

COMMUNICATING THE EXPERIENCE OF WAR. THE ‘US’ VS. ‘THEM’ DIALECTIC IN EVE ENSLER’S *NECESSARY TARGETS*¹

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During the 1990s, the Ex-Yugoslavia was involved in a series of armed conflicts. The debate was opened about the need for an intervention on the part of the U.S. and the NATO. When the intervention finally came, the damage to the civil population had already been done: raped women, dead men and children, displaced people. American Playwright Eve Ensler visited a refugee camp in Bosnia in 1993. What she saw and experienced there she put on stage in *Necessary Targets*, a play where the protagonists un-learn the concepts of “us” and “them” and build a new community based on solidarity and respect.

In 1993 Eve Ensler, American performer, playwright and creator of “V-Day”, a global campaign to fight violence against women and girls through theater and consciousness-raising activism, was walking along the streets of New York City. She turned her eyes to a newspaper kiosk, and there it was:

[A] deeply disturbing photograph on the front page of *Newsday* [...]. [A] picture of a group of six young women who had just returned from a rape camp in Bosnia. Their faces revealed shock and despair, but more disturbing was a sense that something sweet, something pure, had been forever destroyed in each of their lives. (Ensler 1998: 53).

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Enslar was then in the process of writing *The Vagina Monologues*, a “crazy quilt” of female voices where the women of Bosnia found their place, too. The title of the piece she created for them was “My Vagina Was my Village”, where the experience of the Bosnian war is filtered through female eyes and explained in a crude, yet poetic, language that alternates past and present; visions of what life used to be like and what it became after the ethnic conflict and the rapes:

My vagina was green, water soft pink fields, cow mooing sun resting sweet boyfriend touching lightly with soft piece of blond straw.
 There is something between my legs. I do not know what it is. I do not know where it is. I do not touch. Not now. Not anymore. Not since.
 My vagina was chatty, can't wait, so much, so much saying, words talking, can't quit trying, can't quit saying, oh yes, oh yes.
 Not since I dream there's a dead animal sewn in down there with thick black fishing line. And the bad dead animal smell cannot be removed. And its throat is slit and it bleeds through all my summer dresses.
 My vagina singing all girl songs, all goat bells ringing songs, all wild autumn field songs, vagina songs, vagina home songs.
 Not since the soldiers put a long thick rifle inside me. So cold, the steel rod canceling my heart... (Enslar 1998: 57)

After the brutal war and the massive, carefully planned rapes that affected tens of thousands of victims of all ages and ethnic origins, the women of Bosnia had lost touch with their inner selves and their bodies. They and their land, homes, sexuality and identity had been consciously violated and dissolved into nothingness. According to health experts, the trauma of rape has consequences that go far beyond physical damage: “Many women suffer long-term psychological effects as a result of the fear and profound sense of helplessness experienced in rape. These sequellae include flashbacks, difficulty reestablishing intimate relationships, persistent fears and a blunting of enjoyment in life generally” (Ashford & Huet-Vaughn 1997: 190).

War rape victims have a strong necessity of recovering their voice as individuals and as citizens. A new sense of belonging is fundamental for a group of individuals that has become isolated from their families and their inner selves through the most intimate crime that a woman can suffer. Eve Enslar's intention with the monologue was to make that private offense public by putting it into words and staging it. The theatrical piece was to become a denunciation of the strategy devised by political and military leaders in the ex-Yugoslavia, and of the treatment it had received in the Western media and institutions. Yet, a short monologue, intense as it was, did not seem enough to give these women a place in the history of the American stage, just as they had found a corner in the American press thanks to journalist Roy Gutman.

Gutman won the Pulitzer Prize in 1993 for his reports of the ethnic cleansing and the genocidal rapes in Bosnia, which were largely ignored by the Western governments for years. In *A Witness to Genocide*, he criticized that “[t]he assault against Bosnia had all the earmarks of genocide, but no official would utter the word because it would force them to come up with a policy response” (1993: XIV). Similarly, Gutman revealed that rape during the Bosnian war not just a moral crime, but a political one (1993: XV). As a professional journalist, he named the problem and urged the American public to act. Being part of that newly awakened U.S. population, Eve Ensler felt that, as a playwright and activist, she had to provide the Yugoslav women with a louder voice. She decided to travel to Zagreb and live in a refugee camp for two months. Back home, she created *Necessary Targets. A story of women and war*, a play in 17 scenes.

The dramatic thread that Ensler uses in *Necessary Targets* is the “us” vs. “them” dialectic, trying to prove that women all over the world in fact form an “us” united by the experience of sexist abuse. This way, as a feminist playwright, she applies the concept of the *continuum* of gender violence defined by Liz Kelly: “a basic common character that underlies many different events” (1987: 48); the common character being in this case that patriarchal systems and the men who comply with them “use a variety of forms of abuse, coercion and force in order to control women” (Kelly 1987: 48). United by the problem of rape and the unbalanced gender relations brought about by the war, Ensler’s Bosnian characters move beyond ethnicity or religious beliefs, struggling to build a female-centered circle of healing. In their midst land J.S. and Melissa, the American witnesses, trying to make sense of the horror and, initially, to act as saviors for the “poor victims” of the massacre. But in order to do so, they first need to overcome the prejudices that separate them from the refugees and which make the American characters believe that

[t]hem is always different from us. Them has no face. Them is a little bit deserving of all the bad that happens to them. Them is used to violence - it’s in their blood.

There are rules about them. We keep them over there, out of sight, conceptual. We do not get close enough to touch or smell or know them. We do not want to see how easily we could become them - how quickly violence arrives, how swiftly people turn, embracing racist hate. We do not want to know or touch the parts of ourselves that are capable of behaving like them. (Ensler 2001:XI)²

² The quotes from *Necessary Targets* will always refer to the 2001 Villard edition of the play. Hence, the complete bibliographical information “(Ensler 2001: page)” will not be repeated; page numbers are enough to locate the references.

From this duality, Ensler starts her work to construct vivid dialogues, a discourse of otherness and exile for the Bosnian women, and very precise stage directions that point at an expressive body language for all the characters. To use Elisabetta Donini's term, the protagonists of *Necessary Targets* become "shouting bodies" (1998: 82), struggling to find their own expressions of subjectivity beyond imposed silence.³ Continuing with her activism for the promotion of a strong solidarity among women, Ensler breaks down the barriers between young and old, American and European, Muslims, Serbs and Croats. In *Necessary Targets* the audience observes a process of dissolution of differences aimed at achieving final sisterhood, and goes with the protagonists along a complex path of "un-learning".

Embodying the paternalistic attitude of some institutions and part of the Western public towards the Yugoslav refugees, J.S. is presented by the playwright as an urban, upper-class, middle-aged American therapist sent to Bosnia to help the displaced women get over the trauma of rape. She is originally surprised by the offer, being as badly informed as most "pre-Gutman" Americans about the situation in the area. She acknowledges this openly in Scene 1, highlighting that it is an honorable, but awkward mission for her:

I am going for the President's commission. I was asked, and it's a huge honor. To be honest, I was a bit surprised. I mean, Bosnia is not a place I know very much about. I read the news, but until a week ago, the Balkans were not exactly next on my vacation map. (8)

Together with J.S. to Zagreb goes Melissa, a young journalist who is writing a book on the effects of war on women. In the opening scene, she is discovered as an unstable, probably anorexic, very nervous woman, constantly on the defensive with J.S. and willing to go to Bosnia for her own reasons. She is very much under professional pressure, and thinks of the refugees as mere objects of study: "It's my first contract with a major publisher [...]. It is essential that I complete the book this year. I will need to interview these women" (12). This attitude will later be revealed as harmful both for herself and for the rape victims, and Melissa will become an enemy inside the refugee camp.

Once in Bosnia, the American protagonists find out that their overprotective, condescending attitude makes them fail in their first attempts to communicate. The gap between "us" and "them" is too wide at first, and the refugee women receive them with a mixture of awe and suspicion. While kind Jelena tells them that they are "very honored that you Americans came all the way here" (28), elderly Azra tries to move the attention away from them as victims and towards politicians as responsible for the war: "Why don't you get those leaders on the couches? They're

³ The term is translated from Donini's expression "cuerpos que gritan" to refer to women's search for expression and identity in times of war, as it is understood by the group "Mujeres de Negro", which works and exerts its feminist-pacifist activism all over the world during armed conflicts.

the loony ones” (29). Both J.S. and Melissa will be forced, after going through different tests of their identities and feelings, to make a choice: will they stand by the women as equals, or will they leave Zagreb untouched? In Eve Ensler’s line of feminist dramatizations of contemporary problems related to violence against women, *Necessary Targets* stages a complex, enriching journey from distrust to final solidarity.

In a process of unlearning and self-analysis that runs parallel to that of the protagonists, and thanks to the small, but brave steps that the characters take towards one another, the audience of the play is forced to question their own preconceptions about the Yugoslav war, the stereotypical images of Muslim women, and the dangerous Western attitude that divided more than it united during the armed conflict. Also, the spectators are urged to assume the criticism voiced by the refugee characters, who are direct reflections of real-life women in a Bosnian camp. In their straightforward, clear style, they tell the audience how most Western journalists went to Bosnia for the blood and left without leaving any positive imprint in the struggle for peace: “They came from everywhere at the beginning of the war to hear the gory details” (32). They also report bitterly that the sensationalist informers contributed to perpetuate the stereotypes about ethnic differences and the war being a crazy civil battle by publishing pictures of the women with “the scarf, always the scarf” (32).⁴ Finally, they complain of the utter abandonment they felt after the first few months of global media attention: “They left and they never came back” (32).

It is extremely relevant that Eve Ensler chooses not to specify the ethnic or religious bonds of any of the Bosnian characters, whom she defines as “an earthy woman in her late forties”, “a very Americanized teenager”, “an oldie from the village”, etc. (22). By consciously neglecting labels, she avoids the good/evil dichotomy that was most often applied in the media to Muslims (victims) and Serbs (rapists and murderers), in an effort to convince the public that the conflict was, in fact, a civil war in which the Western nations had no right or duty to intervene. For her, the victimization of one woman is that of all women, and the threat of rape is present in every woman’s daily life, especially when her country is at war. During armed conflicts, rape serves as a weapon aimed at the woman’s inner self as much as at the community’s identity and honor:

A violent invasion into the interior of one’s body represents the most severe attack imaginable upon the intimate self and the dignity of a human being [...]. It

⁴ In the early reports about the Bosnian war, Muslim women were presented as the only victims of rape, which diminished the real number of raped female citizens and stigmatized a whole community. Research after Gutman’s revelations has proved that women were raped in all sides of the war. Norma von Ragenfeld-Feldman, for example, denounces that the view of the conflict in the Western media was one-sided, and how some pieces of news contributed to the general confusion by resting on “exaggerated numbers, dubious facts, and the misuse of evidence” (1997: 1).

results in physical pain, loss of dignity, an attack on her identity, and a loss of self-determination over her own body. (Stiglmeier 1994: 55)

All the Bosnian characters in *Necessary Targets*, regardless of their origin or faith, have a terrifying experience in common: they have all lived “homeless in [their] own body” (Copelon 1994: 202), alienated from their sexuality and their identity, denied all rights and reduced to objects of political and military manipulation by their male leaders. Fear, as used by Slobodan Milosevic and other heads of the different factions of the war, worked very well in the establishment of ethnic and gender hierarchies in which women were doubly condemned to being “others” to their enemies, but also to the men of their own communities. Fear of the “other”, as explained by former Bosnian refugees, became a highly effective method of intimidation and distrust (Zajovic 1996: 201). After the conflict, women found that their own husbands, fathers or brothers rejected them because of the “pollution” brought about by the rapes, and they became violent in order to liberate their own rage and frustration.⁵ As the refugees themselves explained to Radmila Žarković in the compilation of testimonies *I Remember*,

[f]or the women of all sides, the war has marched through their own living rooms. The men in their lives, who have been wandering about raping and pillaging, have brought their brutality and their addictions home. Family violence has risen markedly. On all sides of the war, men, if they are lucky enough to come home, have returned bearing guns and internal wounds which are now directed at the women who must live with them [...]. There is a pervasive fear of rape and violence as they feel instability in the men with whom they live. (Žarković 1996: 10)

Deeply affected by the trauma of systematic rape and marked by their lack of land, family ties or means to survive by themselves, the Bosnian protagonists of *Necessary Targets* make it hard for J.S. and Melissa to establish any kind of valid bond with them. Communicating the experience of war is not easy, and the pain related to rape is very hard to verbalize, so building up a wall between “us” and “them” seems to be the best option. In her playscript, Eve Ensler shows the audience/readers the very hard process of meaning-making that rape victims undergo. As David Morris has suggested, “[w]riters in fact express a range of knowledge and experience for which the person struggling with pain quite often cannot find the words” (1991: 3). The women in the play are suffering from physical and, especially, psychological pain, and during the first few scenes, they

⁵ Ethnic ascription was thought to run on the male side, so a pregnant rape victim would give birth to a baby of the rapist’s ethnic characteristics. For instance, a Muslim woman impregnated by a Serb soldier would bear a Serb child, which would bring about rejection in her own community (of herself and the baby).

utter radical phrases such as: "There is nothing normal here" (26); "We are sick of talking" (31); "Oh, so we're a chapter" (33); "We are not wanted anywhere" (35).

In these first dialogues one thing becomes clear: the arbitrariness of Western patriarchal discourse when there is a need to construct an opposition that exculpates "us" and blames "them" for the violence and the sorrow. In some Western reports, the Bosnian war was presented as a domestic struggle for power between different ethnic groups. Already in the 1990s, Beverly Allen reminded us that "[o]bservers in the United States often think of the war in the Balkans as the most recent in an endless series of violent conflicts that somehow characterize *those people*" (1996: 6). In Eve Ensler's refugee camp, however, the dichotomy is subverted as Zlata, Jelena and the rest turn J.S. and Melissa into a new type of "other": well-off Americans who travel to Zagreb in search of a story or of a meaning for their own frustrated lives. They have seen it happen too many times: journalists coming, taking pictures, and going home after a more exciting, profitable piece of news. During the Bosnian war, just as in Vietnam or the two Gulf wars, "the model of character ethics summoned forth by the president, his advisors, and the mass media alike was a model that distinguishes between 'us' and 'them'" (McBride 1995:40), "them" being the enemy, the female or feminized victim.

In order to decentralize the mainstream discourse, rooting her politics of location in the margins, and away from the white, male, Anglo individual perspective, Eve Ensler often resorts to dramatic polyphony in *Necessary Targets*. Her Bosnian protagonists act as a chorus marked by their gender and their circumstances, giving voice(s) to a specific problem: that of female refugees in an Eastern European country, trying to come to terms with a couple of representatives of the fist superpower in the world. In Scene 7, for example, the women appear in a circle, sharing coffee and secrets, and making use of their own voice as subjects of the dramatic exchange. The action takes place in a kitchen, traditionally a space of meeting for women in life and in literature, and it represents a rite of passage for J.S., the American therapist. Until then, she had been seen as the representative of the U.S. government, with all its implications in terms of power, distance and privilege. When she rejects a cup of Turkish coffee on the grounds that "I quit caffeine six months ago" (53), suspicion arises among the Yugoslav women: is her sympathy with them, who share her gender, space and time, or is she still on the side of patriarchal, American culture, where people, as young Nuna ironically points out, "spend their days quitting things" (54)? The main question is also raised by the teenager, when she asks: "Why don't you like us, Dr. J.S.? Why have you come all the way here not to be with us?" (55). J.S. reflects upon this all along the scene, and her gesture closes the tableau, as explained in the stage directions:

All the women pause and watch J.S., waiting for her next move. J.S. looks to MELISSA for help and MELISSA just watches her too. Finally, J.S. takes a sip of coffee. She smiles and drinks more. The other women smile. J.S. drinks with the rest as the lights fade. (56)

Considering Eve Ensler's work within the tradition of political theater in the line of the late Bertolt Brecht or the still very active Augusto Boal, the gesture defined by the playwright for the character of J.S. could be better described as a *gestus*. Elin Diamond, in her groundbreaking book *Unmaking Mimesis*, adapted this brechtian term to feminist theatrical practice through what she called "gestic feminist criticism". In this sense, she explained the *gestus* as "a gesture, a word, an action, a tableau, by which, separately or in a series, the social attitudes encoded in the playtext become visible to the spectator" (1997: 52). J.S.'s decision of joining the Bosnian women and drinking the Turkish coffee she is offered becomes a strategy to foreground the initial prejudices and practices of the American doctor and her subsequent evolution and assimilation within the circle of healing in the camp. Definitely admitted into the camp community, J.S. initiates with the Bosnian refugees a process of "group therapy" in which traditional psychological treatment gives way to communal rituals of bathing, singing, dancing and talking. Specialists who have worked with displaced persons highlight how important these moments of apparent normality are in their way towards total recovery: "Refugee women are terrified of falling into despair, because nothing would lift their spirits. [...] Sometimes they sang, laughed and cried as a group to help each other out" (Asociación de Mujeres para la Salud y la Paz 1995: 69; *my translation*). Reflecting this reality, Ensler's protagonists offer each other "Kleenex and comfort" (48), and become one singing and dancing in the next choral scene (Sc. 10):

Laughter. Whole group of women by the river, dangling toes in water. AZRA, JELENA have bright green cleansing masks on their faces. NUNA is smoothing on the masks like a professional skin-care person. [...] NUNA: Took me days to convince most of these women that beauty still matters. I think Azra's stopped bathing altogether [...] Music from Bosnia-Herzegovina plays. The women sing and dance. (69, 70, 76)

The use of water and skin cleansers in this scene is obviously not casual; it has strong implications of purification. In a symbolic way, the baths and regeneration of the women's skin could be understood as the timid beginning of a new life in which relationships between individuals, religions and countries would start anew, clean and without any trace of the hate that provoked the Yugoslav war. As their confidence grows, Jelena, Azra and the rest start verbalizing their painful traumas and their urging desire for a new, peaceful order based on equality and respect. After studying the history and the consequences of the Bosnian war, it transpires that the dramatic types created by Eve Ensler become rounder and rounder along the play, as well as closer and closer to reality, in the revelation of a kind of pain that real-life refugees have tried to put into words:

I will never understand why people shoot each other –neighbors shoot neighbors, best friends shoot best friends, only because they are Serbs, Croats or Muslims.

But we all pace the same earth, the same sun heats us, we breath the same air. I want to forget all the bad things, but the pain remains. (Žarković 1996: 13)

The pain that refugees talk about (in and outside the play) has to do with the incomprehensible divisions provoked by the “us” vs. “them” dialectic; a discourse of exclusion and aggression that stigmatizes a section of the population because of their family name, religious practice or skin color. According to Baz Kershaw, “all communities identify themselves by creating boundaries between what is included and what is excluded as part of the community” (1992: 30). In *Necessary Targets* the community built by the characters in the refugee camp is defined by gender, which avoids the rejection of any of the women on grounds of nationality, faith, race or age. In Eve Ensler’s alternative, female universe there are no “border guards”:

The mythical unity of national ‘imagined communities’ which divides the world between ‘us’ and ‘them’, is maintained and ideologically reproduced by a whole system of what Armstrong (1982) calls ‘border guards’. These ‘border guards’ can identify people as members or non-members of a specific collectivity. They are closely linked to particular codes of style of dress and behaviour as well as to more elaborate bodies of customs, literary and artistic modes of production, and, of course, language. Gender symbols play an especially significant role in this. (Yuval-Davis 1997:405)

Reinforcing Eve Ensler’s position within the feminist movement, which suggests that a negative emphasis on difference in the Bosnian context can bring about rape, violence and death, in Scene 10 young Nuna gives testimony of the experience of divided self that women with mixed blood like herself went through during the conflict in the ex-Yugoslavia. For them, gender was the only stable bases of identity, since their ethnic links were not clear, and their rights and alliances seemed to change constantly, depending on the political situation in the area:

Those of us who are both are neither one. We are enemies everywhere! [...] Inside me it’s really violent. One part of me hates the other part [...]. I used to think before the war how beautiful that all this had come together inside of me. All this history, knowledge, culture. Before the war, we who were mixed were considered the most beautiful, because so much had gone into making us. Now we are dirt. [...] -I’m waiting for someone to respect me, to see me as their own. (73, 74)

Living and fighting together for survival in the camp, in spite of hardship and scarcity, some of the Bosnian women staged by Ensler manage to regain that sense of belonging that they need in order to recompose their fragmented identity. As refugees of a brutal, dividing war, real Bosnian victims also struggled to readjust their definitions of self and others in the light of the new situation, trying to keep the channels of communication open and to bring about encounter and sisterhood over

the divisions provoked by the battles (Donini 83). In the play, cohabitation also makes it possible for privileged Western women like J.S. and Melissa to throw away their masks and reveal their own conflicts and loneliness. In Eve Ensler's words, "J.S.'s life is completely different when she comes back. I think that an understanding of community is in her now, and the hunger to make that community in America is in her" (qtd. in Greene 2001: 171).

The evolution of J.S., who appears as Ensler's *alter ego* in *Necessary Targets*, is very clear: at the beginning of the play, she favors a distant perspective, privileging her professional habits over her personal options. Thus, in Scene 2 she suggests living in a hotel instead of in the refugee camp, on the grounds that "[t]he hotel would give us some distance" (18). As the dramatic action advances, she is portrayed as a mere *voyeur* character, observing the tragedy of the Bosnian women from the outside, without any risk of being touched and transformed. The author often defines her actions in the stage directions by means of verbs related to sight: "looking at Melissa" (30); "J.S. looks at Melissa" (39); "J.S. looks out" (40); "J.S. watching and listening in the shadows" (44), etc. However, as the relationship with the Bosnian characters changes and the bonds of sisterhood become tighter, J.S. moves away from traditional spectatorship and into a more politically committed option: becoming a spect-actor inside the play.

Brazilian theorist and playwright Augusto Boal, in his now classic *Theatre of the Oppressed*, defined drama as "necessarily political", and as a "very efficient weapon" (1985: IX). One of the possibilities of this weapon for consciousness-raising is the idea of changing the "spectator" into a "spect-actor": a subject, a transformer of the dramatic and/or the real world (Boal 1985: 122); somebody who will stop watching and start acting in and outside the theater. Therefore, the suggestion in *Necessary Targets* that J.S. may try to build up her own female community in America after the Bosnian experience points in this direction. Eve Ensler wishes both her characters and her audience to become agents of a change that should, ideally, bring about the definite end of gender violence, both at peace and in times of war. The first step is to question the *status quo* and the given definitions of "us", "them", or "other". In her own words: "I want the audience to draw their own conclusions about these characters –and themselves. The ending asks, 'What happens when you're affected by people?' Do you change or do you just hold that inside you?" (qtd. in Greene 2001: 171).

After the testimonies presented in the polyphonic, choral episodes, the play reaches a dramatic climax in Scenes 13 and 14, where two forms of sexist aggression -Ensler's main topic- are tackled, showing the continuum of violence that affects women all over the world. According to Liz Kelly, "[t]he concept of the continuum of sexual violence draws attention to this wider range of abuse and assault which women experience, illustrating further the link between more common, everyday male behaviour and [...] the 'extremes'" (1987: 51). In this section of *Necessary Targets*, Jelena, a woman in her forties, talks about the

battering inflicted on her by her husband. Dado has been transformed by the war from a tender lover into a violent beast, a “new mutation of war” (87). Since the conflict broke out in their country, Dado has terrifying dreams about knives, blood, and the murder of his people: “he’d passed out [...] I must have pulled him roughly and frightened him and he just went mad, started screaming about not taking him outside, the knives, that he’d do anything, not to hurt him, not to hurt the others” (87).

Beverly Allen writes in *Rape Warfare* about the “Chetnik cult of the knife”, an expression that describes the systematic use of this type of arm for torture and assassination during the Bosnian War, mostly on the part of the Serbian army (1996: 80). From a gender perspective, there is an obvious symbolism in the knife as a phallic tool of penetration. Apart from the common ritual of throat slitting that Allen describes, during the 1990s there were thousands of women raped by knives, apart from penises, shotguns, broomsticks and other objects in the former Yugoslavia. The aim of these attacks was the utter destruction of the self, of the community, of the ethnic pride and of all the specific signs of identity:

The knife fixation that seems to characterize both the legendary Serb dream of a Great Serbia reaching to the Austrian border and the official Serb military policy in Bosnia-Herzegovina goes beyond the individual accounts of torture and death and suggests instead a collective madness that sweeps all before it in a sea of butchery. Civilians are the main victims of this diseased conflagration: peasants, town dwellers, city dwellers, women, men, children. The knives tear into so much that there is scarcely anything left to kill. (Allen 1996: 81)

Just as Jelena has seen how the knives severed her family ties within the camp, Seada, “a beautiful girl in her twenties” (22), has suffered another terrible punishment for the “sin” of being a woman in Bosnia during the conflict. Through the words of other protagonists, the audience gets to know that Doona, the baby that Seada has been cooing all along the play, is actually just a bundle of clothes, and that the real baby is dead. During the war, the soldiers broke into Seada’s home with the intention of raping her. She ran away with her daughter and “[s]he dropped her as she was running” (97). Seada is thus presented in the play as the representative of the tens of thousands of women raped in Bosnia as part of the politics of ethnic cleansing. The fact of putting her story into words is Eve Ensler’s gesture of rebellion against the overwhelming silence that pervaded in Bosnia after the armed conflict. Wassyla Tamzali, UNESCO representative, explains how rape is chosen as a strategy in warfare because the executor knows that the victim will sink into silence (1997: 152).

Coherently enough with the circumstances portrayed in the play, the story of Seada’s escape does not come directly from her own lips, but from the other Yugoslav women’s. Traumatized by rape and by the loss of her child, Seada at first resorts to denial and silence as survival strategies. Her language at the beginning of

Scene 14 is mainly non-verbal, as specified by the playwright in the stage directions: she eats dirt, pulls her hair, rocks back and forth, hurts herself... It is Azra, Nuna and Jelena who, again acting as a chorus, will put the rape into words, provoking Seada's mad reactions, her sudden recovery of a memory she had repressed, and the two American women's shock at the brutality of a distant war that has become flesh in front of their eyes. The drama of pain, which is "the quintessential solitary experience" (Morris 1991: 37) becomes here a communal event, shared by all the women alike, European or American, Anglo or Muslim, young or old. Unable to share her plight through verbal expression in the first moments, Seada finds her own language of pain, trying with her body to break the barrier between an "us" (the Bosnian women) who understands the suffering, and a "they" (the U.S. therapists) that has, until now, lived outside the experience of pain and loss. David Morris describes this kind of situation as follows: "Outside pain, we can only observe, sympathize, and perhaps reply with a few inadequate clichés, like a tourist speaking from a phrasebook. Inside pain, we immediately attain full possession of a knowledge that defies accurate transmission" (1991: 222). Along the play, thus, the tension between the said and the unsaid is kept by the chorus of Bosnian refugees, making it clear that *Necessary Targets* is "a story of people reluctant to tell stories. Enslar makes it clear -in leaden dramatic terms- that the play is over once the secrets come out" (Finkle 2002: 1).

So as to be able to start her definite healing, a traumatized victim needs to establish, first of all, a safe environment in which she is allowed to reorganize her memories and build up her own testimony by herself (Herman 1997: 3). This is precisely what J.S. tries to achieve once she assimilates the seriousness of the situation, but in a camp like the one portrayed by Enslar, it seems very hard to transmit a feeling of safety and calm. In Scene 14, Seada takes the center of the stage to embody the struggle for a personal narrative in her particular use of verbal and non-verbal signs. This is the scene that contains the largest number of stage directions, including a very detailed description of gesture, movement and feeling for the actress in the role of the young, frustrated mother. But it also includes the longest dramatic monologue delivered in *Necessary Targets*. The fusion of Seada's voice and non-verbal resources faces the audience with the drama of genocidal rape in Bosnia. Pain and trauma overflow the stage and reach a spectator that, by the end of the play, should be closer to action than when the curtain went up. This is what the audience hears when young Seada recovers her voice:

Please, I say, please, can't you help me –help me find my baby. Believe me, I was a good mother. Happy until the war came to our village. Please can't you help me [...]. Those lights, those bright mean lights, and those voices, those loud deep voices laughing, making fun of me [...]. My aching breasts hungry to feed, overflowing with milk for Doona, as they tear off my blouse, these loud, laughing voices wearing black masks, stinking of shit and meat, tear off my milk-stained blouse and rip at my aching, full breasts, biting them, sucking, "Okay, Mommy,

I'll be your little baby"—as the other one spreads my legs and the other holds my arms —Doona— “We'll show you how to make real babies, real clean babies. We'll fill you with the right kind of babies.” Then he shoves himself into me, and there is a tearing, a ripping, the center of my dress, my underpants, splitting me apart, and as I'm splitting I can hear her suddenly, hear her crying out for her mother [...], Doona, crying and crying, I cannot stop it, I cannot get it out of my brain... (104)

Acknowledging her as a member of their community of victims fighting for survival, the rest of the women try to help Seada with all their might. J.S., who is now part of the unbreakable circle of healing and sisterhood, ignores the traditional boundary between doctor and patient and forms with Seada an image of female-only *pietá* at the end of Scene 14. Assuming a motherly role, J.S. hugs Seada on the floor, she rocks her and sings a song of consolation:

She is awkward initially, slightly out of tune, then she gathers herself, gaining her momentum and confidence in her singing. As she sings to SEADA and the women, she finds her spirit, she breaks open, singing with heart and soul in full intensity. As she sings, SEADA stops crying. The wailing in her head begins to subside, then stops. The women gather around, appreciating this beautiful song, appreciating J.S. singing her song. There is silence. (105)

The final silence marks the moment of transformation, the “feminist catharsis” that Ensler herself felt in Zagreb.⁶ It is not a traditional catharsis that brings about recuperation of the *status quo*, but a purifying experience that should provoke change and move towards transformation of the self and the environment. J.S. has completed (and hopefully, so has the audience) her process of “un-learning” and takes home with her the spirit of fight, survival and healing she has seen in the refugees: “Though initially a cool professional, J.S. is truly moved by the women and consequently connects with them on a meaningful level. She is also personally changed” (“*Necessary Targets*” 2002: 2). Back in the United States, J.S. will stop being a mere spectator of her wealthy patients’ miseries and will become a spect-actor in real life. Ensler closes the play with a double set, showing all the women together, reviving the ritual ceremony that first united them in Bosnia:

(The women at the refugee camp gather around the kitchen table in Bosnia to make coffee.) J.S. [...] I am without a country. I am without a profession or pursuit. I am without a reason or even a direction. I am in that refugee camp in the middle of nowhere. I am with Zlata and Jelena and Seada and Nuna and Azra,

⁶ Even though it has traditionally been associated with Aristotle’s theories, the idea of “catharsis” has been appropriated by feminist dramatic practice with a more political meaning, closer to Augusto Boal and his concept of “transformation” and “spect-actor”. Ensler herself acknowledges how writing dramatic pieces is for her a “cathartic” activity (Greene 2001: 156), one that brings about change and desire for action (as opposed to passive purification and liberation of passions in classical terminology).

sometime very early in the morning. We are sitting and we are trying, we are really trying to trust one another, and in between the tears we take little sips of mad, thick coffee. (J.S. looks to the women. Lights fade). (117)

This last tableau also suggests the final success in the exchange of experiences between female refugees from Eastern Europe and a Northamerican middle-class, professional woman. The process of communication has been hard, and Melissa was lost on the way, unable to overcome her own prejudices and fears. The protagonists have gone through different stages (distrust-silence-tolerance-verbalization-sisterhood), but they have eventually reached a point where it can be affirmed that, if there is a common experience that women from different countries can share and understand, that is gender violence. It is a sad bond that unites beyond ethnicity or age, but consciousness about it and the urge for transformation can bring with them the hope of a world at peace and without rape, where women will be able to share coffee, Kleenex and comfort in a safe environment both on and off-stage.

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