

II

To Heal History





Shattered blessing. December 1995.

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GRETA: *I never thought about ethnic categories before, and my parents didn't think of them. But now, when I read a list in the newspaper, I immediately start analyzing who is who. I've changed. War does that. It's an infection we constantly have to fight.*

ALMA: *My mother was the pillar of our home, with us when we were ill to make tea or put a compress on our foreheads. When we were older, she'd check on us a hundred times, as if we were little. I could confide in her. In her, I see thousands of mothers. If all soldiers were women, there wouldn't be so much bloodshed.*

VESNA: *War caused this hatred among people, but we can overcome this. Time will heal. First the economy will bring us together. But just think about it: Even after all we've endured, we have new mixed marriages. You see, love has no borders.*

MAJA: *Women never would have started this war, and if they had, they would have completed it much less painfully and faster. As a doctor, my profession is to love people. Our town is divided, but love doesn't know borders.*

MEDIHA: *I died millions of times during those years. Every one of us did. I was humiliated as a human being. But now I speak as a doctor. We have this gray brain matter, and all our abilities are there. We have to share them with others, out of gratitude. And those of us most gifted must do more.*

The wartime experiences recounted in part I were followed by the women's fiery convictions as to the causes of the war: the unabashed greed of politicians, a policy and practice of privilege that tilted the social balance, and media transformed into a powerful machine, churning out fear for political purposes. They ripped apart the idea that age-old, intractable, ethnic-based hatred made war inevitable. In fact, they described that reasoning as a convenient excuse championed by Milosevic and misguidedly adopted by many within the international community.

It's easy, from the outside, to see the failure of the international community to respond, particularly when thinking about Kada waiting for her Samir to come stumbling out of the woods around Srebrenica, or Maja, crying as the boat left harbor with her two teenage sons, or Emsuda, tending to the psychological scars of her family after their ordeal in the concentration camp. Our failure to respond was a failure of political leadership. A critique of the international community, however, must not shift the blame from those who caused the war.¹

But analysis of the causes and identification of the culprits is not enough. There's rebuilding to be done, for the sake of the women's families, their communities, and their country. In chapter 5 in this second part, the women assess the formidable challenges before them. They move on, in chapter 6, to describe a few of the many projects they're doing to stabilize postconflict Bosnia despite those challenges—work wrapped in down-to-earth wisdom, rooted in basic values of compassion and fairness, and fueled by hope against seemingly insurmountable odds. The war in Bosnia is not *sui generis*. However local the women's efforts, there are global lessons to be drawn. Part 2 ends with reflections on the basic building blocks of reconciliation: getting the truth out, establishing justice rather than revenge, and humanizing the enemy—principles as applicable to Colombia, Congo, or Cambodia as they are to Bosnia.