

## INTRODUCTION

### OPENING THE SUITCASE

**W**e have heard all about the shelling of Sarajevo, scanned headline after headline on the destruction of “Yugoslavia,” and watched endless television coverage of civilians dodging bullets and fleeing destroyed lives, but we haven’t heard the voices of refugees. “When you’re a refugee, nobody asks you how you are,” one Bosnian refugee confided. She was from a Muslim community.<sup>1</sup> And she spoke from a refugee camp in Pakistan. But she could have been from Croatian or Serbian communities, and she could have been in Croatia or Bosnia or Serbia, or in any European or American country. She could have even been a refugee from another con-

1. We prefer where possible to identify people as being from “Muslim, Croatian, and Serbian communities,” instead of as being “Muslim, Croat, or Serb” in recognition of the complex nature of identification of self and other, particularly here, where in a large number of families there are intermarriages, and where many people do not in fact identify themselves monolithically as Serb or Croat, or Muslim, at least not before the war began. Before and even now, many refugees identify themselves according to place and not to ethnic group, or at the very least according to group and place—i.e., Bosnian Muslim, Bosnian Croat, Bosnian Serb. The matter becomes more confused with the term “Muslim” as the word also refers to a religion, but Muslims of Bosnia-Herzegovina are rarely religious and most have little in common with those who practice the religion of Islam elsewhere (see afterword by Marieme Helie-Lucas). To the extent that “Muslim” is used here, the term refers to people who are identified with that ethnonational group.

flict, in Haiti or Rwanda perhaps. When you're a refugee, no matter who you are, nobody asks, "How are you?"

This book asks refugees<sup>2</sup> from Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia this simple question. Here, refugees tell their own stories about their lives *as refugees* in their own voices, through stories, essays, poems, and letters.

In some ways, we are all refugees, if only for a moment. Remember that feeling of loneliness, as if a child uprooted from all things known and unknown, of cosmic displacement, as if an alien on an unknown planet. Then imagine freedom beyond the limit of human need, freedom from context, freedom from life itself—freedom as a personal enemy, bare and raw, imposed by outside forces suddenly and without warning. Being a refugee is the other side of being human, its dark side.

We are all born into a history, but refugees, torn from their homes and cast out of their histories, are forced into the thorny pass of saints. As they gather the threads of their past lives and wait to begin again, refugees all come to the same, often unspoken, realization: All people are kin even if they kill each other, and especially if they kill each other since they all lie in the same graves; there is no just cause, just war, or victory where the loot is only material or the gain is power over another; there are no religious, ethnic, or political differences as great as the gap between pain and joy, war and peace, life and death. This revelation may be worth sacrifice, but we could avoid repeating the sacrifice if only we listened to the wisdom of refugees.

Many Europeans and Americans, soaked in their own prejudice and ignorance, may try to dismiss refugees from Asia and Africa as a distant "other"—a creature foreign from and opposite to themselves. But they can see themselves in the refugees from Bosnia-

2. As explained below, we use a lay person's definition of refugee, not the legal definition. All people who left their community and considered themselves refugees were eligible for this collection.

Herzegovina and Croatia. These are people from small European towns and cosmopolitan cities who have lost their ski vacations, compact discs, and VCRs. Newspapers may love to display photographs of old farm ladies with scarves on their heads—and indeed many refugees from Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia<sup>3</sup> are old and some do wear scarves—but many more refugees are young cosmopolitans. Perhaps if readers begin to relate to this refugee population as themselves, they would begin to feel the needs of other refugee populations as well. All refugees, no matter what race, ethnicity, religion, or geographic location, are “us.”

Popular opinion has turned against refugees, as their numbers worldwide have swollen from 2.5 million in 1970 to over 23 million today.<sup>4</sup> And the number of “displaced people”—people who have fled their homes but who remain in their countries of origin—has reached over 25 million.<sup>5</sup> In World War I, only 5 percent of casual-

3. In line with the wishes of the majority of refugee authors to this collection and unless the authors expressly refer to a different term, we use throughout the names of the internationally recognized countries (Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia) and refer to the larger, prewar territory of Yugoslavia as ex-Yugoslavia or the former Yugoslavia. We use “reduced Yugoslavia” when referring to the only two parts of the former Yugoslavia that remain together and call themselves Yugoslavia. Few people, with the exception of the foreign news media, use the term “former Yugoslavia” to describe the presently existing countries (just as no one, apart from the foreign news media, refers to Russia, Ukraine, or the other newly independent states as “the former Soviet Union”). Even those disagreeing with the use of the terms “Croatia” and “Bosnia-Herzegovina” do not suggest the term “former Yugoslavia.” (For example, residents of the formerly Serbian-populated and Serbian-controlled territory in southern Croatia known as “Krajina” referred to their land not as “former Yugoslavia” but as the “Serbian Republic of Krajina.”)

4. In the middle of 1995, the UN High Commission on Refugees estimated the number of refugees worldwide at 23 million. UNHCR, Office of the Special Envoy for former Yugoslavia, Briefing Kit (March 1995). See also UNHCR, *Information Paper 1994*, and UNHCR, *The State of the World's Refugees* (New York: Penguin Books, 1993), which sets the number of refugees at the end of 1992 at 18.2 million.

5. Estimate drawn from interviews with the International Working Group on Refugee Women, Vienna, February 1995; UNHCR field offices, Zagreb and Belgrade, February and March, 1995; and Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, New York, February 1994.

ties of war were civilians and 95 percent were combatants; today the numbers are reversed: 95 percent of casualties of war are civilians and only 5 percent are combatants. Despite these statistics, European countries have erected new barriers to refugees, issued new visa requirements, built new border crossings, held meeting after meeting to discuss refugee and immigration controls without even putting “how to help refugees” on the agenda. Xenophobia has intensified and few countries have done anything to stem the tide of ignorance and hate.

Dehumanized and defaced, refugees become a suitable scapegoat, especially in countries facing their own ethnic and racial tensions and economic crises. The refugees from Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia, like other refugees throughout time and across continents, are in danger of being treated as mere refuse from a war we would rather forget.

### *Learning the Power of Refugees' Voices*

This project has forced us, the editors, to push ourselves beyond our own despair, which we experienced in different ways and varying degrees but which drove us all to do something to fight the insanity surrounding us. We began this project separately and then came together as our paths converged through our work. One of us was a human rights lawyer, working on war crimes evidence and the gathering of stories of human rights abuses in ex-Yugoslavia. Her task was to focus on the human rights violations themselves and to put her pen down when refugees began talking about their lives after the abuses stopped. In the middle of some of this work, Bosnian refugees in Zagreb gave her a bundle of handwritten stories about their lives *as refugees* and pleaded with her to do something with them. She promised she would do her best.

Few newspaper editors were interested in these stories—only the most immediate crimes and the most pitiful accounts could catch their eye. But these refugees were not pitiful, nor were they asking

for pity. They just wanted to tell their stories with dignity and pride. The human rights lawyer contacted her friends and colleagues in Zagreb and Dubrovnik for their assistance, and two members of the Center for Women War Victims in Zagreb came into the project: one woman from Zagreb and another woman from Bosnia-Herzegovina (herself a refugee). Potential contributors were told to focus on what had happened to them from the point at which they fled their homes and, if possible, to describe a single event, a single day, a single feeling. The stories started trickling in; about 10 percent were usable.

Then at a women's studies conference in Belgrade in June 1994, a beautiful reading on refugees by a feminist author caught the human rights lawyer by surprise. The refugee book needed help. By some coincidence, the feminist author was planning to produce a similar collection of refugee writings. She had heard of the lawyer's work and had been looking for her. Could they all work together? Our collaborative effort began that day.

Yet we had already been collaborating for some time with dozens of people throughout all parts of ex-Yugoslavia and abroad, some of whom we've never even met in person but were connected with via electronic mail.<sup>6</sup> While we traveled extensively in search of stories, we were not able to reach every area in person. Thus, we also relied on contributions sent through electronic mail networks, mailings,

6. The failure of electronic mail is a story of the war and refugees in and of itself. When phone lines were cut at the beginning of the war, e-mail provided the only direct link between Croatia and Serbia and many parts of Bosnia-Herzegovina. In Belgrade, however, the entire e-mail system collapsed in the summer of 1995 when the system became overburdened and then one of the three main operators became a refugee in New Zealand and another, a refugee from Sarajevo, went into hiding to avoid being sent back to fight. Due to this failure, nearly all stories that had been coming from refugees in England and Australia were lost. But electronic mail is not the only kind of mail that fails. Long after this manuscript was completed, several contributions sent via regular mail arrived at the editors' door. Some had been traveling for nearly a year, having been bounced back and forth between Europe and the United States before finally finding the intended recipient.

and personal contacts with refugee and humanitarian aid organizations in Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, and elsewhere; journalists; peace and human rights groups; and, most important, refugee-run magazines and other refugee-run organizations. Our policy was simple: look for contributions everywhere and read everything sent to us.

This is not and has never been a scientific study or a representative sample. An ad hoc collection of stories, this book presents small corners of a many-angled refugee population scattered throughout the globe. This work includes only the few we could reach on a budget of zero, the few who could somehow put aside the trial of everyday survival, the few who could or would remember. While scientific studies lose their importance over time and today's statistics are replaced by those of tomorrow, these stories, as pieces of literature and memories of witnesses, will never lose their importance.

Also, this book is not a collection of testimony for a war crimes tribunal or other court. While some of these stories speak about potentially prosecutable crimes, most of them point mainly to the destruction of the human spirit—alone an offense for which there is no law. The purpose for which these stories were gathered is not the same as that of investigators working for a war crimes tribunal or other court. We weren't trying to prove a crime against an individual based on a set evidentiary standard. We didn't "examine" the refugees. In fact, we didn't ask many questions at all. We just asked refugees if they wanted to talk or write about their experiences *as refugees*. At times we gave an assignment, such as "Write about what you remember from home." Then we collected the stories without judgment, selecting them based on how well they contributed to telling the story of refugee life to outsiders.<sup>7</sup>

7. We sought out stories from all ethnonational groups. When we recognized there was a paucity of stories from Croat refugees, we deliberately sought additional contributions from members of that group. However, apart from this effort, we never asked the ethnonational group of the contributor. (While we could tell some-

In our approach, we do not seek to make refugees into an “Other,” an “object [to be] appropriated, interpreted, taken over by those in power, by those who dominate.”<sup>8</sup> Here refugees are the subject, not the object. To the greatest extent possible, they are to maintain control over royalties from their words, and they are the ones who have directed the content of this project. The stories were written by the refugees themselves or, when refugees found it too difficult to write, the stories were told to the editors and later transcribed. Nearly all refugees chose to begin or end their essays with memories of the peaceful life they left behind; many of them lament the multiethnic society that was and may never be again. Some pledge to return as soon as possible; some swear they could never return; most wish they could return to the old life they’ve left behind. We kept some of these introductions and conclusions in full; we edited some for the sake of space and repetition. In doing so, we have striven to publish the refugees’ stories in as full and honest voice as possible.

Julie Mertus added commentaries at the end of each piece to provide context—to tell a little more about the individual if she or he so desired, the process by which the story was solicited (in particular, acknowledging where the testimonies are mediated), and to provide some factual grounding for readers who have less knowledge about the war.<sup>9</sup> We included more factual notes in the beginning stories to enable all readers to gain entry, and we presented facts in piecemeal

---

times from the last name, we could not detect “mixed families,” nor did we seek to do so, unless the contributor volunteered that information.) The bulk of the stories appear to be from Muslim refugees. To the extent that our collection of stories is not representative of the entire refugee population, it is probably still for a lack of stories by Croats, despite all our efforts.

8. bell hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics* (Boston: South End Press, 1990), 125 (commenting on the phenomena of privileged self and the “Other” in the work of white scholars writing about black people).

9. The factual material in the explanatory notes is drawn from *Economist* and *New York Times* articles, as well as the excellent chronology of events compiled by Samantha Powers for the Carnegie Endowment entitled “Breakdown in the Balkans: A Chronicle of Events, January, 1989 to May, 1993” (Carnegie Endowment Special Publication, undated).

fashion, much as one lives a life. The location cited in the identification line at the beginning of each piece is the home place from which the contributor fled. The location cited at the end of each piece is the place where it was spoken or written; the date the piece was composed is also noted.

We who are not refugees recognize our outsider status and the privilege we have in being able to fly into the war zones, visit refugee camps, sit in refugees' kitchens—and then return to our homes of safety and comfort. At times, we have been paralyzed by this privilege. How could we possibly do justice to these stories? When an eleven-year-old girl tears the only copy of her favorite poem out of her notebook and hands it to us, when our tape recorder dies in the middle of an interview with a rape survivor and the young woman insists on retelling her horror so we can get every word exactly right, when an old man forces himself to remember something he has taken months to try to forget—when we enter other people's lives and dreams, we undertake a serious responsibility. And we know it. We are grateful to the refugees who have chosen to tell their stories and we respect those who've chosen to remain silent.

### *Defining "Refugee": The Scope of the Collection*

In this collection, we have included stories of unregistered and registered refugees (registered with UNHCR, the UN High Commission on Refugees, or the host country). The only criteria is that the person fled from their home in Croatia or Bosnia-Herzegovina and that they consider themselves to be refugees. Thus, we use the everyday understanding of the term "refugee": anyone uprooted from their home because of violence and the denial of human rights. Under international law, however, the definition narrows. According to the 1951 UN Refugee Convention, "refugees" include only those who flee persecution (based on specified factors such as ideology and ethnicity) in their home countries. Those who flee but do not cross country borders are deemed "displaced people," not



refugees. Also excluded from refugee status under the Convention are all who cannot demonstrate that they face persecution *as individuals* and those fleeing economic conditions and general political upheavals.

People fleeing conflict do not register themselves as refugees for several reasons. Often they cannot do so because they have not crossed an international boundary. This is particularly the case in Croatia. While Croatia has accepted over 300,000 official refugees from Bosnia-Herzegovina, the state also must cope with an equal number of internally displaced people who fled one part of Croatia for another. Although they fled because their old homes were taken over by Serbian people who declared a new state, their claims to a new state have not been internationally recognized (and certainly not by Croatia) and thus they are not technically refugees. Fear of ill-treatment by the receiving country also may cause some refugees not to register themselves. For example, some Bosnian Muslims who fled to Serbia told us they feared persecution by the Serbian regime; some male Bosnian Serbs who fled to Serbia told us they feared being sent into the Bosnian Serb army. At the same time, some Bosnian Muslims who fled to Croatia feared being sent back home too early; and Bosnian Muslims in Switzerland and other countries said they feared being sent back because they had never followed the proper procedures for entering the country legally as a refugee.

While we do not observe the legal distinction between “refugee” and “displaced person” here, we understand the importance of legal refugee status. Persons with official refugee status enjoy greater international protection under the law, including protection from being forced back to their homes when they would still be placed in danger and protection from being drafted into military service in their host country. Refugees from Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia have faced both of these concerns. Serbia, for example, has attempted to force refugees who are living in Serbia to return to their homes or to other communities in Bosnia-Herzegovina, even when hostilities have not ended there, apparently to force them to fight for

the territory. In a more blatant move, some male Bosnian Serbian refugees living in refugee camps in Serbia have reported receiving call-up notices for the Bosnian Serb army. If these refugees do not have official refugee status, they cannot rely on international protection. Many authors who did not sign their pieces under their real name are not official refugees.

At the time these stories were written, the authors were in refugee camps or other temporary or semipermanent quarters throughout all of ex-Yugoslavia, and in such diverse locations as Pakistan, Turkey, Israel, The Czech Republic, Hungary, Austria, Germany, Italy, England, and the United States. While this list of countries is extensive, it is far from exhaustive. Refugees from Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia have fled to over four times as many countries as we have represented here.

Bosnia-Herzegovina has the greatest share of displaced people. According to the UN High Commission on Refugees and local refugee offices, in mid-1995, there were nearly three million refugees and displaced people in Bosnia-Herzegovina—over half the population—and over three-quarters of the population was dependent on humanitarian aid for basic survival.<sup>10</sup> During the same time period, the Office for Displaced Persons and Refugees of Croatia placed the number of refugees and displaced people in Croatia at 385,000—roughly 8.5 percent of the population; the Ministry of Labor in the ex-Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia set the number at 15,000 refugees—about 0.7 percent of the population; the Slovenian Red Cross counted 28,000 refugees—1.3 percent of the population; and the Serbian Commissioner for Refugees and the Montenegrin Red Cross estimated over 400,000 refugees and displaced people—4.3 percent of the population.<sup>11</sup>

10. UNHCR, Office of the Special Envoy for former Yugoslavia, Briefing Kit (March 1995), 17.

11. *Ibid.* Note that all these statistics are from governmental sources and UNHCR, and that UNHCR counts only recipients of its aid; it relies on govern-

In August 1995, after this mid-year survey, the number of refugees in Serbia swelled when Croatian troops reclaimed the rebel southern Croatian territory that had been populated and controlled by Croatian Serbs (an area known as the Krajina), forcing over 250,000 Croatian Serbs to leave their homes on the same day, flooding the road in a series of convoys to Banja Luka and Belgrade, soldiers still in uniform walking barefoot, farmers pulling their families in tractors, war profiteers whizzing by in green Mercedes—an entire (failed) “state on the road,” as one refugee remarked. As of this writing, this was the largest single wave of refugees of the war. The first major wave of refugees began three years earlier, in 1992, when the Yugoslav army and Serbian troops attacked Vukovar and other cities in eastern Slavonia (the eastern part of Croatia), forcing thousands of Croatians to flee westward and abroad. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, waves of refugees also began in 1992 and escalated over the next three years, as the policy of “ethnic cleansing”<sup>12</sup> forced entire Muslim communities, and to a lesser extent Croatian and Serbian communities, to flee to other locations in Bosnia-Herzegovina and abroad, sometimes escaping before the enemy army invaded, sometimes being shelled, raped, or used as “human shields” on the road to safety, other times moving from prison camp to life in exile. Throughout this process, the world community passively watched or even aided entire populations becoming “uprooted,” “ex-

---

mental sources for total figures. Given the difficulty in counting refugees and the susceptibility of any figures to political manipulation, we warn the reader against relying on *any* figures.

12. While the term “ethnic cleansing” has been popularized and misused in the media, people from Muslim, Croatian, and Serbian communities technically are not of different ethnicities—they are all Slav people. To the extent that a difference exists, it is one created and imagined by religion, geography, customs, history, and, to some extent, variances in language. Within ex-Yugoslavia, these groupings were known as “nations.” This use of “nation,” however, is often confusing to Westerners and others accustomed to thinking in terms of “nation states” divided by borders and different political systems. The nations of ex-Yugoslavia (i.e., Croatian, Muslim, Serbian) were not neatly grouped within republic boundaries. See *Statistical Yearbook of Yugoslavia* (Belgrade: Federal Bureau of Statistics, 1990).

changed,” and “ethnically cleansed”—ugly euphemisms for tearing people from their homes and destroying cultures and communities. In July 1995, for example, the international community stood by as Bosnian Serbs expelled the entire population of Srebrenica, over 40,000 people, many of whom were Muslim refugees from other locations; thousands of these people are still unaccounted for and presumed dead.

We have sought to include as many voices from these waves of refugees as possible. While the majority of authors for this collection are Bosnian Muslims, reflecting the refugee population, contributors include ethnic Croats from Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croats from Croatia, ethnic Serbs from Bosnia, and others from Bosnia who, even now, prefer to identify themselves as only Bosnian or Yugoslav. By including authors of every ethnic stripe who have fled to every location that would accept them—from Sarajevo to Zagreb, Belgrade to Islamabad—we emphasize that suffering has no ethnic boundaries. As these stories demonstrate, all groups of civilians in this war, to different degrees and at different times, have been used by their own leaders, attacked by the enemy, and pushed out of their communities. We do not equalize blame or somehow excuse the Serbian nationalist agenda which began and fanned the flames of war and the Croatian nationalist policies which conspired in this process, or condone the human rights violations by any group or individual (including refugees themselves). Nor do we imply that all of the authors necessarily share the same vision of the past and future or that all of them have suffered in an identical manner. To be sure, the lives of refugees are better when they are closer to their old way of life and when they can benefit from the support of family, friends, and others who have the means and willingness to respond. And their problems are much worse when they must also cope with scars from a concentration camp, wounds from the front line, and the loss of loved ones. But it is not the purpose of this book to judge whose case is worse and whose case is better. All refugees, *as refugees*, have their own stories to tell.

*The Voices of Women Refugees*

The vast majority of the authors are women since, as in nearly every refugee population, over 80 percent of the refugees from Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia are women and children. Humanitarian aid and human rights groups alike tend to forget this fact, still picturing the model refugee as male. Perhaps this explains why most aid packages exclude sanitary pads and other materials directly related to women's needs; these supplies are distributed separately as if they are for special cases. And perhaps this explains why human rights groups tend to focus most on what happens to men in conflict; the ordeal of the women left fleeing with the children is quietly erased, silenced, forgotten.

Women are rarely seen as women in situations of conflict or in places of refuge. Women may be counted as Palestinians, Rwandans, Bosnians, but rarely as women. Violation of women's human rights and dignity is often viewed as too specific to women to be "human rights" or too generic to human beings to be "women's rights." Yet, although women in war and in refuge are violated in many ways in which men are violated, they are also violated in ways men are not, and these violations do in fact raise serious human rights questions. Women have their own stories to tell—both as victims of a particular group and as women.

Soldiers use rape and other forms of sexual violence to break women and to humiliate them and their men. While men also experience rape and sexual violence in conflict situations, women are targeted in particular. Rape and sexual violence in conflict situations may be part of a planned strategy to terrorize a population, a strategy to use women to satisfy the sexual wants of soldiers as well as acts of individual soldiers that are not necessarily preplanned (though they are often condoned by superiors). In addition, when women are tortured in interrogation and imprisonment, the torture may be of a particular sexual nature. While the women authors here rarely speak of the abuses that have gone before, especially because that was

not the focus of our inquiry, the reader should remember that many women refugees are survivors of these forms of sexual violence and torture.

Despite the far-reaching consequences of conflict upon women, their voices are silenced in all levels of decision making about war, from the UN Security Council to international peacekeeping forces. While women throughout the region have organized refugee support groups for themselves and although many women have been on the forefront of antimilitarism and peace groups, women are rarely included in official government efforts to resolve conflicts. Women are routinely excluded from the aftermath of armed conflict, including peace negotiations, peacekeeping monitors, war crimes tribunals, and the highest levels of decision making about humanitarian aid.

Here, however, women refugees have a voice.

These women are not angels of their homes. They don't even have a home. Some of them even thought of killing the angel in them in order to be free, to live better, to remember, to write. But today on the roads of the world, the angel in them lives as a ghost who will once again thrust upon their shoulders the burden of history, the tradition of women's responsibility for survival, the maintenance of life, and the thin thread of common sense. Civilization's progress in the twentieth century has betrayed them as did Titania's love potion: victims of rape, torture, genocide, starvation, the brutality of watching their children and loved ones killed and tortured, and other acts of physical and mental war violence. Together with their children, these women have been simultaneously cast out of history and made guardians of all that has come before.

None of these women *wanted* to tell their stories. Few of them thought anyone would care to hear about their lives as refugees. But all of them knew that they would write a different story than the official version, that they would tell the "little stories" of real life as a refugee. When they realized that they could write and that they would be taken seriously, some of them even wanted to sign their names.

The “small talk” of women belongs to those songs which make life more bearable, the lullabies which comfort us that everything will eventually pass, the bad we are enduring now, the good we have lost. Women’s words are the substance which qualifies victory or defeat, the wisdom which challenges the slaughter, the power of the powerless which demands to be heard.

Women refugees write differently than other authors about war: they use details from their everyday lives to tell us about the killing of the most visible life during times of peace—everyday life. They trust emotions, common sense, and that common denominator of humanity, “Don’t kill.” Their words push us as waves of some enormous sea which may one day wash over everything and set things straight in this world. Even when victimized by war games, political power plays, and the media, the dignity of women refugees isn’t lost but only attacked; their cry isn’t vindictive but silent; their reasoning and writing, usually invisible, only become sharper and clearer. “And if one person hears and understands a little better,” as one woman author said, “it will be worth the pain.”

## ORGANIZING THE SUITCASE

Nearly all refugees swear that “we didn’t believe it could happen to us.” But everything that happened could happen to all of us. In the first chapter of this collection, “The Journey Out,” refugees from Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia speak of the incredible trauma of leaving home and the risks they took. They stuffed photographs, rocks from their gardens, chocolate bars, and their children’s underpants into a suitcase and crawled through the woods on their bellies, drove stolen cars through combat zones, paid their last German marks to a UN soldier, hopped on a bus, a plane, a Red Cross ship, an armored carrier . . . and got out.

Once free from the immediate menace of shelling and sniper fire, refugees have time to relive memories of those left behind, of walks in the town square that no longer exists, of drinking coffee in a

living room that is now occupied by another family who used to be called neighbor and friend. For readers from countries and areas that have already lost their sense of community (and in particular many Americans), the deep attachment to place in “Dreams of Home” may be utterly foreign. The people of Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina pass around worn postcards of their towns and build toy models of their streets so their children will never forget. On the other hand, those who stayed behind lose their dreams of their past lives when everything changes before their eyes (with and without their willing participation). So the refugees are the keepers of the dream of home.

The chapter “Everyday Refugee Life” is organized around waiting. “One thing I’ve learned from all this,” one Bosnian refugee in Pakistan explained, “is how to steal days from God. Every day I pray that it is night and every night I pray that it is day.” Time for refugees spells danger; it forces them to remember, and at the same time it threatens to take them far from themselves, stripping them of who they once were and what they once desired. Refugees must fight for control over even the most basic elements of human life. College professors and farmers crowded into a gymnasium eat peaches when given peaches, bathe when someone turns the hose on in the yard, sleep on the same gray mats when the lights are turned off. They struggle to prepare birthday surprises for their children, stand in long lines for visas and humanitarian aid, weave handicrafts for sale through local women’s groups, and hang photos of home on their refugee camp walls. But mostly the refugees, no matter where they are, wait for the time they can return home.

Refugee children never stop dreaming, even though they know too much to believe in make-believe anymore. In the chapter entitled “Children’s Voices,” a ten-year-old girl has nightmares about the time soldiers shot her mother, and, in her sleep, she sees her mother in heaven. A three-year-old boy dreams of an airplane to take him home—the only plane he had ever been on was the one that brought him away from Bosnia. A thirteen-year-old girl dreams of a “room of her own,” and an eleven-year-old girl wants only to eat lunch