training with the women.

Danica: How long were you with your husband Silvana? Are you Bosnian by birth, or American?

Silvana: I am American but I was born in Germany and grew up there till I was 7. My mother is from Bosnia and my birth father is from Kiev. I have a mixed heritage and it took me a long time to connect with the Bosnian - ness. My family was always ashamed to be Bosnian - they went through terrible racial ethnic derision when they ended up in Germany as refugees in the Second World War, so it was very 'hush hush.' When I started doing resettlement work with Bosnians in the middle 90's I had definitely found my 'calling'. That is also how I met my husband who is a Bosnian Muslim from Bijeljina. We were together for 3 years almost to the day - and then it has taken another 3 years to sort out the leaving.

Her mother remarried when Silvana was seven after a physically and verbally abusive relationship with her Slavic father. The abuse improved with her mother's second marriage to the level of psychological terror and magnified 'put downs' toward her mother and herself.

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Developmentally a child's language is inadequate to express the horror of having seen their mother's beaten, raped and abused bodies even though it affects them both physically and spiritually. Instead, the credo is silence as the females themselves internally oppress themselves back into the repeating domestic violence cycle.

This is what happened to Silvana who says of herself, " I was not used to being that deer in the headlights, frozen and taken in by the charms of an abuser. I know that it went on in my work with some of my cases – I was in a sea of domestic violence. Silvana and Theresa both South Slavic women- either Bosnian or Serbian are amongst millions of women worldwide who suffer in silence with the knowing; domestic violence is fated to repeat endlessly and is incited by domestication.

In 1996 at a refugee center Silvana volunteered as a case manager for Bosnians running away from the Bloody Balkan war. There she witnessed the



face of domestic violence through interaction with some of the newly arrived families but knew that this was common in Bosnia.

Denver Refugee Center

A colleague was working with a Bosnian woman subjected to domestic violence from her husband and took appropriate action with police and shelters. Silvana remembers commenting to the colleague that her attempts were futile because Bosnian women stay with their men or come back to them despite the beatings and humiliations. In her experience and spoken history from mothers and grandmothers it is the law of the land.

Silvana stated her "working with refugees in the mid nineties was really something to be helpful and it was appreciated (at least on the surface) and I think that I did a lot of soul searching and learned a lot of things about myself, my family - good and bad. Stuff I would have never known without this work. That is also how I met my husband a drama - the whole meeting, getting together living together and all that."



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Identifying her Bosnian sensibilities to only see what was imprinted and indoctrinated by fists, kicks and psychological slurs, she met a Bosnian male refugee who was a former police officer in Bosnia. In 1992 Bosnia, he was brutally wounded, beaten and tortured by Serb paramilitaries looking for Muslim blood. After escape he and his family including his widowed mother landed in Berlin, Germany and they eventually immigrated to the states where he met Silvana. .

Bosnian martyred mothers would have us taking care of their wounded sons from murderous wars. They married and she became the sculpting clay for his trauma explosion. His male entitlement to domestic violence is exploited as a cultural right in Bosnia. She says, "The typical schizophrenic way Bosnians treat their women is similar to the 'Gas Light' (the movie with Ingrid Bergman where her husband tries to make her believe she is crazy?)." No matter what you do it is wrong. The most important thing is to adore. And you don't want to even be thinking anything that he wouldn't be thinking too. So if you know something that he doesn't know...well – you have hell to pay."

Silvana: He was so insistent on getting married from the first day. I thought it was romantic for a few weeks and then one day he said, 'Well you know when we get married all this is going to be different' and I said 'oh really like what?' and he said 'Well - you'll see'. A normal person would have walked out the door immediately. But he had divorced his wife, left his kids brought his mother. You see? I think I thought I owed him.

It was in her home the domestic violence flourished. Domestic violence did not stop when she was breastfeeding her one year old daughter and he hit her across the face so hard she suffered a concussion. As time went on his demands became greater and his jealousy more absurd and there came a time she had to ask permission even to go out of the house.

From a Bosnian family herself, Silvana was privy to the Bosnian gossip that was especially rife from the South Slavic mothers-in-law who did not demand any accountability from their sons even to the point of sacrificing their daughters. As if to subsume the victim role without any conscious intent when beaten by her Bosnian police officer husband said she never entertained exposing him or going for help.

Her daughter literally in her hands, Silvana ran away to another state. Perhaps, the rapes, the beatings are the last frontier of civil human rights however since it takes place in the home and the womb of the female. It becomes the pillar of the marriage institution and ruling entities that have the males' only preference. Marriage, homes are places of domestication threatening hyper masculinity.

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Silvana: "I was myself but could be Bosnian. I have the same or similar family background (I was and still am by some in my family ostracized for marrying a Muslim: you never inter marry apparently) I cooked their food and spoke their language fairly decently. So I just couldn't get it when he would say that I didn't respect him. I told him if he meant I would be meek like his first wife he was mistaken. I know: respect means deference. Not just to some things - in all things. Otherwise he cannot prove he is the man."

The murderous wars fought in the last century on blood soaked Bosnian lands was a patriotic and sanctioned domestic violence pogrom that killed more civilians (females and children make up the majority of civilians) in turn inciting fresh vengeance on yet other men who dared to rape and pillage their own families and homes. When the wars cease, the male entitlement to raping and pillaging their own is deemed a cultural prerogative and largely unseen by the women themselves as such.

Silvana: "My husband was Muslim and my family is Croat; Bosnian all the same but from different religions. That is how they differentiate themselves, by their religion. But it is a newer phenomenon since the last war because in the Tito era (the 'great' dictator) religion was a pretense was made to live all on the same level with no prejudice. So many people, especially the post war and people born in the 60's 70's had little sense of religion until just 14 years ago the last war. The hate came back out from the mothers and the fathers who had suppressed it through the first two wars. My husband was Muslim and he grew up that way in his family - but his own private view was very - vague - communist maybe I don't know. He thought religion was idiotic and when I said he acted like an Arab to his women - he was totally appalled. How could I compare him to those filthy misogynistic Arabs who hide their wives."



Draga Stefanovic, a Serbian feminist -pediatrician after WWI observed that there were 103,320 war orphans. 98,820 were not cared for. Not only that, Stefanovic examined over two thousand infants and young children to uncover the astounding violence that eighty per cent of the children suffered diseases from hunger, poverty and damp apartments.

What is inherent and apparent is the intergenerational violence in South Slavic peoples and the century of wars in the womb of women. This is still the situation in 2006. The domestic realm in the wars according to Barbara Jancar Webster was the target, " In the mountains of Bosnia, Herzegovina,

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Serbia and Montenegro which bore the brunt of the battle and where the front shifted daily, a woman's prime role was sheltering, feeding and clothing her family and attending to the injuries of the wounded."

Danica: The thing that stuck me the most is the collusion shared by the mothers/daughters/sisters in their drama; to never hold males responsible for violence to them (as compared to their partners or wives) on some level that would exceed normal boundaries.



Silvana: I know in my own family my mother has protected her husband. The fact that she is an incredibly strong, intelligent woman who could and most likely would have done and accomplished everything on her own also - eludes her.

Andrei Simic's essay on Machismo and Cryptomatriarchy: The Traditional Yugoslav Family exposes, "the South Slav mother provided a perfect conceptual counterpart to the image of aggressive and heroic male. The power of this maternal image is rooted in a moral superiority derived from self-abnegations and suffering phrased in a mother's devotion to the well-being of her children at the expense of other forms of self- realization."

Silvana: I don't know why the Bosnians insist on living together. They are tribal and it is just so. The sons steal their brides (Muslim culture for the most part) and bring them home to their mothers/parents house. Then they live there and the daughter becomes the mothers' handmaiden of sorts. She is allowed some 'freedom' with her husband but the mother (in law) is there to show her how it is all done and how her son likes it and how to be a good wife and make the right kind of food etc. No one can know the right thing for the son but the mother. Deep down inside he knows she is the only one that will

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put up with all his s\_\_\_\_. (after all she raised him that way). And the mother is very important in keeping the family name safe and clean. The mother is responsible for making sure (presuming that the son works and so on and is out of the house) that the wife is not roaming or doing something she is not supposed to be doing to bring him dishonor while he is gone out of the house. The sons - who in waiting for the father to die so that they get the inheritance or house keeps his own family (wife) in his parents house.

Gossip is part and parcel of domestic violence acknowledging a serious universal bridge that both men and women have; both bounce back and forth between superiority and inferiority. The Bosnian gossip by women with gnarled finger pointing and laying blame at the feet and breasts of women would not protect them in the end, remarked Silvana.

Yet, this instilled doctrine of gossip amongst Bosnian women meant no support or solidarity amongst mothers and daughters formulating Silvana's reasoning to not go to the police if beaten or seek help from others.

The whispering campaigns of defenseless women and children are indeed the need for those with internalized oppression to feel some moral superiority in their lives. While men deny their gossip, the 'locker room speak' of easy females and 'she deserved it' is their lethal brand of gossip-a fear of being domesticated which is associated with females -inferiority.

Whatever is domestic is inferior and what is domestic is female.

Silvana: "I remembered something. When the Bosnian was trying to convince me that we should marry he promised me that he would make 'a man' out of my then 8-year old son. The reasoning was that my son - with only me as a role model - was too 'soft', not aggressive enough, not male enough. He begged me - let me show you how it's done - you'll be happy with the result when (presumably) you have a real man. Instead I allowed him to practically take my son away from me by alienating him (my son) from me - little by little - I couldn't cuddle him to sleep anymore even though it was one of our treasured bonds, I couldn't let my son see my husband harass and torture me so I would send him off to my mother's house when I knew that I would 'be in trouble' and I would lie to my son when he asked if my husband hit me or was mean to me. Thank god I left before all the damage was done. In the last 3 years I have repaired much of the damage done between my son and myself - but I really think the fact that before my son and I had such a close, honest relationship - a more feminine outcome of my mothering. I think it is ironic that the Bosnian thought he could parent him in a way I would be proud of. In retrospect of course it is ironic that I thought he would succeed..."

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Incited by Silvana's vulnerability and their young daughter in the home, her Bosnian husband only did what was sanctioned by his Bosnian mother as his male prerogative to beat rape or pillage his own in his domestic domain. His



torture and beatings incurred during the Balkan war etched in perverse moral superiority that in times of patriotic episodic battles with bombing or pillaging of homes along with rapes of their 'fellow' enemies becomes a man's patriotic duty and right.

Bosnian Children playing on Bogumile Standing stone- near Mt. Vlasic

As their sons went to war propelled by the need to protect their mothers by killing the enemy uncovers the sons' inability to protect his mother from the sanctioned domestic violence in the home and culture throughout his childhood. Silvana's violent former husband triggered by the Madonna and child in his home was only repeating what was modeled to him by his father and perpetuated by his mother.

Andrea Dworkin's intense insight into male violence and how it is normalized asks: Why do young men have a crazed fear of being feminized-pacified and domestic? Hitler harnessed the masculinity, the virility of men, organized it, trained it to kill. He organized the violence of men, especially young men, who then became canon fodder; he harnessed the sadism of men, middle-aged, fully adult men, who then murdered systematically and on a whim."

Silvana: " I'm sure they all suffer from PTSS. From which war is debatable - it's passed on from generation to generation. They never get help. They never get help because it is shameful to ask for help. You are strong and you can deal with any disaster. That is that. Especially emotional stuff. My God. You are not allowed to say things about yourself or other family members to anyone - lest someone suspect you are not in control of your household. That would be a bad reflection on the family - especially the father and/or the family name. Then that is hell to pay. Actually it's irreparable. You have no idea how many families will from one day to the next not speak to each other - ever again. Brothers, sisters, mothers, cousins. Close families. Once is

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enough - your out. I suffered from PTSS and I'm not even from there. Just working with them and all that muck that they drag with them. If a person is not careful you get sucked in so bad. Obviously professionals need to be helping them. But what happens is that regular people try to help - and they are just not prepared for the brutality, the literalness, the insanity, the primal nature of these people. And again: I do think it has a lot to do with the years and years of war. "

Danica: Describe the domestic violence.

Silvana: "He mainly verbally and psychologically brow beat me. He only really hit me 2 times (and I say only not because its ONLY and that is not so bad but as compared to 20 times, every day twice a month etc.) The day I left he walked into the house in a very aggressive manner and I know I had done something but I didn't know what it was. He came up to me in that manner and I was holding my daughter in my arms. It looked like he was going to hit me. And I'm sure that if I hadn't started screaming at him to leave me alone he would have. Instead he laughed and called me stupid because he just wanted to have a few answers to his questions (this always meant endless hours of futile and ridiculously inane conversations usually about things that were completely out of my control and obviously so to everyone but him) and honestly I just couldn't stand one more conversation one more accusatory rape of the brain, I had been so good and so nice and so perfect. And there just was not one more place I could go to get any better than I was. And finally when he started badgering me I just screamed I hate you. He just said 'yes, that is what I think, as far as I am concerned you are all whores.' He said (this is actually taken from a Bosnian joke I kid you not) 'Izvini majika i ti si kurva.' (I'm sorry mom even you are a whore).

The obtuseness of this Bosnian mentality finally got to me, I was not this person that could be treated like this. It might be innate in me to take this

abuse but in my years I did know better."



Danica: What Bosnian legacy is perpetuated in the violence against women?

Silvana: "In general women are told they are stupid - too stupid - and so if you've got the courage to go and make your own way - you had better be successful. If you're not - everyone will say: I told you so. So any desire a

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The Kolo: Women's Cross Cultural Collaboration

woman had of ever achieving more was overshadowed by her fear that if she failed (and who does not fail at times?) she wouldn't just have failed at one thing but all things. She would have drawn attention to herself and if she achieved something everyone would be proud as if they had done it themselves - but if she failed it would also be everyone's failure for letting her step out to the norm. s Jedi i suti. Sit and shut up. You say it to dogs, kids and women. I was not meek, I knew who I was. I had just had a temporary lapse - maybe of sanity I don't know. But I did go through the depths of hell. I didn't know what I was doing I wanted to see how far I could push in order to break the cycle. I was trying to play out my mother and father's roles and fix them. And I think I have heard that is fairly typical in abuse cases. Well - I didn't fix him. But I stand up for myself up, for my children, my son and my daughter. I think that is what my mother tried to do in marrying the other man. He was better - higher up - more sophisticated: for that he was useful to her. He never beat us. Cold fish but he never hit us. I learned, and its ok, she stuck it out and she protects him like she never did my father. She hated him with a passion. Its uncanny how much in my adolescent mind I idolized him. But when my mom realized the Bosnian and I had fallen in love - she went out of her mind. She saw her in him, I know that. I thought I was smarter than her. It no longer hurts to say that I was not smarter than her. Just younger in my experiences...."

Danica: Did you have any insight after reading your interview?

Silvana: Well - that is tough reading. It's all true. It's weird that it was me. While reading it everything in me wanted to protect - not me - my dedication to secrecy. I have said so much .... I'll have to have a smoke and go over it again in a while. Use his last name. Fuck him. It's Ramadani. His name is Safet Ramadani. From Bosnia."

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Hiding the violence in small daily acts within the private space of a woman such as their home, bed and personal relationships is the foremost active ingredient in domestic violence cycles. Women are often unable to foresee how small events, tantrums or small explosions of anger accumulate into the domestic violence fund of mega proportions.

The South Slavic mother and son relationship is very inflated and laden with hero worshipping for anything phallic while devaluing anything even remotely related with feminine natures. The collusion of the mother with the son and within the family unit-patriarch subjects all females to real violence.

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The South Slavic females perpetuate the patriarchs' domestic violence pogrom as victims hoping to not be their next target by submitting to hypermasculine rules/laws and gauging their worth according to what others say they are in a world filled with violence towards their gender.

Julie Mertus for Humanitarian and War project recognized the need to spur advocacy for gender issues in humanitarian activities highlighting exactly what is needed for the home. Stating that "an estimated forty to fifty million people around the world are uprooted"<sup>7</sup> and that seventy five percent to eighty percent are women supports and documents the evidence of how homes-women are targeted. Within the South Slavic home are centuries of physical and sexual abuse issues paving the way for the women to pray for a hero to take them away from what was, what is and what seems to always will be.

Force feeding women to search for rescuers or heroes such as their own sons fuel domestic violence roles to ever increasing heights. Mertus describes how internal and regional strife births other forms of violence such as rape, murder that are sustained and increasingly brutal while women clutch their children on the run from war.

Immigrants and refugees fleeing the war in Bosnia came to the United States with many of the human rights violations and what the males designated as their cultural rights over women via marriage or as the 'father' in South Slavic families. The Bosnian males with their male entitlement prerogative are shocked to discover how the United States term their behavior as domestic violence.

Shocked Bosnian males, South Slav males, carry with them centuries' long male domination and entitlement. The South Slavic traditional family has a long history of psycho-social pathologies. "For instance Ivo Andric, the Nobel laureate, or Petar Segedin both wrote searing portraits of their early years, Andric in a collection of short stories *Otrnc~* and Segedin in his autobiographical novel *Djeca bozia*,"<sup>8</sup> writes Lloyd DeMause, renowned in his research and development of fetal psychology field.

Ivo Andric's home is in Travnik, Bosnia where my kolo trauma work occurs.

Lloyd DeMause corroborates Therese's and Silvana's front seat view of South Slav patriarchy with, "Milovan Djilas, *Land Without Justice*, p. 49-SI. The copy of the book I read and quoted from was used by Vladirur Dedijer years ago. As he was Djilas' friend and was interested in the violent men of Yugoslavia,



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wishing to write a proper study of these bewildering heroic personalities, he put down interesting remarks on the margins of the book. The passage I quote is accompanied by his statement that Milovan Djilas used to beat his wife brutally, almost killing her on at least one occasion."

The two first person stories ask, "What of the traditional South Slavic family- what did we notice?" Shame is present and intergenerational if not genetically encoded to each generation.

Shame according to Doug Hawkins 'is perilously proximate to death which may be chosen out of Shame as conscious suicide or more subtly elected by failure to take steps to prolong life.'" <sup>9</sup>

What Therese and Silvana shares about the traditional South Slavic family in airing their dirty laundry to the world is the use of shaming violent tactics by the offenders allow the women only through gossip some type of passive aggressiveness. But gossip and submitting to the violent domestic violence pogrom does not prolong life instead the former Yugoslav region had 100 years of wars played out in their very backyards.

Hawkins describes how shame used in early life experiences warp the person's physical and psychological health. This is supported by Alena Puhar, psychiatrist's own paper and research into the violence of South Slav wrote:

"In the traditional life of the zadruga, [family life] a man was simply not considered a true man if he refrained from violent behavior and a strict regime was followed to make men of boys. To show affection and gentleness was to be soft- something no man could afford to be. The past tense can easily be replaced for the present perfect tense, as this attitude seems to be as true as ever.

What seems beyond doubt is that on the eve of the Second World War domestic life was extremely harsh and brutal in most of Yugoslavia (with the exception of Slovenia) while in most of Europe children were taught that violence was bad unless it was officially licensed - as in war - this was not so in the Balkans. And the war itself made the situation far worse. The same male Ideal - a real man as a fighter, strong, merciless etc. - is openly cherished in most of contemporary ex-Yugoslavia."<sup>10</sup>

What was cherished in ex-Yugoslavia continues through the refugees who migrate to other countries. Pontificating that the normalized domestic

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violence is a cultural right and often a religious practices and rite, domestic violence is global and contagiously intergenerational.

**Action Items:**

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<sup>1</sup> Luce Irigaray, *Sexes and Genealogies*, (Columbia University Press, New York,1993) p. 72

<sup>2</sup> *ibid*,

<sup>3</sup> *ibid*, p. 13

<sup>4</sup> Geissler, E. M. (1998). Cultural assessment. St. Louis: Mosby. Goldstein, R. D., Wampler, N. S., & Wise, P. H. (1997). War experiences and distress symptoms of Bosnian children. Pediatrics, 100(5), 873-878. Maners, L. (1993). The Bosnians. New York: Church World Sevice. Sundquist, J., Behmen-Vincevic, A., & Johansson, S. E. (1998). Poor quality of life and health in young to middle aged Bosnian female war refugees: A population-based study. Public Health, 112(1), 21-26. World Health Organization (2000). Healthy life expectancy rankings. Accessed on the World Wide Web on October 14, 2000 at <http://wwwnt.who.int/whosis/statistics/dale/dale.cfm?path=statistics,dale&language=english>

<sup>5</sup> Alenka Puhar, Yugoslav Childhood , *The Journal of Psychohistory* 22(2) Fall 1994 Citations

<sup>6</sup> Robin Morgan, *The Demon Lover on Sexuality of Terrorism*, (WW Norton & Company, NY1989) p. 196

<sup>7</sup> Julie Mertus, *War's Offensive on Women*, (Kumarin Press, 2000) p. 3

<sup>8</sup> **Alenka Puhar, Yugoslav Childhood , The Journal of Psychohistory 22(2) Fall 1994 Citations**

<sup>9</sup> Doug Hawkins, *Power vs Force*, (Hay House Inc., CA 2002) p. 76

<sup>10</sup> **Alenka Puhar, Yugoslav Childhood , The Journal of Psychohistory 22(2) Fall 1994 Citations**