

# SILENCE OVER KOSOVO: SOCIAL WORK AND SELF INTEREST

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*In the spring of 1999, the United States government and NATO launched a devastating military attack against Serbia for the stated purpose of saving Kosovar Albanians from persecution and savagery at the hands of the Serbian police and military. Amazingly, there was little public debate and dialogue about the affair. Public support for the attack on humanitarian grounds was quite high. In this narrative, the author explores his personal and professional connections to the region, and how personal loyalty caused a momentary lapse in judgment, leading him to first support, and to then oppose the military action. As such, in this narrative he questions both his own judgment and the role of social work as activists in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.*

The social work profession has a long history of social activism, dating to its beginning early in the twentieth century. Activists like Mary Richmond and Bertha Capen Reynolds paved the way for social work to be an active and powerful voice for social, political, and economic justice in the United States and now, with globalization, around the world. During the 1960's, social workers were often at the forefront of community activism and change efforts in the civil rights and anti-war efforts of the day, despite the fact that these actions ran contrary to prevailing dominant ideologies of the era.

In my nearly twenty years as a social worker and community activist, I, along with others, have watched with dismay as the spirit of activism has slowly been replaced by professional and personal self-interest, primarily related to third-party reimbursement, public funding, and managed care. Slowly but surely, I believe that social work has lost its way, abdicating the role and responsibilities that brought it to the forefront of the great issues of the day. Whether it be managed care, welfare reform, tax policy, or foreign affairs, it seems that social workers, as a group, have recoiled into a protective shell, overwhelmed by large caseloads and budget concerns, leaving activism and public discourse to others.

In 1999, the United States, under the cover of NATO, launched a devastating military campaign against the Serbian people in the Kosovo region of the former Yugoslavia.

This campaign was publicly defined as a humanitarian mission to stop widespread ethnic cleansing in the region. For months before the action began, our media were filled with horrible scenes and reports of atrocities committed by the Serbian military and police force against the Albanian people in Kosovo. The action received widespread public support and was not, in my opinion, adequately debated on the public stage. It seems that the vast majority of the American people agreed that this was the right thing to do.

What was more alarming to me during this time, and something that has confounded me ever since, was the lack of effort and involvement of social workers and the social work profession in creating a public dialogue during that time. We, as a profession, were "missing in action." Therefore, as I prepared to reflect on my actions, I kept returning to the following larger question: Was the loud silence of social workers and the social work profession during the military action in Yugoslavia an aberration, or did it mark a change in social work's fundamental mission of social activism?

Yet, because of personal self-interest, I too found myself in an unfamiliar position during that period. As I explain in this personal narrative, in the beginning I favored the military effort in Yugoslavia. However, my position and praxis shortly changed. As such, this is the story of my personal struggle with loyalty, critical thinking in the face of mass pro-

paganda, and ethical decision making as I traveled the path toward activism. In the end, I offer a personal reflection of my praxis and the lack of activist efforts by the social work profession.

### The Kosovo War

The so-called humanitarian war against Yugoslavia to free Kosovar-Albanians from a campaign of ethnic cleansing was widely considered an acceptable military action by a majority of American citizens, including social workers and the profession of social work. Very few challenged the action or the United States and Great Britain's self-appointed role as the world's police force. Those who did challenge—at least in the United States—attracted few, if any, followers and received no media attention.

Specifically, from my perspective as a social work educator, the apparent lack of involvement by social workers in the process of informed and critical dialogue about the military action was particularly troubling. To me, our professional silence was deafening—and quite telling. On public issues of importance, according to Alinsky, (1971) silence signals assent. So, what did the silence really mean? Perhaps the majority of social workers agreed with military intervention in Yugoslavia, believing in the notion of a humanitarian war. Maybe social workers had grown too comfortable in the booming economic times of the late 1990's to worry about government action beyond stimulating stock market growth or providing grant funding. On the other hand, perhaps the profession felt too threatened to directly oppose a popular government action for fear of losing its standing in the competitive healthcare system.

Whatever the reason(s), the overwhelming political support for the bombing was not surprising, given the government's power to shape public opinion and because of the economic comfort of all but the powerless and voiceless in America over the last decade.

Yet, the way in which the American public fell silently into lockstep with the government's position and logic, and the lack of critical action by social workers to offer a dissenting voice, concerns me. As a profession, we should be worried about what appears to be a naïve political approach, an overwhelming lack of what Mills (1959) called the sociological imagination. Is there a wake-up call on the horizon?

As I began looking at my own beliefs and actions during that period, I realized that I was not above reproach. I, like many others, was caught up in the prewar hype and, because of personal reasons, an uncomfortable supporter of military intervention in the region. To be fair, much of the criticism I level at others begins with a self-critical review of my own praxis. As such, this is a story of how the build up to war, and the war itself, had a dramatic impact on my thoughts, feelings, and actions related to activism.



### The Seeds of Personal Conundrum

The bombing of Kosovo really placed me in a conundrum because I routinely stand opposed to the United States' self-appointed role as the world's peacemaker whenever it uses military force, paradoxically, to keep the peace. From the dark days of the Vietnam War through the "police actions" (i.e., Panama, Haiti, Grenada, etc.) to the Gulf War, I have stood, along with far fewer likeminded people with each passing year, against the use of military force for reasons other than imminent national self-defense.

I scoff at the oft-used phrase “national self-interest” as justification for military intervention. Self-interest, as it applies to U.S. military and diplomatic initiatives, has little to do with real threats to the integrity of the United States and more to do with blockading perceived enemies of the state (Russia and China), capturing scarce natural resources, creating new markets, or locating cheap labor. The national self-interest justification provides nothing more than a socially acceptable license to overpower cultures and nations whenever and wherever the ruling classes see potential economic benefit. In other words, I do not see self-interest as a justifiable reason for war.

For example, destroying Native American homelands and cultures may have been in the national self-interest of the era, but it was certainly not for national self-defense. A national self-defense threshold for use of military force provides a more clearly defined approach with narrow parameters that should stimulate an interesting national dialogue whenever military action is proposed. Unfortunately, the government never seems to ask my opinion on the matter.

Having said that, the Kosovo affair placed me in personal and professional turmoil because of my deep personal connections to the region. Beginning in 1992, the school of social work where I teach helped create the first social work department in Albania at the University of Tirana, its capital city. Since 1995, I have worked in Albania several times, including a lengthy stay in early 2001. In 1997, I was in Albania during its civil unrest, brought on by collapsing pyramid schemes. I lived with Albanian friends through round-the-clock gunfire, mass demonstrations, and the total collapse of its “democratic” government. As a result, I forged the kind of close friendships that result from living together through social anarchy.

Beginning in 1995, I was inundated with information about various Serbian atrocities

against Kosovar-Albanians. They had, reportedly, been occurring since the late 1980’s when Slobodan Milosevic took power. I watched nightly news reports showing compelling footage of student riots, protests, government crackdowns, and alleged mass graves in Kosovo. I know many Albanian citizens—young and old—who actively supported the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) by running weapons across the border and/or leaving their families to fight. Albanians, to a person, believed the Serbs were persecuting the Kosovars and that the west—especially the United States—was ignoring their plight. They wanted military action.

In other words, what was “new” news of Serbian atrocities in the U.S. in late 1998 was old news to Albanians. So, as our government began building its case for military intervention to save the Kosovars from the Milosevic regime, it was apparent to me there was more to the “national self-interest” than saving people that the world had ignored for centuries and that our government and media had ignored for at least a decade. Let’s face it; the U.S. Government has never, in its history, invoked military action simply to protect people from other countries. This includes the Jews during World War II. There is always an economic reason, or one of national threat. If people are saved from tyranny during the process, it’s an added propaganda bonus.

Therein lay the sources of my turmoil. First, I am normally opposed to this type of military intervention for the reason stated above. Second, some my best friends are Albanian citizens, many among the first group of social workers in that country. These friends were clamoring for the United States to punish the Serbs (mainly Milosevic) for committing atrocities against the Kosovo-Albanian population. Albanians believed that the massacre and oppression in that region could only be stopped through U.S. military action. Moreover, my Albanian friends expected me

to carry their message back to the American people, to make it clear that they welcomed, supported, and applauded massive military intervention to punish the Serbs. When I returned from Albania in February 1999, I felt a deep sense of loyalty and responsibility to support the needs and wishes of my dear friends. I would not only support military efforts, but also be a spokesperson advocating the action.

Personal loyalty versus moral and professional integrity? All social workers face this bind at some point in their professional life. For example, do I go along with an unethical agency policy, or challenge it and risk losing my job? Do I continue to deliver inadequate treatment services even when I know they are ineffective? This dilemma—whether they know it or not—faced by social workers in all fields of practice was my personal dilemma during the build up toward military action and the first days of the bombing campaign.

### Denial

At this point, I must make my position clear. Based on the evidence, I fervently believe that the Serbian police and military were committing atrocities against the Kosovar-Albanians. About this, I have no doubt. As such, my firm beliefs in the atrocities and my immersion into the Albanian perspective about the Kosovo question combined to overpower my ability to critically think through the situation, leading me to join the masses ready to place Slobodan Milosevic alongside Hitler, Stalin, and Saddam Hussein in the U.S. anti-Christ hall of fame. I was a full-blown, card-carrying military hawk!

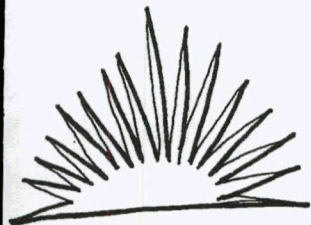
During the weeks leading up to military action, the U.S. government propaganda machine worked overtime to convince us that it was our moral calling to, in fact, cleanse Kosovo of a Serbian presence. The propaganda machine did its job to the fullest. By the time the bombing began, most Americans (and I) believed this action was part of a new,

enlightened approach to the world "... where the brutal repression of whole ethnic groups will no longer be tolerated" (Tony Blair, quoted in Chomsky, 1999, p. 36).

Yet, even as I was doing live interviews for several local television stations on the day the bombing began, my doubts crept forward. While I agreed—then and now—that the world community has an obligation to intervene where genocidal actions occur, I questioned whether bombing was the appropriate route to take. I also wondered why we should bomb Kosovo when these same events were happening in other parts of the world at the same time. Why not intervene in Columbia, East Timor, or in several countries in Africa living through the same—if not worse—campaigns of state-sponsored (often U.S. funded, in the case of Columbia) terror? Kosovo was (and remains) a bad situation, but did it demand action of this magnitude in comparison to the other humanitarian disasters occurring in all hemispheres of the world? Had the U.S. done enough on a diplomatic level to warrant taking the extreme step of all-out military action?

Yet, I said nothing publicly. In the early days of the war, I kept my opinion to myself. When asked, I played the safe middle, trying to see both sides. I was shameless. Then, something happened to dramatically change my thinking and, in the end, level of activism. A local media "expert" on Kosovo came to interview me one day during the first week of the campaign. Now, mind you, this was the only reporter assigned to the issue from the largest, most powerful NBC affiliate in an influential Republican community.

Following the interview—where it was abundantly clear this reporter supported the bombing—they took me aside and said, "Please don't tell anybody, but where is Kosovo, anyway?" With a look of incredulity, I said it was north of Greece, which prompted the response, "Where's Greece?" Now angry, I said, "Do you know where



New York is? Keep going in that direction and you will find it.”

Sadly, I cannot think of a more apt representation of the news media's role in shaping public opinion: uninformed talking heads with perfect diction speaking with socially constructed authority, perpetuating “Truths” fed them by the prevailing political powers of the time. Their job is to teach the public how the State Department and Pentagon want to define “national self-interest” at any particular moment in history. The sad, yet undeniable truth is that these reporters speak to a citizenry trained by years of conditioning to accept what they hear without question.

My astonishing discussion with the news reporter offered a moment of badly needed personal clarity. This reporter's ineptness smacked me squarely between the eyes; it woke me up, lifting my heart and mind out of the loyalty bind that caused me to turn against my better judgment. That evening, I called my friends in Albania and had a long, serious dialogue about the war, my position, and my dilemma. After a while, they understood that my position against the bombing on moral and ethical grounds was not a position against them or the Kosovars. I was relieved. We agreed to disagree on this very important subject.

Later that week, I asked my graduate social work students to dialogue about the bombing. According to my count, all but two students (out of over 100) favored the bombing despite being unable to articulate clear reasons for their positions beyond what they had heard from the media. For social workers, the public campaign to define the national self-interest in this case used the “perfect” message—help the helpless, feed and protect refugees, and stop genocide. These efforts were creatively designed to quash any guilt people might experience from living in such a wasteful and dominating country (America) at the expense of the domestic poor and the rest of the world. It tapped the

patriotic idea that the U.S. is the best, most caring protector of the downtrodden in history. How could we say no for heaven's sake?

As such, it was clear that the American people (including social workers and I briefly) silently agreed with the military strategy for “world-wide containment and control” (MacCannell, 1992, p. 5) to develop future labor and raw material markets while isolating Russia from the west. The two-track policy of extending the reach of western capitalism and isolating a significantly weakened Russia dominates western governmental foreign policy. Ironically, this *modus operandi* can continue only if government has the cooperation of a silent public.

### Taking Action

After my awakening, I began meeting with a small group of local activists to plan strategy for action. In the beginning, the major barrier to action was a lack of historical knowledge about the roots of the conflict. Therefore, our first step was to stimulate dialogue between our group members and then with the broader community in hopes of creating a critical dialogue that would lead to action strategies. Ultimately, public dialogue became our primary goal, necessitating the inclusion of people with differing opinions.

This we accomplished through a series of public teach-ins, producing and airing two cable television programs, developing and disseminating a paperback reader on Kosovo, and conducting a weekly rally at the Federal Building in Grand Rapids. Few attended the weekly rallies. However, we did attract the attention of the mainstream media early in our efforts. Yet, the tone of the reports marginalized and diminished our efforts by presenting a there-they-go-again attitude, instead of offering a serious look at the issues compelling us to act. Ironically, we drew the attention of local police. During the first rally, the police stopped four times in two hours, twice asking if there were any “angry Serbs”

in the crowd. Moreover, the police ordered us to remove our signs from Federal grounds.

The teach-in was helpful in our larger efforts, not because it attracted large numbers (approximately 40 people), but because of the quality of the dialogue. Speaker panels were composed of representatives from Serbian and Albanian organizations, and the debate was lively and informative. Of course, mainstream media would not cover the event but, because it began the process of community dialogue, the teach-in was a success.

We also produced two cable television programs about the war. The first was a pre-taped, two-hour dialogue between a colleague and me, mainly to provide historical and political background for the crisis and to suggest possible action. It ran on the public access cable television channel several times over a three-week period.

The second program was a live, viewer-call-in format that took telephone calls on the air. This program provided a lively dialogue between colleagues on-air and callers, many of whom supported the Kosovo war effort. While the programs aired on local cable and therefore did not attract a wide audience, they served an essential purpose to jumpstart public discourse at the local level.

Our final action during the bombing campaign was to produce and disseminate a paperback reader about the Kosovo crisis. We compiled a series of articles presenting the issues from different perspectives into a 26-page magazine. We gave the magazines to attendees at the annual arts festival in Grand Rapids in early June. We disseminated most of the 2000 readers produced, but also had many people refuse to take them, becoming angry at the content before they had a chance to read it.

### Was it Worth it?

Well, good healthy activism is always worth it. Obviously, we didn't prevent the bombing or help end it. Just as obviously, and

more pertinent, we were not able to convert many people into changing their perspective about the conflict. However, our goal was to stimulate dialogue and engage as many members of the public as possible in the process of looking for truth in the western media barrage, touting the value of destroying Yugoslavia to punish its leader. Were we successful? I guess that depends on one's definition of success. We were able to present alternative information and to engage some people in a serious discussion about a serious issue. In that way, we were successful.

Yet, I was most disappointed in the lack of involvement and support of organized groups of social workers, both locally and nationally. I called various schools and contacted interest groups, only to discover that most in the profession were more interested in preparing grant applications for refugee support than considering the fundamental issue of whether we should be bombing in the first place. I believe the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), whose public position on the Kosovo war was late coming and weak, established the tone of apathy at best. It was clear to me that our national organization abdicated its responsibility to inform and stimulate debate amongst a group (social workers) founded on the principals of social change and activism. There wasn't even room for discussion. I was left wondering how NASW and social workers would react if the same action was taken by a Republican instead of a Democratic president? Would we feel differently about it? I certainly hope not.

Consequently, I wrote a long letter detailing my disappointment and, when it was not included in the national newsletter, quit the organization. Now, I am sure NASW will not fold because of my action, but I believe it has become more interested in ensuring that social workers achieve the same status as psychologists than in taking on the controversial political issues of the day. I could no longer justify being a paid member in an or-



ganization that supports, in my view, the selling out of the social work profession in the name of self-interest.

The apathy toward the war by social workers, beyond which agency would get the biggest grant to place refugees, is deplorable. It spread from the top to the bottom of the profession and into our schools and classrooms. At my school, colleagues and students did not participate, and no issue discussions occurred. Although invited, few educators or students acted with us to question the war, while others supported the government's cause by raising false charity to support refugees (Friere, 1970).

I, like others (Fisher & Karger, 1997), believe the social work profession has been co-opted by the American individualist obsession. Unfortunately, the profession is in serious risk of making itself non-essential to most average people at the same time that it is becoming viable as a professional and academic discipline.

Through the efforts of government and groups like NASW, it appears that social work has become an official "arm of the state," succeeding in qualifying its members for third-party insurance reimbursement panels and enforcing violent national and state family policies at the expense of its foundational, community-based activist roots. As a profession, social work has sold out to capitalist greed for acceptance. For that, we should be ashamed.

### **Why the Silence?**

I believe there are three primary reasons why the American citizenry—including social workers—is largely silent with respect to world affairs and politically disinterested at home. I have room here only for a brief discussion, however, I have written at length about it elsewhere (Johnson, 2000).

First, we live in an epoch where American citizens, living in the majority culture at or above the "middle" of the middle class, can

lead a culturally-defined "successful" life without paying attention to the politics, the people, or the world around them. This is a uniquely American way of life. No where else in the world—or perhaps in the history of the world—can people thrive while being naïve and isolated from the larger circumstances of their world. How can this be true?

For one, American capitalism encourages obsessive self-interest, rampant mobility, and a lack of concern for others. Americans are taught to strive to join the social class above, while ignoring or marginalizing people in lower classes out of a selfish need to lay claim to their place in the predatory capitalist hierarchy. Moreover, there is little at stake in American politics for the majority. Compared to the rest of the world, national and state elections mean very little in terms of radical choice or change. Elections do not require Americans to vote for the continuation of their fundamental way of life or form of government. As Ralph Nader eloquently stated on the stump during the 2000 Presidential campaign, the United States has two political parties that are so much alike that there is little, if any, practical difference no matter which party is in control. In other words, contemporary political parties are fundamentally the same, with agreed upon differences at the margins only to make elections necessary and further each party's financial self-interest.

Of course, people outside the majority culture or those living below the middle of the middle class have much at stake politically and cannot afford to live in a naïve, narrow social world. Yet, the political system is accessible only to those with the financial resources to participate in any significant way. Moreover, marginalized and oppressed people are unable to look beyond their immediate life circumstances to the bigger issues of the day if they want to survive. Life's daily challenges—often humiliating, emotion-



ally violent, and inhumane—ensure political silence as the marginalized and oppressed try to feed their kids and pay the bills. This, of course, is in addition to the *a priori* exclusion they face based on the fundamental fact of their race, class, or other non-majority social status.

The second reason for public silence and passivity stems from the process of “Othering” (Johnson, 2000, p. 35). Throughout its history, the U.S. government has practiced “Othering” as a primary public relations framework for handling foreign policy issues, military action, and domestic social problems. Through Othering, the United States can claim national self identity, overlook social issues in the name of patriotism, and define the national self-interest.

What is Othering? American elites (and certainly elites in other powerful countries as well) socially construct “Absolute Others” by demonizing another country, form of government, leader, or group (Johnson, 2000, p. 36-37), making the Other the focus of concern to the exclusion of all else. Any problems America may have presently, or in the future, are blamed on the Other or ignored because contending with the Other is more vital to the national self-interest.

As such, America’s ruling class (European-Americans above the middle of the middle class) feel better about them by emphasizing America’s (their) righteousness versus the impending threat or gross immorality of the Other. It is important to note that the chosen Other does not have to pose a real threat. A perceived threat that can be publicized and used as a patriotic rallying cry is all that is required.

Ironically, often the very beliefs and practices of the Other(s) that become grounds for public demonization are beliefs and practices used by the U.S. Government in domestic and world affairs. To rectify the apparent contradiction, the United States simply omits the parts of its history deemed undesirable (see

the Cold War, Slavery, and the FBI’s covert activities during the late 1960’s and early 1970’s) or uses a patriotic rationalization (i.e., humanitarian war) to justify its actions *vis-à-vis* the actions of the enemy. For example, as I implied above, the Kosovo action cleansed Kosovo of Serbs through brutal military means. Our cleansing was justified, while theirs was immoral.

For over 40 years, America’s Absolute Other was the Soviet Union. Yet, throughout history, the ruling classes have constructed campaigns against many other so-called Others, both foreign and domestic. Native Americans, Blacks, Mexicans, Communists, and, ironically, protestors and activists have all taken their place as the evil Other, out to destroy the European-American upper-middle-class way of life. Since the end of the Cold War, Saddam Hussein, Slobodan Milosevic, and the Chinese are our foreign Others, while the poor, HIV/AIDS victims, and homosexuals have become our domestic Absolute Other(s).

The net result of Othering on public discourse is stifling. Central to the process is defining the Other as evil, immoral, and “un-American.” This also applies to any majority person or group that supports the Other’s position. Opposing the Other and all it stands for is the only acceptable American position. Those with the courage to oppose suffer consequences. One only has to recall how people who dared challenge have suffered—for example, during the McCarthy period in the 1950’s or on freedom rides in the 1960’s—to understand the social power of Othering.

For American citizens who are Others, this process perpetuates their silence in a similar way. People of color and the poor remember assassinated leaders, jailed marchers, concentration camps for Japanese-Americans, and stolen native lands. These historical tragedies remind people in oppressed groups of the consequences of organizing against the dominant ideology of the state and



the elite group of citizens it serves.

The third reason for public silence makes the first two possible: the power of the elite to control information and its delivery. As Americans, we do exactly what the government and elites want. Silence and under-participation in the political system is the desired state. It allows the ruling class to worry only about satisfying its patrons while operating primarily out of self-interest. In other words, we are good "students." We act as we are taught to act, with assenting silence.

From the moment of birth, via schooling and media, written materials and film, we are indoctrinated by messages that "prove" that America is a privileged country, its people anointed by God with the unique skills and abilities to create this special place in the history of humankind. Of course, this overlooks the fact that America became an economic power because it was the only country left with an infrastructure after World War II. The lifestyle of the Caucasian upper middle class is as much an accident of history as anything else. Yet, that is not what Americans are taught.

The news media, school curricula, community meetings, and politicians encourage us not to think, question, or speak out. Moreover, we seem all too willing to cooperate. Daily news reports tell us how grateful we should be, how conservative "America" is, and how we should all be patriotic and support the military. This is how patriotism came to mean "supporting war." In contemporary America, one cannot be patriotic and against war. Anybody willing to support this notion of America—whether through denial, ignorance, silence, or paranoia—is a "true American." Everyone else is suspicious.

These three issues - social and political stability, demonization of "enemies" through Othering, and cultural domination by elites - conspire to keep Americans silent and the elites in power. It is only through informed dialogue that results in concentrated activism

that we have any hope of challenging this fool-proof system at any level. However, most Americans are too comfortable, busy, or uninformed to participate in creating the sources of their own power and freedom. Generating this energy through critical education, dialogue, and action is supposed to be our primary task as social workers. Instead, it appears we—as a profession—agreed that Milosevic was indeed an evil-enough "Other" to justify the bombing of innocent civilians in Yugoslavia. In other words, regarding Kosovo, I am sorry to say that we "dropped the ball," abdicating our fundamental mission to offer voices of dissent and vehicles for healthy, critical dialogue, to become full-fledged residents in the "house of the oppressor" (Freire, 1970).

### **Where Do We Stand?**

Despite the political rhetoric, calling the bombing a successful campaign waged against a genocidal maniac, and the fact that the region has fallen off the national news and to the back pages of newspapers, the situation in Kosovo, Yugoslavia, and the Balkans remains ominous. This region was one of the poorest in the world before the war. Now, it has become even poorer and less stable.

Because of the war, hundreds of thousands of Kosovars were displaced and then replaced back into their homeland. Moreover, Yugoslavia is now partitioned by ethnicity and religion, a country segregated, if you will, without the hatred that began the crisis solved. Combine this with the partitioning of Bosnia and Croatia after the Bosnian War, the recent change of government in Serbia, and the arrest of Slobodan Milosevic for war crimes, and the result is that western armies now dominate the region. What was in the national self-interest, obviously, was completing the takeover of Yugoslavia, not saving the Kosovars. Now the U.S. can complete the goal of spreading its values by creating a region dependent on the west for its existence. Simultaneously, Russia is further isolated

should it ever seek to expand in the future.

Pertaining to the humanitarian issue that supposedly began this war, almost immediately after the bombing ceased the United States Congress began discussing ways to limit humanitarian aid to the region, and the newly seated Bush Administration has clearly stated that it wants out of the region. Immigration officials allowed just enough refugees into the country to demonstrate humanitarianism and to dissipate any potential guilt in local communities, in churches, and among social workers over the fact that they silently supported the destruction of a country and the killing of thousands of innocent civilians. In the end, the humanitarian project was a credible cover for the U.S. and British governments' neocolonialist designs on the Balkans. This war, in effect, allowed the U.S. and its western allies to finish the job started during the Bosnian War in the early 1990's.

Regarding the present and future, the time for activism with respect to western policy toward Yugoslavia, Kosovo, Albania, and the rest of the region is just beginning. As activists, we should hold the United States to its promise to commit for the long haul, to rebuild and revitalize an area of the world destabilized by this neocolonialist war. If this were a humanitarian effort, then the "investment" by the United States just began. We shall see.

There is still time for social workers and the social work profession to recapture its calling. While it may sound like I am advocating one position over another in matters of war and human rights, I am not. That is not my intention. What I am advocating is critical education, reflection, and public action. I want social workers and the profession of social work to join the dialogue and speak out on behalf of people and governmental actions even if the actions fall outside of personal or agency self-interest.

Social work has the foundation, methods, and size to have a significant impact on the

debate—any debate—should we decide to invest. Public involvement is our job and our professional calling, while private practice and an obsession with self-interest is what the system that relies on our silence expects from modern social work. Common people all around the world need us, with our unique training and talents, to speak for and with them until they can forcefully speak for themselves.

Does anybody care?

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