

OP-ED

Women and war

Story and photos by Marissa Roth

MY PARENTS WERE HOLOCAUST REFUGEES; my mother from Budapest, Hungary, and my father from Novi Sad, Yugoslavia. They met on the Queen Mary in November 1938, on one of its last Atlantic crossings before being requisitioned as a troop carrier. My mother's parents were hidden by Raoul Wallenberg in Budapest and survived the war. My father's parents and other family members were killed on the doorstep of their home in Novi Sad in January 1942. The tragedies that befell both sides of my family during World War II made me deeply interested in the effect of war on ordinary people. ¶ While working on assignment as a Times photographer in Pakistan in 1988, I was drawn to tell the story of the Afghan war widows, who at the time numbered about 100,000 after 10 years of war between Afghanistan and the Soviet Union. I went into Afghan refugee camps in Thal and Peshawar and photographed women and children, for what I considered to be an underreported story of that war. ¶ My experiences in Pakistan inspired me to continue photographing other women affected by other wars, a photo essay that has turned into a 20-year personal project dedicated to documenting the lives of women who have been directly affected by armed conflicts. ¶ Men traditionally fight the wars. But it is the women who are left behind to pick up the pieces. ¶ These are some of the women I have met, photographed and interviewed in 10 countries and three continents for a body of work titled "One Person Crying: Women and War."

Nuk Nimny
Phnom Penh,
Cambodia
Feb. 18, 2009

NUK NIMNY was born in 1972 in Banteay Meanchey province, Cambodia. Several members of her family were killed during the brutal Cambodian revolution of the Khmer Rouge, which was in power from 1975 to 1979. An estimated 1.5 million people were executed or died of disease or starvation related to the brutal policies of Pol Pot, who headed the government.

"My father worked in the local government as a secretary. He was killed in 1976. My two older sisters were killed in 1977. My mother and I hid in the jungle with other family members. I live with my mother who is now 78 years old. I don't remember that much because I was very young. . . . Don't forget about us."



Margaret Hale
North Belfast,
Northern Ireland
Oct. 5, 2006

MARGARET HALE, 41 at the time she was photographed, grew up in Belfast during a period of turmoil and violence between Catholics and Protestants. As a child, her Catholic family's home was burned down by Protestants. And even after "the Troubles" ended, the tensions remained.

"Five years ago, on Oct. 20, 2001, there was a lot of trouble on Limestone Street, where people were always getting beaten. At 5 or 6 a.m. I heard a scuffle. It's all a bit foggy. I remember going out and talking to a guy on the corner, asked him what was going on. The last thing I remember, he went into the bushes and there was a flash of light and everything went black. I got hit with a club across my face — broke my nose and smashed my left eye socket. He beat my back and broke my leg."



Photographs © MARISSA ROTH

'It's better to ask me who was not killed.'

— ZIFA BUMBOLOVIC



Zifa Bumbolovic
Srebrenica, Bosnia and Herzegovina
Sept. 21, 2009

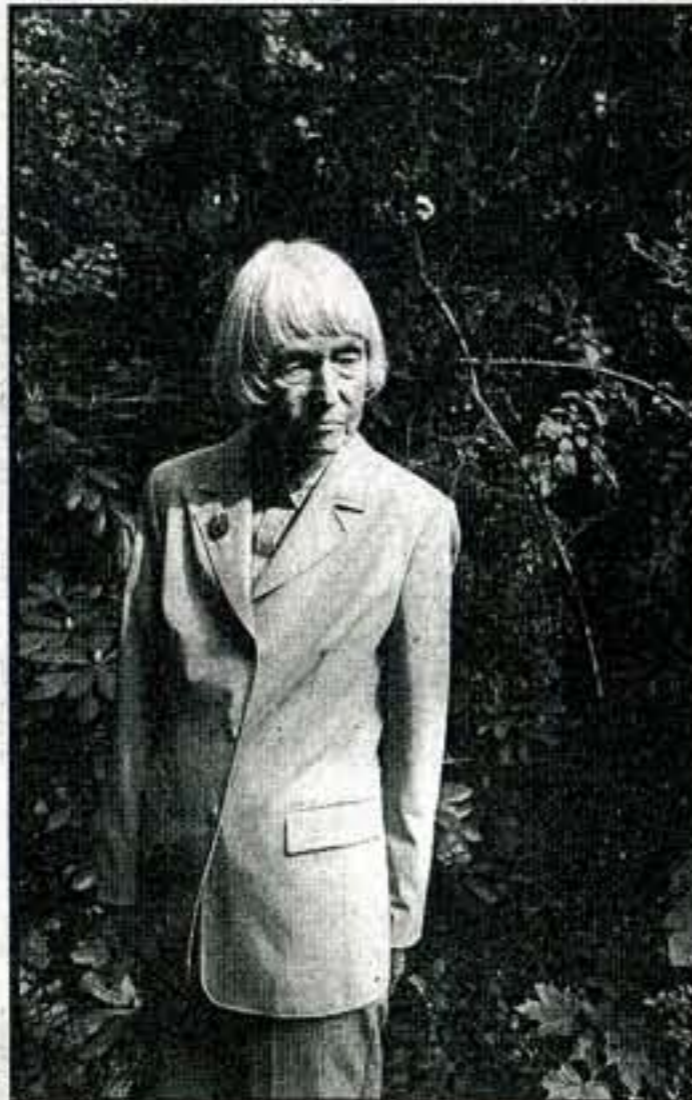
WHEN THE SREBRENICA ENCLAVE fell to Serbian control in July 1995, Zifa Bumbolovic and her family, along with thousands of other refugees, fled to an abandoned car-battery factory in Potocari that was used by U.N. peacekeepers. After three days, Serb forces divided the men from the women and young children. The women were taken to Tulza, a predominantly Bosnian Muslim city. The men and older boys, including Bumbolovic's 19-year-old son, were driven into the forest and shot and killed, then buried in shallow mass graves.

"So, who was killed? My son, Fikret, my son-in-law, Ekrem, two of my brothers, three of their sons. The only reason my husband Meho survived was because he was in Serbia working at that time, but his father, brother and nephew were killed, and his sister is still missing. . . . It's better to ask me who was not killed."

Ilse Kleberger
Berlin
May 6, 2008

ILSE KLEBERGER, a doctor and children's book author, lived in Berlin during World War II.

"We lived with cousins who were house-sitting for a general who was a prisoner of war. . . . We believed the army was coming and that it would defend Berlin. I went to a hospital and offered my services. I had to amputate limbs without disinfectant or anesthesia. We were hiding in a cellar when the Russians came on May 3rd or 4th. After that, we would have to cross a bridge to get to another part of the city to get food. One time I saw all of the young German soldiers lying dead in piles. It was the worst experience for me. I never forgot it. I was raped twice, but that wasn't as bad as seeing these dead children. A lot of girls committed suicide after they were raped, but I thought, I never wanted this stupid war. The men made the war, not the women. There was no reason to kill myself. My life was worth living."



Sabrie Krasniqi
Tirana, Albania
May 31, 1999

BETWEEN MARCH 24 AND June 10, 1999, in the final days of fighting in the former Yugoslavia, close to 1 million people in the war zone fled to Albania. Sabrie Krasniqi was one of them. She was photographed in a hospital.

"The Serbian soldiers poured a samovar of boiling hot water over me, after they invaded my village. My extended family lived in seven or eight houses near each other. When the Serbs got there they were angry because they saw there were no men. They wanted something to hurt, so they attacked some of the children and some of the women. I don't know where my family is."

Cathy Weiss
West Los Angeles
Aug. 11, 2008

CATHY WEISS was born in Satu Mare, Romania, in 1926, a predominantly Jewish Hungarian city. On June 3, 1944, her whole family was forcibly taken to the concentration camp at Auschwitz, where her mother and grandmother were killed. After Auschwitz, she was sent to another concentration camp at Schlesiersee.

"Soon after we arrived, a group of young teenage women prisoners was ordered into an inspection room. We were terrified, and quickly pinched our cheeks so they would look rosy, and we stood up straight to appear healthy, because we knew we were about to be inspected by [Dr. Josef] Mengele. We also knew that if he spoke to us directly, or if we looked sickly and could not work, that we would be chosen by him to be taken away for experiments. He looked me straight in the eyes and, without saying a word, passed me by."

