

Peace Work in Process

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ABSTRACT

We present a collage of some of the ways women are doing peace work: in creating anti-war leaflets for distribution at silent marches; in writing down the words of peace activists when they speak out publicly; in sharing by e-mail the knowledge of other activists; and in paying tribute to those who have gone before.

RÉSUMÉ

Nous présentons un collage sur les façons dont les femmes font du travail pour la paix; en créant des dépliants anti-guerre à être distribués lors de démonstrations passives; en prenant note par écrit des paroles des militants pour la paix lorsqu'ils parlent en public, en partageant la connaissance de d'autres militants par l'entremise de courriel; et en rendant hommage aux prédécesseurs.

INTRODUCTION

At the heart of the Global Women's Movement is the peace work to transform the social and economic practices that reproduce war. Feminists have challenged the inevitability of military "solutions," pointing out the obvious: that these are no solutions at all, just more of the problem. The pulse of this peace work passes from person to person across millions who know that wars, however rationalized, are wars on people, on women, and on the earth.

In the week of the midnight sun, in Tromsø, Norway, some of the women gathered for *Women's Worlds 99*, the ninth International Interdisciplinary Congress on Women, discussed what their countries and communities were doing in response to the ethnic cleansing and the bombing in Kosovo. We learned that the media focus which seems to be international, is received very differently in Pakistan, for example, than it is in Canada; the images of these refugees whose plight the world cares about seem strange in a context where the sufferings of millions are routinely ignored by the press. We heard about the regular demonstrations of over a hundred thousand in Italy in front of the American military who used Italian bases for their NATO flights over Serbia - principled and popular opposition to the bombing which our press did not keep before our eyes.

Women also talked about the work to reestablish relations among women's organizations, the need for feminist analysis of these events and conditions, and the need for feminist political action.

In the selections included here, in this collage of women's peace work, *Atlantis* celebrates the daily and possible work of creating real alternatives to war. We have tried to make visible some of the deeply intelligent, powerful, and hopeful activities rarely brought into focus by our media, and to document some of the very different dimensions which peace perspectives reveal. These dimensions are evident in the shift away from the clever look-at-me logic so necessary to acts of deception and dominance. In replacing that centre with many voices from many margins, peace work embodies the "horizontal democracy" which Muriel Duckworth talks about. Weekly demonstrations in silence, like those organized by the Voice of Women in Halifax throughout the NATO bombing, dramatize the unheard opposition to bombing, but they also remind us of the socially constructed silences in which most of us live. We have reprinted here a sample of the leaflets which demonstrators distributed, a new leaflet for each week of the demonstration. These leaflets, which were written by Donna Smyth and Gillian Thomas, provide analysis and information in forms that are alternative to those of the corporate controlled media. This approach also reminds us that we do

not need to wait to "be published" in order to write and to be read. Donna Smyth has a history of creating alternatives. She was the Founding Editor of *Atlantis*, and Gillian Thomas, Muriel Duckworth, Frances Early and Barbara Roberts were all members of the Board or contributors in the early years of the 70s and 80s. So these selections, in this last year of the millennium, also celebrate the participation of *Atlantis* in the feminist/peace activist struggle to envision, articulate, and enact a civilization. And *that* is the fabulous Atlantis rising from the sea.

Muriel Duckworth's piece here is written not by her, but as she was heard by Keith Fulton and Ann Manicom, when she spoke as guest of honour at the Congress of the Social Sciences and Humanities. In these meetings, where younger academics try to make their work known, older academics try to make their power felt, and many of both try to create academic communities, Muriel Duckworth's voice demonstrated the best of what education and learning can provide: an empowered, knowledgeable citizen. A founder of the Voice of Women, Muriel, in her ninety-first year, is still an active organizer and public speaker. Readers interested in her life and work might begin with Marion Kerans' biography, *Muriel Duckworth: A Very Active Pacifist* (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 1996). Muriel had planned to provide *Atlantis* with a written version of her talk, but she broke her leg shortly after her talk and is now using her energy to heal in the home she grew up in on the shores of Lake Memphremagog. To us at *Atlantis*, this editorial challenge of publishing knowledge that was spoken and not written is much like the practical challenge of peace work - it requires a practical alternative; here we document our memory of Muriel's analysis and practical options for action.

When Muriel finished her talk, she invited others to speak - surely a feminist conclusion! Leigh Brownhill responded with an account of the peace protests held on the two bridges in Fergus, Ontario. Her text here supplies the function of the Voice of Women leaflets: a written record of understanding and commitment.

Frances Early's tribute to Barbara Roberts

is the final piece in this collage celebrating the cross-generational work of making peace. Our colleague and sister Barbara Roberts died in July 1998, and her work and life as a feminist peace scholar and activist is acknowledged and remembered by Frances Early, another feminist peace scholar and activist. Such testimony to each other's knowledge is a critical contribution to a feminist learned journal, increasing the visibility of feminist peace work in the world and in the academy.

That each of these texts is a form of feminist scholarship and yet not one of them written for scholarly publication reminds us that Women's Studies research is frequently action research, arising from and contributing to feminist change work. The work is frankly political, for it addresses our relationship to the reproduction of patriarchal and capitalist power and identifies where we readers have some choices and responsibilities.

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What follows was written by Keith Fulton and Ann Manicom from our notes and is not intended to reproduce Muriel's flow of speech, but the points of conviction she conveyed. We are not supposed to be dazzled or delighted by her oratory; we are just to listen and to reflect. Important as these ideas are, what is most important is that they are not just ideas. Muriel is speaking from her knowledge of organized peace work about the actions we can all take to save our lives and our earth.

Errol Sharp, publisher of Fernwood, invited **Muriel Duckworth** to speak at the University of Sherbrooke on June 6 as part of the 1999 Congress of the Social Sciences and Humanities and helped her up the steps of the raised platform in a large room set out with tables and chairs for coffee. His words of introduction begin to capture the effects of Muriel's activism:

Muriel Duckworth can be found in the area wherever there are progressive demonstrations in Halifax; that is, for the winter. In summer she

works in this area where she was born nearby on the Lake Memphremagog. Last October she celebrated her ninetieth birthday. For years she has been helping women to organize, and for the last eight weeks, she has been coming every Friday in Halifax to stand in front of the public library, leading a protest organized by the Voice of Women against the war in Kosovo. Her leadership is an inspiration to a lot of us. She helps all of us to understand that this struggle is going to go on for a long time, and helps us keep the desire to speak out. Now it is Kosovo, a couple of years ago it was Iraq, and it goes on and on. She provides an alternative voice and perspective.

Muriel Duckworth stood at the microphone. She is tall and slim, and while her body has some of the frailty of ninety years, it also has a suppleness and strength; she reminded me of tall prairie grass, firmly rooted.



Muriel before a vigil, June 1999, Halifax, NS. Photo - Digital Recordings, Halifax, NS.

Muriel Duckworth:

Now you all know how old I am, you will understand why I forgot to bring the speech I wrote for today! I can remember what I want to say, though. I want to talk about war and peace.

There are those in the world who believe in war. But there are those who don't believe in war, who know that war doesn't solve anything. There are a lot of people all around the world who know that war doesn't accomplish anything. People don't talk about this war in Yugoslavia because it bothers them too much. I think they are beginning to understand something that is very difficult to know, that war is not the way to solve anything. Instead of beginning from the perspective that war is likely to be inevitable, we should begin with the fact that there can and must be a non-violent solution for everything. We can be on the side of life for all our life.

This is difficult to know; it was years before I could really accept that you could have a world where people don't resort to violence. That we could create a culture of peace.

Most people don't realize how strong the peace movement is around the world. In Halifax, there have been eight vigils so far, every Friday at noon. People gather in silence to protest the bombing in Yugoslavia. They know that war has to be eliminated from our relation with each other.

Elizabeth May spoke on the David Suzuki radio program last Sunday about the damage we are doing to our world and the need to protect the whole earth. She points out that if you learn you have cancer, you don't just disregard that information. Your life depends on doing something about it and acting to heal yourself.

Now the health of the whole earth depends on us moving from a culture of violence to a culture of peace. This is the moment to act for a culture of peace. For the sake of all life on this planet, war must be eliminated.

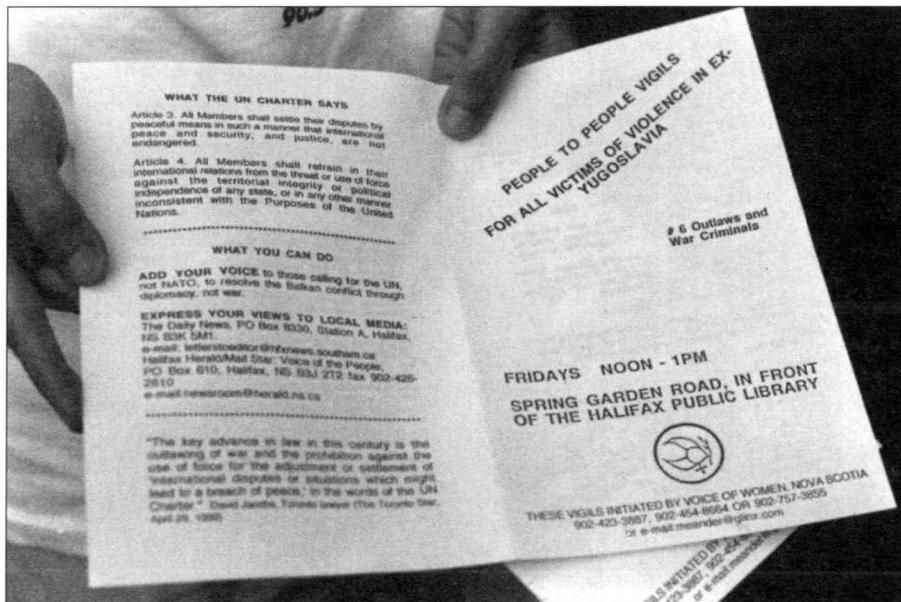
The President of the United States (I always forget his name) spoke the other day about the violence in the high schools; he said that kids have to learn to "use words, not weapons"! That

from the President of the United States! What are these young people to think! We have to quit sending them such double messages, saying one thing and doing another. We can expose hypocrisy when the language is watered down; for example, we should never be fooled by "collateral damage" which really means "death."

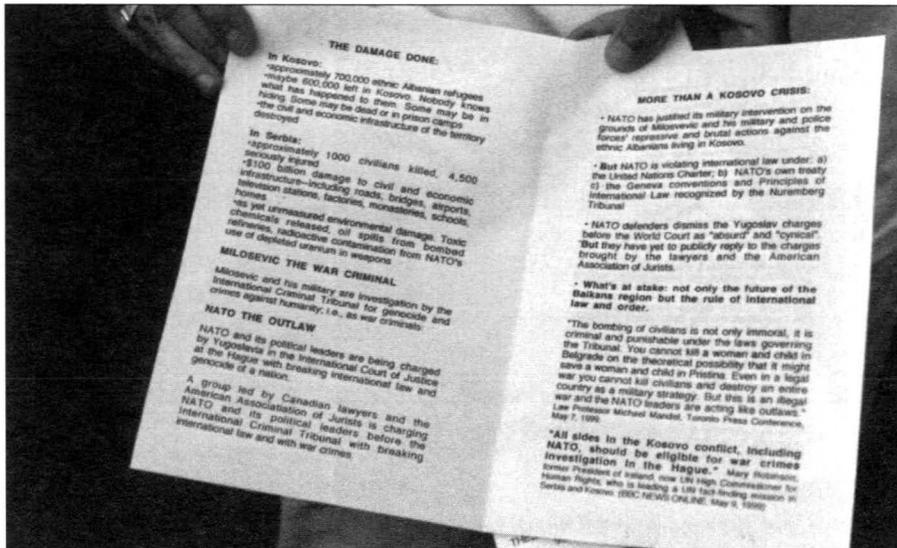
We can use words and actions together. A friend of mine reminded me that we are only going to get rid of war bit by bit. People think that we are through with land mines, but we are not finished with land mines. There are concrete things we can do everyday that I want to talk about. One definite plan for us is to get rid of nuclear weapons. Some say that as part of the Y2K problem, we should take the nuclear war heads off the missiles so that we could not have an accident. We could do that before 2000. We should be demanding that our government recognize the priority of doing away with war and of taking seriously the possibilities of non-violent solutions. Specifically, the need for

disarmament must be at the top of the agenda; second, Canada must get out of NATO; and third, the federal government should provide support for the Peace Movement and peace work. A culture of peace depends on all of us, each working to create alternatives to violence. I want to say, however, that women have been taking the lead all over the world in making this a world of peace. Two women teachers of English, Donna Smyth and Gillian Thomas, wrote the flyers we distributed each protest. Not only are many of the leaders in peace work women, but the ways of doing peace work will be in the processes and spaces women are creating in organizing. And the men who are following the women's ways will contribute to this struggle. We will not make a peaceful world using the ways that men have organized.

As Robin Morgan reminds us, the exercise of making peace is a creative act: "We are the women who will transform the world."



The front and back covers of the sixth information leaflet distributed at the regular Friday vigils organized by the Voice of Women in Halifax during the months of NATO bombing. When Donna Smyth and Gillian Thomas prepared the leaflet each week prior to the vigil, they made extensive use of Internet sources. They were on several list-serves (e.g. the UK Anti-War List) and visited various web sites to read the work of dissident reporters writing for international newspapers. In addition to newspapers published on web sites (such as *The Independent* from the UK), they accessed international radio sites on the Internet. All of these sources provided information far different from what we were hearing from mainstream news sources in Canada. Photo - courtesy Mary MacDonald.



The inside pages of leaflet #6. The focus of other leaflets included: information and analysis on alternative strategies to bring peace to the Balkans; challenges to NATO's claims about the need for the bombing; analysis of the propaganda waged by the state and military on both sides; information on the bombs being used, including the effects of cluster bombs and depleted uranium weapons; the ecological, political, financial and human costs of the war; strategies for peace and reconstruction; and an analysis, in the end, of who "won" and who lost. Photo - courtesy Mary MacDonald.

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After Muriel had finished speaking, she invited others to come to the platform to talk about women's work for peace in their communities. **Leigh Brownhill**, from Fergus, Ontario, spoke about her group's demonstrations, and later sent more details to Ann in an e-mail message:

Date: Sat, 12 Jun 1999 13:33:21 -0400 (EDT)
 From: Leigh Brownhill <lbrownhi@uoguelph.ca>
 To: ann.manicom@msvu.ca
 Subject: peace protests on Fergus bridges

Dear Ann,
 Here is the information on the peace protests we have had on two bridges in Fergus to protest the bombing of Yugoslavia.

One dozen Fergus and area residents gathered at noon on 15 May 1999 on the footbridge behind the farmers market to protest the NATO war in Yugoslavia and the dictatorship of Slobadan Milosevic.

They wore targets on their chests, held banners and carried wind chimes, Central American flutes and shakers. After giving interviews to the local cable station and newspapers, the protestors marched to the bridge on Tower Street, a main thoroughfare into the village of 10,000.

The following is an unreleased press release written by Leigh Brownhill, one of the initiators of the bridge protests:

"This is a gathering of peaceful protestors. Our aim is to occupy the bridges that connect the two sides of our village, Fergus, wearing targets on our bodies to symbolise the courage of the Yugoslav people. We stand in unity with other anti-war activists around the world. We are ordinary members of the public autonomously acting on the imperative to offer a peaceful alternative to the troubles in Yugoslavia.

What is the alternative? It is the popular

participation of people of different ages, ethnicities, genders and political persuasions in the defence of human life and the environment. We recognise and encourage the deep history of inter-ethnic cooperation amongst ordinary people in Yugoslavia. We recognise and protest the involvement of international banks and big businesses, in agreement with President Milosevic, in the disintegration of the Yugoslav economy and culture in the mid to late 1990s.

We want Chretien, Clinton and Milosevic to hear our voices. We want peace protestors around the world to know we are with them. And finally, we want citizens of our town to be encouraged by our message, which celebrates what we see as our participation in the establishment of non-violent and just peace negotiations and social reconstruction."

We have held three protests on consecutive Saturdays. We are 90% women and children but have welcomed the participation of men and have had participants from Northern Ireland as well as Canada. On each protest we have also tied strips of brightly coloured cloth to the foot bridge, prayer flags for peace which are used by the Tibetans in their demonstrations.

We are regrouping now that the bombing has stopped and ground troops enter to carry out goodness-knows-what kinds of operations.

Sincerely,
 Leigh Brownhill

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IN MEMORIAM: BARBARA ROBERTS



Barbara Roberts. Photo courtesy of Athabasca University.

Antiwar activist, socialist, feminist, and peace historian Barbara Roberts died in July 1998 after a brief and valiant fight against a rare form of cancer. Barbara's husband, David Millar, and close family members and friends were with Barbara during her final days which were spent in Victoria, BC, in the home she and David had planned to live in after their retirement from academic life. When illness struck Barbara so unexpectedly and suddenly, she was in the prime of her life. She was enthusiastically engaged in peace research, a comparative study of Canadian and Australian women's peace work in the era between the world wars. Barbara was also busy with her teaching job at Athabasca University in Edmonton, Alberta, where she was professor of Women's Studies.

Barbara was born in Eureka, California, in 1941 and grew up there. She left the United States at the height of the Vietnam War determined to

make her antiwar stand. She and her two small sons, David and Michael Hoffman, settled in Vancouver where Barbara completed her BA and MA at Simon Fraser University (1972 and 1976). At Simon Fraser she successfully defended feminist interpretations of Canadian history over the protests of old time historians. She taught some of the first women's studies courses in BC at this time. Barbara then moved to Ottawa where she completed her PhD in Canadian history in 1980 at the University of Ottawa. Her dissertation concerned the reception and deportation of immigrants and has been published as *Whence They Came* (1988); it is an outstanding historical monograph.

During this period of her life, Barbara married David Millar, also an historian, and they went to teach labour, immigrant, and women's history at the University of Winnipeg. She also gave special extension courses and workshops and produced popular "Your Rights" pamphlets for inner-city women, immigrants, unionists and people in remote mining communities in northern Manitoba. In Winnipeg, Barbara joined the Society of Friends and became active in the Canadian peace movement, notably the Voice of Women of Canada. In 1983, Barbara moved on to Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, where she was employed by the Department of Educational Foundations and introduced feminist and cooperative methods there which have influenced an entire generation of students.

In 1985 and 1986, when Barbara resided in Halifax, Nova Scotia, she turned her creative powers to peace work while, at the same time, she pursued research into the origins of the Canadian women's peace movement. She and a number of other pacifist women organized the Peace Tent at the UN Decade of Women Conference in Nairobi, Kenya. After this meeting, Barbara and another peace worker, Alice Wiser, created a women's Peace Caravan which travelled through many towns and villages on the Atlantic seaboard. Barbara also participated widely in international peace networks, developed the idea of an international peace university, Ovum Pacis, and toured remote fishing villages in Nova Scotia, urging women to become active peace proponents.

During this time, the late 1980s, Barbara conducted extensive interviews with women peace activists throughout Canada for a book she was preparing at the time of her death on the Canadian women's peace movement. In the 1990s Barbara expanded her international feminist work, co-authoring with Deborah Stienstra, *Strategies for the Year 2000: A Women's Handbook* (1995), a follow-up from the Beijing Conference.

Barbara managed - with flair and integrity - to combine the activist with the scholarly life. In addition to monographs, pamphlets and handbooks, publications include close to thirty articles on feminist, peace, immigrant, and labour history. Her path-breaking essay "No Safe Place: The War Against Women," *Our Generation* (spring 1983), has been republished many times and has been translated as "Ni treve ni abri" into Italian and other languages.

Barbara will be remembered by those who knew her as a vivid, direct, and passionate individual who cared deeply about justice for all people and who used her talents creatively and generously to bring forth that better day. We feel her absence now. But at the same time, we celebrate and absorb strength and hope from her tenacious spirit and uncompromising commitment to the cause.

[Some of the information on Barbara's life and work is gratefully acknowledged as excerpted from the Society of Friends' Memorial Service in honour of Barbara entitled "Barbara Roberts: A Life of Conscience-Raising and Spirit-Raising." Thanks are extended to David Millar for additional information.]

Frances Early
August 1998

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Friday peace vigil, May, 1999, Halifax, NS. Photo - Digital Recordings, Halifax, NS.