
Civil Courage in War and Peace

On April 12, 2012, **Svetlana Broz**, director of the NGO Gariwo Sarajevo, gave a lecture in the framework of the Human Rights Nights Festival in Forlì. Svetlana Broz delivered her speech to the students of the **Master of Arts in Interdisciplinary Research and Studies on Eastern Europe** (MIREES) and to a large audience of students and citizens of Forlì.

The lecture, titled "Civil Courage in War and Peace", was introduced by Prof. Stefano Bianchini. He drew the attention of the class on the extraordinary life of Svetlana Broz, who devoted a great part of her life to civil courage. She founded the **NGO Gariwo Sarajevo**, with the aim of commemorating those who opposed themselves the abuse, torture, and murder of innocent people on ethnic or religious grounds during the 1990s wars in the former Yugoslavia, often putting at risk their own lives. Svetlana Broz was born and grew up in Belgrade, where she studied medicine and became a cardiologist. At the outbreak of the **war in Bosnia** in 1992, she decided to move to the war zones to provide help to the wounded as a physician.

During her stay in Bosnia, she started collecting the accounts of those whose life was saved thanks to the intervention of someone of different ethnicity or religious beliefs. **Prof. Bianchini** subsequently mentioned to the class Broz's book "**Good People in an Evil Time**" (Other Press, 2005), which collects stories of civil courage from the Bosnian War. Her work inspired a play entitled "**La scelta**" (The choice), written by Marco Cortesi. The play was performed by Cortesi and Mara Moschini as the opening event of **Human Rights Nights**, on April 11, 2012. "La scelta" introduces the public to the war through five stories of Croats, Muslims and Serbs in Bosnia and Herzegovina during the war, recounted in first person through the voices of the actors. One of these stories reproduced the experience of a Muslim man taken on a bus with many others from **Srebrenica** in July 1995. When Serb soldiers asked the bus driver, a Serb, to stop and let the men off, he refused, knowing that they were to be killed. At the risk of being shot himself, he kept on driving until he could and dropped them off in a relatively safe place. "La scelta" is about the choice that we would have made in that situation. At the end of the performance, the public was invited to attend Svetlana Broz's lecture on the following day.

In the first part of her speech, Dr. Broz defined **civil courage** as the capacity for resisting and opposing those who abuse power to violate human rights. When she moved from Belgrade to Bosnia and Herzegovina, to work as a **cardiologist** during the war, she noticed that the patients' needs were not limited to the physical healing of their wounds. They also wanted to talk about their personal stories and explain how they managed to survive up to that moment. When she asked herself why were they telling her, their doctor, there was only one answer she could think of: her patients thought that she had a better chance of surviving the war. Since they wanted their stories to survive the war and be told to others, they relied on her to convey them.

After the war, Svetlana Broz went back to Bosnia and Herzegovina to record stories of people who were saved thanks to the civil courage of someone belonging to a different ethnic group. At the time, her work was not well received by the **Serbian authorities** and, once in Belgrade, all the material collected in Bosnia was stolen. Dr. Broz was not discouraged and traveled to Bosnia for a second time, in order to record new accounts from the survivors.

According to the speaker, the media coverage was focused on the evil of the war, but in order to build something out of the experience of the war, it is necessary to highlight stories of civil courage that can set an example and educate younger generations. **Education** to civil courage is especially important, because it implies disobeying to the authorities and deviating from the behavior of the majority. Showing civil courage can lead to sacrifice in order to comply with our **moral norms**.

The strength of these principles was exemplified through the story of a prisoner in a **concentration camp** in Bosnia. The man was asked to choose ten people among a group of fellow prisoners that were to be killed, and the way of their death. Looking into the eyes each of them, including his best friend and his family, he could not make any choice and was immediately shot to death by the guards.

In the concluding part of her speech, Svetlana Broz emphasized the difference between a **bystander** and an upstander. The prisoner who chose his own death for the life of his fellow prisoners is an example of an **upstander**. The speaker suggested that in situations that need civil courage, whether in war or in peace times, people are asked to make a choice. They can either show civil courage and be upstanders, or watch passively as bystanders.

The audience found Dr. Broz's lecture inspiring. The speaker was very interested in hearing stories and opinions from the students, and a **lively discussion** followed regarding the importance of civil society, the differences and similarities between Eastern and Western European societies, the role of the citizens and the mobilization of the masses.

Daniela Lai,
Portal on Central Eastern and Balkan Europe