

# **Assault on the Soul: Women in the Former Yugoslavia**

*Assault on the Soul: Women in the Former Yugoslavia* has been co-published simultaneously as *Women & Therapy*, Volume 22, Number 11999.

## The Women & Therapy Monographic "Separates"

*Assault on the Soul: Women in the Former Yugoslavia*, edited by Sara Sharratt, PhD. and Ellyn Kaschak, PhD (Vol. 22, No. 1, 1999). *Explores the applications and intersections of feminist therapy, activism, and jurisprudence with women and children in the former Yugoslavia*

*Learning from Our Mistakes: Difficulties and Failures in Feminist Therapy*, edited by Marcia Hill, EdD, and Esther D. Rothblum, PhD (Vol. 21, No. 3, 1998). *"A courageous and fundamental step in evolving a well-grounded body of theory and of investigating the assumptions that unexamined, lead us to error."* (Teresa Bernardez, MD, Training and Supervising Analyst, The Michigan Psychoanalytic Council)

*Feminist Therapy as a Political Act*, edited by Marcia Hill, EdD (Vol. 21, No.2, 1998). *"A real contribution to the field. . . . A valuable tool for feminist therapists and those who want to learn about feminist therapy."* (Florence L. Denmark, PhD, Robert S. Pace Distinguished Professor of Psychology and Chair; Psychology Department, Pace University, New York, New York)

*Breaking the Rules: Women in Prison and Feminist Therapy*, edited by Judy Harden, PhD. and Marcia Hill, EdD (Vol. 20, No. 4 & Vol. 21, No. 1. 1998). *"Fills a long-recognized gap in the psychology of women curricula, demonstrating that feminist theory can be made relevant to the practice of feminism, even in prison."* (Suzanne J. Kessler, PhD, Professor of Psychology and Women's Studies, State University of New York at Purchase)

*Children's Rights, Therapists' Responsibilities: Feminist Commentaries*, edited by Gail Anderson, MA, and Marcia Hill, EdD (Vol. 20, No. 2, 1997). *"Addresses specific practice dimensions that will help therapists organize and resolve conflicts about working with children, adolescents, and their families in therapy."* (Feminist Bookstore News)

*More than a Mirror: How Clients Influence Therapists' Lives*, edited by Marcia Hill, EdD (Vol. 20, No. 1. 1997). *"Courageous, insightful, and deeply moving. These pages reveal the scrupulous self-examination and self-reflection of conscientious therapists at their best. AN IMPORTANT CONTRIBUTION TO FEMINIST THERAPY LITERATURE AND A BOOK WORTH READING BY THERAPISTS AND CLIENTS ALIKE."* (Rachel Josefowitz Siegal, MSJ.V, retired feminist therapy practitioner; Co-Editor, *Women Changing Therapy; Jewish Women in Therapy; and Celebrating the Lives of Jewish Women: Patterns in a Feminist Sampler*)

*Sexualities*, edited by Marny Hall, PhD, LCSW (Vol. 19, No. 4, 1997). *"Explores the diverse and multifaceted nature of female sexuality; covering topics including sadomasochism in the therapy room, sexual exploitation in cults, and genderbending in cyberspace."* (Feminist Bookstore News)

# Assault on the Soul: Women in the Former Yugoslavia

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## ABOUT THE EDITORS

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# Preface

I am proud to present in the first volume of my new editorship this collection of writing on applications and intersections of feminist therapy, activism and jurisprudence with women and children in the former Yugoslavia. Focusing on the former Yugoslavia offers a look at applied feminist practice in a cultural context outside the American or Northern European. Nor is it the more usual milieu of working in the undeclared war zones. As many of the women writing in this volume have crossed man-made boundaries to honor the feminist connection of women, so I hope that this book can contribute to the project of making visible the still too often invisible connections between and among women in various cultural contexts. Sometimes even we do not know all the places in which feminists are practicing. To reach back and borrow a phrase from the sixties in the United States, "We are everywhere." The writers in this collection are German and Dutch, Norwegian and Costa Rican, North American. They are therapists, lawyers and justices of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. All of them are struggling with the profound immorality of the circumstance, with keeping their vision and its applications culturally sensitive, contextually based and psychologically or legally useful. All have been profoundly changed by doing this work. A Serbian and a Croatian woman offer their perspectives on the situation, on the arrival of many of these women, foreign by official standards, to offer aid, to offer what skills they have, often inadequate in the face of the horrors with which they are confronted, to offer themselves in a struggle from which they could easily have turned away.

This material will never appear in official records, in the records of the United Nations or of the International Criminal Tribunal. It is women's psychology, women's history, women's geography, women's jurisprudence. It always has been and still is our work as feminists to make visible what patriarchy conspires to erase or confine to the margins. And so I hope that these writings will serve as part of the record of what women have done in

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this war: this cadre of women, some crossing the borders, others working in the international courts of the Hague, still others from the war-torn territories, who offer their skills, their visions and their hearts without hesitation.

This collection, then, is also intended as an historical document, an assurance that both the plight of women and the role of women in bringing it to visibility, to the attention of the international community and the justice system, will not be erased. The official version will likely include "the facts"-who got tried and convicted, how many individuals were put in camps, tortured or killed, how many rapes were counted by the voice of authority. In these articles, the authors tell us what really happened to the most ordinary women and children. And to themselves. They recount a heroics of the ordinary.

This collection of articles includes three interviews with representatives of the justice system. They are not included to imply that women receive greater justice in the courts than in other social institutions, but that they receive greater justice when women are part of the decision-making process-not just any women, but those who are able to see with women's eyes, to notice the injustices that would simply have gone unnoticed except to someone who also lives life in a woman's body. Secondly, the intersection of justice and healing is a crucial one. Healing from such severe injuries inevitably requires an arena in which the truth is finally spoken and heard. The courts are only one possible arena for this to occur and it may be long overdue for feminists to devise others as part of the treatment of the effects of such atrocities. Here we visit some of the places where justice and healing come together.

What can happen when one female justice of the court decides to stay up all night looking for indictable instances of rape that she was told were not there? When a Serbian woman refuses nationalism for the connection of international feminism? When women already brutalized are willing to put themselves in further peril to testify against their torturers? When others living in relative comfort and safety are willing to place themselves in peril, to cross men's borders to offer their skills and compassion to other women trapped in the former Yugoslavia? And what happens when they return home too traumatized themselves to continue their previous lives?

Women go to war after war after war ministering to the wounded and the weary with the latest in psychological techniques. Many still use diagnosis and the DSM, for what tools and signposts do they have other than the woefully inadequate Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)? Would that in this world of postmodernism, declared postfeminism and various other posts, we might actually arrive at a time of post-trauma for women and children. Would that we really had more cases of post-trauma rather than chronic or repeated acute trauma. For as I have long argued (Kaschak, 1992), there is nothing *post* about trauma for women who continue to reside in the former

Yugoslavia and nothing *post* indeed for any women who reside in violent and damaging patriarchal societies even if they have not officially declared war on women.

And what of the idea that such trauma causes stress, a concept much too small to contain the multiple reverberations of ordinary life as a woman, much less the terror and grief, the shame and loss of being treated not only as the enemy, the spoils of men's wars, but not even as the enemy, instead as the battlefield itself. Women's bodies are part of the ground upon which war is waged; women's psyches and souls are damaged and compromised until feminist therapy must begin with reminding these women of their basic humanity. These women have committed perhaps the most ancient crime of all in patriarchal society, that of being women.

It is an artifact of the narrower lens of non-feminist psychotherapy that commitment is spoken of almost exclusively in the context of dyadic partner relationships and with a particular concern for its absence. For feminist practitioners, for those with a wider lens, the kind of commitment that these women demonstrate to the victims of this war, to the lived practice of feminism and to humanity is obviously one of the most profound kinds of commitment there is.

Still, how disappointing that, almost thirty years after the introduction of feminist theory and practice, there is still such need for us to continue to develop and apply feminist interventions for tortured and traumatized women. How disappointing that these immoral acts continue, that we have to go to war yet another time, that I have to repeat the very words that many of us spoke for the first time as we were developing the earliest feminist interventions almost thirty years ago. May all our practices in the name of damage to women's bodies, psyches and souls be rendered obsolete.

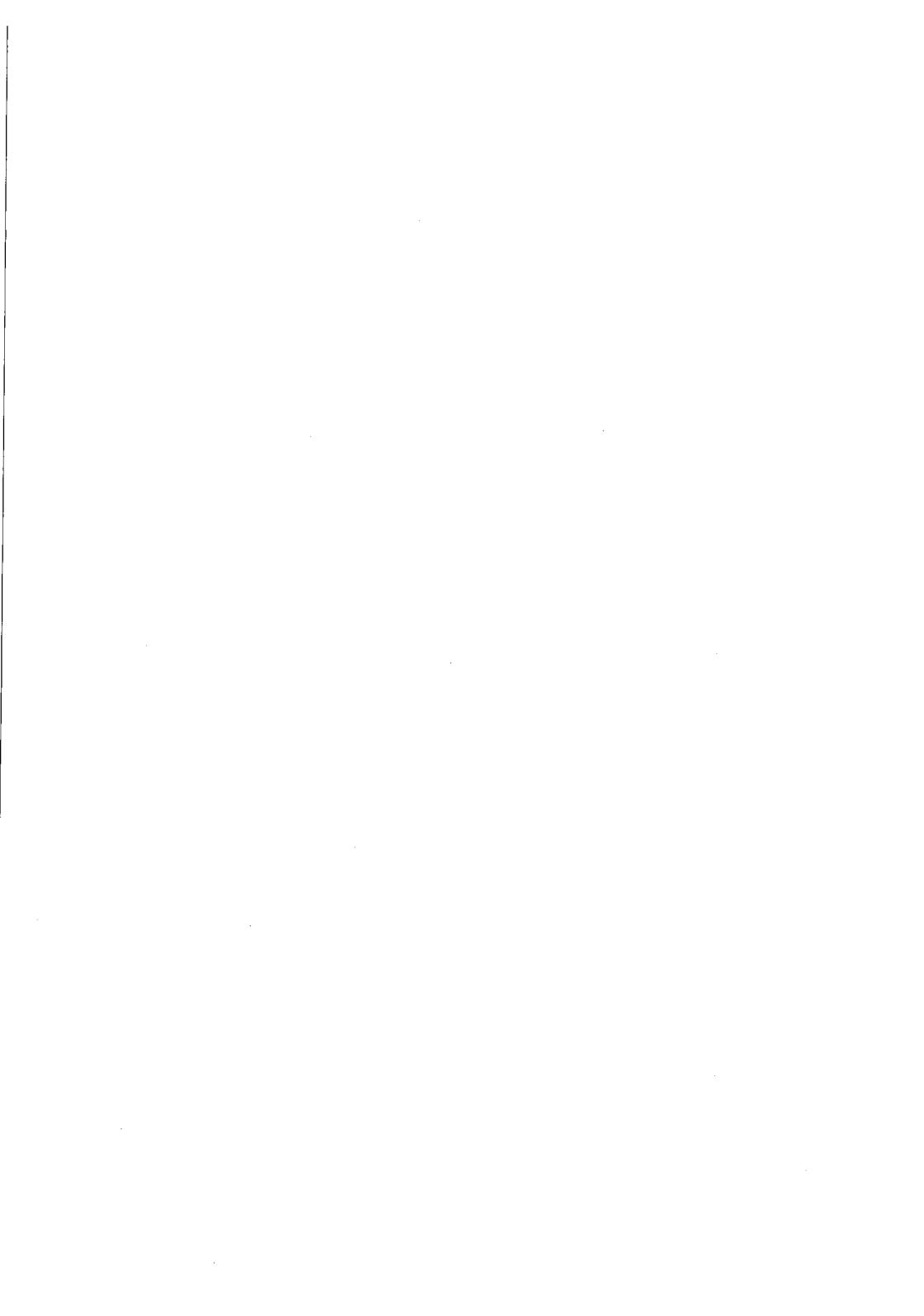
*Ellyn Kaschak*

## NOTE

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## REFERENCE

Kaschak, E. (1992). *Engendered lives: A new psychology of women's experience*. Basic Books: New York.



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