Lecture and seminar for Chevening Scholars
Postwar Reconstruction Unit, University of York
March 2008

Session 1
45 min Lecture

"War, women and gender: the case of Bosnia-Herzegovina and the wars of the former Yugoslavia"

We have a three hour session today, which we can break into two parts. As I see it the overall task that's set us for this morning is to understand the relationship between *war and women*, and from that starting point to look at the links between *war and gender* - because of course you can only understand the category 'woman' in relation with the category 'men'. It never makes much sense to look at one sex on its own.

But, having said that, there's no reason why we shouldn't stand in the shoes of a woman and use our imagination to read about, and visualise, and think about what she experiences in war. David suggested we use Bosnia as an example, which as you remember experienced a very terrible conflict between 1992 and 1996.

So my plan is to use this first session to look in some detail at what the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s meant for women, and how they dealt with the experience - those that survived. And then I'll go on after the break to analyze the connection between gender and war, as social systems.
But we've got plenty of time, and I'd like before I start, to know what circumstances of war or armed conflict you in this room have experience of. Because I know that while I'm talking you're going to be thinking and comparing with similar situations that you've lived in, survived, or which you've been close to, or tried to intervene in. That way I can exercise my imagination and have in mind what may be going on in your heads while I tell you what I

know about Bosnia. So let's have a go-round. For a start is anyone here from the former Yugoslavia?…..

I'm going to talk now for about 45 minutes on women in the Yugoslav wars.

- I'll start by taking a look at how it used to be for women in Yugoslav society before the wars.

- Then we'll see the changes that women began to be aware of as war approached.

- We'll look at the particular nature of these wars and the things that characteristically happened to women as their "victims", and "survivors".

- We'll look at women as actors in the conflict, as perpetrators of violence, but also as mitigators of violence - because some became humanitarian workers.

- And finally and most important I want to look at the way some women: -

    - on the one hand tried to work together across the dividing lines drawn by war;

    - and on the other actively opposed the nationalist and militarist frenzy of their own societies.

A bit about the history, then…

The name ‘Yugoslavia’ means ‘southern Slavs’. All but some small minorities of the former state of Yugoslavia have this shared identity as Slavs. That’s sometimes forgotten. Women's situation in the family and society of these southern Slavs living in the Balkans changed a lot from the beginning of the

20th century to the 1980s. At the beginning of the century the people were mainly rural. They often lived in large households containing several generations of an extended family. It was a patriarchal and patrilineal society - and also patrilocal, in that a woman on marriage moved into her husband's family's home and sphere of authority. Women lived very conventional lives - whether they were in the Orthodox Christian tradition, the Catholic Christian tradition, or the Muslim tradition, and all three for historical reasons coexisted here. Some were Muslims because they'd converted when the Ottoman empire controlled this region for several centuries.

An important turning point was the Second World War between 1939 and 1945. Nazi Germany invaded the Balkans and were supported by some collaborators, particularly but not only a segment of the Croatian (Catholic) population. There was also a big resistance movement of Partisan military units led by Joseph Brod, usually known as Tito. In 1942 a lot of local women's groups came together in an Anti-fascist Front of Women that had 2 million members. They estimate that 100,000 women fought with the Partisans against the Nazis. It's thought that 25,000 women were killed in action and 40,000 were wounded. There was a lot of mutual killing and atrocity going on in these years between the various South Slav populations - Croat, Serb, Montenegran, Slovenian, Macedonian and Bosnian.

The Partisan movement during the war had a political meaning, not just in the context of war across Europe and the world, but as part of a local struggle for democracy, republicanism and independence. Even earlier in the century, under a monarchy, the various southern Slav entities had barely held together as a thing called Yugoslavia. After the war, Tito pulled a deeply divided country together, under a political party called the League Of Communists. When they joined the Soviet bloc they did so by popular choice unlike the rest of Central and Eastern Europe, and rather on Yugoslavia's own terms.

Post war, the women's organisations were closely tied in to the Communist Party. But in turn the party did introduce formal equality between the sexes. It banned sex discrimination in employment for instance. On the other hand in

retrospect, women today say that patriarchalism continued in a new public form, and that masculine authority in the family pretty much went on as before.

The country was divided into a series of republics in which the different Slav groups with their different religious heritage were recognised, but now welded together in an antireligious communist regime in which people were often employed outside their home regions and learned to coexist and feel like Yugoslavs rather than Serbs and Croats and Muslims etc. There was a lot of intermarriage.

Tito's unity survived well for around 40 years, but he died in 1980 and in the middle 1980s the Western monetary institutions began to put economic pressure on Yugoslavia, which caused high unemployment and destabilized the society. The political elites in the republics started acting in their own divisive interests, reviving ethno-nationalist sentiment and looking for a way out of the Soviet bloc that was by now itself disintegrating.

What women were noticing by 1989 or 90…

was that women's role was being discussed in a rather unpleasant way…. especially in Serbia, under the leadership of Slobodan Milosevic, who was rapidly converting his rhetoric from communism to nationalism and stoking up hatred against Moslem communities in Kosovo, Bosnia and elsewhere in Yugoslavia. It began to be said that the Serb population was getting out-bred by Moslems and that Serb women ought to return to the home and give birth to more children. Little warriors – they were foreseeing war. Actually it was specifically being said that you can’t get a people that has only one son per family to fight.

In the representative bodies in the one-party state led by the League of Communists women had had a statutory 30% quota of places. In the first multiparty elections held in the disintegrating Yugoslavia in 1990, the quota

was removed. Women's representation dropped dramatically to 2% or less. Women were simply erased from public life.

So where were women as Yugoslavia into the 1990s, as the disintegration of the federation approached? They'd been brought up in a rather contradictory situation. On the one hand they'd been second class citizens in what had remained a patriarchal society. But on the other hand it had been a socialist, modernising, educated and outward looking kind of society. They'd become urban, they'd had a semi market economy with plenty of consumer goods, they'd been free to travel, read books and see films from all over the world, and Yugoslavia's coastline had been a popular tourist resort for other Europeans. They were modern women. And they were about to be…

Driven back to the Stone Age…

The disintegration of the state was precipitated first by the republic of Slovenia seceding, followed by Croatia – they were opting for a European identity. Then Bosnia-Herzegovina declared independence too, seeing itself as being abandoned inside a fiercely anti-Muslim rump Yugoslavia. By the late 90s Muslim Albanian Kosovo would also want out. Milosevic was whipping up and exploiting ethnic identity, attempting to create a Serb-dominated, even purely Serb, version of Yugoslavia by grabbing certain bits of land and driving people of the wrong name out of them. It was the incredibly bloody war it was, precisely because the population had become so mixed up, mixed marriages, mixed regions and especially mixed cities.

The term ethnic cleansing was coined now, a terrible euphemism. To take just Bosnia-Herzegovina, local Serb extremists, supported by the Serb dominated Yugoslav National Army, attempted to drive Moslems and others from a swathe of the North and East which they planned to join to Serbia. And the Croat extremists living in the southern bit called Herzegovina, tried to consolidate Croat power by driving others out of that and adjacent areas of Bosnia with the idea of attaching it to the new Croatian state. So it was a three

sided war, first one waged by Serbs on Moslems and Croats, and then one waged by Croats on Muslims and Serbs.

Women experienced this in several different ways. I think it's possible to distinguish three.

First, their identity and lifestyle as modern European women was wrecked. Second, their traditional responsibility, everyday life in its domestic, local entirety, was destroyed. And third, their integrity and well-being as women, as human beings, as individuals, was viciously attacked, through the sexual violence of this war.

1. **As modern women then..**.

at the outbreak of war the more educated urban working women of Yugoslavia were really not very different from the middle class women of Western Europe. Even if women seldom got the top of the employment ladder a lot of them were holding down reasonable jobs for reasonable salaries. They were rather less religious than Western European women, because communism had pretty much eclipsed both Christian and Muslim identity in Yugoslavia by now. Islam in particular was only followed as a religion by quite a small minority of those ethnically categorised as Bosnian-Muslims. They were proud perhaps of certain customs and roots that distinguished them and gave them character within Yugoslavia, but they were basically secular and certainly didn't accord much authority to the imams. When war came Bosnian-Muslims found themselves labelled with this ethnic identity they felt very ambiguous about -- if it was being attacked by others you had to defend it, but on the other hand it didn't really seem like you. You probably lost your job now -- and had your role in life reduced to domesticity. And you were challenged immediately as to how to respond to war. Just as a lot of men didn't want to fight and tried to hide or escape from conscription into one of the armies or militias, women who had the resources and the contacts overseas, and who weren't encumbered with children, looked for ways out of the country into the West. Some managed to keep their independent lifestyles in this way but at a

terrible cost in loneliness and feeling foreign, feeling like the exiles they now were. Others along with everyone else just sank into the misery of trying to survive in war. And when photos of Bosnian suffering appeared in the world's press and we saw some very impoverished, miserable and poor women, looking like rural peasants, it was often these now unrecognizable, drastically de-modernized women.

2. As the keepers of everyday life…

The second impact on women was through the war's destruction of urban and rural community life. Because, as I tried to show, Yugoslavia had modernised women in lots of ways, BUT communist emancipation, through getting to do paid work in the labour market, had not in fact liberated them from women's traditional responsibility for the family and everyday life. Ordinary women had gone on, as in the centuries before, being the ones mainly concerned with keeping a roof over the family's head, shopping and cooking, caring and cleaning, and looking after the micro economy: subsistence farming and gardening, selling produce in the local market, making artisan products for sale and so on. And now the "modernized" women joined them all were down here doing daily life together.

And ethnic cleansing is precisely about smashing all this to pieces. It's such a fragile and wondrous thing, isn't it, the little carefully woven artifact, the basket of activities and resources that is everyday life. The where and what and with whom and how you make and sell and buy and consume. The little structures and intimate processes through which your children grow from babyhood and get an education, your grandmother and grandfather have company as they age and get ill and die. The adults, you and your partner and maybe adult brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles, fulfil themselves and have a basis from which to participate in society. It takes centuries of evolution to bring it to what it is at any moment in time. It takes the tireless commitment of living members to keep it working, keep it alive.

And along comes a militia or an army, and rips it to pieces in days. They shells the market place, tear the local economy to pieces, bomb work places, torch houses. Tanks roll through orchards and gardens, schools are flattened and people driven out. Women in huge numbers became refugees. It's an astonishing thing to become a refugee in your own countryside – they told me about it. A lot of the hillside places surrounding towns like Sarajevo and Mostar were picnic spots where you took your kids in the car on a Sunday. Play frisbee, gather blackberries for a pie, pick wild flowers to take home and put in a vase on the dining table in your apartment. Now suddenly you find yourself trekking through these very same familiar places, but on foot, in inadequate shoes and clothes, cold, hungry and roofless – not knowing where you're going next, where you are going to end up, whether the little ones and the old ones will make it. And without your man – the one who drove the car perhaps, and lit the barbecue. He's now at the front, fighting, you don't know where. Refugee? *Me?* Women have told me how deeply surprising it was to find themselves bearers of this new identity. Survival depended on adapting to it quickly and doing it cleverly. Sustaining everyday life - but now in vastly more challenging circumstances, in the woods, or under canvas, or if you were very lucky in a transit camp. A profoundly diminished everyday life.

3. Women's bodies…

The third impact on women was through the way women's bodies were seen and used by men in the war. I was going to say "in *this* war". But actually sexual violence is commonplace in all but a very few wars. What was different about this war was its visibility -- I'll come back to this later.

In ethnic terms, rape was just part of an overall story of genocide – the murder of a culture. The paradigm case of rape in the fighting in Bosnia-Herzegovina was rape of Muslim women by Serb men as they swept through those towns and villages they intended to drive Muslims out of and to claim as Serb. As they went, they were fighting against the new Bosnian national army, rapidly thrown together and badly equipped. But actually Croats also raped Muslims, in the phase they called "the war within a war". And Bosnian Muslim men are

also known to have raped Serbian and Croatian women, though the opportunities were fewer and it seems not to have been part of a purposeful military strategy.

Men were also in smaller numbers raped, sexually tortured and genitally mutilated by enemy men. This also had both an ethnic and a gender meaning – reducing them to women, effeminizing them.

Quite early in the war, the Bosnian refugees that fled to neighbouring Croatia in the summer of 1992 were reporting rape. In August the American journalist Roy Gutman wrote the first full story on it. For months there was not much reaction. But by the end of the year the world really began to take notice. It became a scandal discussed internationally.

An estimate of the number of rapes, made towards the end of the war was 30,000 - but guesses ranged between 20,000 and 50,000. Of course it's impossible to know. How could you ever count? In the first place not a small proportion of women actually die after rape – because they're murdered or die of wounds, so the raped are subsumed in the category of the dead. Secondly, women are often raped repeatedly over a period of time, or are gang raped in one episode. How many rapes is this? Are we to count the women affected or the number of incidents? Is enforced cohabiting or prostitution rape - and how do you enumerate it? In the third place a high proportion of women never report what happened to them. And those who did, and looked for help, were often never recorded by any authority.

One characteristic of the rapes in BH was the use of certain buildings – characteristically former schools, or hotels or night clubs – as rape "camps", effectively military brothels where women were imprisoned. My first close friend when I first went to Bosnia, just as the Dayton Peace Accords were signed, was a woman in her twenties. Later wwe went on to do some research and writing together. She was the eldest of three sisters, so-called Bosnian Muslim by ethnicity. They lived in the eastern part of BH where the Serb nationalist offensive happened. My friend was away at the time in

Central Bosnia, studying. But her two younger sisters were imprisoned in a centre like this, a so-called rape camp, just out of the town where their parents lived. As soon as they went missing their mother went crazy running round town looking for them, struggling to find them and get them released. After some weeks they let one go, and she remained in a very bad state of physical and mental health for a long time afterwards. The little sister who was fifteen at the time was never seen again. Nor was her body found. A lot of women who were repeatedly raped were simply disposed of in this way.

Maybe this is a moment to talk a bit about sexual violence in war more generally. The first important point to make is that while the Yugoslav wars, and Bosnia Herzegovina in particular, became infamous for the incidence of rape, this was not because it was an exceptional case. It was because it was in Europe after a half century without war and people were particularly shocked by this. And it was because we by now had what's called the second wave of a feminist movement, which had started in the sixties and seventies in a lot of countries, and so there were women alert to the abuse of women and ready to publicize and condemn it loudly.

In a recent spell of desk research on sexual violence in war I downloaded all the showed significant conflict-related sexual violence in the past 20 years. They turned out to cover no less than 51 countries, in Africa, the Americas, Asia, Europe and the Middle East. As we go back in time step by step, to the secession of Bangladesh in 1971 (an estimated 200,000 rapes), to the Partition of India in 1947 (unknown thousands), to the various theatres of World War II (an estimated 20,000 Chinese women raped by the Japanese in Nanking in 1937; 100,000 in the Russian zone of Berlin in 1945), to the Great War, and further still we find simply that sexual violence is endemic in war – although often it's under-reported.

The term sexual violence is used today in preference to rape because the word rape simply isn't adequate to the case. Rape – well you can say this is sexual intercourse. People do it all the time, willingly. Rape simply means it's coerced. But it's not like that. Women are raped with penises, but also

(and usually not by one man alone but by groups of men) with fists, sticks and miscellaneous weapons. Bizarre forms of sexual torture are commonplace in war, often involving mutilation before or after death - breasts are cut off, pregnant bellies sliced open and foetuses impaled, and so on.

Bosnia-Herzegovina was a bad case, but it's by no means the worst, either in numbers or the severity of the abuse of women. I've no doubt you've read about what went on in Guatemala in the 1980s, in Sierra Leone in the 1990s, what's going on in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Darfur even now. When I said that one of the impacts of the war on women was that "their integrity and well-being as women, as human beings, as individuals, was viciously attacked" it's all this that I had in mind.

The Bosnian case gave rise to quite a lot of feminist analysis of the meaning of rape in ethnic war. It prompted Ruth Seifert among others to question the meaning of rape in war. Of course she stressed, as others who've written about rape in peacetime have done, that it isn't primarily about sexual desire even if it's expressed sexually. It's about hatred – a despising of women, and the wish to exercise power. She suggests a number of things. That rapes are part of the ancient rules of war, women are booty. It's also a kind of promise that armies make to their soldiers, because in training soldiers manhood is emphasized and the entitlement to women's bodies. In belligerent disputes the abuse of women is an element of male communication. It communicates from man to man that the men around the women in question arent able to protect their own women, so it wounds their masculinity and puts them down. It's a bid to destroy the opponent's culture because patriarchal societies see women and women's purity as a valued possession, and its loss or damage is an attack on masculine honour. Finally, she says, the background to orgies of rape in war is "a culturally rooted contempt for women that's lived out in times of crisis".

But we need to move on from women's victimization and think about …

Women as actors in this war

And again I'll single out three ways women were active as women. First, in

1. Humanitarian work, for instance among refugee women and children.

The zones that weren't directly involved in the fighting were of course the places where the refugees from the ethnically-cleansed areas went first for shelter. Some of them might eventually be received abroad, in other countries, but usually they started their displaced life within the region and some never got any further. Quite a bit of international money from elsewhere flowed in to set up centres for refugees - and to be a bit cynical this was partly because the rich countries of Western Europe and elsewhere didn't want them clamouring as migrants at their own doors.

A lot of local women took initiatives, channeled the incoming money and began the long, hard and terribly depressing work of receiving, housing, getting medical attention and psychological care for deeply traumatised women and children. One of the best known projects was the Centre for Women War Victims in Zagreb, the capital of the newly independent Croatia. Another one that I made a case study of was in Zenica in central Bosnia, that part of Bosnia that was never in the end over-run by Serb or Croat forces. It was called Medica Women's Association. It was a centre that housed women and children and gave them medical and psychological care – and carried out abortions when necessary and when women wanted it. I wrote about it in a book called *The Space Between Us.* In Belgrade there was the initiative they called the Autonomous Women's Centre - actually a centre of feminist activists running an SOS line for women currently suffering abuse. They didn't run a refugee centre of their own, but they visited and supported women coming into refugee camps that were being established by other agencies.

I visited a refugee camp once. I can't think exactly where it was, it must have been in central Bosnia somewhere. It was a good one, as camps go. The accommodation was decent. The food was enough. But what I'll never forget

was the total, overwhelming, mind-numbing boredom of life there. It was mainly elderly women. They had nothing they could call their own except a bed with a neatly folded blanket and a box of personal belongings on a rack overhead. They had nothing to do except sit on the bed and stare into space. And, being elderly, their families dead or fled, they had no prospect of *anything* else. Nothing different tomorrow. No hope, no project, no future.

The second way women were active, it has to be admitted was …

2. On the side of war

And this itself could be in one of two ways. One was that a lot of women were just as nationalistic as their men, particularly in Serbia and Croatia. These societies experienced a huge surge of nationalist sentiment, combined with intense militarism and patriarchal conservatism – the three things interlock and all have a distinctive and traditionalist expectation of women. The Orthodox Christian Church in Serbia and the Catholic clerics in Croatia came out of the woodwork the communist regime had confined them to, and had a lot of sermons to preach to women about what church and state expected of them in this new era. A lot of women it has to be said espoused all this willingly. And they weren't all head-scarved women in their middle years. I don't know if you remember the famous turbofolk singer Svetlana Veličković, "Ceca", she was called, a sex object whose nationalistic message was heard every hour of the day on Serb radio stations. She was the wife of Arkan, the notorious leader of a particularly extremist paramilitary force, the Tigers.

The second way of being active for some women was to take up arms – although very little was heard about this. It wasn't many, but it was in all three armies. Dubravka Zarkov writes about this – her very important book is in the reading list.

Finally, there were women who responded entirely differently to the challenge of the 1990s. They worked tirelessly and bravely…

3. Against the tide of war

Because it wasn't all women by any means who got swept into the nationalist projects of the male leaders. A whole generation of both men and women had grown up NOT thinking of themselves as Serbs, Croats or Muslims. They'd thought of themselves as Yugoslavs. They'd intermarried, scarcely thinking of it as "intermarriage" at all, so subdued was any ethnic identity. They weren't susceptible to appeals of the mosque and the church because they were atheists. They'd been proud of the role of Yugoslavia in the international movement for a third political way, neither pro-Soviet nor pro-West. They simply refused, in so far as they could, to take on the revived, reworked and deepened hate-laden identities the nationalists were now insisting on.

My reason for going to live at Medica Women's Centre for some months just as the war ended wasn't actually because I wanted to study the psycho-social care of rape victims. It was because I knew that there were a small number of women of local Bosnian-Croat and Bosnian-Serb identity on the staff of Medica working alongside the majority who were local Bosnian-Serb women. I wanted to know how this cooperation in the middle of war had been achieved, at what cost, with what rewards, with what hope of being sustained. Again it's written up in a chapter of *The Space Between Us,* and I've brought a photocopy if anyone wants to read about it in more depth.

I found a huge amount of pain and a huge amount of love in Medica. The pain of women of different ethnic identity was equal but different. Bosnian Muslims felt the terrible pain of the victim, Bosnian Croats and Bosnian Serbs felt the terrible pain of seeing what the perpetrators were inflicting in their name. But the love was identical. One woman said, "We had mixed marriages. Our children were raised together, they went to school together. We loved each other. I don't know what happened". Another said, "The patients at Medica know I'm married to a Serb but they never say anything against me and I have a feeling *they really love me*. I feel proud of that." But they had to work very

hard at being aware of the other's feelings and needs, and sometimes they hurt each other.

I went on to do a second research project immediately after the war, with two women colleagues from Medica. We travelled together around the country to learn about half a dozen women's groups in different areas that were doing something that was pretty much unique to women in the post-war period - trying to build bridges in divided localities.

We wrote a book together called *Women Organizing for Change.* Although we produced a few hundred copies in English, the main point was to publish it in Bosnian or rather in Serbo-Croatian, the language of the former Yugoslavia. I've photocopied a chapter for you about a town called Gornji Vakuf. It's a small town in a fertile valley in middle Bosnia where they grow cabbages and make sauerkraut. The town is long and narrow, stretched out along a main road that carries buses and lorries across the region. This road became the front line between Bosnian-Croats and Bosnian-Muslims in a local war that tore the town in two. When I was there the road on either side for some hundred yards back was still a scene of devastation. There was a hotel that was a heap of concrete and reinforcing rods. The post office was a wreck. The houses were blasted to pieces.

Don't think for a moment that these were respectively a Croat and Muslim "side of town". Actually the population had been pretty jumbled up. What the fighting did was to sort the sheep from the goats, driving all the Croats to one side where the church happened to be, all the Muslims to the other side around the mosque. Hundreds died. When the ceasefire happened it was hardly peace. People certainly came out of the cellars where they'd been hiding for months. But for a year or two after the war people didn't cross the main road to the other side. There was a cold war, non-speak, two separate economies, separate schools that had now become religious schools. They even tried to divide the language, stressing every little tiny difference of dialect in what was really a unitary language, so as to be able to say in our school the

children speak Bosnian, or in our school the children learn Croat. A very good reason of course for never getting together again.

The project started with one woman who simply got fed up with this stand-off maintained by the still militarized males of Gornji Vakuf. She crossed the line to find an old friend. Then they organized a little get-together of old friends in a café that belonged to one of them, right on the main road. They put posters up around the town to call a meeting there. Fifty or sixty women turned out – amazing! They formed a little organization they called Federalna Zena, Federal Woman. And they soon rented a house, with a small grant from an international organization. They started to run activities – bought some sewing machines to stitching and stuffing teddy bears and dolls for sale, organized a computer course, set up legal advice services and so on.

And we found and worked with other healing projects like this in other areas, some of them bringing back together Bosnian Muslim and Bosnian Serb women. We weren't only doing research on them. The deal was that if we could hang out with them for a week or two and learn what they were doing we would pledge to do some fund-raising for them from English charities. And we managed to win a little bit of funding for each of them before we finished.

While some women were active in humanitarian projects, and some like these were doing bridge-building work during and immediately after the war, there were other women who were activists against militarism and nationalism. The most notable group was in Belgrade, the capital of Serbia-Montenegro, or "Yugoslavia" as it was still calling itself, the very epicentre of those ideologies and institutions.

These Belgrade women were feminists in a way that women in other European countries would recognize themselves to be. There had actually been quite a lively feminist movement in the former Yugoslavia in the 1980s. It was mainly in the capital cities of republics, Llubljana, Zagreb and Belgrade – and to a lesser extent in Sarajevo. Now these women in Belgrade (this is all on record because they've written and talked about this endlessly) saw what

was happening all around them. They saw what they were about to lose. They saw patriarchy re-emerging as a force with the power to divest them of all their freedoms, this time in partnership with nationalism and militarism, a deadly trio. Unbelievable! They were incredulous. They hung on to their unity with women in Llubljana and Zagreb and Sarajevo, against the spasm of rupture.
And of course here in Belgrade they were in the belly of the beast. Milosevic and his regime were the fount of all the hatred, and they "owned" the very large and well equipped Yugoslav National Army. The women saw what was coming and their responsibility was to challenge these men who claimed to be acting in "our" name. The women mobilized in disloyalty. And it had to be total – they were disloyal to the state, the church, to the military and to male power.

On Wednesday, 9 October 1991, calling themselves Women in Black against War, they held their first public demonstration. (It was a name they'd adopted from Israeli and Italian women activists). They boldly chose to stand right in the monumental heart of the city, in Republic Square. And these public demonstrations would continue weekly for years, all through the Bosnian war and the later conflict in Kosovo. The women were the only antiwar group to have a regular presence on the Belgrade street in these years and they've been hugely influential in spreading Women in Black activism round the world in the seventeen years since then, so that it's now an international movement. They've always theorized their politics and I've drawn a lot on their writings in my own.

Well, 45 minutes is about up. That was, if you like:

An empirical account of women as factors and actors in a particular war

We haven't talked about men. And the gender relation has only been there in shadowy outline. I guess we have about half an hour now till we should take a break. And what I'd suggest we do with this time is like this. First I'd like to know if there are any questions that arise out of my story, things that weren't clear or that you want to know more about. Second, I'd like to hear similar

stories from the war zones you live in or are most familiar with, to fill out the picture of what happens to women in wars. But third, I'd like us to begin to compare notes too on what happens to men in wars. What does militarization mean for men? What do men get out of war fighting and what do they lose? What do they do if they want to resist militarization and war? What price do they pay for that?

So let's chat for a bit about these things – still at the empirical level. And after the break I'm going to take ten minutes to be more theoretical about gender and war. I'm going to suggest that we might actually see gender not just as being a feature of war but as being a driving force in war. And then I'd like to break us into small groups to do some thinking about whether and how that's so – and if it's true, what it would mean for post-war reconstruction. Before we end, we'll try to bring this all together back in the big group.

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Session 2:
Introduction to seminar

"Gender as a driving force in war"

In suggesting that "gender is a driving force in war" I'm consciously making a *strong case* about the connection between gender and war. It's saying that gender has a certain *causality* – or more precisely the particular form taken by gender relations in patriarchy has. I'm suggesting for instance that certain aspects of gender relations in pre-war Yugoslavia that I described contributed to predisposing that society to war.

This isn't only my own argument – I wouldn't be so confident if it were. I just finished two or three years of research that took me 80,000 miles to 12 countries to meet women in women's organizations opposing militarism and war. The reason they organize *as women*, rather than in mixed groups of men and women (some of them have come out of mixed groups) is mainly

because they themselves have a gender analysis of war that the mainstream mixed groups are blind to. Stasa Zajovic has written about how in 1991 she left the mixed anti-war movement in Serbia, led by men, in despair because it was simply reproducing what she called “the patriarchal model”. She became one of the founders of Women in Black in Belgrade.

Of course, what women are saying is not for one moment that gender is the *only* social power system implicated in war. They say, yes, of course economics - need and greed – that’s a cause of war. And yes, nationalist grievance, ethnic identity struggles, racist hatred of foreigners – that bunch of factors are a cause of war too. These are generally understood as the main causes of war. Women antiwar activists are not bringing gender relations into the picture as an *alternative* to these, but as an intrinsic, interwoven, inescapable part of the very same story. They are saying patriarchy is *right in there* with capitalism and ethno-nationalisms among the motors of war. G*ender in the way we live it* in patriarchal societies perpetuate militarism, fuel belligerence, and drive war along.

To see this it’s helpful to think about war in a particular way, to see it with a particular lens – really I suppose it’s a sociologist’s lens. To see it first and foremost as something social, relational. That sounds crazy, because war’s about killing. But it is a social phenomenon, it involves shared understandings, and can be studied with the tools of sociology including a gender analysis. Secondly it helps if we see war as being systemic. It’s a system involving hardware and software, structures and ideologies. And thirdly it helps if we see war as a continuum – a kind of cycle that has phases spiralling along over time: so-called peace, pre-war, war, post-war, demobilization, so-called peace again, rearming, more war.

Gender is a system too – sometimes it’s called the sex / gender system. It’s the arrangements by which a society deals with sex and sexuality, marriage, reproduction and parenting. In all the societies we know of today and as far back as we can clearly see in time, the sex/gender system has been patriarchal, an arrangement characterized by male supremacy and

female subordination. It doesn't need to be. In theory the gender system could be one of sex equality, but we've never seen it yet.

To survive over time the patriarchal gender order has to reproduce itself, adapt to changing circumstances. This is achieved through social processes that construct us, in childhood, at school, in adult life, as appropriate kinds of men and women for a contemporary patriarchal society. It works out best for a male power system if men and women are constituted as not alike, as distinctly different – to be precise – as dyadic, *complementary*, so that the qualities deemed masculine are the opposite of those deemed feminine, and vice versa. Patriarchal gender relations *specialize* men and women – actually they make each of us half persons. Women have a very particular feminine role in patriarchy – valued, yes, but for specific domestic and reproductive purposes. So gender relations are a relation of inequality and power – in all societies to different degrees. They are predicated on violence, latent or open.

When we say that gender relations, patriarchal gender relations, are a cause of war – it's not to say that they're a cause in the same way that economics and nationalism are causes. You have to look for different types of cause in different places. Usually you can see economic causes in the news headlines. What are the aggressors demanding? What are the defenders defending? Oil wells? Land? Mineral resources? For ethnic, racist, nationalist causality you have to look at what the ideologues are proclaiming. In whose name are they speaking? Who are they labelling, calling the enemy?

To see the gender causes of war you have to look at the cultures that are apparent in the times when war is not actual, still only a possibility. Is the ideal man in this society a soldier, are warrior virtues a source of pride – so that war is always thinkable, always a possibility? Are women worth less than men, relatively "worthless"? If so it's likely that the point of view arising from women's typical experience, let's say prioritizing nurture and care, that may lead to a view that war causes more problems than it solves, are easily pushed aside. Is the notion of masculine honour endemic to the society so

that when there are preparations for war it can slip neatly into the prevalent discourse? Is negotiation and compromise seen as wimpish, less than manly? Have men been readied for war even in peace time by being obliged to suppress, to kill, the woman in themselves?

The reason it's important to address the possibility that gender-as-we-know-it plays a part in perpetuating war is because the idea has practical implications for restoring and sustaining peace after war. After all, we're ready to recognise that a sustainably peaceful society is going to have to be one in which *economic* relations are different from today's - more just and equal. And that it will have to be one in which *national and ethnic* relations are more respectful and inclusive. The women I've been working with would like to add something to this: they ask us to recognize that, to be sustainably peaceful, a society will *also* have to be one in which we live *gender* very differently from the way it's lived today.

Those who wanted a sustainable peace in the Balkans hoped that the Dayton Accords signed in December 1995 would recognize the economic factors in the war, resources gained and lost, and make a just restitution. They hoped and assumed that the ethnic, genocidal, nature of the war would be recognized and ethnicity de-emphasized in the peace, rolled back towards inclusion and proximity between peoples. Actually the peace agreement was deficient in both respects and rewarded the aggressors.

Feminists also had specific hopes of Dayton that were also disappointed. They hoped that the terribly gendered nature of the war would be recognized by the peace negotiators and the ground laid for a transformation of gender relations in the postwar society – equality and respect for women, a new non-combative masculinity encouraged.

A report on Dayton Accords by the Swedish women's NGO Kvinna till Kvinna analyzed the peace agreement specifically from this point of view and concluded that (quote) 'the gender dimension of the conflict and the differential impact the conflict had on women and men was not a political

priority and therefore not a part of the political analysis or of the final peace settlement. These are serious missed opportunities…' they said.

Women had not been invited to be part of the drafting, human rights but not women's rights were detailed in the Accords. Transformation of gender relations postwar had simply never been on anyone else's agenda but that of women in civil society. So women's vulnerability continued its downward slide. A lot of men remained armed, criminality drastically increased, domestic violence against women was more prevalent than ever – and to all this was now added a surge in prostitution and trafficking. These dire gender relations now feed back into the continuum of war. They disturb the peace, as the saying goes, constitute a breach of the peace, predispose to another war one day.

What I'd like us to do now is divide up into small and work together for 30 minutes. I'd like half of the groups to look at pre-war moments and search them for evidence, examples or instances that *support or contradict the contention that patriarchal gender relations predispose a society to war.* Think of countries you know, wars you've experienced or know about.

I'd like the other groups to think hard about *the postwar moment, ways in which you'd like to see gender relations transformed when the fighting is over, and imagine measures or clauses that could be introduced into a peace agreement to make that more likely.* You may like to think about postwar societies you've got experience of, and peace agreements you've seen in operation.

Then we'll get back together and share our ideas. So prepare a spokesperson to report back.